

Streetwise for Book Smarts:  
Culture, Community Organizing, and Education Reform in the Bronx

by

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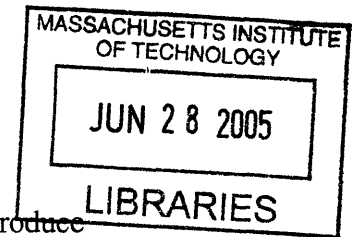
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# STREETWISE FOR BOOK SMARTS:

## CULTURE, COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, AND EDUCATION REFORM IN THE BRONX

by

CELINA SU

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
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### ABSTRACT

Education organizing groups that have similar goals frequently employ divergent political strategies in their campaigns. In the literature on social movement organizations, such differences are usually attributed to variations in political context, or variations in resources. This dissertation builds on currently dominant social movement theories by investigating how cultural norms inside organizations also contribute to distinct types of political strategies.

Specifically, it utilizes archival, direct observation, and interview data on five education organizing groups in the Bronx to explore the role of cultural norms, usually manifest in the form of rules of membership, activities, and protocols. All of the case study organizations have been engaging in grassroots political campaigns for similar goals in local school reform and funding increases in the South Bronx.

The analysis contrasts the categories of Alinsky- and of Freire-derived norms inside these organizations, which, when applied, are more akin to cumulatively developed cultural tool kits than coherently formed, whole “cultures.” The dissertation carefully delineates the key characteristics of the two categories. For example, the Freirian category is marked by leadership development that emphasizes the organizer as a partner rather than as a traditional teacher, rituals that focus on the individual member rather than the organization as a whole, and activities that tend to be unrelated to political campaigns at least at first glance.

The two categories’ respective cultural tool kits, in turn, are associated with differing capacities and preferences that emphasize certain political strategies over others. Through their cultural tool kits, the case study organizations attempt to mitigate three crucial tensions in their political strategies: the balance between pursuing collaborative strategies versus pursuing confrontational ones, the balance between focusing on strategies that aim for policy adoption versus ones that aim for policy formulation, and the balance between explicitly addressing issues of race in political campaigns versus building broad-based constituencies, sometimes at the expense of ignoring race-delineated issues.

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Organizers and leaders at the five social movement organizations that serve as case studies generously allowed me into their world. In basement offices or fancy conference auditoriums, in the middle of a hailstorm or under highway overpasses on steaming hot black asphalt, I came to more fully appreciate the difficulty of their work: the long hours and last-minute summits, not to mention the flexibility, enthusiasm, and common sense required of someone who is not just akin to one person's Personal Digital Assistant, but the Personal Organic Enabler of dozens, if not hundreds, of people. These thoughtful organizers and leaders

not only indulged me in answering thousands of questions, they engaged me in hours of thought-provoking conversations about New York politics and schools, political strategies, and current state of social movements and community organizing. The depth of their analyses, personal experiences, and passion continue to move me. If I do not name them all by name or construct large banners to publicize their work, it is not because I wish to withhold credit where it's due, but only because I have chosen to keep names confidential.

This type of intensive fieldwork, taking place over both days and nights for many continuous months, would not have been possible without the Jacob K. Javits Fellowship from the U.S. Department of Education. This fellowship permitted me to devote my full time to my studies for the entire dissertation period, and I realize that this was the opportunity of a lifetime.

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Altogether, the reflections and feedback shared by leaders, organizers, colleagues, mentors, and committee members were so consistently well considered and astute that I sometimes found myself pulled in disparate directions. In the end, this dissertation reflects my interpretation of and views on the riches of data collected along the way. While its limitations remain my own, its insights could not have been developed without the collective help of so many others.



## List of Abbreviations

ACORN	Association for Community Organizations for Reform Now
AQE	Alliance for Quality Education, statewide alliance of over 10 organizations
BOE	Board of Education, the now-dissolved New York City education agency
CAA AV	Organizing Asian Communities, or Coalition Against Anti-Asian Violence
CC9	Coalition for Community School District 9
CFE	Campaign for Fiscal Equity, organization that brought a lawsuit to New York State over the education funding formula
DOE	New York City Department of Education
HCLC	Highbridge Community Life Center
IESP	Institute for Education and Social Policy, at NYU
LIS	Local Instruction Supervisor, reports to the Regional Superintendent, who reports to the Chancellor
LGBT	lesbian gay bisexual transgendered
MOM	Mothers on the Move
NCLB	No Child Left Behind, national education legislation
NSM	new social movements
NWBCCC	Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition
NYU	New York University
PAC	Political action committee
PC	Parent Coordinator, one is hired each year by the school Principal
PEA	Public Education Association
SBU	Sistas and Brothas United, part of NWBCCC
SMO	social movement organization
SURR	Schools Under Registration Review, indicated as schools with low performance
UFT	United Federation of Teachers, the New York City teachers' union
UPOH	United Parents of Highbridge, part of HCLC
YLP	Youth Leadership Project

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## Part One: Setting the Scene

Briefly, the first three chapters of this dissertation set the scene in different ways. The first presents the puzzle to be unraveled and the methods taken to do so, the second describes the main theories that attempt to predict the behavior of various actors in the puzzle, and the third introduces the historical and political context in which the action takes place, and finally, the actors, or social movement organizations, themselves.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

A yellow school bus struggled to lumber up a tree-lined hill in a suburban community in midstate New York. In the bus, members of the Bronx-based Sistas and Brothas United (SBU) prepared for their surprise “hit” at Governor Pataki’s home. They hoped to send a message to the Governor, arguing that his proposed funding formula for New York City schools was inadequate. A teenage boy wearing the urban uniform of an outrageously baggy, white tee-shirt, baggy jeans, and cornrows in his hair, reviewed the event’s protocol: How they would march up the driveway, what the hand signals for silence or departure would be, and what to do if cops arrived. Reviewing the chants, he went over the perennials: “What do we want? .... When do we want it? Now!”

All of this is expected. The leader also inserted commentary along the way, however, about how “lame” the chants were, and how he would make sure that they had new, original ones by the subsequent event (Personal communication, March 27, 2004). What might such homegrown lines sound like? Earlier in the day, Lisa, a tenth-grader, recited the following:

Soldiers of society trying to keep their eyes on me  
 In their hands is my education  
 And I blindly search for academic salvation  
 Though I have no books to read, no chairs to sit in, no room to breathe  
 And y’all say, “keep your head up”  
 Well, to tell you the truth, I’m fed up  
 Even the Governor says we don’t need college  
 All we need is an eighth-grade education?  
 Yeah, that’s enough knowledge...  
 Why does the government fail to realize the importance of our youth?  
 Governor Pataki, I have some things I’d like to say  
 But they would be inappropriate  
 So Jeremy, it’s your turn to play... (Personal communication, March 27, 2004)  
 Jeremy, a ninth-grader, continued with the spoken word. Such performances have

become routine in Sistas and Brothas United, and to a certain extent, have become part of events sponsored by the Northwest Bronx Clergy and Community Coalition, the larger organization that

encompasses SBU. They take place not only during events, but as ice breakers during smaller meetings, as well. A few weeks later, during the inaugural meeting of a new Student-Teacher working group, Jeremy, read:

There's many problems with our education...  
 Is it the students' fault? Just try and *think* about their status:  
 Got books from when the colony's first established...  
 Constantly treating them like a statistic, treating them like lab mice.  
 Scantrons mess up and lower scores, and *students* pay the price.  
 Well, if we say it's not the students' fault, let's look at a new vision.  
 Are the teachers to blame? Now let's just look at *their* position...  
 Forced to teach us student from... disengaging, irrelevant books,  
 Forced to teach 30-35 students, and feeling like they have no weight.  
 Stressed while teaching, and the check ain't even that great...  
 They're raising standards for us, and it sure ain't fun,  
 And who's responsible for raising standards for all of them?  
 To make up for their mistakes, they try to keep us going at a fast pace,  
 With not enough resources to keep us on track in the first place...  
 In order to beat the powers that be, we got to try to work together with all our  
 might... (Personal communication, May 27, 2004)

At these two occasions, the spoken word pieces elicited a much warmer response than other components of the events, even though they fit into somewhat divergent larger political strategies. The first was a rallying cry against Pataki, and obviously confrontational, and the second argued for the opposite, for collaboration rather than blame-shifting. That said, both the antagonistic political strategy, regarding state funding, and the collaborative one, regarding local teacher quality, developed organically from SBU's cultural norms. These norms included intensive and emotional periods of time together for all the members, a lot of boasting and joking around during everyday activities, downloading hip-hop MP3s together, and the informal sharing of books like *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and Michael Moore's *Stupid White Men*. These were not discussed in any formal workshops, though those existed as well. Here, the leaders placed a lot more importance on love and respect in friendships than on authority or official membership.

This culture of emotional bonding is not limited to youth organizations. At another organization working on education reform, United Parents of Highbridge (UPOH), the cultural

norms of shared potluck meals, and calling each other for help at midnight, help to establish norms of personal, rather than professional, exchange. Outreach is not conducted by individuals; rather, the members sit out together in front of church on Sundays, or work in groups to approach potential members after school. The UPOH leaders also share a common vision of better neighborhood schools, but its political intricacies have not been ironed out at such gatherings. Instead, the parents' bonds stem from a sense of personal, mutual obligation. Many of the parents, or even most of them, have attended GED or English classes, received job counseling, or even found jobs through UPOH's umbrella organization, Highbridge Community Life Center (HCLC). Services, and mutual assistance in all ways possible, are an integral part of the culture there. Meetings are as likely to end with one parent selling lotions and creams to other UPOH members in an Avon-style demonstration, as they are with a rallying cry for political action. In their everyday activities, UPOH members meet either to conduct outreach for a large event, or to help an individual parent with a problem at school.

One and a half years ago, core leaders of UPOH spent a long time listening to members and incorporating them into a larger plan for local education reform; in collaboration with other groups, a platform was articulated. With other local Bronx groups, UPOH helped to stage several large events to win political support for a pilot Lead Teacher program. They succeeded and won \$1.6 million in funding for such a program.

In sharp contrast to SBU leaders, who meet five times a week, leaders at ACORN Bronx gather less often for local meetings. Organizers spend much of their time door-knocking in order to get new members, since a significant percentage of the organizations' funding comes from \$120-a-year membership dues, rather than foundation grants. Such a dues system helps to build a sense of "real member ownership" of the organization, as well as a feeling of financial independence from foundation agenda. Together, members and organizers build strong social networks that can be relied upon to participate in rallies, to lobby city and state legislatures for

specific policy proposals, and to vote for or against specific candidates or referenda in elections. The emphasis of this social movement organization was on “organization,” and this helps ACORN to build impressive constituencies and, they argue, the political power necessary to place pressure on policymakers. This is especially the case because, for the most part, Bronx leaders join groups from other boroughs, or from unions and ACORN-affiliates like political action committees.

The activities and the verbal rhetoric at ACORN emphasize the importance of numbers, money, and outreach. At many meetings, the agenda consists of learning to conduct phone banks, or listing all of the family members and friends one can enlist as ACORN members. The culmination of this work lies in the attendance of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of members at large rallies, accountability sessions, protests, or elections, with city-wide, state-wide, or national public officials present.

#### Cultural norms, potential links to political strategy

Each of these groups demonstrates a different set of cultural norms. The rituals, activities, language, and symbols adopted, and the rules of interaction, helped to shape political strategies that eventually are developed in each of the organizations. Although it is difficult to judge the effectiveness of the political strategies themselves, one can clearly discern links between cultural norms and the choice of political strategies.

At SBU, small arguments often broke out between members, but they spent such large amounts of time together that they were eventually forced by other members to sit down and negotiate, ultimately developing an ambience that they described as “a love thing.” Clearly, friendship and a culture of intense, in-person negotiation was key to their work. They continued to be belligerent towards Pataki, but that was partly because they had to meet with me him, face-to-face, and it fit their style of intense engagement, akin to common perceptions of

“teambuilding” or “conflict resolution” sessions. These leaders are in it for the long haul, and their strength lies in their commitment to strategies that involve the development and creation of new policy proposals.

At ACORN, there is much less interaction between members, and the focus is on individual membership rather than relationships. Yet, individual participation in this formidable grassroots organization was a source of pride, and this pride was best shown off at large events. Partly because the cultural norms here placed less emphasis on conversation and local work, larger-scale, city-wide political strategies, that relied upon making an impression or voting someone out (or in), were the group’s strong point.

Between the cultural norms exemplified by the two cases of SBU and ACORN, UPOH’s cultural norms underscored committed, personal relationships, like SBU’s did, but the rituals that accompanied this relationship-building were more likely to be social services than political discussions. There was less activity around education policy issues themselves, and more on building the organization. One can see how UPOH’s norms were, in a way, a mix of those more apparent at ACORN and those at SBU. In turn, UPOH’s political strategies involved multi-year campaigns of political persuasion that required high levels of commitment and outreach, but less policy analysis and confrontation than those proposed by SBU. All of UPOH’s political strategies have attempted to work with, rather than attack or replace, the current Department of Education officials.

The research question here is whether cultural norms in a social movement organization (SMO) help to shape the political strategies chosen. If so, how? An organization’s political strategies are often attributed to what appears to make sense given the political context, especially the state’s friendliness to the movement. In this study, such friendliness would have taken the form of the Bloomberg Administration’s enthusiasm for school reform proposed by outsiders. Another common explanation is the level of resources available to the organizations.



While these theories are certainly helpful, resource mobilization and political opportunities do not tell the whole story, especially given that these groups are operating at the same time, in the same context, with different political strategies. The everyday rituals, activities, and customs also play a role, by developing particular capacities and tastes for political strategies. Rooted in the literature of social movement organizations and community organizing, this dissertation aims to describe just what the role of culture in social movement organizations is. Along the way, it attempts to lay out a more nuanced model that pays heed to structure, but it also endeavors to allow room for agency and creativity in how education organizing groups<sup>1</sup>, and perhaps other social movement organizations, operate.

### Pounding the pavement: Research methods

As described above, the key question in this dissertation is how cultures of participation in social movement organizations influence or shape the external political strategies these organizations choose. Over the course of the past two years, I both explored the cultures inside social movement organizations and tracked the political strategies they chose, in how they approached external targets and public officials in their campaigns. I simultaneously conducted data collection and developed my dissertation's theoretical framework, following an iterative case study process presented by Yin (1984), which allows the researcher to utilize multiple research methods, such as documentary analysis, interviews, and observation.

Because much of the required data cannot be elicited through survey, since the risk of social desirability bias is rather high, observation in a real-life context was necessary. In fact, many of the observed protocols and norms contradicted stated principles, and comments made during meetings often belied those made during interviews, and vice versa. As I conducted

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, the term "education organizing group" is sometimes used to refer to social movement organizations that specifically engage in community organizing around education issues.

preliminary interviews and conduct archival research and literature reviews, I honed in on meaningful variables and exploring theories that appeared to be applicable. In keeping with Miles and Huberman, I refined the theoretical framework, as the “current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated,” until its delineated concepts, and the directional arrows between them, made sense (1994, p. 20).

### *Validity and reliability*

Specifically, I focused on the notions of validity<sup>2</sup> that are appropriate for each phase, especially construct validity of measures towards the beginning, external and internal validity during analysis, and reliability throughout. I chose ways of evaluating culture that were both established in the literature and could be measured in the actual fieldwork. I chose a setting where there were many cases, so as to hold political opportunities constant, and chose cases as to hold other potential confounding variables, especially high variance of resources, constant. Furthermore, I selected cases so that norms and rituals, rather than ideology per se, would serve as components of the independent variable. In its analysis, this dissertation relies upon “thick description” of the South Bronx context of my dissertation in order to allow limited, nuanced generalizability and transferability to other settings (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Each of the stages of my research, as well as the accompanying issues regarding validity, is described below.

### *Stages of case selection and data collection*

I first conducted a literature review of grassroots organizing groups, especially those working on education issues, as well as the larger context of grassroots movements and democracy. I focused on the theoretical frameworks described in Chapter Two, namely that of social movement organizations and their cultures. Concurrently, I spoke with experts (both

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<sup>2</sup> According to Mason, a work of research’s validity is measured by “how well matched...the logic of the method [is] to the kinds of research questions you are asking and the kind of social explanation you are intending to develop” (1996, 147).

academics and practitioners), as to share and examine my research question, the robustness of my theoretical frameworks, and the rigor and practicalities of my methodology.

In case selection, I followed a stratified strategy whereby case studies were purposive, and reflected required diversity of the independent variable (Ragin, 1992). The participants recruited for each case were snowballed and triangulated, to gain as in-depth and complete data as possible. I held constant the time period of the investigation, the local political context, the overall type of organization, and the campaign issue. In addition, all of the organizations work with predominantly poor households. Partly because of the high poverty and school enrollment rates in the South Bronx, there are many groups working on education organizing in a small area, and the potential for rich, comparative case studies was great. By constraining the organizations' geographical area, I was able to investigate how organizational norms differed when dealing with similar populations, demographic characteristics, and political context. While some variance exists, all of the organizations work with primarily Latino, African American, and African populations, in descending order by percentage.

The following table lists the community organizations working on education reform in the Bronx. The table presents the organizations as primarily defined by how their constituencies are defined, i.e., whether they are primarily drawn from congregations, through services networks, or from the neighborhood. Over the course of preliminary interviews and direct observation, however, the categorization of education organizing groups changed. Since this was done after case selection, it is described in more detail towards the end of the methods section.

Table 1-1. *Preliminary list of education organizing SMOs in the South Bronx (old typology)*

Organization	Social Services-based	Faith-based	Neighborhood-based
ACORN			X
Citizens Advice Bureau	X		X
Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council	X		X
Mothers on the Move			X
New Settlement Apartments	X		X
NW Bronx Community & Clergy Coalition		X	X
Organizing Asian Communities	X		X
South Bronx Churches		X	X
United Parents of Highbridge	X		X
Youth Force	X		X

As the table shows, the South Bronx boasts a relatively high concentration of grassroots organizations in a small geographical area. Since each of the groups deals with specific neighborhoods only, the third category was not useful. While all have initiatives for school improvement, the groups vary according to affiliations, ideologies, and length of experience. I attempted to control for these variations, for careful selection of cases based on independent variables rather outcomes (King, Keohane, and Verba, 1994, p. 116; Collier and Mahoney, 1996). Therefore, I also had to ensure that that any variables highly correlated with political strategies, the dependent variables, be held constant, lest they become confounding.

Several organizations in the South Bronx were eliminated as potential cases because their ideologies correlated highly with certain political strategies. Organizing Asian Communities is a race-based organization with a strong anti-capitalist ideology, and it has explicitly admitted to an aversion to some collaborative strategies. This means that its cultural norms are less likely to be independent of its ideology. Youth Force was also eliminated because its ideology diverges greatly from those of the other groups. South Bronx Churches was not organizing around education, but solely sanitation and housing, during the fieldwork period. It was therefore also eliminated as a case study. Finally, some of the organizations have been organizing for fewer than five years; these include Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council and Citizens Advice Bureau.

Out of the five remaining organizations, four were contacted with letters of introduction, and they all agreed to become part of this dissertation study. At each organization, I first approached a head organizer, conducted a preliminary interview, and then formally requested permission to observe the organization. When it existed, the social movement organization's board, rather than the organizer, made the decision. The organizations were not offered monetary payment in return for participation, although I offered to share research findings and to write relevant reports that they might find useful. In addition, I conducted some basic quantitative data analysis on area demographics and student achievement scores when requested.

The selected social movement organizations were chosen according to the independent variable: their different activities, rituals, and other potential components of cultural tool kits. None of them appear to have predetermined political strategies, the dependent variable here. All of these community organizations are so-called "power organizations," in that they all attempt to work through traditional channels of politics, such as the City Council, and to influence policy-making by gathering residents to work on a single education campaign (Smock, 2003). They all operate with the notion that there is "power in numbers," and that overall, current political institutions respond to social movement organizations. This differentiates them from groups ideologically opposed to the current political economy as inherently unjust and classist, as well as those that aim to improve the community via 'social control' mechanisms, rather than changing policies or getting involved in politics.

The four organizations in this study are Mothers on the Move (MOM), Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC), ACORN Bronx (ACORN), and United Parents of Highbridge (UPOH). All of these organizations have been working on education campaigns for seven or more years; none has worked with a large group of parents for more than 12 years. As the NWBCCC's name suggests, it is actually a coalition of small organizations, including 9 neighborhood associations and Sistas and Brothas United, a Coalition-wide youth group. Unlike

the other groups, UPOH's umbrella organization, Highbridge Community Life Center (HCLC), began as a social services agency akin to the settlement houses throughout New York City.

I investigated the four organizations for the 2002-2004 time period. Because finding former staff is difficult, a longer investigation period without concurrent fieldwork might have introduced selection and recall bias into the interviews. Although such bias cannot be completely eliminated, the two-year time frame allowed me to capture data that were both comprehensive and sufficient. These data included several key campaign initiatives and decision-making protocols, as well as some potential cultural changes, in each organization.

I anticipated most of my research to be qualitative, as to observe abstract variables such as "experience," norms, and culture which are not easily quantifiable. Via my case studies, I hoped to glean the immediate causes and effects of these variables, since "culture" itself is not easily encapsulated or captured, so as to construct narratives and provide a "thick description" for each case study (Stinchcombe, 1968, p. 42; Geertz, 1983). Given my research question, I was especially interested in the "multiple layers" of interpretation of the same situation, and in the different perspectives of multiple actors.

Prior to actual fieldwork, I completed and submitted an approved Human Subjects Review, in order to conduct interviews and direct observation. I then began a four-pronged plan of data collection: archival research and documentary analysis, direct observation, interviews, and triangulation.

First, I studied documents such as meeting minutes, newsletters, flyers, websites, official mission statements, memoranda, public correspondence, and relevant legislation or reforms enacted. I also gathered quantitative data on the funding and personnel aspects of each organization's capacity, and on public school system data, e.g., school, district, and new regional level drop-out rates, achievement test scores, reduced or free lunch eligibility, etc., as well as basic demographic data on race, gender, and income in the Bronx and New York City.

The bulk of my research, however, took place in the form of fieldwork. I attended education committee meetings, accountability sessions, and rallies, and spent time, over repeated visits, at each organization. As part of my research into the organizations' cultural norms, I paid particular attention to formal and informal rules and routines in their decision-making processes, and to protocols during meetings, trainings, and other events or conversations. I also observed their interaction with other organizations and public officials as part of the investigation into the political strategies chosen. I attended as many events as I could; when events conflicted, I chose the type of event that I would not be able to attend at a later date.

Towards the latter third of my fieldwork period, I conducted semistructured interviews with organizing directors, leaders, and parents at each of the organizations, and with public officials and other third parties. I interviewed at least five people at each of the organizations in my study (See Appendix C). I did not begin this immediately, but rather spent some time focusing on participant observation. This is partly because many of the organizations' members did not trust new outsiders, and because I wanted to ensure that all questions stemmed from the data. This adheres to an "evolving theory" process in qualitative studies, where beginning stages of data collection are designed to be open to all observations and discovery, and later stages place gradually greater emphasis on theoretical relevance (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

For each interviewee, I explained the goals and nature of my study. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions about my study and signed consent forms with the understanding that their participation was voluntary, that they would have the opportunity to review notes and transcripts, and that any comments they made could be held confidential or anonymous upon request. Each interview followed a protocol, of 10 questions (See Appendix A), which served as starting points for in-depth discussions on their roles in the organizations, the activities and norms of the organizations, and the political strategies of the organizations. Most of the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. In some cases, the interviewee felt more

comfortable with notes as the primary record. For the purposes of this dissertation, the names of all interviewees from the five case study organizations have been changed.

I also combined the above methods to conduct triangulation, to glean multiple perspectives on each event and theory. For instance, I interviewed public officials who were targets of education campaigns, as well as people who collaborated with the organizations.

In all, I attended approximately 150 events, ranging from two hour-long meetings to three-day retreats, primarily over the 15-month period of May 2003 to July 2004. I eventually interviewed approximately 50 participants, some several times; each interview took place over one to three hours, occasionally longer.

### *Analysis*

In my analysis, I followed a five-stage model outlined by Sarantakos (1998), in which: I transcribed the data from the original audiotape form to paper, as well as organized transcripts and notes; reviewed transcripts, organized the data, and prepared them for analysis; tabulated all quantitative data and further organized the qualitative data, focusing on patterns that emerged, and the evolving theoretical frameworks in my study. Finally, I verified and revised my analysis after reviewing data, sharing some of my analysis with participants and receiving their feedback, conducting further triangulation by checking my data for bias, and employing a “cross-site analysis” suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

I concluded the data collection and analysis stages of my dissertation when new data confirmed, rather than added to, previously obtained data, thus signaling “saturation” (Morse, 1998). Over the course of concurrent data collection and analysis, I separated Sistas and Brothas United from the larger Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, because their cultural norms were different enough to merit separate analyses; to conflate them would be to muddle relatively distinct cultures of participation.



Along the way, I developed new frameworks for categorizing the cultures of participation: Specifically, they changed from three categories (services delivery, faith-based organizing, and neighborhood-organizing) into two. There were several reasons for this. First, the data indicated that faith-based rituals were not, in and of themselves, the basis for any organizational norms. Unlike the faith-based organizing described in books on Gamaliel, PICO, and Industrial Areas Foundation networks (Wood, 2002; Osterman, 2002; Hart, 2001; Warren, 2001), the Northwest Bronx Clergy and Community Coalition's faith-explicit norms, like prayer, were much less common. When they did exist, they were associated with individuals, rather than with member of affiliate institutions. Second, all of the organizations, whether they were ostensibly faith-based or services deliverers, were in fact very much rooted in neighborhoods. While the original categorizations were helpful and are not completely irrelevant, they fail to capture the meaningful aspects of the variation amongst the different groups.

### Prototypes of power

More precisely, the groups were instead better classified along an Alinskyite to Freirian spectrum, based on the teachings of Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire and further described in chapters 4 and 5. This new typology of case studies, then, looks like the following:

Table 1-2. *List of education organizing SMOs in study (new typology)*

	Primarily Alinskyite	Mixed	Primarily Freirian
ACORN Bronx	X		
NWBCCC	X		
UPOH		X	
SBU			X
MOM			X

The categories are by no means distinct, and it should not come as a surprise that the types of cultural norms manifest themselves in slightly different ways amongst the groups. Still,

the Alinskyite and Freirian categories help to shed light on each of the organizations in the analysis, as well as their corresponding strengths, weaknesses, and probable political strategies.

The three key characteristics of these categories are presented in the following table.

Table 1-3. *Key characteristics of cultural norm categories*

	Alinskyite	Freirian
Role of organizer	Organizer as coach/ guide	Organizer as partner
Focus of activities within the organization	Members learn skills in civic engagement, outreach, and build the organization: Focus on the organization	Members learn skills in political engagement, and together, they work toward creating a longer-term vision for the world: Focus on the individual
Rituals	Committee meetings, outreach, trainings	Committee meetings, outreach, trainings, meals and retreats, political education, services, cultural exchange

### Overview of dissertation

Previous theories of social movement organizations highlighted the importance of structural variables in explaining political strategies. Chapter 2 reviews the theoretical background and literature couching this dissertation, moving from structural or rationalist theories of social movement organizations towards those that emphasize the role of culture. It ends with a theoretical sketch of how cultural norms and rituals form cultural tool kits in social movement organizations, and how these tool kits, in turn, shape the organizations' capacities and tastes for political strategies. Along the way, it explicitly defines the key concepts in the case studies and their analysis. Chapter 3 describes the state of public education and community organizing in New York City, especially in the South Bronx. It also includes short profiles of the case study SMOs that become the focus of my analysis.

The introduction to Part Two describes the two categories of cultural tool kits that inform this study's social movement organizations. Chapter 4 presents what the Alinskyite category

looks like, at least in this study. It describes both the prototypical cultural norms and the category's real-life variations. Chapter 5 introduces the Freirian counterparts.

Part Three consists of analyses of key trends and tensions in the relationship between cultural tool kits and political strategies. Chapter 6 initiates an analysis of the cultural tool kits in each of the two categories, especially concerning the ways in which issues of race and ethnicity are handled in the corresponding organizations. Chapter 7 takes a look at political strategies, or how the organizations interact with outsiders—other social movement organizations, targets, public officials, the media, and the public at large (beyond its potential constituency). More specifically, it investigates how the chosen political strategies depend, in part, by specific capacities associated with the two cultural categories. Chapter 8, in turn, turns from capacities to the issue of tastes, and how cultural norms help to shape organizational preferences for political strategies, distinctly from questions of capacity or effectiveness. It attempts to delineate how perhaps, the SMOs' demands for strategies follow their supply.

Finally, Chapter 9 offers some theoretical and practical implications for social movement organizations and their use of cultural tool kits. By paying more attention to the cultural facets of rituals, practices, and symbols, SMOs campaigning for school reform can work towards cultural tool kits that better support their declared values and political strategies. At the very least, such organizations can become more cognizant of the strengths and weaknesses associated with their cultural tool kits, and the types of political strategies that befit them.

## Chapter 2: Cultural Power Tools

During the week of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, five social movement organizations in the Bronx simultaneously pursued wildly different strategies in their common pursuit of local school reform. On April 1<sup>st</sup> itself, Sistas and Brothas United (SBU) led City Council members on a tour of Bronx high schools, pointing out details like overcrowded classrooms, floor-to-ceiling windows without bars or closing mechanisms, and bathrooms without stall doors or locks. This group of activist students had carefully planned their demonstration to draw attention to the need for more construction funding; they timed the tour so that the council members were caught in the hallways when the school bell rang, so that they could see and feel firsthand the pushing and shoving of throngs of teenagers between classes.

SBU's students then rode buses downtown to join other members of the Northwest Bronx Clergy and Community Coalition (NWBCCC), their parent organization, on the steps of City Hall. They arrived for a press conference marking the State Legislature's official deadline for its approval of the New York State budget. "April Fool's Day," quipped a key NWBCCC leader, "They haven't passed the state budget on time in over two decades, and they won't this year." SBU and NWBCCC members unfurled banners and held placards arguing for more state funding for New York City schools. Later in the day, Joel Rivera, the City Council majority leader from the Bronx, decided that since SBU members had already taken the day off from school, they might as well stay downtown and watch a City Council session firsthand.

A glance at the few days preceding SBU's tour and press conference demonstrate that other Bronx organizations concerned with school reform were equally industrious that week. For example, on the Sunday before, a few hundred members of NWBCCC had performed a surprise protest at Governor Pataki's home in mid-state New York. On Wednesday, members from another group, Mothers on the Move, had visited Albany to lobby for more New York City

funding, and to exhibit support for a lawsuit against the current state funding formula. Finally, members of NWBCCC, along with members of yet two other groups with similar missions, United Parents of Highbridge and ACORN Bronx, had just wrapped up a month's worth of collecting signatures for a petition asking the city to fund a Lead Teacher campaign, placing experienced mentor teachers in each of their partner schools.

### The puzzle of tactics and strategies

A quick survey of the campaign strategies and tactics executed by these five groups, during a one-week period, yields press conferences, surprise protests known as "hits," in-person lobbying, letter-writing and petitions, lawsuits, and tours for public officials. At the same time, two of the organizations were also working collaboratively with the Department of Education on community-based small schools proposals. Clearly, the tactics vary from the very confrontational to the collaborative. Yet, the varied tactics had to do with more than the political context. After all, all of these groups are operating in a small geographical area, in the South Bronx area of New York City, at the same time. The groups also have relatively similar resources.

This chapter begins with the currently dominant theories of social movement organizations, which rely on rational analyses of political contexts and resource maximization; such theories do not always sufficiently explain the variation in political strategies described above. The next section, then, lays a foundation for agency, by delineating how cultural theories might be used to explain variations in political strategies. Specifically, the concepts of collective action frames and cultural tool kits are especially helpful in beginning to explain how the role of culture in social movement organizations.

The chapter concludes with a reformulation of how, and when, culture contributes to a social movement organization's political strategies. Specifically, it argues that culture matters. Rationality-oriented theories do not sufficiently explain how political strategies are formed and

chosen. Culture itself, even within organizations, has remained a nebulous concept in academic literature. To see how culture plays out in social movement organizations, one needs to dig deeper than ideology or values, for often, the rituals and norms at an organization do not coincide with stated values. Because the popular theoretical lens of “collective action frames” focuses on stated values in the relationship between organizer and members, it is limited in its explanatory scope. Furthermore, once committed to the organization, members might still have agency in how they pick and choose from “cultural tool kits” towards their political strategies.

Specifically, the last section presents a brief introduction to the different ways in which members participate and interact, including the symbols, stories, and places around them, affect strategies in two ways: First, they reveal strengths and weaknesses in the organization, so that some strategies make more sense than others. They form different capacities. For example, an organization like ACORN, that primarily involves large numbers of people in short meetings, is more likely to pursue strategies pressuring elected officials for the adoption of a legislative bill than an organization like Mothers on the Move, with regularly scheduled, discussion-heavy workshops. The latter is more likely to have formed the capacity for policy formulation strategies, developing and articulating new programs, that rely on the repeated attendance of key stakeholders. Some tools in the kit become stronger than others, and so strategies are sometimes chosen to befit the confrontational hammer, even if another organization might have reached for its manipulative monkey wrench.

Second, the organizational norms shape members’ perceptions of which tactics are routine and preferable; the members develop a taste for certain tactics. This depends on more than the activities in which they participate; it also involves the rhetoric that is emphasized—whether the language used at public events and organizational meetings draws upon fear or pride, for example—and the objects, symbols, legends, and places that are used in the organization, or become part of its folklore. These factors often seem irrelevant at first. For

example, the consistent use of spoken word and music at SBU's protests, and the police precinct map that dominates ACORN's office, do more than suggest that they are both engaged in safety campaigns. How the message is conveyed is often as powerful as the substance of the message itself. Every organization has its own legends, and certain components of these legends are emphasized over others.

Since there are both positive and negative stories at all of the organizations, members must choose which ones they retell, and how. More likely, there are varying, even contradictory, cultural tools of all kinds in an organizational kit. At any point in time, members choose to emphasize some over others; some tools are likely to become their favorites. After a while, even the most efficient tools are not necessarily used because they are analyzed and deemed to be most efficient; they became the tactics SMO members automatically reach for. This does not necessarily correspond directly to which tools are strongest—It might just be that they seem to be most exciting, or most challenging. By studying cultural tool kits alongside structural factors, a more holistic analysis of SMO political strategies can take place.

Along the way, this chapter also defines key concepts in this dissertation, like social movement, culture, collective action frame, and agency.

### Rationalist and structuralist theories of social movements

*Now, is that irrational?*

Before the 1960s, many of the theoretical approaches portrayed crowds as irrational, encapsulated in the notion of a “mob mentality” (Rucht 1991). Individuals would get caught up in the strange emotions of a group in action, or act on “generational rebellion” (Jasper, 1997, p. 234). With the advent of the civil rights movement, some researchers struggled to develop

theories that legitimized the grievances pronounced by social movements<sup>3</sup>. Some used Mancur Olson's *Logic of Collective Action* (1971) to calculate the interests, risks, benefits, and costs of individuals in their decisions on whether to join a social movement. Russell's book on ACORN, for example, utilizes this type of analysis (1990). Such case studies sometimes incorporate "social goals" such as friendship in their analyses, incorporating altruism, concern for others, and emotions into the rational-choice model,<sup>4</sup> but they then go on to emphasize inculcated social norms as well as individual interests in predicting collective behavior. To the extent that social norms play a role in these rational models, they remain on the sidelines, and giving a cultural analysis center stage may help to disentangle their effects in an SMO's political strategies.

Members can participate in a social movement organization because of momentary compassion as well as long-term calculations of friendships, a reputation of goodness, or expectations of policy changes. A cultural analysis would explain, and hopefully unravel, situations in which members of a social movement organization engage in a struggle even when it appears to be hopeless. It would delineate the norms that helped to shape the members' preferences for a confrontational strategy, even when cost-benefit and risk analyses suggest that such a strategy is unlikely to yield a campaign win. Further, it would trace the process via which the members' preferences are formed, so that they are not automatically counted as innate self-interests. The origins and natures of such preferences, whether social or individual, are thus not assumed and allowed to change.

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<sup>3</sup> Social movements are defined as "conscious, concerted, and relatively sustained efforts by organized groups of ordinary people (as opposed to say, political parties, the military, or industrial trade groups) to change some aspect of their society by using extrainstitutional means" (Jasper, 1997, p. 5). "Extraintitutional means" indicate that social movements focus on influencing policy or social change as outsiders. These people are not in government, either in elected bodies or city agencies, and they try to maintain an image independent from any allies or partners. The five case studies in this dissertation are social movement organizations, which means these groups also have established entities, officially independent from any individual member, with tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service, as non-profit and non-governmental. That they are social movement organizations does not say anything about their political ideology or the substance of their goals. In this study, the organizations in question are all working towards local education reform in the South Bronx.

<sup>4</sup> See discussion of Chong in Jasper (1997, pp. 27-9).



Resource mobilization and political opportunities analyses were primarily developed in the 1970s and 1980s, and they tend to emphasize the rational decisions made by individuals and leadership of organizations. They differ from the rational-choice theory just described, however, because they take political and historical contexts into consideration (Rucht, 1991). Together, they represent the “classical paradigms” that remain dominant today.

*How do we keep going?*

Resource mobilization theory predicts that an SMO’s mobilization is dependent upon the costs and benefits of participation, the existent resources for organizations, and expectations for success, though without much attention given to place- and time-specific contexts (Klandermans, 1991; Mayer, 1991). It differs from the rational-choice model above in that the organization is the primary unit of analysis, and it can operate with a rational calculus just as the individual does (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Studies focused on the practical aspects of social movements: how organizations get individuals to join, how they secure money, how they build super-institutional resources like foundations. This focus on formal organizations and concrete factors, especially quantifiable ones like numbers of people or dollars, makes resource mobilization theory appealing because its hypotheses are clear; the books associated with it have even been labeled a “how-to guide for activists” (Jasper, 1997, p. 29). The theory is more helpful, however, at helping to explain which social movement organizations survive, and how, than why or how they emerge. For example, there are well-developed sub-theories on competition over financial resources among social movement organizations, and how this leads some of them to solicit money from individual donors via direct-mail or find a specialized niche, like focusing on the mental health of transitional housing residents who were just released from prison, rather than homelessness in general (Zald & Ash, 1966; Piven & Cloward, 1977). The reliance on certain streams of money helps to shape political strategies; a reliance on individual donors, for example, makes it less likely that an organization can pursue a sustainable strategy when it has

not secured a steady flow of resources, and this leads many organizations to become preoccupied with organization-building and turn toward institutionalization.

All of this is to say that resource mobilization theory has a great deal to say about money, and a good amount about numbers of people. It has less to say about creative strategy, media, morals, symbols, and cultural factors. What it does say runs some similar risks to those outlined in the rational-choice model. Namely, the statements about social factors can become blurry and reductive. For example, earlier works on the civil rights movement focused on the numbers of people recruited at African American churches, ignoring other aspects of social network analysis, such as the strength of “bonds,” as well as what was being said at those gatherings, what the activities were, or how intense or persuasive the sermons were (McAdam, 1982, pp. 128-30). Some have argued that by treating cultural factors as resources, “mobilization perspectives run the risk of becoming tautological.... Even moral support, public opinion, psychological states, and favorable symbolism have been considered resources” (Jasper, 1997, p. 31). According to this line of reasoning, resource mobilization theory’s focus on structure allows little room for creativity in protest, and it does not articulate how the same symbol can be interpreted in different ways, how a nation’s waving flag can be contested by different groups, its reputation and ‘resource value’ decreased or increased. Grievances are already present and articulated (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977, pp. 250-1). Treating rituals and norms as resources gives them a static, ready-made feeling that does not always mesh with actual circumstances of social change.

The cultural analysis presented later in this dissertation complements resource mobilization theory in its attention to fundraising, financial streams, and recruitment activities in social movement organizations as cultural norms. The impact of members and funders in numbers is certainly significant, as predicted by resource mobilization theory, but so is the sometimes *dissimilar* impact of membership and funding activities on generating commitment, shaping ideas and friendships about campaign goals and issues, and the strategies pursued by

different SMOs. What accounts for the diversity in the political strategies of five SMOs, for instance, is partly the way in which this money fits in with other cultural norms in the organizations. Similarly, one social network with 500 potential new members is not necessarily similar to others in terms of depth, shape, coherence, and cross-cutting alliances. Paying attention to other cultural norms alongside resources, then, can facilitate understanding of the ways in which overall tendencies and capacities in political strategies are shaped, given similar resource constraints.

*Why now, why here?*

In many ways, political opportunities theory, sometimes called political process theory, does a better job of addressing factors besides money than resource mobilization theory does. It is especially helpful in explaining a social movement organization's behavior not just in relation to other organizations in the field, but in relation to the state, and in relation to time and place. It predicts that the activities of a social movement organization (SMO) are shaped by how amenable to protest the governmental and political contexts are (Tarrow, 1998; McAdam, 1997), and it is therefore especially helpful in looking at the ups and downs of a social movement across time or a set of SMOs at the same time, but in a variety of places (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996).

Still, there remain relevant weaknesses to the political opportunities approach. One is that, on its own, it sometimes does not have sufficient explanatory power. In earlier work, McAdam focuses on the social movement organization's capacity, the state's responses to protest, and the SMO's expectations of success (1982). In some ways, then, it goes beyond resource mobilization in addressing external actors in the environment. Its primary hypothesis is that SMOs are more likely to emerge when the state becomes friendlier, or less repressive. Even McAdam points to situations when this was not the case, however; sometimes, an especially harsh event, like the televised images of non-violent protestors being beaten in Birmingham in

the Civil Rights Movement, mobilizes more supporters and earns more sympathy from third parties (1996, p. 253).

A second, related weakness is that an overwhelming focus on the state does not give enough credit to public opinion, the media, and other actors. The theory befits social movements Jasper calls “citizenship movements,” those operating “organized by and on behalf of categories of people excluded in some way from full human rights, political participation, or basic economic protections,” more than “post-citizenship” ones, like the environmental or nuclear disarmament movements (1997, p. 7). That is, political opportunities theory is more likely to be helpful when the SMO participants in question are disenfranchised in some way; it is less persuasive when the SMO members are privileged citizens fighting against the use of fur as clothing, for example, when the state might not be the focus of attention. Likewise, the theory’s emphasis on the state also makes most sense when one assumes that SMOs draw upon pre-made, or naturally delineated, collectives with grievances.

Third, it is difficult to develop objective criteria for “political opportunities.” The electoral defeat of a city mayor may appear to be the dawn of a new era for one social movement organization, while another SMO may think that the new mayor essentially represents more of the same. That is, perceptions of political opportunities can in themselves be culturally and socially constructed. It is significant, then, that both McAdam and Tarrow later address more cultural factors in their analyses. Although both authors have also written explicitly about framing processes, to be discussed in the next section, Tarrow partly deals with cultural factors by incorporating them into his definition of political opportunities. He writes, “By political opportunity structure, I mean consistent— but not necessarily formal or permanent— dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure. Theorists of political opportunity structure emphasize the mobilization of resources *external* to the group” (1998, p. 85, italics in original).

Here, Tarrow runs the risk of saying that SMOs emerge or act when there are incentive political opportunities, and political opportunities are structures that provide incentives. Room remains for an exploration of how such incentives and political opportunities are perceived or culturally constructed by SMOs.

Some “structures,” like allies, can be the result of painstakingly built coalitions, and divisions in the enemy ranks can also be the product of strategy rather than purely external factors.<sup>5</sup> To take full advantage of the insight provided by political opportunities theory, a cultural analysis is needed in order to investigate what aspects of the state are subject to a consistent interpretation across social movement organizations, and what aspects of the state are susceptible to different interpretations. This would be a first step in rendering existent incentives structures distinct from actions taken by individual SMOs, and it would facilitate an analysis across SMOs and space as well as across time, the latter being the forte of political process theory.

The dominant theories of resource mobilization and political opportunities both focus on external factors shaping social movements, and both treat SMOs as rational agents, so that an SMO is less likely to engage in an activity or strategy if the government would not respond to it, or if there were no funding. By emphasizing rationality, they help to transform protesters from kooky paranoiacs into legitimate, calculating citizens. They recognize, too, that an SMO’s activities are more than the sum of the members’ rational calculations. Historical and political contexts play a role. Yet, without accompanying cultural analyses, the endeavor of a social movement sometimes still feels a bit fatalistic. What happens if the state is repressive, and there is little money? The theories are far from being so simplistic; nevertheless, they beg the question of how change occurs. Environmental movements have changed quite a bit in the past thirty

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<sup>5</sup> I do not want to go too far in problematizing the distinction between internal and external factors. I am not saying that a change in the government majority is necessarily part of an SMO strategy rather than a political opportunity, for instance. I do believe that a distinction is helpful, and I think that it needs to be clearly defined.

years, but the strategies of many environmental SMOs have remained the same over this period of time (Carmin & Balser, 2002). What accounts for this? On the flipside of the coin, why are there not always inevitable flurries of activity when the state is welcoming policy changes with open arms, and foundations are waiting to throw money at new SMOs? Individuals and SMOs do not necessarily and automatically translate concerns into action, or adopt new activities as soon as the opportunity arises. These opportunities sure help, but motivators, morals, galvanizing symbols, and SMO cultures might have a role, too.

In the context of this dissertation, the use of accompanying cultural theories would help to explain why there is so much protest activity when many members find the struggle to be ultimately “hopeless,” or when the government has shut down all apparent political opportunities. When utilized alongside these dominant theories, cultural theories would more fully explain the behavior of the case study SMOs working on school reform when these SMOs will not themselves see the eventual returns, or when they are not fighting the state *per se* but also trying to elicit more public participation and sympathy as goals unto themselves. Moving beyond a focus on straightforward success or failure, such an analysis can also be better equipped to account for situations in which coexisting SMOs appear to exhibit different notions of success.

#### Cultural components of social movements

In contrast to the dominant social movement theories described above, some researchers have used the concept of “culture” to examine what happens *inside* SMOs. Cultural theories, then, endeavor to explain situations in which the behavior of social movement organizations cannot be predicted by structural variables, such as resources and political opportunities. In other words, they have attempted to answer the question, “Where’s the agency?”

Here, agency is defined as “the temporally constructed engagement of actors of different structural environments-- the temporal-relational contexts of action-- which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 970). It indicates that culture matters, but that culture is both enabling and constraining. The political strategies of social movement organizations<sup>6</sup> are not products of pure rational calculus, and they cannot be predicted solely from adding up the expectations of individuals, or by examining the political contexts and resources available to them. On the other hand, neither is culture everything. Some of the literature on culture has run the risk of attempting to replace resource mobilization and political opportunities theories with cultural theory. A more helpful tract might be to look instead at how these different theories interact. This dissertation focuses on culture not because the others do not matter, but because it is more likely to explain the strategic differences of SMOs that operate in the same context.

While there are theories suggesting that structures such as political economic systems are also socially constructed, this study focuses on the cultures *inside* organizations as if they can be examined separately from each other, and from society as a whole. This dissertation on social movements operates with the assumption that SMOs can matter, and in believing that the notion of “social change” and policy changes exist, it refuses to dismiss agency by saying that we are all mere reflections of our socially constructed realities.

The next two sections, then, consider cultural theories that have emerged in social movements literature, and the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, namely “frames” and “cultural tool kits.”

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<sup>6</sup> Here, political strategies are defined as the systematic plans of action meant to elicit a political position for the organization or policy change. They involve a series of decisions and events, as well as overall motivating factors and an overarching vision of the plan. For example, while the events described at the beginning of the chapter, on their own, describe tactics and not strategies per se, they still hint at the overall political strategies in which they are embedded, at whether are meant to be part of continued pressure, persuasion, or bargaining, for example.

*Framing and mobilizing*

One way to begin unpacking culture is via the concept of frames. The term “frame” is used by Snow et al to mean the “schemata of interpretation” which “organize experience and guide action” in an SMO, and there is a focus on process rather than static structures or interests (1997, p. 235). Collective action frames, then, are useful tools for analyzing different SMOs operating at the same time, in the same setting. Collective action frames are also the primary means of cultural analysis in much of social movements literature (McCarthy, McAdam, & Zald, 1996; Johnston & Klandermans, 1995; Meyer, Whittier, & Robnett, 2002).

Johnston and Klandermans write, “as far as the processing of culture is concerned, any research tool that looks for answers to questions of how framing activities penetrate the black box of mental life to affect behavior, how public discourse generates collective action frames, how socially constructed meaning influences action mobilization is extremely relevant for social movement literature” (1995, p. 23). While resource mobilization and political opportunities theories have helped researchers to contextualize social movements, Snow and Benford’s “collective action frames” are one way of operationalizing their ideas in action. As Piven and Cloward write, “the social arrangements that are ordinarily perceived as just and immutable must come to seem both unjust and mutable,” and collective action frames are the idea-based work SMOs present to accomplish this transformation. Taking Goffman’s “framing” process (originally discussed in everyday life, not in social movements per se) as a starting point (1974), collective action frames simplify and condense aspects of the “world out there,” but in ways that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Snow & Benford, 1988, p. 198).

The key dynamic is one of attempted “frame alignment,” so that the SMO’s goals and ideas mesh with those of potential participants. Snow et al present four processes significant to collective action frames: 1. frame bridging, 2. frame amplification, 3. frame extension, and 4.



frame transformation (1997, p. 238). These are different ways of linking the SMO's goals to those already existent in society, and all of them focus on SMO mobilization. Frame bridging, for example, consists of building contacts and bridges to like-minded SMOs, by advertising in leftist magazines like *Mother Jones* or obtaining the mailing lists of ally conservative groups; other ideas for recruitment, like emphasizing a certain aspect of the SMO's goals, or stretching the overall mission to include something related that potential participants might be interested in, correspond to the other framing processes (Snow et al., 1997; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). These latter processes might not just appeal to well-articulated worldviews, but "their sense of empirical credibility, their own life experiences, and the narratives they use to describe their lives" (Jasper, 1997, p. 75).

Collective action theory has spawned its own literature, and more recent studies have focused on how frames are contested by the media, countermovements, and other groups within the movement. For instance, Gamson and others have used the framing concept to analyze changing metaphors, images, and goals of political debates during election seasons (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989; Gamson, 1995).

There are two main limitations to the use of collective action frames as the primary means of analyzing culture in SMOs. First, critics have called Snow and Benford "theorists rather than researchers" (Swidler, 1986, p. 31), and stated that, "Frame-alignment theories have remained rather abstract, describing the need for resonance without always exploring its substantive sources" (Jasper, 1997, p. 75). Related to this is the criticism that collective action frames do not give enough credit to the cultural work that is already out there, or to the conversation that goes on between SMOs (Steinberg, 2002; Whittier, 2002). By focusing on how individuals' frames are in sync, framing theory thus far has paid inadequate attention to publicly constructed frames, those existent in the shared world. Some argue, then, that while culture matters, frame analysis lends *too much* agency to organizations and activists. They cannot spin

their identities, or the meanings and definitions of their struggles, out of thin air. As Tarrow elaborates, “Symbols of revolt are not drawn like musty costumes from a cultural closet and arrayed before the public.... [but] woven from a blend of inherited and invented fibers into collective action frames in confrontation with opponents and elites” (1998, p. 118).

As originally conceived, collective action frames are schemata as applied by organizers and activists; they have no lives of their own. Other SMO theorists who disagree, then, draw from linguistic theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin, to describe how social movement organizations are in discourse with external players in constructing the meanings of key words or frames (Steinberg, 2002). Sometimes, the frames accrue meanings activists would have never imagined; collective action frames are thus defined through conversations rather than by any single individuals or SMOs.

The most prominent contemporary example of such frame recreation via contestation, in education policy, is that of community control. Specifically, the ‘community control’ frame constructed by Black activists in the 1960s served as a means to gain representation in school governance structures in a racially unequal system, and this led to School Board decentralization in New York City (Stafford, 2000). Over the years, however, the same term has been adopted by groups with ideologies quite incongruous with those of the 1960s community control activists. Specifically, voucher proponents view community control as a means for fiscal control, to promote school choice and other market-like mechanisms in the school system; with this, an unlikely alliance was struck between neoconservative policymakers and the African American community in Milwaukee (Margonis & Parker, 1999). After a few years, however, the alliance soured when African American leaders felt that policymakers were not addressing their goal of racial justice, and other cities began to question community control (Hess, 1999). In addition, Naples writes about how the frame of ‘community control,’ originally used to lend power to disenfranchised, inner-city minority populations, was transformed by groups of suburban social

conservatives in a way unimaginable to those who coined the term (2002). Specifically, these conservative groups have used the ‘community control’ frame to successfully ban textbooks that do not reflect ‘their’ community values, such as Rainbow Curriculum literature about gay and lesbian families. Frames are not given, then, or necessarily steadily out there to easily bridge, amplify, extend, or transform. Each group’s framing activities are both enabling and constrained by the dynamics and constant shifting contexts around them.

When researchers do try to use the frames concept to analyze the broader culture, they sometimes stretch too far; unless one investigates and acknowledges the different audiences targeted by different collective action frames, one can easily conflate internal framing with external political strategy. But culture is not always strategic. The second limitation, then, is that collective action frames measure ideologies, well-formulated values, and public messages (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; Swidler, 1986). They do not explicitly address rituals, unintended symbols, norms, and other aspects of culture. These latter components of culture are unlikely to follow the ideas of an SMO’s collective action frame to the bullet point.

To the extent that frames are implemented and enacted in different ways, collective action frames remains an insufficient cultural theory. In this way, collective action frames place emphases on community organizers, movement leaders, and other elite—It is all up to them. They give less agency to members and other leaders in SMOs, who have more responsibility in internal, ongoing culture. Ironically, Benford has himself written that “those operating within the framing/ constructionist perspective... continue to write as though our movement actors (when we actually acknowledge humans in our texts) are Spock-like beings” (1997, p. 19). Looking at culture beyond collective action frames, then, would help us understand why different groups that adopt one collective action frame might end up pursuing different political strategies.

For these reasons, collective action frames are used in the dissertation, but in a limited sense. As per Jasper, “If we are willing to use some additional concepts to get at culture, then we

can restrict framing to the *conscious efforts by groups or recruiters to craft their rhetoric and issues in such a way that they appeal to potential recruits*" (1997, p. 77, italics in original; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996).

### Cultural tools in the field

At this point, a brief detour from theoretical literature might be helpful. What does the empirical literature on organizing and social movement organizations tell us about culture and political strategies? Few studies have addressed the issue of culture in community organizing for school reform, or community organizing overall. Most contemporary books on contemporary community organizing have focused on housing or worker campaigns, which have a longer history (Rooney, 1995; Jonnes, 2002; Russell, 1990; Delgado, 1986; Gecan, 2002).

In addition, to the extent that education demands a different set of strategies than other issues do, books specifically addressing organizing on education issues have largely focused on case studies in the Southwest (Warren, 2001; Shirley, 1997; Wood, 2002). These have mostly focused on case histories, the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies in those cases, and some discussion of social networks, leaving less room for cultural analysis. Osterman (2002) also focuses on the Texas IAF, though forthcoming articles lend greater emphasis on to culture, specifically on how certain rituals and training styles in the organization help to develop member leadership that questions and challenges the top, and prevents the organization from becoming oligarchical (forthcoming).

To the extent that the published books do address social processes or cultural issues, many of the issues discussed are limited to those surrounding social capital or explicitly declared values. For example, Warren's analysis of churches as a base for social capital echo, in some ways, McAdam's analysis of the role of black churches in the Civil Rights Movement. Statistics for attendance are listed, and the churches' strength in "connectedness" is cited, but it is

somewhat difficult to glean how churches influence the participation and views of congregation members, rather than how many congregation members can be reached via this institutional channel (2001). In rough social capital parlance, the current literature on community organizing for school reform places a greater emphasis on *bridging* social capital, between institutions and local groups, than on *bonding* social capital, the norms and trust that exist within each group.<sup>7</sup>

Comparative analyses are fairly rare; a recent book by Kristina Smock compares five ‘models’ of organizing: power, women-centered, transformative, civic, and community development (2003). As mentioned in the first chapter’s section on case selection, all the groups in my study could be placed in the first category, for they all attempt to influence policy-making by gathering residents to work on a single education campaign. An older study focused on “Alinsky” and “women-centered” models of community organizing and focused conceptual differences, such as the two models’ definitions of leadership and power (Stall and Stoecker, 1998).

Two comparative studies of SMOs and culture are *Cultural Dilemmas of Progressive Politics: Styles of Engagement among Grassroots Activists* (2001) by Stephen Hart and *Faith in Action* by Richard Wood (2002). The former takes a look at several SMOs on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, spending the most time on anti-abortion activist organizations and human rights ones. He argues that right-wing organizations have become much more willing and therefore successful at bringing explicitly moral values into the discourse, in order to gain mobilization, while leftist organization have focused on issues around success and effectiveness. This type of discourse limits the leftist organizations’ ability to draw people in and make strong cases for their causes. Though his analysis of culture is helpful, Hart’s arguments span

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<sup>7</sup> For example, see Warren (2001, pp. 25-8, 249-51). It is perhaps significant that indexed under “social capital,” there are several “bridging”-specific entries but no “bonding”- specific ones (p. 320). Although this is certainly not a decisive analysis, it supports the notion some studies have incorporated deeper and more thorough analysis of how the IAF expands social networks using church membership than how the norms within each group are produced in the first place, and how these, in turn, shape inter-group dynamics and external political strategies.

movements rather than investigating organizations working on the same issue. Therefore, it is difficult to glean and conclude which aspects of the organizational cultures can really be extrapolated. Furthermore, Hart's concentration on discourse is in many ways akin to Snow and Benford's concept of framing; like frames, the "styles of engagement" considered do not consistently include nonverbal and less intentional components of culture.

Wood examined a faith-based, PICO-affiliated group and a race-based, Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO)-affiliated group in Oakland, California, and drew conclusions about their cultural strategies (2002). Wood's case studies of two organizations in Oakland, one race-based and the other congregation-based, concluded that the race-based organization held steadfastly to a more extremist class-based ideology, which helped it to excel on controversial issues such as police brutality, but impeded its progress on issues that demanded collaboration or the planning and development of new policies or programs, such as the creation of new schools. In contrast, the congregation-based organization succeeded on issues like the latter because of its claim of non-ideology<sup>8</sup>. Wood includes norms in his two analysis of the two organizations, and examinations of congregation theological arguments, rituals, and sermons are especially insightful and in-depth. Still, some of this is done in order to get at their underlying values, rather than looking at the effects of these components of culture unto themselves, not just as representations of organizational values. This is important because some of the activities, rituals, etc. may have unintended consequences that do not mesh with any organization-wide values. Some of the differences between the two groups could therefore have been attributed to ideology rather than cultural norms.

Furthermore, some organizers argue that Wood does not "grasp the depth of cultural transformation that PUEBLO [the CTWO-affiliated group] is capable of generating in its

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<sup>8</sup> Though Wood does not discuss this explicitly, I would argue that the congregation-based IAF case is not *completely* non-ideological, since it adheres to tenets such as, 'everyone is driven by self-interest,' which suggests that the organization is willing to participate in a liberal society.

leadership” (Mumm, forthcoming). This is particularly so because Wood rates the effectiveness of the two groups according to criteria that shed the PICO-affiliated group in a more positive light; part of Mumm’s argument may then be that alternate criteria might have in turn favored the CTWO-affiliated group. The most vociferous of critics of some IAF-affiliated groups are Gary Delgado, who worked for over a decade in ACORN and later helped to develop CTWO, and more recently, Marshall Ganz, who also worked in organizing for decades before turning to research. Delgado’s key criticisms lie in his opinion that the “centrality of race” is often ignored, and that globalization, increasing diversity, and social movements have moved “beyond the politics of place,” so that neighborhood-based organizing must be conjoined with other organizing principles, many of these around identity-based “communities of interest” (1994, 1998, 2003). One of his earlier works (1994) great controversy in the organizing world and helped to generate both critiques that he makes “an assumption that there is a specific way in which race and gender issues must be addressed... [when many] issues have been subsumed by issues of class solidarity in most community organizations” (Miller, 1996, p. 66), as well as subsequent rebuttals against such critiques (Calpotura and Fellner, 1996). Ganz has iterated criticisms somewhat similar to Mumm’s and Delgado’s, stating that IAF groups are adept at encouraging civic engagement, but that they are unlikely to lead to social transformation (2003, 2004).

The dissertation at hand does not rate the overall effectiveness of the groups’ political strategies per se, though how the cultural tool kits of the different groups lend themselves to mitigating certain tensions in the political strategies is laid out clearly.

For these reasons, to the extent that education might demand different frames and cultural norms in social movements other than housing or the environment, and New York provides a different political context, this dissertation offers a unique opportunity to see how five power-based organizations, all working on community organizing for school reform in the Bronx,

develop different internal cultures of participation. In turn, I look at whether and how these organizations' cultural tool kits shape their external political strategies.

According to my research across five organizations, the internal cultural norms do make a difference in the external political strategies chosen by the organizations as a whole. By investigating five organizations working on education reform in the Bronx over the same period of time, I had the opportunity to see different organizations react to the same political situation in different ways. In addition, the same organization sometimes asserts different cultural norms, or presents different aspects of their identity, according to the situation. This indicates that strategies are not pre-determined, either by pure rational calculus or subconscious cultural paradigms or identities. By unpacking the means with which creativity is a factor in political strategies, then, we can begin to formulate ways in which social movement organizations can draw upon their cultural strengths for education reform, or work towards different organizational cultures.

### Using cultural tool kits for political strategies

This dissertation attempts to answer the following question: How does culture in social movement organizations influence the political strategies the SMOs pursue? Building upon other social movements theories and the points gleaned from literature on community organizing, it is possible to demarcate a concept of culture that both adds to the theories described above and can be operationalized in an analysis of case study organizations working on education reform.

#### *Defining culture in social movements organizations*

What, then, is culture in social movement organizations? Well, "Hardly anyone agrees with anyone on a definition of the concept of 'culture,' but almost everyone agrees that is among the most elusive and difficult to specify of social science concepts" (Lofland, 1995, p. 190). "Roughly speaking," according to Zald, "culture is the shared beliefs and understandings,



mediated and constructed by symbols and language, or a group or society... [and] frames are the specific metaphors, symbolic representations, and cognitive cues used to render or cast behavior and events in an evaluative mode and to suggest alternative modes of action” (1996, p. 262).

Culture consists of the means of sharing behavior and views within a community, “including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms, and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories, and rituals of daily life” (Swidler, 1986, p. 273; Hall et al., 1996; Frost et al., 1985). In real-life cultures, these stories, rituals, etc. might be varied and even contradictory; handbooks to action might include some passages emphasizing non-violence and others emphasizing confrontation. Bibles of social movements, from the Holy Bible to Alinsky’s *Rules for Radicals*, usually leave enough ambiguity between the lines and give enough contextualized advice so that SMOs can pick out a line to support almost any tactic or action, even if others disagree with the thrust of the SMO’s strategic interpretation. Each organization also has its own activities and rituals, which tend to acquire a tenor of their own. In this way, cultures are not monolithic but more akin to tool kits, “public practices infused with power” (Swidler, 1995, p. 38; Swidler, 1986; Lichterman, 1996).

More specifically, Swidler (1986) critiques ends- and value-oriented “Weberian” analyses of culture by describing how a “culture of poverty,” for example, is not captured by a survey of poor people’s aspirations. They share the same goals middle-class people do—going to college, having a successful career—and they do not necessarily value loyalty more than individual achievement, but if their social skills help them to stick together with the family rather than become a physician, then their norms and skills shape their action strategies. “If culture influences action through end values, people in changing circumstances should hold on to their preferred ends while altering their strategies for attaining them. But if culture provides the tools with which persons construct lines of action, then styles or strategies of action will be more persistent than the ends people seek to attain” (Swidler, 1986, p. 277). By measuring actions and

silences as well as words, researchers can dig deeper into not only what culture *is* but what it does—in this case, how an SMO’s internal culture influences its political strategies. In this dissertation, all four case study SMOs claim to be working towards the values and goals of education reform, social justice, and more equitable distribution of school resources, but their strategies differ.

If culture might be better thought of not as a singular entity but as a cultural tool kit, then political strategies are like *bricolage*, and the tool kits shape the strategy work in two ways. First, different cultural tool kits build capacities for different political strategies. Cooking communal meals for organizational meetings and sleepover retreats force SMO members to know one other relatively intimately, to form rapport as well as game plans and agreements on the division of labor. Such cultural tools develop trust that, in turn, enables members to take on risky political strategies, where SMO members develop their own policy proposals and can tell (even if the politician cannot) when one of them is bluffing off the cuff. Cultural tools such as phone banking and petitioning alone in front of churches would better lend themselves to a political strategy dependent upon intensive outreach and turnout, like an election. These tools often act as the clincher that ultimately ‘wins’ policy adoption or additional program funding, rather than the formulation of a new policy altogether. Norms such as careful documentation of all meetings, in binders constantly and prominently displayed in the office, do more than inform members of what has been going on, and who has been there. Such documentation forms different expectations in members and might translate into a political strategy that requires data analysis.

Second, SMO members develop a taste for certain tactics and strategies. Books often describe how SMO members change through their participation, usually focusing on how the members became less shy, or became politically awakened (Wood, 2002; Osterman, 2002; Warren, 2001). In addition, SMO members usually attach certain emotions to these changes (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001). For instance, someone who learns basic statistical analysis

does not just know it, she probably feels proud of it, and may even go out of her way to find instances to utilize her skills, even when the data itself are not particularly compelling. In such cases, a meeting with which to impress the target with her adept use of numbers and evidence might seem more appealing than an electoral strategy. SMOs that use music regularly might have members who enjoy the catchy power of rhythm in public settings. Many people feel sympathetic to several causes and trust several choices of political strategy to be effective, but only pursue those that are, to them, fun and fulfilling. SMO members who feel overwhelmed every time they see a large group of teenagers want to bring education experts to crowded high school hallways, away from the numbers and to the classrooms. The thrill of seeing a powerful person in a setting where the tables are turned, if only figuratively, can lead SMO members to seek such a strategy even when they expect the event to be unsuccessful in terms of official, expected campaign outcomes.

Sometimes, an SMO pursues a political strategy not just because it utilizes the SMO's capacities, but because it also fits well with the tastes and preferences that have been developed in the SMO. These tastes are sometimes subtle: A norm does not have to be articulated to make a difference; by concluding meetings without summarizing the points of agreement, an SMO's culture can lead to incremental or isolationist political strategies, even if no one said anything about how individuality or partial success is valued. Cultural rituals, beliefs, and symbols form not only capacities but also expectations.

#### *Some implications*

By analyzing how cultural tool kits help to shape political strategies, we can also investigate how structure and agency interact in a more nuanced way, and how all of the theories discussed thus far influence our choices for a single set of strategies. With apologies for briefly employing a metaphor besides the cultural tool kit, Jasper wrote, "If the choice of tactics is like deciding to take a car rather than a bus or train, strategic decisions include how fast to drive,

when to switch lanes, and whether to use the horn” (1997, p. 234). By extending this political strategy as travel metaphor, we can contemplate all the ways of getting from point A to point B. A resource mobilization theory helps to explain what we can or cannot afford, and how our means of travel might also reflect our fundraising approaches. According to the political opportunities approach, our travels in part depend on whether there is a set of public institutions like buses, subways, etc. This dissertation in no way attempts to refute structural theories, but to add to them, to explore the effects of agency in the mix.

With our own cultural tool kits, we also develop preferences depending on whether we are strong enough to walk, whether we would like to carpool or find scheduling conflicts with potential partners to be too troublesome, and whether we have a taste for adventure and would like to hitchhike like Jack Kerouac. We also form preferences as to whether we like to get people’s attention by honking, cutting them off, or meeting them at point B. Sometimes, we change our transportation lifestyles not only when the subway fare goes up, or the bus routes have changed, but when we spend more time with a new partner who turns out to be a bicycling fanatic, when a heart attack tells us we need more exercise and we decide to walk everywhere no matter how long it takes, or when our environmental concerns about the greater world tell us that we need to buy a more fuel-efficient car, or stay away from automobiles altogether.

In these ways, cultural tool kits add to the theoretical constructs described above by paying due attention to the consequences of nonverbal norms and the actions of members within the organization. The five case studies to be analyzed in this dissertation were very much restricted and enabled by their resource levels, interests, and political opportunities. At the same time, the diversity in the SMOs political strategies is partly explained by the different cultural tool kits they used to maneuver through similar political opportunities, interests, and resources. Taken together, then, these theories highlight one another’s strengths and amplify cumulative explanatory powers, especially in comparative analyses. Whereas political opportunities theory

predicts that a social movement organization's political strategies are partly determined by how friendly the state is to possible demands, for example, the cultural theory in this dissertation predicts that a social movement organization's political strategies are partly determined by the capacities and tendencies, repertoires of action, built by the SMO's fairly stable cultural tool kits.

The following table features the focal points and guiding questions for the theories discussed in this chapter. Because this dissertation focuses on a setting in which the state, goals, timeline, and overall issue—local school reform—are held constant, its context places a natural emphasis on cultural theories.

Table 2-1. *Focal points of social movement theories discussed*

	Guiding Question(s)	Actor(s)	Focus of analysis
Rational Choice	What are we working for, and is it worth it?	Calculating individuals	Individual interests
Resource mobilization	How do we keep going?	Members, funders, fundraisers, social networks	Practical considerations of resources, social movement organizations
Political opportunities	Why now, why here?	The state, social movement organizations (generally reactive)	Emergence of social movement organization in reaction to a single state across time, or to different states at the same time
Collective action frames	How do we recruit and expand?	Organizers, social movement organizations' elite, media	Conscious, verbal articulation of beliefs and organizational identity
Cultural tool kits	How do we choose political strategies and change?	Organizers, social movement organization members	Member agency and consequences of both verbal and nonverbal norms

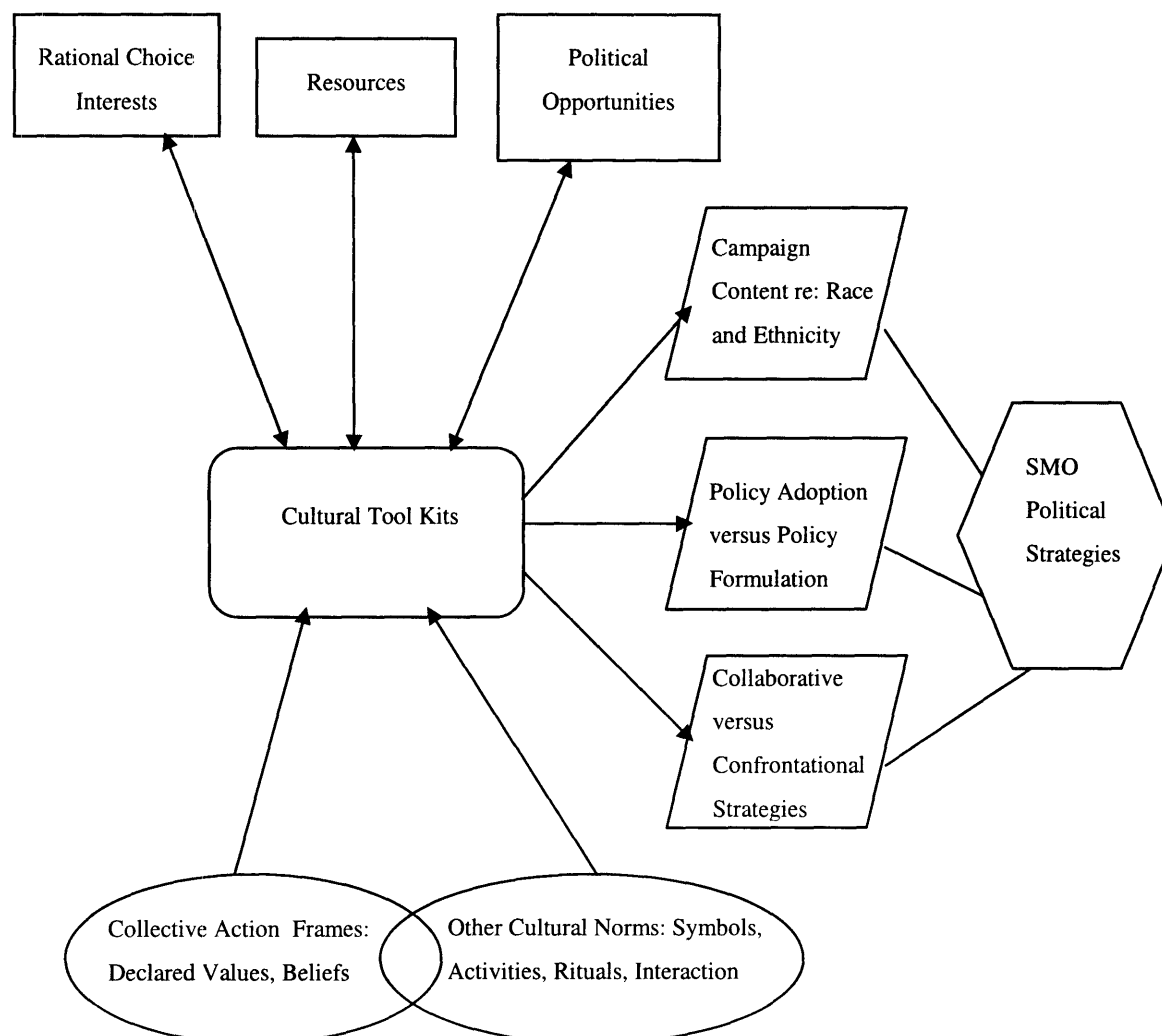
Finally, the following figure visually summarizes some of the key principles and concepts in each of the theories, with a focus on the cultural tool kits theory utilized in this dissertation. As noted earlier and illustrated in the figure, the cultural analysis that becomes the focus of this dissertation is not meant to replace dominant theories such as resource mobilization and political opportunities, but to add to them.

Since the purpose of this study is not to pursue to an exclusive analysis but a robust one, it also attempts to investigate the interaction between the different theories. For example, it looks

at how the same political context might be perceived as a political opportunity by one SMO and not seen as such by a neighboring SMO. This is partly mitigated by the SMO's strength in policy formulation rather than adoption of old, ready-made programs. In such cases, a friendly state may be warily perceived as a co-opting force rather than ally. In another context, an SMO's propensity towards confrontational strategies may also not perceive a friendly state as a potential ally, since its members would rather gather to demand for full-fledged support than engage in protracted, potentially compromising, collaborative strategies.

The interaction of the different theories also sheds light on how membership dues, a focus of resource mobilization analyses, also act as a cultural tool in cementing member commitment to organizational identity in Alinskyite category SMOs. In turn, hefty membership dues help to develop organizational capacities for the large-scale political strategies conducive to winning policy adoption, as well as tastes for the kinds of confrontational political strategies that make great use of the cultural tools built by financial 'ownership' in an organization.

Figure 2-1. Figurative rendering of theoretical principles in shaping SMO political strategies



This chapter has attempted to lay out a theoretical road map, if you will, of the territory of educational organizing groups in the South Bronx. The truism that ‘the map is not the territory,’ then, compels us to now simultaneously clarify and flesh out the key concepts by examining them in practice.

## Chapter 3: Public Education and Organizing in the Bronx

This chapter completes a sketch of the landscape in which this dissertation takes place. It begins with a very short historical walk or, more truthfully, a historical jaunt, through the ever-changing school governance structures in New York City. This history helps to explain why there are so many social movement organizations working on education in the city, and why civic participation remains important today. It also illuminates the substantive education issues and political context faced by the SMOs in the study. The next section presents a profile of the challenges facing public education in New York City today, specifically in the Bronx. Finally, the chapter presents a brief overview of community organizing for school reform in the Bronx, including profiles of each of the five social movement organizations in the study.

### Centuries of learning

The current state of public education in the Bronx is very much a cumulative product of the past century's institutional changes in the city's school system as a whole. Namely, the story of inequality, and of competing institutional forms and norms, permeates the entire history of the city's schools. The ways with which administrators, parents, and politicians deal with these themes and obstacles therefore leave a legacy that contemporary activists must choose to continue, or break. This section focuses on bureaucracies' relationships with civil society groups, especially since 1960, and it is accompanied by a barebones timeline on the governance structures overlooking the public schools (See Appendix B); even at a glance, the motifs of undulating centralization and decentralization are clear. Both inadequate data and limited space preclude the possibility an analysis of whether and how culture helped to shape the political strategies of *historical* social movements. Still, the sheer diversity of concurrent perspectives



*within* social movements at every pivotal point in New York City school history suggests that indeed, their history is not wholly explained by divergent interests, resources, or political opportunities.

*From patchwork to blanket administration*

New York City's public schools have older histories than those of most American cities. Partly because little is known about the social movements surrounding their early history (Cremin, 1961; Cohen, 1964, 1999; Ravitch, 1974), this short section gives an overview of their institutional beginnings, with an emphasis on their 'official' version.

A major port city and a center for immigrants, New York did not undertake a large-scale implementation of one-room schoolhouse model so common in the midwest, or evoked in many Americans' minds as something akin to the school in *Little House on the Prairie*. While some academics have argued that schooling rates were much higher in the Northeast because of the need for higher skills in the manufacturing sector, others disagree. Mike Katz argues that such a urbanization and industrialization model "does not clarify the relation between institutions and social change" very well because the chronological fit between industry and institutions is imperfect, and attempts to construct causal models or develop tight and coherent explanations are usually too mechanistic and vague (1987, p. 12).

Rather, Katz maintains, New York's sprawling schools emerged from a network of private foundations and non-profit organizations endowed by wealthy patrons. Rather than teaching skills to the public, some academics also argue that the original purpose of public schools was to civilize the poor. According to this view, there was little trust in poor parents' ability to raise their children, especially regarding their "fondness for drink" and "reluctance to work," and for this reason, the Children's Aid Society shipped over 90,000 kids west to live with farm families, during the latter half of the nineteenth century (Katz, 1987, p. 39).

Most of the schools themselves, with education as the primary goal, operated as part of the Free School Society. The Free School Society was a bit of misnomer, as it was a philanthropic organization primarily providing schooling to the middle-class. In 1824, it was transformed into the New York Public School Society. In 1825, county poorhouses also began to teach some classes to poor children (Katz, 1987, p. 12). For the most part, the opinions of parents of attending children were not as well documented as the intentions of the policymakers. Further, rather than histories of say, confrontation or collaboration between parents and administrators, the literature primarily sketches overall resignation or satisfaction among different New York City communities; when there is dissatisfaction, parents appear to set up their own private institutions rather than engage in the public sphere (Berg, 1981; Ment, 1995b; Berrol, 1981).

This early type of association between civil society and public schooling was reflected in the school system structure: There was not a school system per se, so much as a collection of foundations, charities, and social services agencies working alongside the New York Public School Society to help targeted populations. According to Katz, there were four major institutional models: 1. paternalistic voluntarism, an extension of the ethic of noblesse oblige, 2. corporate voluntarism, which combined noblesse oblige with neighborhood character and “self-perpetuating boards of trustees,” 3. democratic localism, which drew support from the public’s mistrust of imposed social change, and 4. a burgeoning, and ultimately victorious, bureaucracy of the Progressive Era and the twentieth century.

Before the latter model truly flourished, however, there transpired one episode that hints at the social movements bubbling under, and contesting, the surface history of official school structures. In the 1840s, the city’s Catholic and Baptist communities viewed the New York Public School Society as essentially Protestant, and they warily eyed whether the Society schools were also attempting to proselytize (Ment, 1995b; Ravitch, 1974). The main protestors were the Catholic bishops, however, and this campaign hardly appeared to be grassroots, for the bishops

campaigns for school reforms despite a *lack* of support among lay people, at least as demonstrated by newspaper editorials in the Catholic immigrant press (Ravitch, 1974). Rather, the Catholic clergy chose to pursue the political strategy of antagonizing local politicians in order to appeal to the State Governor and Legislature, where they thought they would gather more support. In the context of this dissertation, then, an interesting, unanswered question lies in whether cultural norms might help to explain why the Catholic populace felt no political opportunities existed, especially if their main political rituals revolved around local elections, and the Catholic elite felt that political opportunities did exist. In 1846, the Catholic clergy did not get their policy proposals adopted wholesale, but they did succeed in eliminating the old system. In order to guarantee that New York public schools were truly nondenominational, the State Legislature abolished the Public School Society and replaced it with official, ward-based government-run public schools (Ment, 1995b; Ravitch, 1974; Sanders, 1981).

This ward-based system remained intact for half a century, until another contentious, well-documented period provides some data on social movement organizations and their political strategies for school reform in the city. First, the points of relative consensus that eventually emerged focused on rapid institutionalization, and they were representative of the construction of the “semi-welfare state” from the 1890s to the 1930s. This new “state” was marked the institutionalization of “child saving”: compulsory education, foster care, kindergartens, and the removal of kids from almshouses all attempted to save children from the corrupting forces of their mostly immigrant parents, placing them instead under the care of benevolent and civilized women. These women, in turn, were presumed to act upon their maternal instincts while the ratio of male administrators to children began to skyrocket, from one staff administrator per 100,000 pupils in 1900, to one per 2,000 in 1974 (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 19; Kantor and Brenzel, 1993). Along the way, the schools came to spawn, or to fit, the highly regimented and sprawling institutional structures and cultures to which we are so accustomed today.

How and why these schools came to be, however, remains highly controversial.

Depending on the historical account one reads, the Progressives were an interest group or an entire social movement (Cremin, 1961; Gittell, 1969; Ravitch, 1974; Cohen, 1964, 1999). By all accounts, the Progressives' primary education SMO, the Public Education Association (PEA), was decidedly not grassroots. Therefore, the relevance of its cultural norms in this dissertation's primary analysis remains limited. Still, some potential lessons can be drawn. For example, its founders and key members were primarily women, partly because women were barred from other civic associations such as the City Club and Good Government Clubs, and its political strategies replicated those of other "women's" associations, such as Sunday concerts and weekly public lectures "to foster cooperation between teachers and parents"; those that took place on weekends were especially well-attended by teachers (Cohen, 1964, pp. 33-41).

Other female voluntary societies in the Progressive Era expanded from being Protestant and middle-class to being organizations with "more diversified membership" after they "met one another at meetings and exchanged ideas in a network of letters in which they spoke of a sisterhood of women" (Berg, 1981, pp. 162-3). Their campaigns eventually included visits to brothels and publishing editorials naming the clients as well as setting up elementary schools, evening schools, and peer groups exclusively for working-class women. These reforms stemmed not from preconceived self-interest, as it was "through their work" that these women learned about issues that "generally had little impact on their own lives"; they evolved from the members' actual experiences and their cultural norms inside the organizations (Berg, 1981, p. 161).

"Once women breached the mythical barrier and entered the 'public arena' by exercising their right of petition," they continued to lobby city and state officials (Berg, 1981, p. 159). The fact that the barrier was to a certain extent "mythical" speaks to the importance of culture as well as concrete resources in these organizations' political strategies. In other words, the women's

association eventually built their own cultural norms and community. “Over time... in addition to a degree of socially imposed separation, there was added an increasing degree of chosen separation... the community of thought that grew up among women social reformers in New York City... engaged in school reform [and] joined largely by the belief that it was socially necessary to find wider avenues of feminine ‘influence’,” thereby constructing their own social movement organizations, with their own cultural norms, instead of continuing attempts to join the SMOs that had rejected them earlier (Condliffe, 1981, p. 148-9).

Furthermore, these organizations’ campaigns, diversity, and reform cannot easily be explained by political opportunities or moments of friendly administrations, given that some of the reform activity “by [these] middle-class women was most surprising, coming as it did during a period of our history when many native city dwellers found cultural differences repugnant” (Berg, 1981, p. 163). The PEA, also, maintained its political strategies even when the city administration was emphatically hostile to the Progressives’ policy proposals. For almost a century, the PEA’s campaigns consistently involved working behind the scenes towards reform, as well as publishing articles in mental health journals and obtaining supportive editorials in the *New York Times* (Cohen, 1964; Ravitch, 1974).

One of the most interesting episodes in this movement concerned the so-called “Gary Plan,” which advocated for half-days for students and incorporated hands-on tasks in the school curriculum (Cohen, 1964, p. 216; Ravitch, 1974; Berrol, 1981). In one of the rare instances of well-documented public opinion, more than 1,000 demonstrators, mostly Jewish immigrant boys under the age of 15, took to the streets in protests and riots against the Gary Plan, “with little explanation of their origin” (Ravitch, 1974, p. 224). Theories diverge as to whether the demonstrators were spurred or organized by socialists suspicious of the Gary Plan as a factory system, Tammany Hall politicians opposed by the PEA, or other activists (ibid.).

*An alternate history surges to the forefront*

As even the short section above suggests, New York City's public schools have always been shaped by debates on the role of immigrants, the lower class, local versus state-level institutions, administrative experts versus teachers or parents, and private corporations versus private foundations or government agencies. Until the second half of the twentieth century, however, these debates were primarily under the jurisdiction of 'experts.' Still, there exists what some academics call an "alternate history," one in which civil society groups built alternative institutions and fought to transform official ones. This section, then, quickly summarizes one such alternate history, focusing on the pivotal episode of Ocean Hill-Brownsville community control debates of the 1960s via the lens of the African American community.

This alternate history began in 1834, when the Public School Society of New York City obtained the African Free Schools Association, originally formed in 1787, from the Manumission Society (Stafford, 2000, p. 8). This angered some black leaders, but their alternative visions of public education were, for a time, submerged in city government. When the Public School Society dissolved in 1853, the African Free Schools were placed in the supervision of the Board of Education, founded in 1842. Within a few years, there were complaints of a "caste" system based on race and symbolized by differing facilities, pay schedules, and expenditure levels. Because of this, New York State Governor Grover Cleveland abolished public colored schools in 1884, but civic organizations continued to set up white-only schools until Cleveland's successor, Theodore Roosevelt, outlawed those in 1890.

Still, disparities between majority-white and black schools continued, and both black benevolent organizations and official school authorities continued to report on these disparities over the next few decades. Fiorello H. LaGuardia, who appointed black administrators and commissioned a report on the 1935 Harlem riots, refused to make public findings that highlighted the city's segregated education and school district zoning systems (Stafford, 2000, p.

11). Another major report came from the Harlem Project in the late 1940s, put together by administrators, social scientists, and politicians after their investigation of conditions for black schooling. They found, for example, that some students had been locked out of schools for over a month. These problems were compounded by City College system's refusal to admit blacks, so that the primary feeder of teachers into the city's schools was off limits (ibid.).

This alternate history began to shift in the 1950s, which represented a renaissance of sorts for black leadership, sowing the seeds for community control. However, as the fight continued into the 1960s, new questions began to emerge alongside demographic changes in the New York City population. Community leaders began to doubt that desegregation would ever occur, and they feared that trusted leaders would become co-opted in negotiations with the City. As Jewish teachers replaced Irish ones and the number of Puerto Ricans skyrocketed, the tone of the debate also changed. While the black versus white dynamic remained, Jewish and Puerto Rican communities were targeted by both sides of policy debate (Podair, 2001). For the most part, the United Federation of Teachers, which formed when the Teachers Guild and the High School Teachers merged in 1960, shifted its focus on Socialism to one against community control. Puerto Ricans became advocates of the new policy proposals alongside the African American community in Brooklyn, especially the African American Teachers Association (ATA), existent under a different name since 1964, which represented the first sizeable group of black teachers (Stafford, 2000, p. 20).

The tensions were exacerbated partly because, throughout the early 1960s, the Board of Education refused to go further than implement voluntary desegregation policies, even as the New York State Board of Regents declared that the city's education system violated the 1954 Supreme Court *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. A boycott in February 1964 drew around half a million students and supporters and gained quite a bit of media attention (Stafford, 2000, p. 23). A smaller, majority white, counter march from within the same movement, spearheaded

by UFT-ally Bayard Rustin, illustrates the deep schism within the black community at the time; this schism worsened in July of that year, after an off-duty white police officer shot and killed a black youth, riots ensued, and relations between black groups and the City disintegrated (Stafford, 2000, pp. 25-7). Concurrently, white parent groups staged a sit-in and later planned their own boycott against transfers out of neighborhood schools for integration, keeping thousands of children home in September.

Reconciliation plans were too much for certain white groups and not radical enough for a growing number of black parents. Around this time, the policy debates also began to include overtly cultural content, so that black parents rejected the notion that the children's upbringing made them difficult to teach, and instead, they demanded that curricula be molded to fit Afrocentric history. Meanwhile, "echoing the criticisms of the earlier UFT coalition, [Diane] Ravitch... [and other academics] called Afrocentrism a form of apartheid, and claim... that it has no room at the table with other white narratives" (Stafford, 2000, p. 79). This episode, like so many others in New York City school history, is highly contentious and open to different interpretations (Gittell, 1969). The different political strategies pursued by organizations from the same movement also suggest that perceptions of the state's willingness to change policy, and of the political opportunities that existed, varied greatly. Further, much social movements literature has examined the extent to which the divergent political strategies pursued by SNCC-descendant SMOs and the Black Panthers were in part explained by their different cultural norms, e.g., decision-making practices, hierarchies, relations between men and women, and activities and experiences together (Meyer, Whittier, and Robnett, 2002; McAdam and Snow, 1997).

As the stakes rose by the month, different sides of the debate argued over the number of teachers of color to be hired or promoted, but the move towards actual desegregation appeared no closer. Over the next couple of years, leaders proposed several boycotts against the city, and



others opted instead to open Freedom Schools mimicking those established by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the South. White parent groups and the American Jewish Congress remained steadfast against the boycotts, but City Council members and the UFT supported them at first. Later, the tactic was abandoned both by those who deemed them ineffective and those who favored greater confrontation.

Instead, black parents turned from focusing on desegregation to advocating for community control and community development, arguing for greater democratization in social services delivery. This shift worked in tandem with participation by more diverse constituents in the debate, especially black and Puerto Rican women. By 1966, Superintendent Donovan and the Board of Education began to discuss community control of IS 201, a middle school in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville neighborhood in Brooklyn, where parents would choose a School-Community Committee. However, this time, the UFT opposed the transition, saying that it violated the union contract, and in turn, the Board of Education proposed a community advisory board that included union members, which did not please the black constituents.

Eventually, in 1967, “in a series of strategic decisions, the Ford Foundation funded the Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC) headed by... [several leaders] and the NAACP. MARC, the country’s first major black think tank, would play an important role in devising policy and program solutions to educational problems. The think tank also provided political and civic independence for Clark” (Stafford, 2000, p.38). This led to several demonstration projects, including one at IS 201, focusing on concurrent quality education and community participation. Al Shanker, UFT President, sent telegrams denouncing the proposal supporters and IS 201 protestors, and on both sides and in the media, the level of acerbic language escalated.

In November of 1967, the Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Decentralization issued the Bundy Report, calling for a school system with 30 to 60 community school districts and elected School Boards. In a series of court orders and negotiations, the 1968 teachers’ strike ended with IS 201

under trusteeship, and on April 30, 1969, the decentralization bill passed in the State Assembly with a vote of 125 to 23, and similar ratios in the State Senate (Ment, 1995a, pp. 121-2; Stafford, 2000, p. 73). Most of the dissenting votes were cast by black, Puerto Rican, and liberal legislators, and in the end, the UFT regained many of its previous powers and shaped the required the compositions of the School Boards.

This episode indicates that in New York, the socio-historical context of public education has been decidedly contentious. This is most succinctly capitulated in lasting impressions of the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville crisis, where residents of the two Brooklyn neighborhoods became the focus of a movement for community control (Naples, 2002). Although a city-wide teacher's strike and community board reform followed, different parents, educators, and activists offer contrasting explanations of the details and causal factors. While some newspaper accounts now portray the protesters as "young men wearing Black Panther berets and bandoliers... terrorizing the teachers" (Traub, 2002; Ravitch, 1974), others recall a more complex, and at least initially, less racialized, debate about community control (Barrett, 2002; Naples, 2002; Rogers, 1969).

Different sides also disagree on both the shape and effectiveness of the resulting governance structures. While some have characterized the failure of the subsequent decentralization as proof of the need for the renewed recentralization, others argue that the subsequent governance structures never realized real community control, nor meaningful decentralization. Instead, the teacher's union retained control over the majority of school boards, parents remained relatively powerless, and media distorted the legitimate claims made by the impoverished neighborhoods (Podair, 2003). In subsequent years, activists and academics on all sides have accused others of being revisionist (Ravitch, 1977; Barrett, 2002; Podair, 2003; Kay, 2003).

As Stafford (2000) asserts, there is no monolithic civil society, and this African American perspective is only one alternate history. Another prominent alternate history in New York City,

for example, is that of Puerto Ricans and the Young Lords Party in the South Bronx (Latino/a Education Network Service, 2004). Still, although the complexity of the history cannot be summarized here, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville episode points to the potential importance of perception and experience in an organization's strategies towards today's school centralization.

*A crossroads of accountability and democracy*

Like the long, heterogeneous history before it, the period of fieldwork for this dissertation was filled with political turmoil and policy changes for New York City schools. This section summarizes recent, key legislation and policy debates at the city, state, and federal levels.

In 1996, after almost three decades of teachers, parents, and politicians criticizing School Boards for being ineffective and corrupt, State legislation transferred some of the key powers, such as that over the hiring and firing of superintendents, from the School Boards to the Chancellor.

In 2002, the State legislation further centralized governance by placing the entire school system under the control of the Mayor. The community districts and their accompanying School Boards were eliminated, replaced by regions with accompanying Regions, Parent Coordinators that answer to the principal at each school, an appointed Panel of Education Policy, and local Education Councils that were still in construction in late 2004. This gave the Mayor the most control in 130 years of school governance. The Mayor used this power to shut down the Board of Education and replace it with the Department of Education, located right next to City Hall, and to implement the Children First initiative, which imposed a uniform curriculum on most elementary schools.

On the state level, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE) has been campaigning to increase state funding to New York City schools.<sup>9</sup> In 1995, the Court of Appeals (the state's

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<sup>9</sup> Detailed descriptions of the lawsuit, as well as full transcripts of court orders, can be found via the Campaign for Fiscal Equity website, <http://www.cfequity.org/> (accessed 1 July 2004).

highest court) ruled that CFE had a right to sue the state for not meeting its constitutional clause of providing all constituents with a “sound basic education.” In 2001, a trial court judge ruled in CFE’s favor and asserted that the current state funding formula is unconstitutional because New York City residents are not receiving funds. However, in 2002, the State Supreme Court stated that the current funding formula is adequate, since it provides the City with enough funds to provide the equivalent of an eighth or ninth grade education, fulfilling the “sound basic education” clause. One year later, the Court of Appeals (the state’s highest court) overturned the Supreme Court’s decision, and the courts then ordered the State Legislature to pass a bill adjusting the funding formula to give New York City its due by July 30, 2004.

Because of debates surrounding the education funding formula, the State budget not only failed to pass by its April 1<sup>st</sup> deadline for the 20<sup>th</sup> year in a row, it failed to meet the court-appointed summer deadline. A Special Master and panel were called to create a new timeline and plan. In August 2004, there were still three versions of the budget being debated, from Governor George Pataki, Republican Senate majority Joseph L. Bruno, and Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. Although exact opinions differ, the Assembly’s proposal is considered the most generous towards New York City. In December 2004, the panel ordered the state to increase New York City funding by 5.6 billion dollars (Winter, 2004).

Nationally, President Bush signed No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in January 2002. The legislation emphasizes punitive and incentive mechanisms for school performance, measured primarily by standardized test scores. In addition, the bill aims to encourage school efficiency by mandating more “highly qualified teachers,” and by allowing parents to transfer their children out of failing schools and sign up for tutoring.<sup>10</sup> Since 2002, however, the bill has been criticized

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<sup>10</sup> The entire No Child Left Behind legislation is available via its website, at <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb> (accessed 5 August 2004).

for punishing schools for under-performance without giving the resources and funds the schools require to meet standards.

Local implementation of measures has also been mired in controversy. Parents complained that they did not receive notice of their rights to transfer or tutoring in time, small percentages of eligible parents exercised these rights, and funding limitations forced the City to limit the number of transfers in 2004 (Gootman, 2004a). Furthermore, when Chancellor Klein announced that third-graders who failed standardized tests would be retained, critics accused that he did so only because the policy would ‘cream’ promoted fourth-graders, thus garnering artificially inflated fourth-grade standardized test scores. According to these critics, the City chose to do so because NCLB legislation judges a school district on its fourth and eighth-grade test scores (Personal communication, March 31, 2004).

All of the organizations in this study participated in campaigns aimed at both city and state policy; each organization’s signature campaigns are presented later in this dissertation. Overall, the policy debates have centered on notions of accountability and democracy, with the two concepts sometimes portrayed as at odds with each other. Specifically, both the NCLB and Children First initiatives were explicitly written to increase “accountability” of schools, thus increasing performance. Mayor Bloomberg, for instance, has argued that centralization and appointed panels allow him to have a clear chain of command in the school system. In the meantime, civic groups, including some of those in this study, claim that these policy changes were made at the expense of “democracy,” since there are no elected policy-making bodies in the current governance structure.

In turn, many civic groups are turning towards the small schools initiatives as a means of implementing their visions for education. At the same time, there are also debates on whether attention on these small schools exacerbates the neglect of the remaining schools, the ones the overwhelming majority of New York City students continue to attend.

All of these circumstances and debates indicate that this is a volatile but fascinating context for organizing for education reform. According to political opportunities theory, one would predict that there is little room for organizing activity or social movements; indeed, Fernando Ferrer, former Bronx Borough President, suggested that the yet-to-be-formed Education Councils would be the primary “window of opportunity” for organizing groups to work for change (Personal communication, July 22, 2004). Still, the five groups are doing more than working for new small schools or pilot projects. They are also protesting other policy changes or conditions, including safety, overcrowding, and poor parent-teacher relations. Several are also focusing on state funding, while others participate in these protests only peripherally. The combination of structure and agency, the role of culture, and the way in which these political campaign and strategy decisions are made amongst these community organizations form the focus of this dissertation.

### The current scene

#### *Community organizing for school reform in the Bronx*

The current crop of community organizing SMOs in the Bronx, including those currently organizing for school reform, began to proliferate after the 1960s crisis, in the 1970s and 1980s (Mediratta, 2001). At that time, several local organizations and parishes tried to prevent buildings in the area from burning down, the way buildings farther south in the Bronx did, often because they were set on fire by landlords in order to collect insurance money. Many people specifically credit the Northwest Bronx Clergy and Community Coalition for “saving” the Bronx (Jonnes, 2000; Personal communication, November 6, 2003). In the mid-1980s, ACORN also decided to expand from the midwest and southwest to the East Coast. It began by organizing in Boston and opened an office in New York a couple of years later. At the same time, IAF resolved to plant a stake in New York, sending Jim Drake from Valley Interfaith to help a Texan

named Heinemeier open South Bronx Churches in 1987 (Rooney, 1992, p. 109). All of these organizations primarily focused on housing issues.

In the late 1980s, ACORN and IAF began to form parent groups at alternative sites such as Head Start offices and congregations, and to encourage parent participation outside of traditional institutions such as the PTA and School Boards. This is partly because many of the official parent organizations were known as corrupt and impermeable to outside feedback. Overall, however, this stage of community organizing for school reform in the Bronx consisted of small groups of parents, without larger networks or district-wide campaigns.

Another, more significant “wave” of education organizing in the Bronx, and in New York City as a whole, took place a few years later, in the early 1990s (Mediratta, 2001). Mothers on the Move began to organize on inter-school issues, such as facilities and district accountability. Concurrently, organizations in other parts of New York City were forming as well. Together, six local groups (including MOM, ACORN, and NWBCCC) formed the city-wide Parent Organizing Consortium (POC), which still meets occasionally to share updates on campaigns and possible ideas for coordination.

Finally, the last noticeable “wave” occurred in the mid-1990s, when traditionally social service-oriented organizations, such as United Parents of Highbridge, joined the organizing arena. At the same time, New Settlements Apartment (NSA) formed a Parent Action Committee nearby, after working with the Institute for Education and Social Policy at NYU. The collaboration with NYU encouraged other agencies in the area to venture into community organizing as well. As a result, Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) and Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council, which traditionally offered classes and services, also hired organizers. This wave in the Bronx was also accompanied by the founding of several similar groups in Brooklyn and Queens. At this time, the Edna McDonnell Clark Foundation created a new opportunity for organizations

to specifically work with parents and form new groups holding schools, and the Board of Education, accountable.

Meanwhile, two other trends began to emerge. First, NWBCCC began to work with high school students in the late 1990s, forming youth components of various neighborhood associations. In 2001, these youth formally formed Sistas and Brothas United (SBU), a separate association in the Coalition. In addition, another organization called Youth Force began organizing in the southeast region of the Bronx. Youth Force focused specifically on racial and school discipline issues, working with many students who were formerly in juvenile detention. They also released reports on race, violence, and media. For example, one report compiled all *New York Times* articles about school violence in a four-year period and compared the average number of instances in which a white youth defendant is quoted in news reports and articles, to the average number of instances in which a black or Latino youth is quoted. In 2002, Organizing Asian Communities also moved to the Bronx. Formerly headquartered near Chinatown, Organizing Asian Communities is still known by the acronym CAAAV because it began as the Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence. CAAAV first developed the Youth Leadership Project (YLP) with Cambodian and Vietnamese refugee youth in the Bronx in 1996, but most of its activities really took off since the office move. While most of the YLP's campaigns have focused on welfare benefits, which affect 70% of Southeast Asians living in the Bronx, it has also pushed for language- and culture-appropriate interpreters and additional resources in schools.

The other recent trend is that of networking and coalition-building amongst the different organizations. Specifically, the state-wide Alliance for Quality Education (AQE) has been working with community organizations, lobbyists, unions, and others to increase the amount of funding the state bestows upon New York City schools. Similarly, several organizations have collaborated informally with the Center for Fiscal Equity (CFE). CFE has sued New York State because, it argues, the State has violated Constitutional provisions mandating that all New York



City public school students be provided with an “adequate” education. At the present time, the State and CFE are disputing each other’s definitions of what such an “adequate” education means. Finally, the NYU IESP has provided numerous resources to the organizations, from data collection and analysis to space for meetings.

Why did these groups either emerge in late 1980s and early 1990s, or decide to pursue education campaigns then? Most explanations involve a changing political context or resource mobilization, and these do play a role. For example, the increase in funding is clearly a factor, and this can be readily gleaned from even the short narrative above. Foundations continue to be important players in the survival and sustainability of education organizing in the Bronx.

Another major factor is the succession of Chancellors at the Board of Education. Education organizing really took off in the 1990s after Ramon Cortines’s term ended in 1995. Community groups, who generally felt antagonism toward Cortines, were pleasantly surprised to see that their demands were more likely to be heeded by the successor, Rudy Crew. As a result, organizing groups grew during Chancellor Crew’s four-year-term. When Harold Levy took over in 1999, most community groups felt ambivalent towards him because they viewed him as a transitional Chancellor; they knew that the subsequent mayor would probably hire a new one. This is exactly what happened when Mayor Bloomberg took office and appointed Joel Klein as Chancellor. Klein, who is noted for his service at the Department of Justice under President Clinton, has not yet cemented antagonistic nor collaborative relationships with community groups as a whole.

Accompanying Chancellor Klein’s appointment is a sweeping overhaul of the school system in New York City, with 32 Community Districts being replaced by nine Regions, and School Boards being replaced by advisory councils. Many of the changes have yet to be implemented. Community groups seem to view these changes with a mixture of resignation and hope. That is, many of the changes took place without much community input (Barrett, 2003),

and activist parents are unhappy about this. Simultaneously, however, community groups see that this is an opportunity to shape the new institutions to their liking. A similar change occurred in 1996, when New York City recentralized schools by taking budgetary authority away from the school boards and giving the Chancellor full control over choosing superintendents (Educational Priorities Panel, 2004).

Finally, interviews with community activists and policymakers show that the Ocean Hill-Brownsville experience remains salient to Brooklyn activists, but that fewer Bronx residents and community organizations remain embittered towards the Department of Education because of the memory. This is partly because none of three experimental districts sponsored by the Ford Foundation was located in the Bronx, and there has been a substantial amount of teacher turnover in the past three decades.

In a relative short amount of time, then, the South Bronx has sprouted a new crop of education organizing groups. Together, these circumstances suggest that funding and resource mobilization, as well as successions of chancellors and political opportunities, are indeed important in the *emergence* of SMOs and education campaigns in the Bronx. Yet, the cultural analysis presented in subsequent chapters in this dissertation is needed because a theory of cultural norms helps to answer why the SMOs that have emerged choose different issues of local school reform and pursue different political strategies. In this descriptive section, however, the point is only that, working off vastly disparate models, a number of organizations have sprouted to work on education in a relatively small area. Similar developments have taken place in Brooklyn and Queens, and indeed, in other cities around the country. Still, the magnitude and breadth of education organizing in the Bronx, from the past decade alone, is quite remarkable.

#### *The state of public education in the Bronx and New York City*

On many levels, the state of public education in the Bronx matters to all of us. Although the American public education system is relatively decentralized, with over 15,000 school

districts, New York City, as the largest in the nation, serves approximately 1.1 million children (Advocates for Children, 2004). In the 2002-2003 school year, approximately one third of these students were Latino, another third African American, and for the most part, the remaining student population was evenly split between whites and Asians (ibid.). Out of the five boroughs in New York City, the Bronx has the highest percentage of children, as well as households with children. In the year 2000, over 230,000 children attended public primary and secondary schools in the borough (Community Studies of New York, 2004).

This school district also matters for reasons besides sheer magnitude, however. The challenges faced by the New York City public schools are, in many ways, weaknesses in schools throughout the nation: overcrowding, poorly qualified teachers, inadequate funding, and segregated populations by race and income. The remainder of this section, then, summarizes some of the key data regarding Bronx schools and the borough's overall population.

In some Bronx high schools, classes of 40 have to share rooms with other classes, inadequately separated by bookcases or milk crates. At Walton High School, eight students sit at tables meant for four (Personal communication, March 31, 2004). At several others, there are so many students five lunch sessions are held each day, so that the cafeteria can accommodate them all; the first lunch period begins at 9:21 in the morning (Gootman, 2003). Still, other schools in New York City are excellent. Outside of the six famous high schools that require certain admissions tests, including Stuyvesant and LaGuardia, there are also neighborhood schools that perform fairly well, and there is greater variability in the quality of the education. Test scores and drop-out rates, at least, show patterns of inequality to exist along racial and economic lines, with the Bronx housing a disproportionate percentage of the city's worst schools.

The following few tables and figures give snapshots of the current state of poverty, educational status, and demographic make-up in the Bronx and New York City. All of the data

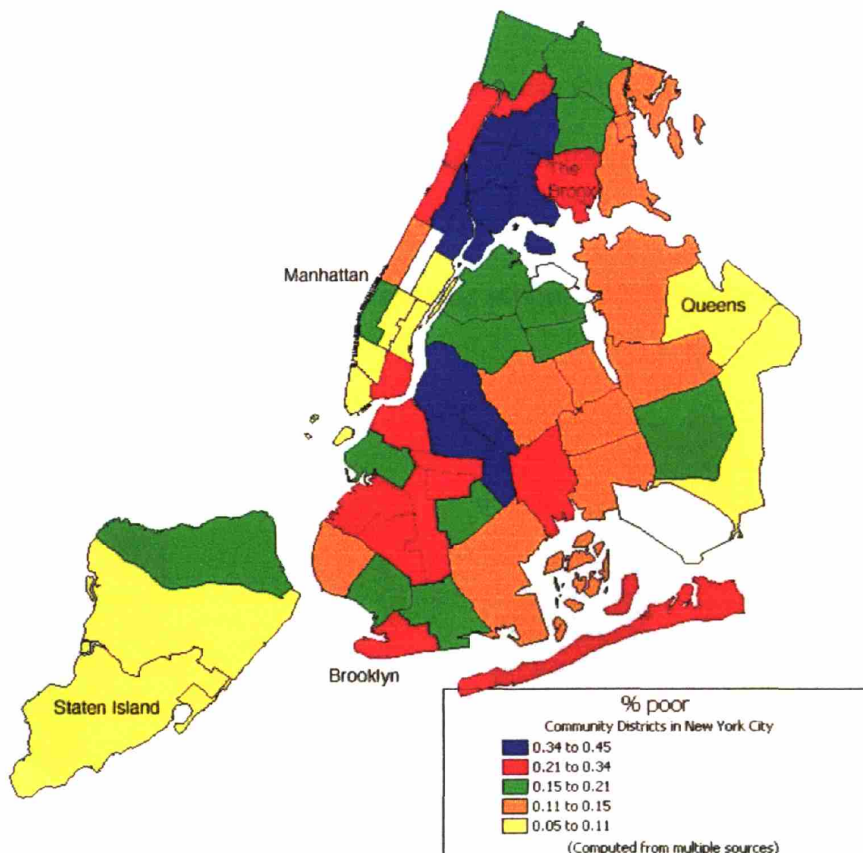
were drawn from Census, state, and city surveys and then tabulated using the Infoshare website (Community Studies of New York, 2004).

Table 3-1. *Population and income status by borough, school district, and community district*

Area Name	Population	Per Capita Income 99	% poor	
New York City	8,008,278	\$ 22,402	21%	
<b>Bronx</b>	<b>1,332,650</b>	<b>\$ 13,959</b>	<b>30%</b>	
Brooklyn	2,465,326	\$ 16,775	25%	
Manhattan	1,537,195	\$ 42,922	19%	
Queens	2,229,379	\$ 19,222	14%	
State Island	443,728	\$ 23,905	10%	
<b>South Bronx</b>	<b>682,725</b>	<b>\$ 10,148</b>	<b>40%</b>	
<b>School Districts</b>				
7	105,234	\$ 9,827	37%	
8	203,475	\$ 14,731	27%	
9	212,849	\$ 9,819	41%	
10	348,028	\$ 14,985	31%	
11	334,019	\$ 17,624	17%	
12	128,956	\$ 10,681	39%	
Community District	Population	Per Capita Income 99	% poor	Community School District
BX1 - Mott Haven/Melrose	86,885	\$ 8,856	43%	7
BX2 - Hunt's Point/Longwood	47,431	\$ 8,896	43%	8
BX3 - Morrisania/Crotona	68,064	\$ 9,273	45%	9
BX4 - Highbridge/Concourse	139,211	\$ 10,399	39%	9
BX5 - Fordham/University Heights	125,600	\$ 9,828	42%	10
BX6 - Belmont/East Tremont	74,375	\$ 9,073	44%	12
BX7 - Kingsbridge Heights/Bedford Park	141,159	\$ 12,389	32%	10
<b>South Bronx</b>	<b>682,725</b>	<b>\$ 10,148</b>	<b>40%</b>	
BX8 - Riverdale/Fieldston	93,522	\$ 25,631	16%	10
BX9 - Parkchester/Soundview	178,584	\$ 13,269	27%	10
BX10 - Throgs Neck/Co-op City	104,044	\$ 21,940	12%	8
BX11 - Morris Park/Bronxdale	110,567	\$ 17,851	16%	11
BX12 - Williamsbridge/Baychester	150,426	\$ 16,715	19%	11
<b>North Bronx</b>	<b>637,143</b>	<b>\$ 18,108</b>	<b>19%</b>	

The following figure clearly shows that the Bronx has large tracts of high poverty, here marked in blue, and that these tracts lie in the southern part of the borough. The only other community districts with 40% or more poor persons lie in Harlem, the northeastern-most area of Manhattan, and on the western tip of the Brooklyn-Queens border.

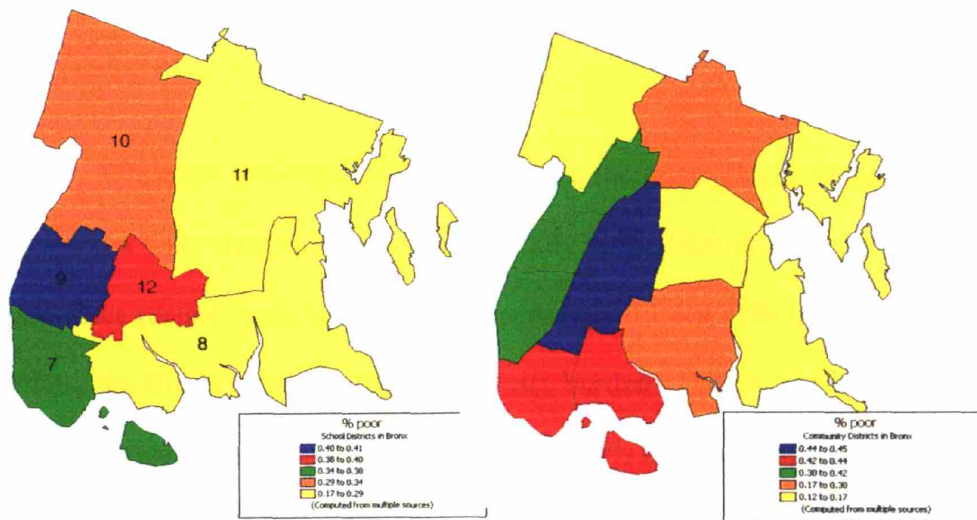
Figure 3-1. Percent of poor persons by Community District, New York City



The table and figure above demonstrate why much of the quantitative data here use community districts, rather than schools districts, as the geographical units for comparison. This is because school districts, as currently drawn, mask many of the income and educational disparities within the Bronx (See Figure 3-2, below). District 8, for example, reports a 27% poverty rate, when almost half of all Mothers on the Move area residents in District 8 are poor. When we map community districts instead, the area served by Mothers on the Move, the western tip of School District 8, changes from yellow, the lowest poverty category, to red. Generally, when compared to the Bronx map of percent poor by school district versus community district, we see that the legend categories are slightly different because they are more extreme, and more precise: Whereas the highest categories in the map on the left show blue and red to show school districts where 38 percent or more of residents live below the poverty level, the same colors in

the map on the right indicate those community districts where 42 percent or more of residents are poor. All of the areas served by the case studies in this dissertation are blue, red, or green in the map on the right. (Note that all of these areas fall into the very highest category of poverty in Figure 3-1; thus, in comparison to the rest of the city, the entire South Bronx is incredibly poor.)

Figure 3-2. Percent of poor persons by school district and by community district, the Bronx



The remainder of this section, then, shows comparative data for New York City, the Bronx, and the South Bronx area served by the social movement organizations in this study. Numbers for this South Bronx area were aggregated by Community District.

Table 3-2. *Income, poverty status, and public assistance in New York, the Bronx, and the South Bronx*

Area Name	New York City	Percentage	Bronx	Percentage	South Bronx	Percentage
Persons with income below \$15,000	699727	8.7%	149178	11.2%	92956	13.6%
Persons with income less than the poverty level	1668938	20.8%	395263	29.7%	273723	40.1%
Persons with income 200% and over of the poverty level	4729636	59.1%	622310	46.7%	233166	34.2%
Total persons on public assistance - '02	449691	5.6%	153637	11.5%	116367	17.0%
Area's share of New York City's general population		100.0%		16.6%		8.5%
Area's share of New York City's public assistance population		100.0%		34.2%		25.9%
Area's share of Bronx general population				100.0%		51.2%
Area's share of Bronx public assistance population				100.0%		75.7%
Total persons on public assistance - '92	859024		233286		177563	

While the number of public assistance recipients declined from 1992 to 2002 throughout New York City, they did so less dramatically in the Bronx. Thus, the percentage of NYC public assistance recipients living in the Bronx increased from 27% in 1992 to 34% in 2002. This hints at how the Bronx carries a disproportionate burden of public assistance recipients in New York. While its overall population constitutes only 17% of New York City's, its share of public assistance is double that. The numbers for the South Bronx, the geographical area for my fieldwork, are more extreme: Its population constitutes just 8.5% of the city's population, but 25.9% of the city's persons on public assistance live there.

Table 3-3. *Race and Hispanic ethnicity in New York, the Bronx, and the South Bronx*

Race	New York City	Percentage	Bronx	Percentage	South Bronx	Percentage
TOTAL	8008278	100.0%	1332650	100.0%	682725	100.0%
White persons	3577052	44.7%	398530	29.9%	146751	21.5%
Black persons	2116379	26.4%	473407	35.5%	236634	34.7%
Native American persons	36657	0.5%	10429	0.8%	7208	0.0%
Asian/ Pacific Islander persons	792980	9.9%	40175	3.0%	16358	2.4%
Other race persons	1485210	18.5%	410109	30.8%	275774	40.4%
<b>Ethnicity</b>						
Hispanic/ Latino persons	2161530	27.0%	645222	48.4%	421698	61.8%

Separate data by country of birth, not included here, show that Puerto Ricans and Dominicans account for the largest numbers of foreign-born persons in the Bronx (Community Studies of New York, 2004). Of note is the fact that while Africans constitute 2% of Black persons in New York City, they constitute 10% of Blacks in the South Bronx, and they are especially visible in the Highbridge, Fordham, and Kingsbridge Heights neighborhoods. While not presented here, tabulated data show that the racial make-up of children enrolled in grades K-12 in the Bronx are less white, and more Black and Hispanic, than the overall population.

Table 3-4. *School-enrolled children (grades 1-12)*

Area Name	Persons	Percentage of Overall Population	Per Square Ft.	As Share of NYC School Enrollment
New York City	1376790	17.2%	198.4	
<b>Bronx</b>	<b>285414</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>320.0</b>	<b>20.7%</b>
Brooklyn	471408	19.1%	276.0	34.2%
Manhattan	180986	11.8%	385.1	13.1%
Queens	359800	16.1%	170.7	26.1%
Staten Island	79182	17.8%	44.9	5.8%
<b>South Bronx</b>	<b>167395</b>	<b>24.5%</b>		<b>12.2%</b>

While Brooklyn has a lot more school-age children than the Bronx, the Bronx has a much smaller geographical area, so that it has the greatest density of schoolchildren among the boroughs. Furthermore, the percentage of school-enrolled children as part of the overall population is highest in the Bronx. Together, these data hint at the magnitude and acuteness of the conditions in which Bronx children attend school, and why education organizing groups have been struggling to improve conditions and performance.

Partly in response to these data, the Gates Foundation recently gave a \$51 million grant to New York City non-profits that help large high schools break down into smaller, ideally more intimate and nurturing, themed schools. New Visions is the largest nonprofit doing this work, and it alone received almost \$30 million to open 30 small schools (New York City Department of Education, 2003). This is a large enough trend so that three of the five case studies in this



dissertation have relationships with specific New Visions or otherwise Gates-funded small schools, and several have been or are in the process of creating small schools themselves.

Much literature discusses the Chicago case as a democratic model of education reform and participatory policy-making, whereby Local School Councils, with elected parents and neighborhood residents, teachers, and principals, oversaw most school issues, including budget allocations and approval, and administration employment (Bryk et al, 1998; O'Connell, 1991; Fung, 2004). In Chicago, then, bottom-up participation has been institutionalized.

In contrast, New York has decided to standardize curricula and re-centralize school boards in the past year. Because cities may follow a New York-style model, and community organizations both challenge and buttress expert-driven and politician-harnessed reform, it is important to investigate what strategies organizations employ where bottom-up participation is not institutionalized, and how these organizations respond to political contexts in flux.

### Case study profiles

All of the organizations in this study share a passion for education reform and a belief in the power of learning to work with and challenge the system. While housing was definitely the focus of earlier organizing by some of the case study SMOs, education has emerged as an issue as salient and galvanizing, if not more so. One staff person of NWBCCC, for example, commented that, “working on education issues gets us closer to core problems in our neighborhoods” (Mediratta, 2001, p. 19). Some leaders have also stated that to them education is one of the key reasons children in the Bronx are not achieving the goals to which aspire (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Others also point to the obvious inequality lying along 96<sup>th</sup> street; that is, that that Manhattan schools below 96<sup>th</sup> street receive funds and teachers at rates much higher than in the Bronx (Personal communication, March 23, 2004; December 5,

2003), suggesting that the public education system distributes unequal amounts of resources along socioeconomic and racial lines.

The following sections describe each of the organizations in this dissertation in a bit more depth, focusing on overall organizational history, key experiences in education organizing, and basic financing structures. The order in which they are presented is that in which they are discussed in later chapters.

### *ACORN Bronx*

ACORN, which was founded in 1970, is the oldest organization in the study. It was started by Wade Rathke, who remains Chief Organizer of the entire organization, in Little Rock, Arkansas. At the time, Rathke had just worked as an organizer in the short-lived National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), described as a case study in Piven and Cloward (1977). ACORN claims to be “the largest organization of lower income and working families in the United States” (Russell, 2003). Nationally, about 85 percent of funding is internal, and about half of this internal funding comes from members (Delgado, 1986, p. 204). With more than 120,000 dues-paying members nationwide, this alone ideally amounts to 14 and a half million dollars each year, since each member pays \$10 a month. Each family is only allowed to have one member, which also means that the number of people easily tapped for actions and rallies is that much larger. The remainder of the funding comes primarily from foundation grants.

Although ACORN claims to have staffed offices in the more than 50 cities across the nation, more than one-fifth of the nation’s members reside in New York City. In addition, the new international offices, based in Peru and the Dominican Republic, are based on networks established by New York members.

ACORN began organizing in New York City in the late 1980’s. Nationally, ACORN admittedly had a hard time that decade, as “the movement spirit of the 60s and 70s died away,” they had trouble hiring organizers, and there were more and more policies to fight under the

Reagan Administration (Russell, 2003). At that time, the ACORN Schools Office consisted of representatives discussing issues throughout the city. It was not until the mid-1990s that ACORN began to gain attention for its education work with the report “Secret Apartheid,” which used test audits to document the city schools’ tracking students of color away from gifted and talented programs, from kindergarten on. In 1998, ACORN Bronx released a report detailing underfunding and persistent problems in three South Bronx school districts. Finally, in 2001, ACORN joined the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) to lead a voting campaign to defeat a city proposal handing the Edison Corporation control of 5 schools (Personal communication, June 30, 2003). According to the teachers’ contract, 51% of the parents must have voted for the tally to be valid. ACORN focused on voter turnout, and at the Bronx school in question, P.S. 66, over 400 parents voted ‘no,’ compared to 100 in favor of the takeover.

Currently, the ACORN Bronx-Manhattan office employs approximately 6 organizers. While the staff director and head Manhattan organizer are bilingual, none of the other organizers are. Approximately half speak Spanish, and half speak English. A majority of the organizers are monolingual. The Staff Director and Manhattan Head Organizer are bilingual, while the current Bronx Head Organizers are not.

While ACORN Bronx is located in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx, it also operates in sections of Concourse and Morrisania. Furthermore, it shares an office with Manhattan ACORN, which primarily operates in East and Upper Harlem. During the course of this study, the staff director at the Brooklyn office, which works as the City’s headquarters, left the organization. A month later, the Bronx-Manhattan staff director assumed the title for the entire city, splitting her time between several boroughs.

Unlike the other organizations, ACORN engages in city-, state-, and national campaigns on a regular basis. MOMs and NWBCCC have attended national conferences or actions, and all of the organizations in the study have participated in a state-wide campaign sponsored by the

Alliance for Quality Education and Center for Fiscal Equity, demanding more educational funding for New York City in Albany. Still, ACORN is unique in the study. It not only organizes residents around social justice issues, it also works with the Working Families Party and electoral politics, is involved with union organizing via the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), operates radio stations in Texas and Arkansas, and actually develops and owns housing, sometimes through HUD.

There are two books written about ACORN. The main one is *Organizing the Movement* by Gary Delgado, who previously worked with the organization and traces its roots and the first 15 years of its development (1985). This book lauds the organization's successes but warns that the ACORN model, as it was, was not truly member-driven and neglected race- and gender-delineated issues partly because its organizers were primarily out-of-state white progressives, and because it avoided such issues in order to attract people via the "lowest possible denominator," namely money and socioeconomic status (p. 197). Later, Delgado founded the Applied Research Center, affiliated with the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO). The other book that focuses on ACORN, *Political Organizing in Grassroots Politics*, emerged from Dan Russell's dissertation after working with ACORN as well (1990). While this one comes to some of the same conclusions, it should be noted that Russell continues to be affiliated with ACORN, authoring its history and accomplishments for its website and archives. In New York, ACORN has also served as a case study in reports for the IESP at NYU.

#### *Northwest Community and Clergy Coalition*

At first, the Northwest Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCCC) sounds like a misnomer, since this study ostensibly focuses on the South Bronx. Officially, the Northwest Bronx consists of all neighborhoods west of the Bronx River and north of the Cross-Bronx Expressway. NWBCCC's name alone, then, hints at the powerful changes that have swept through the Bronx in the past few decades. When Catholic clergy founded the organization in

1974, images of burning buildings in the borough raged on the evening news. Working on housing issues to hold landlords (and the banks and government agencies who funded them) accountable, the organization wanted to stop the “South Bronxing” of the Northwest Bronx. Much of this history, until 1985 or so, is described *South Bronx Rising*, by Jill Jonnes (2002). While it remains on the borderlines, its colloquial inclusion in the South Bronx therefore points to NWBCCC’s struggles over safe, well-financed neighborhoods and issues of segregation.

In 1995, however, the NWBCCC also began to organize around education issues. Parents were angry about overcrowding in schools. First, the organization campaigned to open schools on time and later, to increase the number of seats in the district—a major, long-term struggle, considering the fact that New York City School Construction Authority budgets school construction only once every five years. It also worked to gain bilingual education for the Bangladeshi community and staff changes at another underperforming school.

Each year, the Coalition receives more than one-half of a million dollars in funding, most of which comes from foundations, and it has an annual budget twice as large. However, the organization has just implemented a new dues system, which works on a sliding scale, includes partial-year memberships, and suggests a top tier of \$30 per family per year.

Like ACORN, NWBCCC is actually a coalition. Unlike ACORN and like MOM and UPOH, however, NWBCCC is decidedly local. It is comprised of 10 neighborhood associations, including Social Action Committees from religious congregations, and Sistas and Brothas United (SBU), a youth organization. It has by far the largest organizing staff of any group in the Bronx, with over 15 organizers. One organizer only serves the Education Committee, and at any given time, several neighborhood association organizers will be focusing on education campaigns as well.

The NWBCCC is the only case study organization with explicitly faith-based organizing activities, and it has been working with youth leaders for a number of years. In addition, it is

relatively unique nationally in that it works not only with primarily Catholic, Methodist, and Episcopal churches (Delgado, 1985; Wood, 2002; Warren, 2001), but also with Jewish and Muslim congregations. Over the years, the clergy in the Coalition relinquished leadership positions and decision-making power to the neighborhood associations. Two years ago, however, a new faith-based organizer was hired to re-solidify the relationship between congregations and other parts of the organization.

The Coalition's neighborhoods include Norwood, Bedford Park, University Heights, Mount Hope, Crotona, Mosholu-Woodlawn South, and Fordham. Together, their population is similar to but more diverse than that of other case studies. While African Americans and Latinos constitute the bulk of the local demographic, there is also a large number of Korean, African, and to the wealthier northwest, Jewish residents. In the organization itself, 20% of the membership is white, and 10% is Asian (Mediratta, 2001).

Most recently, the Coalition has continued to work on convincing the city to turn the Kingsbridge Armory into a school and community center, fighting a filtration plant in the area, and numerous education issues. Specifically, the issue of overcrowding continues to be salient, and 2004 marked another Capital Plan year in the 5-year physical plant budget cycle. One of its schools also joined the CC9 network, though the remaining NWBCCC schools remain independent. Finally, SBU has once again worked to open a new small school focusing on youth leadership development.

While Northwest Bronx has received little attention in comparison to IAF-affiliated faith-based organizations, this is changing. In the last year alone, it was a case study in upcoming reports by Cornell University on leadership development, the NYU IESP on organizing overall, and several foundations. Because it has been around for so long, it has strong ties to several local institutions, including Fordham University, Manhattan College, and NYU.

*United Parents of Highbridge*

Highbridge Community Life Center (HCLC) was formed in 1980, the year after two Dominican nuns came to the Bronx from neighboring Rockland County, to help with social services and community outreach (Gnagni, 2003; Romero, 2002). The agency provides services such as GED classes, tutoring, afterschool programs, counseling, and job training, primarily for employment as a nurse's aide. It had a total staff of 116 in 2003, and it has a budget of almost 64 million dollars ("Profiles in Courage," 2003, pp. 2-3). In most ways, then, the organization acts like the traditional settlement houses all over the Lower East Side, mostly founded during the Progressive Era. While Highbridge's founders are Catholic, the organization's mission is decidedly one of assistance and capacity-building. There are no religious symbols on the walls, nor do any of the organization's documents mention a religious affiliation. The only giveaways of the organization's origins lie in the fact that some of the top administrators are members of the clergy; the Executive Director, for instance, is known in the community simply as Brother Ed.

Funded primarily by foundation grants, the organization also receives moneys from New York State entities, specifically the Education and Labor Departments, as well as some city agencies. Because the neighborhood was also designated an Empowerment Zone, HCLC also received federally allocated funds to distribute services and coordinate job training with companies such as United Parcel Service (UPS). Finally, it also received donations from parochial institutions such as Catholic Charities and the Dominican Sisters of Blauvelt. Most large grants are program-specific. For example, the Neighbors in Highbridge initiative, which encompasses the organizing component on which this study focuses, is primarily funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation.

HCLC's unique standing in this study, then, stems from its origins as a social services agency. The organization began to reach into the organizing arena about seven years ago, in 1996, when Highbridge was one of five organizations in the country to launch a Neighborhood

Partners Initiative, attempting to draw upon and strengthen local social capital by forming groups and establishing a governance structure. According to different parties, however, ‘real’ organizing did not take place for several years (Personal communication, March 11, 2004). Staff gathered people for meetings, but there were no organizing issues discussed, and no relationships were established. The groups therefore dissolved quickly. In 2000, NYU approached Highbridge about education reform, and HCLC hired a new head of staff, Anthony. He and the then-housing organizer, along with VISTA volunteers and interns, worked to form a Merchants’ Association and Community Council, and provided some training in formulating vision for the neighborhood, as well as basics in choosing a campaign.

UPOH, the education organizing component of HCLC, stands for United Parents of Highbridge, which formed as a group in 2000 (Williams, 2003). The education organizing at Highbridge is wholly part of CC9. Both the full-time and part-time organizers at HCLC are funded through the CC9 Coalition. This means that the organizers remain focused on district 9-wide issues as well as those in neighborhood schools, and that most of the group’s time is spent on the two local school which are part of the CC9 network, PS 126 and IS 73. These two schools are within a few blocks from each other and the HCLC headquarters.

The HCLC Storefront is in many ways the most accessible of the organization’s offices. In several ways, then, it serves as an ideal anchor for the organizing component of HCLC as a whole. It is clearly visible, with floor-to-ceiling glass windows and stands on a prominent corner, next to an AIDS shelter and across the street from the Taqwa Community Garden. The front half of the office is staffed by workers who act as gatekeepers; they listen to the details of a walk-in’s situation or problem and direct him or her to the appropriate office or service. The back half of the office houses the desks of the Neighbors in Highbridge Director, a housing organizer, the full-time education organizer, the community newspaper’s editor-in-chief, and has desks for other organizers.



The Highbridge neighborhood has clear-cut borders: 162<sup>nd</sup> Street and Jerome Avenue in the Southwest, the Major Deegan Expressway and Hudson River in the west, and the Cross Bronx Expressway. Of the different organizations in the study, then, Highbridge is the most localized; the others all work with wider geographical areas. The neighborhood is located just north of Yankee Stadium, and aside from home game days, Latinos and African-Americans constitute around 96% of the population. Almost half of neighborhood residents live in poverty, and more than half of adults aged 25 and over have no high school diploma. While the neighborhood has improved dramatically in the last decade (Neighbors in Highbridge, 2001), safety remains an issue. While one of the UPOH schools has successfully dealt with drug dealing on the corner, PS 126 is still confronting a similar problem. At the organizing Storefront office, no person can be left in the office alone at any time. This means that people cannot always go to lunch or stay late at work as they wish.

Of the organizations in the study, HCLC is the only one that has attracted no academic research thus far. Yet, it is one of the leading forces in the much-touted CC9 coalition in the South Bronx, and its housing organizing work has received attention from outlets such as the *New York Times*, as well as perennial local outlets, such as NY1 and Channel 12 news. More importantly, it is only one in a spate of new community development and social services agencies that have decided to expand activities into organizing. Many of its struggles regarding internal culture and organizational structure, then, are indicative of similar problems likely to increase in prevalence in the next few years.

#### *Sistas and Brothas United*

Approximately five or six years ago, youth in the Mosholu-Woodlawn South and Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood associations of Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition began to actively participate in political organizing campaigns. One summer, the youth gathered to organize a campaign against city youth employment cuts. After months of work, they

decided to stick around, forming the Kingsbridge Heights Youth contingent of NWBCCC. As the ranks began to grow, NWBCCC organizers and leaders learned that the youth would faithfully attend any rally if requested to do so, and by the accounts of several organizers and leaders, NWBCCC came to rely upon the youth to add dozens, sometimes hundreds, of attendees to any event (Personal communication, November 5, 2003). As the number of youth increased dramatically and spanned beyond the Kingsbridge Heights neighborhood, they also became resentful of the fact that, while they contributed greatly to political campaigns, they did not have official voting power or board representation in the organization. In 1998, this changed, and the youth won not one but two seats on the NWBCCC as the association called Sistas and Brothas United. Its membership has also continued to grow far beyond the size of a typical NWBCCC neighborhood organization.

Although SBU is officially part of NWBCCC, it merits its own case study for several reasons. First, it boasts of its own by-laws, official leadership definitions, and even tweaks with the NWBCCC dues system. Its staff members are NWBCCC employees, but it has its own floor in the main office and is looking for a building of its own. The majority of its funding comes from foundation grants that are SBU-specific. More substantively, its continued expansion has been accompanied by development of its own cultural norms, campaigns, and political strategies. It carries its own reputation with public officials, which sometimes contradict political strategies pursued by NWBCCC as a whole. Put bluntly, SBU is its own animal.

From the beginning, SBU has focused on education organizing. Its campaigns to transform vacant lots have focused adding classroom space to public schools and improving facilities, and its anti-war campaigns emerged from personal experiences with curricula and military recruiters in the high schools. Although campaigns focus on more than one Bronx neighborhood, they primarily deal with the neighborhoods surrounding the three main public high schools attended by members, if not the schools themselves.

One of its organizers, Elena, and several leaders have been with the organization since its inception. In addition, SBU staff include a second full-time organizer, a full-time Tutor Coordinator and in-house education expert, and at various times, additional part-time organizers and workshop coordinators. Unlike NWBCCC, then, SBU provides services to its members. The other obvious characteristic that makes SBU unique is its focus on youth, though there is also a new but growing youth component in Mothers on the Move.

SBU has strong ties to Fordham and NYU Universities, working in collaboration with researchers on several projects. Thus, it has been mentioned in various foundation and think tank newsletters and monographs, newspaper articles, and news reports, but it has not yet been the subject of in-depth academic manuscripts.

#### *Mothers on the Move*

In this study, MOM is special because its entire history is relevant to the dissertation's focus. While other organizations began in housing organizing, or may not have even branched into organizing until relatively late in the organization's life, MOM began and continues its struggles because of the poor state of public education in the South Bronx.

In October 1991, adult literacy students at Bronx Educational Services (BES) were shocked when they investigated their neighborhood schools' math and reading scores, as compared to others in the city. Their outrage grew when they realized that even other schools in their own district, located in the adjacent, wealthier Throggs Neck neighborhood, performed better than those in Hunt's Point (Mediratta and Karp, 2003). Mothers on the Move was formed in 1992, after BES parents visited PS 62, a local low-performing school, and realized that their children's academic problems were not simply reflective of their own limitations.

With funding from the Edna McDonnell Clark and Aaron Diamond Foundations, the group drew from BES teacher Barbara Gross's previous experience with ACORN and hired a full-time organizer, Millie Bonilla, who had previously worked for South Bronx People for

Change, focusing on housing. A participatory model of organizing was set from the beginning. The parents took the lead in making decisions, and they made conclusions based on local and personal circumstances. Through research help from the Data Consortium at NYU, they quickly moved from organizing at PS 62 to protesting disparities at a district level. More detailed histories of their early campaigns have been documented by Mediratta and Karp (2003) and Guishard et al (2004).

At this time, both Millie Bonilla and Barbara Gross, the original head organizers, work at the NYU Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP). During the time of this study, Mothers on the Move was in the midst of dramatic transition. The year before, the Directors were fired, and a majority of the Board of Advisors, made up of original MOM parent leaders, quit as well. With a new education organizer, new Co-Directors, and a few years of experience in environmental justice and housing campaigns alongside education, the organization has changed radically since 1992, even if its official structure has not.

Although MOM currently has a dues structure requiring \$10 a year from members, the overwhelming majority of its funding comes from foundations. This means that MOM is sensitive to the traditional funding cycle, with renewal limits, specific outcomes measures, and trends in education policy and social movements. Its annual budget has nearly doubled in a couple of years, from \$200,000 to \$450,000. With this, MOM focuses solely on organizing on three issue areas, with six full-time organizers and occasional part-time ones for specific campaigns, as well as new fundraising staff and new slots for organizers. It is also part of a city-wide collaborative called the Parent and Youth Transformation Collaborative (PYST) with similar organizations in other boroughs.

Like Highbridge, MOM works with neighborhoods with distinct borders. Mothers on the Move has traditionally worked in the Hunt's Point area of the Bronx, which encompasses Hunt's Point, Longwood, and Intervale Valley. This area forms the southernmost area west of the Bronx

River and north of the East River. As cited by government institutions, e.g., Community Board 4, as well as investigative reports (Trebay, 2000), its services are decidedly poorer than those in the northern and western parts of District 8. There are many noticeable vacant lots in the area, filled with decades' worth of trash. The neighborhood's most defining characteristic, unfortunately, is NYAFCO, the local sewage plant that processes half of the city's waste. Ironically, Hunt's Point is also home to the city's docking point for all organic produce arriving in New York City; none of this produce remains in the neighborhood.

Approximately a third of residents receive public assistance, and children's asthma rates are the city's highest (cited in Mediratta and Karp, 2003). Like the populations in Highbridge and the ACORN neighborhoods, that of Hunt's Point is overwhelmingly black and Latino. However, most older residents, including many MOM leaders, remember when Hunt's Point was more diverse, with large Irish, Eastern European Jewish, and Cuban populations, as well as the Dominican, African-American, and Puerto Rican communities there now. Recently, as with the Northwest Bronx, there has also been an increase of immigrants from Africa. Finally, MOM has also begun education organizing among youth, with a new group tentatively called Youth on the Move.

MOM has received the attention of some academics at the IESP at NYU, as well as Michele Fine at the CUNY Graduate Center. The publications describing MOM's work thus far focus on the organization's early victories, documenting the work via Participatory Action Projects and monographs rather than evaluating them in the context of culture or social movements. Along with ACORN and Northwest Bronx, MOM also co-founded the Training Institute for Careers in Organizing (TICO).

### *Summary*

While the previous sections presented histories and descriptions of the five case studies, the following table presents some of key, concrete characteristics of the five social movement

organizations and the communities they serve *within* the South Bronx. While the overall organizational budgets vary, the primary cost of education organizing is staffing and all of the case study organizations have similar levels of staffing and salary scales; therefore, budget components pertinent to this dissertation are comparable. Cultural norms and activities within each organization, such as their meeting frequency, etc., are summarized in tables alongside more detailed descriptions in Chapters 4 and 5.

Table 3-5. *Basic characteristics and constituencies of case study SMOs*

<b>Organizational Characteristics/ Constituencies</b>	<b>ACORN</b>	<b>NWBCCC</b>	<b>UPOH</b>	<b>SBU</b>	<b>MOM</b>
Number of education organizers	2 to 3	2 to 4	2 to 3	2 to 4	2 to 3
Education organizing budget estimate	\$45,000	\$60,000	\$50,000	\$65,000	\$60,000
<b>Constituencies by race*</b>					
% Black	44%	37%	42%	35%	32%
% Hispanic/Latino	61%	56%	60%	59%	72%
% Non-Hispanic White	1%	6%	1%	5%	1%
<b>Constituencies by income</b>					
% at or below poverty level	44%	38%	41%	39%	44%
<b>Leadership and membership</b>					
Core leaders	10	20	10	20	15
Estimate of base membership	7000	2000	150	300	450
Estimate of education campaign membership	unknown	150	100	100	150

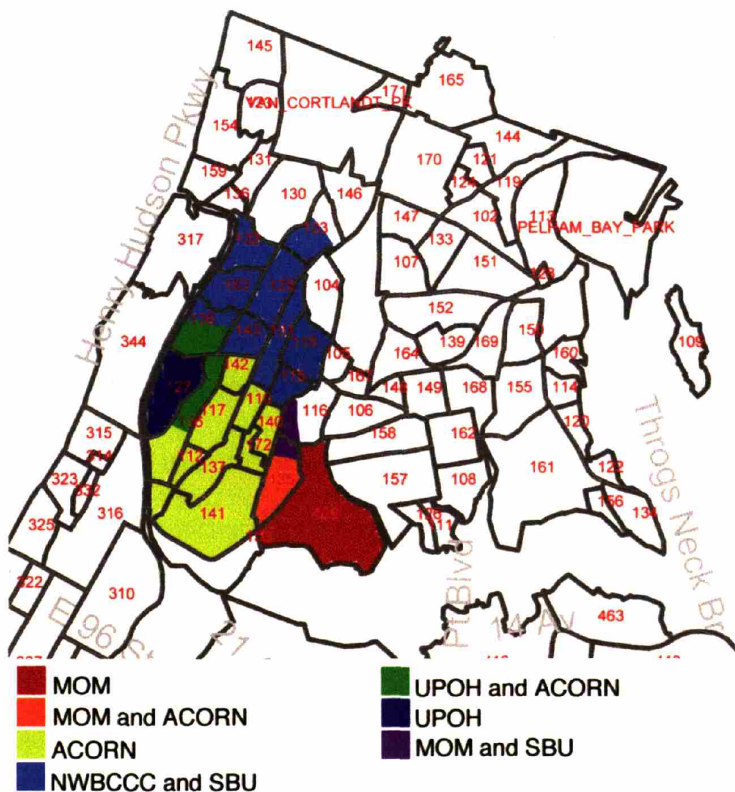
\*Note: Percentages for Black and Hispanic/Latino populations add up to more than 100% because Black constituents are calculated by race, Hispanic constituents are calculated by ethnicity, and many constituents report as Black Hispanics, i.e., Black Puerto Ricans.

While NWBCCC and ACORN appear to have much greater numbers of base members, they are also the organizations that pursue housing and environmental justice campaigns in addition to education ones. For the remainder of the case study SMOs, education campaigns continue to constitute either the sole or primary use of resources. Therefore, the estimates of education campaign membership, like the education campaign budgets, are considerably more comparable than aggregate SMO numbers. It is noteworthy that UPOH, an SMO with both Alinskyite and Freirian category cultural norms, has a fairly small base of general members.

organizations. Certainly, as stated earlier, participants in all of the case study SMOs share the same goals and code words of building *power* in a *movement* for *justice*, and working towards good schools and school reform for the people of the Bronx; among the different SMOs and participants, these code words do not appear to hold any obvious differences in their use or definition. It follows, then, that education campaign organizers at both NWBCCC and MOM face around 150 members who are interested in education issues. At each of the organizations, leaders and organizers do not get to create cultural norms from scratch to fit their needs, but they do get to participate in, and help to perpetuate, divergent cultural norms that speak to the explanatory power of culture in shaping political strategies.

Finally, the following map shows geographical boundaries of the neighborhoods served by the five case study social movement organizations within the South Bronx.

Figure 3-3. Rough geographical territories of case study SMOs in the Bronx



The map is shown with caveats. Some of these boundaries are far from defined; they especially change when SMOs choose to “expand their territory,” engage in disputes over territory with other SMOs, or draw constituents from a large geographical area, partly because their cultural norms form organizational identities around principles *other* than neighborhood. For example, as Mothers on the Move expands into youth organizing, constituents that might have earlier joined Youth Force (not included in this dissertation) or Sistas and Brothas United may now be more likely to join Mothers on the Move. It should also be noted that because the SMOs sometimes organize by school or by building, SMOs often ‘claim’ constituents on certain blocks or in large apartment buildings in one another’s territories. Finally, it should also be noted that a good chunk of MOM’s territory, especially in the southeast corner or Hunt’s Point, is largely unpopulated and composed of industrial parks.



## Part Two: Cultural Tool Kits

The first three chapters presented an overview of the dissertation, a theoretical outline and analysis of the role of cultural norms in social movement organizations and their political strategies, and the historical and contemporary background of public education and organizing in the South Bronx.

As described earlier, the five case studies were selected as to hold overall education campaign funding levels and political context constant. In investigating why political strategies differ in the five case studies, we must first take a step back and examine the existing cultural norms in each of the five organizations. As outlined in Chapter 2, however, cultural theories of social movement organizations have thus far primarily focused on “collective action frames,” key messages and schemata applied by organizers and activists. Collective action frames measure ideologies, well-formulated values, and public messages (McAdam, 1996; Swidler, 1986). For the most part, they do not acknowledge rituals, activities, meeting protocols and typical agenda, unintended symbols, and other cultural norms. These cultural norms are also important components of the organizations’ *cultural tool kits*, even though they sometimes fail to ‘stay on the message’ officially dictated by SMO staff. They are also as likely to be created, or at least replicated, by members as they are by organizers. The cultural elements in collective action frames that are most important during initial recruitment, then, do not always *continue* to be significant in garnering *commitment* to political mobilization.

This dissertation begins to address these limitations by investigating a greater range of cultural norms of SMOs. Thus, it focuses not so much on the rhetoric and symbols used by organizers, but the rituals and norms enacted by all SMO actors, including members, in building commitment in SMOs. Together, these rituals and norms, cultural tool kits, are less predictable

than collective action frames because they are enacted collectively by so many actors. Along the way, they shed insight on how services and inter-member friendship norms, in particular, contribute to SMO norms and create personal commitment in a ways unexplained by frame alignment processes. Furthermore, the recruit's self-interest is not even articulated when he or she joins in some cases, so there was no political frame with which to align. An investigation of norms reveals that political preferences are shaped in the process of mobilization, and emotional returns can be as important as political or other traditionally rational factors in an individual's commitment to an SMO.

What do these cultural tool kits look like? Recording each SMO's cultural tool kit could result in a massive compendium of parables, instructions, songs, chants, agenda, oral histories, and artifacts, as if each social movement organization could have an authoritative bible, apocrypha included. From these compendia, we could then analyze the (sometimes conflicting) cultural tools that stand out and the themes that arise, and the ways in which these themes and cultural tools might help to shape different political strategies with external actors. Compiling and presenting these compendia would not be especially helpful for researchers, however, if all of the case studies were presented as unique and exceptional. In order to begin generating testable and potentially generalizable hypotheses about cultural norms and political strategies in social movement organizations, and in order to elicit concrete lessons for social movement organizations and policymakers, the cultural norms of the five case studies are presented according to the typology briefly described in Chapter 1, namely the Alinskyite and Freirian categories, respectively based on the works of Saul Alinsky and Paulo Freire in community organizing. These categories facilitate a comparative analysis of SMO cultural tool kits and their respective political strategies.

In investigating what each case study SMO's cultural tool kit looks like, we also see that they are collectively reused and reinforced by all participants: members, leaders, organizers, and

even third-party observers. While they may have been instrumental when they were first created, the cultural norms have since then become entrenched in their own right. Neither completely instrumental nor meaningless scripts, these cultural tool kits give meaning to and are given meaning by SMO campaigns. In this way, each participant has an important role to play and several important cultural tools to use, but the cultural tool kits are less likely to be active, self-conscious constructions created by any single participant.

Alternative means of categorizing the five case studies, such as capacity-building for those SMOs that emphasized social services and leadership development for others, proved to be woefully inadequate for several reasons. First, these categories focused on specific activities rather than bundles of activities and norms. Second, these categories also ran the risk of simply reinforcing or echoing the messages laid out by organizers, rather than investigating the activities and norms that form the cultural tool kits themselves. Instead, by outlining the ways in which the cultural tool kits reflected the works of Alinsky and Freire, this dissertation allows room for contradictions and varied norms within the SMOs, while emphasizing the themes and key points that do arise.

Briefly, then, the Alinskyite category is marked by a cultural tool kit with activities that emphasize traits and obstacles shared by all members and a focus on building the organization. In contrast, the Freirian category is marked by a cultural tool kit with activities and norms that emphasize what is unique about each member as well as what is shared, with a resulting focus on the individual as well as the organization as a whole. Along the way, the relative percentage of outreach and recruitment activities as a share of all member activities, the relationship norms between organizer and leader, and the structure of regular education organizing meetings also vary along categorical lines.

## Chapter 4: Organizing the Organizations

This chapter focuses on the nuts and bolts or, in this case, the cultural tool kit inspired by Alinsky. Both this chapter and chapter 5, which focuses on the Freirian category's cultural tool kit, unfold with significant caveats. It is well-documented that contemporary Alinsky-inspired social movement organizations, such as the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and Gamaliel, have developed norms and frameworks quite different from those espoused by Alinsky in the 1950s and 1960s (Osterman, 2002; Warren, 2001). Even when social movement organizations agree on what Alinsky principles or "rules of organizing" are, they can implement these principles in different ways. It is with some hesitation, then, that this chapter describes the Alinsky category of cultural norms. Still, such a category is necessary to develop a framework of cultural norms in action, so that such norms do not simply exist in the abstract, and so that there is evidence for the link between cultural tool kits and political strategies in a later analysis. For each case study, basic characteristics of the organization-wide activities, education campaign activities, protocols, office set-up, and public access to information are both described and summarized in table format.

### The Alinsky category

In two books (1946, 1971), Alinsky outlined a specific set of rules for community organizing. These rules include, "The first step in community organization is community disorganization" (1971, 116), disrupting existing patterns of interaction to mobilize neighborhood residents into citizen participation, and focusing on 'winnable' issues. The rules emphasize practical organization-building, rather than social movement-building per se. At least in the popular imagination, one would hazard to guess that the reigning images of social movements are those of Civil Rights bus boycotts or Pride Parades, where individuals join, and

sometimes exist, a group of people united by a specific goal or cause. By contrast, the Alinsky-founded Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) is officially a federation of dues-paying congregations and community organizations with their own organizers. Although the IAF has changed considerably since Alinsky's time, this characteristic fits well within the Alinskyite category. Other community organizations following the Alinsky model, which tend to mobilize individuals rather than existing institutions, still tend to have dues systems, as well as well-defined by-laws, and official IRS non-profit organizational status.

Further along these pragmatic lines, the category's organizational political ideology is conspicuous via its determined absence. Alinsky was careful to criticize liberals as well as conservatives and "cited as his intellectual forerunners Jefferson, Paine, Lincoln, and Gandhi, as well as Hannibal and Machiavelli" (Delgado, 1985, p. 21). As a result of a lack of specified political ideology, no specific issue is guaranteed to be addressed by an Alinsky-descendant community organization. Instead, local constituents choose issues, and the respective campaigns focus on aims from housing repairs from slumlords to minimum wage increases. Within the last decade, there have also been more campaigns on school and education reform.

Still, Alinsky's writings also show that education and leadership development remain important aspects of organizing as a whole. For instance, "A People's Organization is constantly searching and feeling for methods and approaches to make the community climate receptive to learning and education. In most cases the actual procedures used to further popular education will not be independent projects but simply a phase of every single project which the (organization) undertakes" (1946, p. 159).

In *this* dissertation, then, the Alinsky category is defined by its emphasis on three factors: first, activities and protocols that relate directly to organization campaigns, especially recruitment; second, a focus on developing the organization as a whole, rather than the individuals within them per se; and third, leadership development with the organizer as a guide.

Related to the first factor is a concept of self-interest, and a focus on delineating self-interest as a source of motivation and mobilization. Ernie Cortes and others have greatly elaborated on self-interest as more than narrowly focused, selfish interest and drawing upon its etymological roots as meaning that which is “between” as well as in individual actors (Warren, 2001; Osterman, 2002). For the purposes of this dissertation, however, the concept of self-interest is simply important in how it links organizational activities to those of individual members, drawing upon experiences and interests to which members can immediately relate. This aspect of the Alinskyite category will become much clearer when it is contrasted with, and thrown into sharp relief by, activities of the Freirian category in the next chapter.

Table 4-1. *Themes of Alinskyite category cultural norms*

<b>Cultural Norms Theme</b>	<b>Alinskyite Category Focus</b>
Emphasis of Organization Activities	Recruitment and campaigns
Focus on Typical Activity Agenda	Organizational development
Nature of Organizer-Leader Relationship	Leadership development with organizer as teacher

### ACORN: Building the organization

#### *Recruitment and campaign activities*

With ACORN, it is perhaps best to begin with the rituals and activities that occupy the organizers. Official work hours are 11 am to 10 pm each weekday, plus a half day on Saturdays. Organizers show up at the office around 11 am and make phone calls; those that have e-mail addresses also check the Internet. Around 12 pm, there is a staff meeting once a week, and organizers prepare to go out door-knocking. Otherwise, general paperwork, designing flyers, and other administrative work is done at this time.

Generally, organizers go out door-knocking from 2 or 3 pm to 7 pm each day. One day, for example, I accompanied Melissa, then the education organizer, on a door-knocking trip in a

large apartment building in the Morrisania/ Concourse Village neighborhood, a 15- to 20-minute bus ride away from the office (Personal communication, October 14, 2003). Melissa knocked on each door, primarily introducing herself in Spanish. There had been an introductory meeting at the building lobby a few weeks before, and a few of the tenants recognized her. Other than on one occasion, however, she did not stop to speak with those tenants, because they had already signed up as ACORN members. She focused on new potential members, telling them that she was with ACORN, an organization that “builds power” and “wins victories” on issues that concern them, such as building repairs and schools. Most residents who opened their doors politely said that they were not interested; if they stated a specific reason, Melissa responded. For example, to those who said that they did not have dues money on them, Melissa stated that ACORN has a bank draft program, so that members do not have to hand in a \$10 check or cash each month. To those who declared that such efforts were futile, Melissa listed specific victories from ACORN history.

Although she knocked on over 80 doors that day, she spoke to perhaps one-quarter of them, and had conversations of longer than five minutes with perhaps six or seven people. At two apartments, the tenants spoke extensively of poor building conditions, and they gave me and Melissa a tour of their apartments. When the meeting approached 15 minutes, however, Melissa politely ended the conversation if they did not agree to sign membership forms. On that day, no new official members were recruited.

The official target for ACORN organizers is to sign up two new members a day, but realistically, Melissa wanted to recruit between five and eight a week. Based on observations made on door-knocking in several case studies, even this “realistic” goal is rather ambitious. Melissa expressed some concern about the high demands of the work, stating, “I don’t know if [the Head Organizer] thinks we just doorknock without taking a break for lunch or dinner.” With a wry smile, she added, “I think maybe she does” (Personal communication, October 14, 2003).

Around 7 pm, organizers return to the office. For the remaining three hours of the work day, organizers call existing or lapsed members from phone lists and call, asking them to renew membership. They also use this time to call certain members to remind of upcoming meetings and events. Organizers noted, however, that most households rarely answer telephone calls after 9 pm, so that the last hour felt like a “waste” (Personal communication, February 25, 2004).

#### *Organizational development*

For the most part, meetings and activities are not scheduled regularly; rather, they are arranged around existing campaigns. For instance, as part of the CC9 coalition, focusing on District 9 schools with other SMOs, ACORN organizers and leaders conducted outreach on several occasions for large rallies and petitions. They also hosted some CC9 meetings, and conducted a neighborhood tour with approximately 10 teachers in October 2003. At several of the CC9-wide meetings, including a leadership development and planning retreat (Personal communication, October 19, 2003) and a planning meeting for Family-School Partnerships at local schools (Personal communication, March 22, 2004), the organizer was the only ACORN affiliate to attend. At the latter event, school principals and teachers had been prepared to meet with parents to set agenda for the Family-School Partnerships. During such events, the organizer usually joined other working groups hosted by other SMOs; each of those usually had approximately eight to 12 members in attendance. It should be noted, however, that a subsequent meeting with one of ACORN’s two partner schools did yield a significant number of issues to be explored by the Partnership there. After months of attempts, a meeting at the other school had yet to occur (Personal communication, June 23, 2004).

Outside of these meetings and events, a handful of meetings were held during the school year. On one occasion, this researcher was the only person, besides the organizer, who showed up at the hosting ACORN member’s apartment for a local education meeting. During the meeting, the organizer called several members to inquire about their promised attendance; these



members cited emergencies and lack of child care as reasons for their absences (Personal communication, October 15, 2003). Although they did not explicitly say so, Melissa also hazarded to guess that the World Series Yankees game discouraged some members from attending the ACORN meeting. In addition to meetings, organizers occasionally hold one-on-one meetings in the members' apartments; these usually concern possible plans for specific, already existent campaigns. In one instance, for example, Tara updated the member on a recent campaign and asked if she were interested in upcoming events, and if she could be relied upon for her presence (Personal communication, March 11, 2004). In this case, the member had been watching Spanish-language television during the one-on-one, and commercials for Mel Gibson's *The Passion* aired repeatedly during the meeting. The member started to speak about the upcoming Easter holiday, and Tara quickly changed the subject before leaving. Once outside the apartment, Tara noted, "She's Pentecostal, and I'm Jewish," by means of explaining her avoidance of speaking about religion (ibid.). Overall, this instance reinforces the unspoken protocol at ACORN of focusing on issues and activities that relate directly to campaigns, even during one-on-ones.

In addition to meetings and one-on-ones with specific campaign agenda, general leadership meetings are held sporadically, around once a quarter. These meetings allow new ideas for issue campaigns to be aired and discussed. On one such occasion, the meeting began with each person stating his or her name and how long he or she has been an ACORN member, in years and months (Personal communication, July 22, 2004). Four men and 11 women were in attendance. Sylvia, a leader, chaired the meeting, handing out "network forms," sheets of paper with lines for ten people—relatives, friends, neighbors—whose phone numbers attendees should list, in order to recruit for ACORN. The agenda stated that the next item was "rebuilding the base...why/ how," but this was not really discussed. Instead, the chair gave instructions about filling out the network forms, and a few people in the room immediately began to do so. In the

meantime, Sylvia addressed the next agenda item, a discussion of new, key issues in the community. Few people spoke; one stated that she had been having a lot of trouble with a specific bus route, and another spoke of witnessing a man get mugged and beaten a few nights earlier. At that moment, Jack, an elected officer in the SMO and the first non-Spanish-speaker to attend the meeting, arrived. The chair announced his official position, and attendees clapped in response.

Although translation equipment was available, it was not used until Jack arrived. A young woman assumed the role of translator, but remarks were only translated sporadically, with her own commentary of agreement or disagreement interspersed. Jack listened as the two stories about neighborhood issues were repeated. Sylvia cited the summer heat as a factor in crime waves, and Jack noted, “There are muggings in every neighborhood, so we can’t do anything about that. At night, when the restaurants close, is when these kinds of people come out and follow you.” He gave a series of tips, including common-sense ones such as, “Don’t walk alone. To the store, to the subway. Walk in groups,” as well as, “Carry a whistle and mace. It’s illegal. The cops catch you, they’ll arrest you for it.” Other members nodded their heads, and he went on, “Use a chain with an old-fashioned can opener, the kind with a point at the end, and swing it. It can take an eye out. Trust me, I did it already.” Some members laughed.

Sylvia asked if there were additional issues to be addressed, and Jack asked, “Do people know about the shelters that are going to be built?” People shook their heads, and he listed information for three shelters, according to their street intersections, the numbers of beds, and the demographic characteristics of the clients: “At Cypress and 141, there’s going to be a shelter for 200 single men coming out of prison and drug programs across the street from the public school. At 142 and Jackson, there will 400 beds for single men.... And at 146<sup>th</sup> street and St. Ann’s, there will be 100 men who are [sic] AIDS.”

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<sup>11</sup> Such official tiers of leadership are reminiscent of IAF categories of leadership (Osterman, 2002; Warren, 2001).

Murmurs of dismay sprang from other meeting attendees, and someone asked Jack, “What can we do?”

“You can protest,” he declared. “The Mayor’s office said that there would be no more shelters of that type anywhere built.” Someone asked if the Mayor made that promise before these proposals were made, and Jack announced that he did. Later in the meeting, he stated, “Instead of giving the building to the community, they gave it to the drug program... It becomes a big problem for schools.” Jack’s objections to the proposed shelters were vociferous: “Not even families! Coming out of prison! People from the South Bronx just eat shit and don’t fight.... Our asthma rates are the highest! This is the worst place in the world to bring up children! And it’s only going to get worse! We don’t have nothing here...” Sylvia concurred, murmuring, “Trash and drugs...” Since the neighborhood already houses three shelters within a five-block radius, meeting attendees nodded in agreement to most of what Jack said during the meeting. Still, he and Sylvia were the primary speakers; no one else spoke except to ask for one or two more details about the situation. It was decided that ACORN would arrange a meeting with the local precinct, to ask for more surveillance in the neighborhood and to look at shelter options. It was by then getting late, and the meeting adjourned.

The meeting’s events highlight a couple of ACORN’s key cultural norms: activities that emphasize recruitment, and a style of introduction that emphasizes the significance (and honor) of being a member. There are examples where exactly such protocols have worked as attractive cultural norms for new leaders. Angela, an ACORN member for 11 years, says that she first joined “by accident. [Another leader] was already involved with ACORN and constantly inviting me. I always said no—‘I have to take care of my kids,’ or ‘I have classes,’ ‘I don’t have time’—you know, the typical excuses. But then I came here, and I really liked it! So then I kept coming” (Personal communication, May 11, 2004).

That said, not all of ACORN's members were recruited via door-knocking or through friends. Sylvia, for example, became interested when she stumbled into ACORN because, as she explains, "My daughter, she's not a good student, but it's not because she doesn't want to.... And when I started going to meetings, to try to do something, I went to the PTA meetings and saw that they were just the same people every time, drinking coffee and talking about nothing. Drinking coffee and gossiping. And at the PTA meetings, they had no Spanish. I found out through ACORN that I had a right to an interpreter" (Personal communication, May 11, 2004). Here, Sylvia's reasoning fits well with the Alinskyite notion of self-interest, where activities and information distributed in the organization fit well with the member's personal experience, and the returns to organizing are readily apparent.

The bulk of ACORN's non-recruitment activities are, in fact, not Bronx-based. They are citywide, and sometimes national. A major portion of regular meetings is associated with the elected boards. Citywide Board meetings take once a month, and statewide ones quarterly. Tara, formerly head organizer at ACORN Bronx and now a head of staff for New York City, also commented that she is "not a big fan of school-by-school organizing. There's a lot of petty relationships and gossip and things that you can get sucked into" (Personal communication, June 30, 2003). In this view, then, to be involved in local education politics is to be mired in them, and activities are, to a certain extent, accordingly structured. Instead, Tara asserts that ACORN has been more successful with school improvement zones and citywide campaigns. Therefore, most meetings are perhaps more likely to take place in Brooklyn, ACORN's New York headquarters, as they are in the Bronx. In addition, Tara muses about forming a large parent union as a laudable goal (*ibid.*).

While this chapter focuses on internal norms themselves and attempts to stay clear from directly addressing political strategies, these details are important in emphasizing ACORN's focus on institutionalized hierarchies, large citywide and national networks, and organization-

wide, rather than, local or individual-based, activities—even those meetings, picnics, etc. that do not deal with campaigns per se. Tara’s reference to unions, especially, is echoed by other ACORN organizers. Edgar, for instance, also compares ACORN as a whole to a union:

We organize kind of like a union. There’s a lot of similarities. We talk to folks just like union leaders talk to the workers in a shop and get together to put pressure on the owner and the contract for better wages, better vacation time. We do the same thing with the schools... Yeah, there are some basic differences, but in essence, we’re the same. Well, they have lots of money, and we’re not structured in that sense, but we have organizers, we talk to people about what they think they can change. (Personal communication, March 24, 2004)

To the extent that unions have clear institutional norms, dues, well-defined tiers of leadership, and work to build powerful organizations, ACORN does hold striking similarities.

Another important aspect of ACORN’s strong institutional norms is the dues system. According to both members and organizers, the hefty dues render the organization accountable to members rather than external forces, such as foundations (Personal communication, June 30, 2003). This feature of ACORN has been emphasized since its inception; Delgado writes that although they were simply political rhetoric at first, dues did become the primary source of organizational funding within a few years (1985). Furthermore, dues are portrayed as a necessary and natural sacrifice. In comments that echo the quote, “You can’t have something for nothing,” members and organizers stated that dues give members a sense of ownership. Sylvia cites the dues system as one reason members would be comfortable asking to see ACORN budgets, and, “If you’re paying, you’re paying for power. It all depends on the people. If my parents give me everything, why should I do anything?” (Personal communication, May 11, 2004)

According to Edgar, dues also lend members a sense of entitlement in holding the organizers accountable: “Dues are a commitment. It’s coming out of your pocket. You’re paying my salary [so that] in essence, I need to bust my ass for you. There has to be an understanding that neither one of us can do this work alone” (Personal communication, March 24, 2004). He anticipates an argument that the dues are too steep for the working poor, by continuing, “Yeah,

dues can be a problem for some members; that's why we have the bank draft account system, because you don't feel \$10 coming out of your bank as much as putting it on my hand, you know? Listen, it's \$2.50. Anyone can do that—If you can put up seven dollars for a pack of cigarettes, six bucks for a six-pack of beer, you can also put \$2.50 a week away. So that we can make your life a little better” (ibid.).

*Leadership development with organizer as teacher*

The organization's strength in numbers and orderliness are consistently cited by dedicated members, who are clearly enthusiastic about ACORN. Angela is employed at Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council, an organization that also engages in education organizing for local school reform. She asserts that she feels little emotional attachment to her employer, however, stating, “You have a passion—that's the difference as a leader. Mid-Bronx had asked me to represent them, and I was angry, because I am loyal to ACORN. It is something no one can make me do” (Personal communication, May 11, 2004). To which Tara, an organizer who was listening to Angela speak, stated, “Well, Mid-Bronx isn't a member organization” (ibid.). Angela, for one, does hold considerable decision-making power, for she's National Vice President of ACORN. Because of that, she notes that she has less time to pay attention to local issues. Instead, she makes decisions on issues like the national wage structure for organizers, who according to her are due for a raise, and agenda for national meetings.

That said, organizers and members are careful to note that ideas for local campaigns come from members, rebutting a common criticism of many unions. Edgar, at least, avows that, “We don't say, ‘You need to say this’; we say, ‘What do you think?’” (Personal communication, March 24, 2004), and Melissa, who was in many ways critical of ACORN, maintained even after she quit as organizer that, “Leaders do make decision locally, and city-wide via representatives” (Personal communication, February 25, 2004). It may be the case, then, that organizers and key leaders recognize persistent problems and relay prioritized concerns to the official decision-

making boards. Indeed, on an everyday basis, one does encounter many instances in which organizers write down specific grievances by members calling in or just showing up (Personal communication, September 30, 2003). These grievances usually deal with emergency repairs, heat or electricity being suddenly cut off, or instances of harassment. In many cases, organizers help members address these problems fairly quickly. The origins of larger campaigns are more difficult to discern, especially since ACORN does not hold as many general, issue-generating meetings as other organizations. The point here, then, is that overall, ACORN's cultural norms indicate that members are involved in all types of organizational activities, but membership- and recruitment-oriented ones are most prominent.

In addition, active members can receive a significant amount of attention from organizers, for what is in effect hands-on leadership development. After attending a number of meetings and rallies, members become familiar with what such activities look like. They also become familiar with public administration, and the decision-makers they might contact regarding common neighborhood problems. For example, leaders know that the Department of Transportation, rather the Department of Education, should be contacted for a safety guard or speed bump in front of schools. As with the organizers, however, the primary way in which members assert their leadership is via recruitment of additional members. Sylvia, for example, was working on establishing an ACORN group amongst grocery store workers in Westchester County, where she works every day (Personal communication, July 22, 2004).

On the whole, however, the amount of leadership development workshops and training available varies greatly by organizer and member. During the year of direct observation for this dissertation, such workshops were repeatedly postponed, and to this researcher's knowledge, none occurred. Helen, a leader who is often the only person representing ACORN at CC9 meetings, stated that she had not met with an education organizer more than twice during the entire school year, even though ACORN ostensibly participates in three or four CC9 meetings a

month (Personal communication, June 15, 2004). Still, when training does occur, it can be substantive. Angela attended Leadership School after three or four years as a member. In addition to learning public speaking skills, she “also went to Legislative Training in DC, over 5 days...[and] spoke with politicians,” learning about various issues along the way (Personal communication, May 11, 2004). According to organizer Edgar, most of these workshops consist of mock role-playing with landlords, politicians, and other authority figures (Personal communication, March 24, 2004).

There are exceptions from these patterns of institution- and recruitment-heavy activities. Helen solely attends frequently scheduled CC9 meetings, and her intense involvement in ACORN includes no or little recruitment and outreach. Her case appears to be an exception, however, and her lack of communication with organizers and other ACORN members is indicative of her isolation from the organization as a whole (Personal communication, June 15, 2004). It is notable, then, that those members who do not participate in recruitment-oriented activities tend to abstain from ACORN-specific activities overall.

In short, ACORN leadership development exists, and it is sometimes substantial, but it varies greatly. Meetings are more likely to pertain to specific campaigns and events than serve as regularly scheduled gatherings, and they are more likely to be part of city- and nation-wide activities than stand on their own. Ultimately, the primary ritual in ACORN is that of paying dues and being an official member. The notion and importance of official membership permeate through all of the activities and rhetoric at the organization. Organizers’ time revolve around members, newsletters emphasize the number of members locally and nationwide, and other organization documents emphasize that it is unique because most of its funds come from membership dues, thereby lending the organization financial independence from foundations.

ACORN is exceptionally adept at building a strong organizational identity, one in which each member feels as if he or she is part of a much greater force in politics, thus making a



difference in local education reform. Further, the cultural norms build a specific brand of ownership and sacrifice, contributing to well-crafted and tangible expectations, by organizers and leaders themselves, to do more with less in the organization. The SMO suffers, however, from fairly high turnover among both members and organizers, and it excels more at pushing and pulling projects and legislative bills than parsing options and underlying policies themes. The specific ways in which the case study's cultural norms translate into political strategies are explored in depth in Chapters 6, 7, and 8.

#### Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition: Strength in unity

Although cultural norms in NWBCCC fit well within the Alinsky category with their emphasis on leadership development, building the organization, and getting things done, they are nevertheless strikingly different from those at ACORN.

#### *Leadership development with organizer as teacher*

Mark's introduction to the organization illustrates some of NWBCCC's key cultural norms. He jokes that when he was younger, he was a "detriment" rather than an asset to society, and that he was never involved in community organizations. In fact, "I actually lived there on the corner for 2 years, and used to go to this store [next door], and never knew what this building did; I never cared" (Personal communication, March 17, 2004). He suddenly became involved in 1996, when he discovered that the kindergarten his daughter was supposed to attend, a couple of blocks away from his home, was cancelled. Instead, she was to be bused over four miles away. Since she was prone to motion sickness, he thought this was outrageous: "There's no way."

He wanted to do something about this, but he did not know what. He spoke to a reporter from the *Norwood News*, a local newspaper, who suggested that he approach the NWBCCC. He found Sam, then an organizer and now a key organizer in the organization. Sam told Mark that a

good starting point might be a petition, and that he should collect signatures from aggrieved parents and neighbors. Sam helped Mark formulate a petition.

In many ways, Mark demonstrated leadership from the beginning. He claims to have been nicknamed the “Mayor of Norwood,” was born in the Bronx, had lived there all his life, and was clearly embedded in local social life. “I didn’t know anything about community organizing,” he said, “but I was pissed off.” After the meeting, Mark and a friend “stood on street corners, by the supermarket, by the school, and collected 1500 signatures over 3 days. We showed it to Sam, who was floored” (Personal communication, March 17, 2004). Over 60 parents showed up at a subsequent meeting, spilling into the hallways, but most appeared resigned to the busing situation. Sam told Mark that NWBCCC had formed an education committee the year before, and though those parents were from a different neighborhood, Mark saw that they shared interest in many of the same issues and became involved in the organization.

A rally soon thereafter at the Kingsbridge Armory, an enormous building nearby, managed to gather media attention, especially since Al Sharpton and Ruth Messinger, then running for Mayor, attended. Mark spoke to the *New York Post* and *New York Times*, stating that he had already bought “Hooked on Phonics” to keep his daughter at home rather than bus her away. Concurrently, parents were signing up on waiting lists for kindergarten placements at another nearby school, three blocks in the other direction. Mark, however, received a phone call from school saying that a spot for his daughter had opened up, and he took it. “It turns out there was no real waiting list, and the other parents complained about why he should cut in line. But you know, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, and this should serve as an illustration of when organizing makes a difference” (Personal communication, March 17, 2004).

This episode suggests that at NWBCCC, organizers obviously consider whether an issue is “winnable” and has ready public support as criteria for potential campaigns. As a contrast to ACORN, it is also noticeable that the first activity was campaign-related, and discussions about

membership did not come until much later. In fact, NWBCCC did not institute a dues-paying structure until fairly recently, and in comparison to ACORN's, it is nominal, of 30 dollars a year, with other sliding scale options for low-income people.

That said, the dues system now in place is fairly elaborate and closely linked to new, clear delineations of the leadership structure. Although leaders do not have to be on the board to carry significant responsibilities in an official capacity, such as assigned "expert" roles in campaigns, NWBCCC now has clear bylaws about who constitutes a member, leader, key leader, etc.<sup>11</sup> Each category is accompanied by certain expectations, such as the number of campaigns with which the member is familiar and can speak upon, the responsibilities held by the member, and to a lesser extent, the length of time he or she has been involved.

NWBCCC certainly has extensive leadership development, with Organizing 101 and 102 sessions on a regular basis, at least quarterly, hired consultant organizers from other groups and foundations facilitating longer retreats, regular meetings, and research groups. A typical meeting opens with introductions, where each member states his or her name and interest in the meeting, either as a person with a particular role, i.e., teacher, parent, student, etc., or with a particular passion, i.e., teacher training, overcrowding, etc. The first item on the agenda is usually a reflection on a quotation; examples include, "It's better to light a candle than to curse the darkness," from Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as quotes by Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights leaders. These are always available in Spanish and English (Personal communication, November 6, 2003, April 27, 2004). Once in a while, the reflection is not a quote but a short discussion on a specific topic; for example, one centered on the meaning of respect as manifest in meetings and negotiations, and the ground rules that are necessary for all participants to feel respected (Personal communication, March 15, 2004).

In the end, the organizer is a guide rather than a partner. As Mark points out, "I spent a lot of time with Sam after breaking my back [soon after joining NWBCCC campaigns]. And a

lot of other parents. Since I had nothing else to do and couldn't go to work, this was like therapy. And it gave me a chance to talk to adults, which, you know, when you have three kids, is just great." Still, his mentor was another NWBCCC organizer, who gave him "so many opportunities to learn how to be a leader, to follow her lead" (Personal communication, March 17, 2004). According to Mark, much of this dealt with learning to allow others to speak, to do research, read documents, and become well-versed in policy. At least at first, preparation for frequent activities like flyering, door-knocking, writing speeches, and meeting with politicians are performed under the guidance of organizers.

Monica, another leader, described leadership development this way: NWBCCC "give[s] the parents the tools... to be able to see a problem, not view it as just a problem but as a campaign—if the school lunch is not nutritious, in their minds, they can see we need to bring in a group that does nutrition, maybe get the support of a local hospital that works with children. These questions pop into their heads automatically. They see all the steps they have to go after. We've enabled them to do so" (Personal communication, March 23, 2004).

Still, to what extent was someone like Mark a ready-made leader? Some of the skills traditionally emphasized in leadership development, like public speaking, appear to have come naturally to Mark. He admits himself to being a "ham," and, "I think I had some of these abilities before; I just didn't make use of them. Like speaking, I've always been into it... But if you ask my ex-wife today, she said that the Coalition was my mistress," since he was spending so much time attending meetings, and especially because he was often the lone male at many events. Here, the point is that the constant activity tapped into interests and capacities that were perhaps not fully realized before. Eventually,

[Being a leader] developed a career for me. After chairing an education committee meeting, the woman who would become my boss asked, 'Would you like a job?' I said, 'Doing what,' and she said, 'What you're doing, organizing parents,' and I said, 'You're going to *pay* me, to do what I'm already doing for

free?’ She said, ‘Sure, it pays \$12.50 an hour, are you interested?’ So I went down there! (Personal communication, March 17, 2004)

Mark, who had up until then worked as an office manager and had dropped out of high school years before in order to get a job, was hired as a organizer around literacy issues for a separate local services organization.

As he gained more responsibilities in NWBCCC, Mark began to develop leaders himself, sometimes via “trial by fire. For instance, mentoring Christina, four years ago. We went to a press conference, I told her just to come and hold the sign up, because she was very shy. Then, during the press conference, which was being aired on *Good Day New York*, I suddenly announced, ‘And now, Christina, one of the parents here, will talk about the conditions,’ and she was stunned, but then she went for it, and boom! She was amazing. But sometimes, it didn’t work out... I got burned a couple of times” (Personal communication, March 17, 2004).

Christina’s transformation is similar to that described by Monica, a long-time leader and now the overall NWBCCC education organizer. Although not quite as orchestrated as Christina’s debut as public speaker, Monica recounts a rally in October 2002 as her “initiation,”

[In front of] over 400 people at St. Nicholas [Church]... And the translator hadn’t really done a meeting that size, and she got involved in the issues and forgot to translate, and Louisa came up to me and said, ‘Could you translate for the rest of the meeting up in the front?’ ...I had a very small role, because I really wasn’t very confident. But someone needed to do that, and I was fluent in both languages. And it was difficult at the beginning, but then it just flowed, including the questions and answers in Spanish and English. And at the end, I said, ‘Wow! I didn’t know I could do that!’ (Personal communication, March 23, 2004)

While it appears that some key leaders faced steeper learning curves than others, all of them expressed sentiments similar to Monica’s, at least in terms of recognizing a sense of power and participation in the political system:

My own development, being able to see myself as someone who did have a voice and who did have power. It really changed everything. My entire view of myself and things around me. One of the things I admire most about the Coalition is when I see brand new leaders, and I see the older well-established [leaders] will not blink if they believe if they need something needs to be done. They roll up

their sleeves and do it. But that's because they were given the tools, they weren't just given the part. (Personal communication, March 23, 2004)

*Organizational development*

Working in a direction that is almost opposite from that ACORN's, NWBCCC activities are in a way compendia of activities put together by individual neighborhood groups, rather than local activities acting almost as subsidiaries of citywide and national networks. The work is often intensive, for, as Monica noted, "We had to be interchangeable in our knowledge" (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). Although this example draws from her work on the environment rather than education, it is indicative of the activities that surround a new potential campaign: "So we kind of divvied up the issue. Part of it was research into the actual nitty gritty scientific details of exactly what filtration does and whether we need it, another was the political structure and how we can use it, or for us, or how it was being used against us, past instances of filtration. And then we came together and exchange information constantly" (ibid.). In the realm of education, such division of labor occurs in campaigns against overcrowding, regarding research on school construction codes, local zoning and vacant lots that serve as potential construction space, the political power structures to be pressured in campaigns, student population projections, and the views of local principals and teachers.

Although the organizer is a guide, the substance of the activities and discussions often clearly stem from the leaders themselves. Monica remarked that organizers from other groups often express doubt that she really is organizing the education committee at NWBCCC, because, "[It looks chaotic to an outsider] because I'm not controlling it. I'm more of a resource. I don't see myself as a catalyst" (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). The organizer still retains a distinct role, but this role is less heavy-handed than some might expect, and he or she does not necessarily provide the primary means to frame an issue. The entire organization's perception about the complexity of the filtration issue, for example, changed as leaders conducted more research:

At first, we thought it was very local. By the time we finished the research, we understood that it was more of a global issue—where you have companies that want to control water because that is one of our greatest commodities, and in the future it isn't going to be oil, but water, that you want to control. Understanding that these companies are working with the façade of cleaning water, when what they really want is control. (ibid.)

With education, also, there are people who are designated to research the situation on one issue, another to stake out a specific politician, etc. Meetings, then, are more likely to be comprised of discussions around potential campaign plans than outreach, which often happens rather informally (Personal communication, November 6, 2003, March 6, 2004, February 11, 2004, March 31, 2004).

#### *Recruitment and campaign activities*

It should be noted, however, that outreach is considered a keystone activity even if it is not the agenda highlight at meetings the way it is at ACORN. In fact, it is considered so important before large events like rallies and the Annual Meeting that Daniel, a leader and former organizer, feels resentment towards it, because it cuts into the time usually reserved for other activities (Personal communication, May 20, 2004).

The Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition has worked hard to allow norms from individual neighborhood groups to coexist with organization-wide rules and activities. This balance has been difficult to strike at times; some members feel loyal to individual groups and feel little affinity to NWBCCC as a whole (Personal communication, November 26, 2003, February 19, 2004). This is exacerbated by the fact that NWBCCC has several neighborhood offices, and many members never or rarely step foot into the main headquarters. Furthermore, the board is known as more of a rubber-stamping authority than a decision-making group, and most substantive activities are based in issue or neighborhood-specific committees. These are some of the reasons why NWBCCC has focused so heavily on organization-wide institution-building in the past year, formulating new dues systems and by-laws.

One interesting ritual is the annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, which includes sermons by a Presbyterian Korean minister, a Muslim Imam, a Jewish Rabbi, a Catholic Bishop, and several other priests and deacons (Personal communication, November 19, 2003). In 2003, its third year, the service included sermons from different traditions, several songs, spoken word by members of the congregation, and a large dinner afterwards, with both kosher and halal food available. The overriding theme was that of “strength in unity,” and this was displayed by both the content and the format of the event. A homily on the Tower of Babel by the participating Rabbi, for example, emphasized the lesson that great achievement and tall structures are self-defeating if other members of the population are left behind, the chorus in the gospel finale emphasized the importance of joining forces and forgiveness, and dinner tables were set up as to facilitate intermingling. Translation was provided throughout the service itself.

During the Annual Meeting, also, banners from individual neighborhood groups were hung around the gym walls, but the actual speeches emphasized how individual contributions formed a *collective* record of achievement (March 27, 2004). After the actual meeting, members piled onto school buses and, together, performed a surprise hit against Governor Pataki, protesting his stance on the education budget. Later, the membership split into two, and half the buses proceeded to conduct a hit on a landlord named Pallozzolo, while the other half went to an action against a proposed local filtration plant. However, when it at first looked like more people wanted to visit Pallozzolo, the NWBCCC Director and Head Organizer requested that some members volunteer to the anti-filtration action instead. This incident indicates that, to a certain extent, all members of NWBCCC are presumed to be in the same boat, and all activities serve each member’s interest. Together, the Annual Meeting activities echo the organization’s theme of “Strength in unity,” its diversity, and its attempts to emphasize an overarching vision by tying norms into the idea of a whole organization and campaigns that impact all of its members.



The faith-based activities, which are fairly rare, are also structured to accompany current campaign goals, rather than the other way around. Sermons during the Thanksgiving Service were still NWBCCC-specific and often spoke about school reform; in another instance, a Catholic priest explicitly linked the struggle for environmental justice to Jesus's struggle for social justice in speeches at each stop of the Passion of the Christ procession Easter weekend (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). An Interfaith Vigil and Action for Civil Rights, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Brown versus Board of Education*, also explicitly included protests on the steps of the State Capitol in Albany, demanding more New York City funding as per the *Campaign for Fiscal Equity versus State of New York* decision in 2003 (Personal communication, May 20, 2004). While NWBCCC's norms include faith-based activities, the congregations are not official members, as they are in the IAF and Gamaliel networks.

All in all, NWBCCC boasts a wider range of activities than ACORN, all of which still mesh well with the Alinskyite category described in this dissertation. Although membership itself is not the basis of most organizational rituals, other norms, such as an opening reflection, research, and organization-wide leadership development are also important ways of institution-building, and all relate directly to campaign issues, such as education, housing, or the environment. Finally, both the mission statement and actual activities tend to emphasize the input of leaders rather than organizers, but the organizer remains an important, guiding force. For example, according to several organizers and leaders, the Director and Head Organizer ultimately determine the final copy of flyers and announcements, if only by means of vetoing several drafts before approval (Personal communication, May 20, 2004, May 4, 2004).

NWBCCC's organizational identity is as strong as that of ACORN, but its tasks in accomplishing this are made much more difficult by the SMO's willingness to emphasize diversity as well as likenesses among its constituents, thus forming new definitions of solidarity and membership via its cultural norms. To a certain extent, it has succeeded in making "strength

in unity,” for all the diversity, a driving force. Using a self-proclaimed ‘hybrid’ model, NWBCCC also attempts to draw upon and coalesce values from both congregations and neighborhoods into a value system of its own. Correspondingly, as some interviewees cite “mission” and others “victory” as their primary reason for continued commitment to the organization, NWBCCC must accommodate different membership narratives by providing cultural norms that form a sort of social glue, without cementing leaders in place.

The following two tables list some of the overt, easily reduced cultural norms of the two Alinskyite category organizations in this dissertation. The first presents an overview of overall organizational norms, including office set-up, public and member access to information, and organization-wide activities, and the second table focuses on education campaign activities.

Table 4-2. *Office setup, access to information, and organization-wide activities*

	NWBCCC	ACORN	Themes or Patterns
<i>Office setup</i>			
<b>Office locations</b>	Offices throughout area, spanning several neighborhoods, one three-floor main office	One office for Bronx and Harlem/ Upper Manhattan	Federal system of sub-organizations or chapters; offices are set up to emphasize organizational activities and victories.
<b>Office decorations</b>	Past event posters, commemorative tributes, notes, all emphasizing NWBCCC	Dry erase board with staff schedules, police precinct map (later removed), ACORN banner	
<b>Calendar</b>	Organization-wide on server in main office	No single calendar	
<i>Public access to information</i>			
<b>Documentation</b>	Shelved binders	Some documents upon request	Access to documents is available, but primarily via organizers, and newsletters play a prominent role in synthesizing activities and publicity.
<b>Newsletter</b>	Quarterly	Bimonthly newsletter, weekly national email	
<b>Website</b>	No	Yes (national, with little local ACORN Bronx focus)	
<i>Organization-wide activities</i>			
<b>Social services</b>	None	Mortgage and home-buying, tax preparation	Extensive leadership development exists, but its form varies; little or no social services exist; staff meetings are regular and follow formal protocols; public organization-wide activities tend to be large-scale events
<b>Organizer Training</b>	At least 4 times a year	In-job training	
<b>Leadership training</b>	Semi-annual Organization 101 and 102 classes, additional workshops, orientation, retreats, informal coaching	Orientation (city-wide), informal coaching	
<b>Staff meeting</b>	One per week	One per week, city-wide	
<b>Annual meeting</b>	Overview, invited politicians, surprise hits	National annual meeting	

Perhaps partly because organization-wide activities tend to be more focused in Alinskyite category SMOs, the education organizing activities and rituals are also campaign-focused rather than free-ranging, and they tend to mirror overall organizational norms. Agenda are fairly straightforward or, in some cases, so standardized as to be easily predicted or assumed.

Table 4-3. *Education organizing activities*

	<b>NWBCCC</b>	<b>ACORN</b>	<b>Themes or patterns</b>
<b>Local education meeting</b>	One per month	No regular schedule	While activities vary, most deal with recruitment or ongoing campaigns.
<b>Meeting protocol</b>	Food and child care available, set agenda, introductory reflections	Set agenda, introductions with name/ address/ length of membership	
<b>Rotating Chairs</b>	Sometimes rotating, sometimes organizer chairs	Sometimes rotating, among a small number of key leaders	Decision-making and research activities are directly related to campaigns.
<b>Outreach (by leaders and members)</b>	Door-knocking, petitions, leading orientations and organizing classes, flyering, visits to schools	Petitions, flyering, phone banks	
<b>Agenda-setting</b>	Leaders, through discussions at meetings	Organizers, through discussions and board representation	
<b>Research</b>	Census tracts, power structures (by organizers and leaders)	Occasional research reports (by organizers and other staff)	

### Moving forward

As embodied in ACORN and NWBCCC, cultural norms in the Alinskyite category are flexible and pragmatic. Members and leaders are obviously the base and crux of the organizations, but organizers, in a way, remain the glue. Activities are structured to build the organization, via increased membership or collective identity, and to move campaigns forward. Leaders in both organizations learn public speaking and outreach skills, and some campaign design skills, and those in NWBCCC are more likely to also learn research skills. Interestingly, interviewees in Alinsky-category organizations were much less likely than those in organizations described in the next chapter, of the Freirian category, to call themselves activists. For sure, this survey was in no way statistically significant. Still, the reasoning revealed in the participants'

comments suggest that they distance themselves from the label ‘activist’ because it is associated with social movements. To members of the Alinskyite category case studies, social movements are not taken as seriously as ‘organizations’ and therefore relegated marginal status.

At the same time, to the extent that these organizations maintain grassroots credibility only so long as they threaten, challenge, and protest those who are currently in power, the leaders and organizers also go out of their way to make assertions of their militancy. What might seem like a contradiction, in fact, fits well with the Alinsky category’s focus on building institutions that are real power brokers and therefore, at least partly legitimate and working within the larger political system, while simultaneously criticizing individual players within it, i.e., current elected officials and administrators. Such strategic implications are discussed in greater depth in the analytical chapters in Part Three, after a comparative look at the Freirian category.

Finally, while one of the key contentions in this dissertation is the notion that SMOs have agency in pursuing their political strategies, and that this agency largely lies in the cultural norms taking place in the SMOs, the data in this dissertation nevertheless suggest that it is incredibly difficult to actively change, or construct from scratch, an SMO’s cultural norms. Based on the histories of the organizations, both of the SMOs described in this chapter began with cultural norms that adhered to most Alinskyite principles, and based on the cultural tool kits observed in the dissertation’s fieldwork, they appear to have remained so through the years.

This suggests that, unless the SMOs have not desired to change at all along the way, path dependency plays a role here. The extent to which the myriad activities, rituals, and informal norms do adhere to key Alinskyite principles in these two organizations is notable. While these cultural norms may have been molded to serve certain purposes, these cultural norms are enacted according to that basic mold, without instrumental changes made along the way. The leaders, members, and organizers in this dissertation who work with these SMOs do so because they believe in the cultural tool kit, or feel a sense of ownership in the script. They follow the scripts,

improvising a bit, but not changing the cultural tool kits they learn. For the purposes of the analyses in subsequent chapters, such stability helps us to make predictions about the ways in which these cultural tool kits shape political strategies.

In other words, the data do not show organizers and members to be shaping cultural norms in order to recruit certain members or attract a certain type of funding; rather, for the most part, different participants jointly enact and concurrently reinforce categorical cultural norms. In the current state of the SMOs, the cultural tool kits come with their own reasoning and instruction manuals, all ready to go.

## Chapter 5: Friends Forever

Everyday activities at any community organization are often unpredictable. Meetings are cancelled at the last minute or simply fail to materialize for inexplicable reasons. At other times, constituents seem to appear out of nowhere, galvanized by a landlord's misstep or a politician's sudden announcement. In the context of community organizing, where little activity is predictable on a daily basis, routine activities at the Sistas and Brothas United office in the Bronx are surprising. Every day, dozens of teenagers show up to discuss local education politics, conduct orientation sessions without the supervision of organizers, conduct research, chair meetings, and strategize campaigns. Participation rates are high, and the work is consistent. As boys in baggy, knee-length shirts and girls in decidedly non-baggy tank tops arrive, they give one another kisses, and some of them even shout, "I love you!" across the room as a greeting. One girl sits alone, with a sullen look on her face. "Leila," another girl asks, "What's up?" Leila quickly slides a composition book across the main table and says, "Last page." The other girl quickly opens the composition book to the last page and reads a poem to herself. She then nods, walks over, and gives Leila a hug. The scene evokes images of support groups, therapy sessions, or conflict resolution meetings. It does not conform to traditional notions of community organizing.

### The Freirian category

This dissertation primarily draws from *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (1985) and especially *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, first published in 1968, for its description of the Freirian category. In its original context, the latter book describes a model with which Freire concurrently taught literacy and politically mobilized the uneducated poor in Chile and Brazil in the 1970s. In exile at one point, he later became Minister of Education in Brazil.

Like Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*, then, Freire's books are products of lessons he learned through experience. At the heart of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire contrasts two categories of education: the "banking" and liberating methods. Put simply, the predominant "banking" method encourages a "culture of silence," whereby a teacher is accorded authoritarian status and "deposits" knowledge into the students, who are presumed to hold empty minds. Instead, Freire advocates a system of tackling illiteracy by teaching adults critical thinking skills as well as basic reading and writing. In the process, teachers and organizers are not simply relying upon students to become 'enlightened' after accumulating a certain amount of information, nor are they assuming that "banking" is automatic. In this way, the students exchange information with the teacher and experience *conscientização* (consciousness-raising), which allows them to critically analyze the causal forces in society.

Two key points of contrast between Freirian and Alinskyite categories are first, the relationship between means and ends, and second, the primary categories into which societal actors are placed. First, Freire appears to count the means of organizing and education as important components of the struggle that should only be executed in certain ways; there is little distinction between means and ends (1968, pp. 120-124). Alinsky (1971) is known for asserting that, "in war the end justifies almost any means" (p. 29), "generally, success or failure is a mighty determinant of ethics" (p. 34), "any effective means is automatically judged by the opposition as being unethical" (p. 35), and "you do what you can with what you have and clothe it with moral garments" (p. 36). As a result, some have deemed that, "Freire's writings (perhaps because of the reasons we have stated) are in strong disagreement with what Alinsky presents as [rather cynical, hard] rules. I think Alinsky describes the way of things as they *are*, and Freire describes them as he thinks they *should* be" (Facundo, 1984, section 2, para. 29).

Second, Freire's writings express a more rigid dichotomy than Alinsky's. More specifically, Alinsky writes that society is for the most part divided into the "haves," the "have-

nots,” and the “have some, want more[s]” (1971, pp. 18-26). The latter category, especially, has built-in clause of self-interest (“want more”) describing the potential for coalition-building between middle-class and low-income individuals and populations. In contrast, Freire appears to primarily divide society into “oppressors” and the “oppressed,” perhaps leaving less room for coalition-building between the two groups (1968, pp. 27-57).

Like Alinsky’s, however, Freire’s principles have been molded or changed in implementation over the last several decades. Even theoretically, understanding of Freire’s writings has shifted significantly (Facundo, 1984; Heaney, 1996). Considerable amounts of research have used Freire’s writing to discuss issues around race, for instance, when Freire himself appeared to focus almost solely on issues of class (Isaksen, 2003; Freire, 1968). As in Chapter 4, then, it is necessary here to reiterate the caveat that the Freirian category described here is just one of many potential versions. Still, the one described below was carefully chosen to highlight important characteristics of cultural norms among the case studies here, and it serves as a good foil for the Alinskyite category.

In this dissertation, the cultural norms of the Freirian category are marked by first, activities that at least initially, do not appear to be relevant to the content of campaigns or draw upon traditional notions of self-interest; second, a focus on the individual member, rather than the organization itself; and third, leadership development with the organizer as a partner. Two obvious and practical aspects of the Freirian category, then, are the inclusion of services and activities that serve no immediate campaign purposes, i.e., meditation and yoga, fiction book trading, potluck dinners not accompanied by meetings, etc., and the blurring of the line distinguishing organizers from leaders and other members.



Table 5-1. *Themes of Freirian cultural norms*

<b>Cultural Norms Theme</b>	<b>Freirian Category Focus</b>
Emphasis of Organization Activities	Emotional or cultural exchange (through services or hanging out)
Focus on Typical Activity Agenda	Individual development
Nature of Organizer-Leader Relationship	Leadership development with organizer as partner

### United Parents of Highbridge: ‘They call me a funny organizer’

This section focuses on the rituals and norms implemented by leaders at United Parents of Highbridge (UPOH). According to UPOH’s official mission and collective action frame, parents get involved and become leaders because the organization serves their self-interest, most predictably via better school outcomes for their children. Recruitment, therefore, is usually initiated by addressing a school-specific problem at dismissal time, for example, or by describing an existing UPOH policy proposal.

At the Highbridge Community Life Center, UPOH formed approximately four years ago to confront problems in the local schools, including drug dealing on the corner, dangerous conditions in the school cafeterias, and numerous car accidents in front of the schools. As a result, through protests, petitions, and rallies, UPOH has been able to win additional school safety agents, new stoves, and speed bumps and crossing guards for the schools. In addition, it began to work with other local community organizations two years ago on a district-wide initiative to improve schools. In May 2004, UPOH received news that this larger coalition would receive \$1.6 million for a Lead Teachers program, placing a mentor-Lead Teacher in each of the coalition’s ten schools, two of which are affiliated with UPOH.

#### *Organizational and individual development*

As a general rule, UPOH holds biweekly meetings during the school year, though as many as a third of them are usually cancelled at the last minute because of conflicting schedules, weather conditions, or insufficient attendance. Although some meetings attract approximately

two dozen members, most draw around half that number. Over the course of the 2003-2004 school year, the meetings also changed venues and a new organizer was hired; these changes resulted in some confusion. According to meeting protocols themselves, UPOH norms resemble those of ACORN. Much of the agenda consists of discussions about recruitment and building the organization, and there is little room left for other topics of conversation. In these ways, some UPOH norms fit well with the Alinskyite category. In an overview of approximately ten meeting agenda, consistent characteristics include a “de-briefing” of some kind near the beginning, a discussion of follow-up strategies for a plan already in motion in about half the meetings, and announcements about upcoming events and the next meeting date at the end. This agenda format is formulaic enough so that sometimes, an agenda is not drawn in advance, and organizers scramble to write and photocopy one in the few minutes before a meeting starts; these meetings appear to run similarly to others (Personal communication, September 10, 2004). Although it is not officially written in the agenda, almost every meeting also includes an overview of the multi-year CC9 platform in which UPOH takes part. This is done for the sake of newcomers, but it often takes 15 minutes away from other potential discussions. Still, because it is usually embarked upon spontaneously and by enthusiastic, long-time leaders, the speech often succeeds in getting newcomers excited about the organization.

Sometimes, working groups are convened for brainstorming about what the next campaign idea should be (Personal communication, March 31, 2004, April 29, 2004, May 12, 2004). These brainstorming sessions, however, are limited to topics already chosen beforehand, i.e., UPOH announces that it will embark on one safety issue campaign for each of its two partner schools, and working groups for those schools end up deciding on specifically addressing the drug dealers at the end of the block, the need for a speed bump, or the need for new kitchen stoves. These discussions tend to draw upon the parents’ knowledge base; they hear from their children or see first-hand the major problems at school, and there is generally no shortage of

them. Overall, however, the role of members and leaders is somewhat limited to recruitment and ideas for new campaigns, which are limited by constraints and choices made by organizers.

Finally, meeting closings are also illustrative of cultural norms at UPOH. Specifically, most meetings close without official ceremonies. When a head of staff of Highbridge organizing is present, some meetings close with all attendees holding hands and singing a song, or having a moment of silence (Personal communication, September 17, 2003). When a coordinator of the multi-SMO coalition is present, meetings always close with attendees huddled in circle, each with his or her right hand in the middle of the circle, chanting the group's name in response to the repeated question, "Who are we?!?" (Personal communication, December 4, 2003) At other times, a meeting ends with one UPOH leader distributing and selling lotions and bath products to everyone present (Personal communication, October 23, 2003). The variety of closing rituals indicates that in some ways, UPOH has not yet developed consistent meeting protocols, and the core of its norms does not lie in education committee activities per se.

*Leadership development with organizer as partner*

Overall, however, parents express a great deal of empowerment through UPOH. For example, Leander, a long-time leader, spoke of how the progress being made in the neighborhood shaped her relationship with the organization: "I'm committed to the group because we get things, like beautification, speed bumps, and other things that help the schools" (Personal communication, June 2, 2004). At the same time, Leander herself changed through her experience at Highbridge. Specifically, when a staff member noticed her volunteer work at a local school and asked her to be a VISTA volunteer at the organization for three years, she noted,

It was a big deal for me, because I hadn't seen all that in myself... I was learning about me, who I am, and I was developing as a woman. The biggest change in me, was that I was public assistance at the time... [Highbridge] had a huge impact on my self-esteem... Highbridge changed my life because of that. (ibid.)

In turn, it was through this work that Leander gained confidence and became involved in more overtly political work, questioning the way principals and teachers ran the local schools in

a way she did not dare before. At first, “We let them do their thing, and all we did was try to assist them. After all, they’re educated, and we don’t have degrees. We always just assumed that they knew what the best thing to do was” (Personal communication, June 2, 2004). Now, she helps local residents make decisions about economic development, political alliances, and services delivery in several organizations. In addition, she performs all this work in a collective, with a strong belief in the “cohesiveness in our leadership, and you really feel the strength in numbers” (ibid.).

In many ways, then, this UPOH story resonates with that of Highbridge Community Life Center as a whole. Indeed, when Gabriela, a Highbridge resident for 40 years, first began to work with UPOH a few years ago, she only did so because it was mandated, in her self-interest. Specifically, in order for her son to be eligible for its after-school program, she had to attend its classes. Although this deviates from the typical organizing story told in some case studies, in which someone in Gabriela’s position would join an SMO because of a problem like poor classroom conditions, the reigning motivation of self-interest remains.

#### *Services and other activities*

UPOH is discussed in this chapter and not in Chapter 4, however, because its most distinct characteristic is that of services, which primarily work to focus on and help the individual, and because of cultural norms that venture far beyond traditional notions of self-interest. As time went on, Gabriela became more committed not because of self-interest per se, victories, or political accord, but because of a sense of obligation. She also described how this sense of obligation stemmed from a flagrant *transgression* of a rule common in community organizing, that staff organizers do nothing that leaders can do for themselves, i.e., that they provide no social services:

I feel like I *owe* Highbridge. I have a commitment with them that’s not easily broken... I was unemployed at the time, even though I was doing volunteer work, I needed to start looking for a job. So Highbridge offered, like I said, a lot of

services, and I got involved in the Certified Nurse's Aid Program Highbridge offers... I now have been 2 1/2 years employed at St. Patrick's [Hospital] through Highbridge. Highbridge got me that job, the placement, the education... So, I mean, how much more can I ask for? I got my full-time position. I'm an 1199 [union] member through Highbridge... So whether they have the money or they don't, I would do the job the same. (Personal communication, March 11, 2004)

Gabriela stated that she would work on any campaign demanded of her, and that

she was not necessarily tied to education or any specific issue. These sentiments of emotive, personal obligation, rather than political commitment per se, were echoed by other leaders. For example, during one meeting, another leader named Altagracia spoke of her attachment to UPOH because of its contrast to her experience going to a social worker for help with her son's troubles in school. The social worker had breached confidentiality clauses and spoken to a school official, so that "every time [Altagracia] went for help, [she] felt like she was sinking... Deeper and deeper in the hole" (Personal communication, March 4, 2004). These comments point to why Highbridge's merging of social services and political organizing is intentional, with unique, substantive results. When Gabriela first met Altagracia in front of a local school at dismissal time, Altagracia wore sunglasses every day in order to cover signs of domestic abuse, and she never mingled with other parents. According to Gabriela, traditional organizing would not have transformed Altagracia into an outspoken leader. Gabriela went out there with her,

I helped her get an order of protection [against her husband], some people say I took it personal; I mean, one night she called me at 12, and I went out there with my boyfriend. We waited for the cops (because by the time she called the police, he kept coming back and leaving and beating her up) and saw him. And he went and stood there across the street, and she was so scared to point him out, and I kept saying, 'Do it, do it, I can't do it for you, don't make me, I will, I want it to be you to point it out,' and she went, 'Him!' He ran, and they got him, and he did his little 30 days. He came back one more time, and this time, everybody's waiting for him. People tell me, 'Oh you're nosy.' (Personal communication, March 11, 2004)

Because of stories like this, Gabriela is repeatedly told by older organizers that she becomes too personally involved, and her style of organizing contrasts with other 'power-based' groups described in the literature (Wood, 2002). This is not only because Gabriela answered the phone at midnight, but because she was helping Altagracia with an issue rarely addressed by

community organizing groups, domestic violence. While there have been many cases of ‘women-centered’ groups addressing such issues, few of these groups primarily abide by ‘power-based’ organizing principles and tactics, working with large groups of people on political campaigns (Smock, 2003). In other words, Gabriela’ action was outside of the official collective action frame, in that it did not relate to her official statements about UPOH, but it nevertheless contributed to the cultural norms there. At least according to Gabriela and Altagracia, then, organizing requires a special brand of support that is not provided by social work.

Gabriela, who was later hired as an organizer, rebukes her organizing teacher by stating,

He said, ‘Oh, you’re just being slick. You’re doing social work.’ I said, ‘Oh no! social workers don’t do that! They give you the 20 lists, and ’cause you don’t have insurance, they tell you to call yourself.’ So, we’re organizers, and believe you me, I do help the people help themselves. (Personal communication, March 11, 2004).

Gabriela and other UPOH staff also open the food pantry at all hours of the day and night for anyone who declares that he or she is hungry. While there are social workers, teachers, and childcare workers at HCLC, Gabriela is not one of them. She is officially an organizer, but as her work is realized, the line between these titles blurs:

[The community organizing institute] told me that I was a funny organizer. They said, ‘You’re real slick, aren’t you?’ I said, “Yeah, I’m helping them get the help they need.’ They said, ‘No, you’re doing it for them.’ ‘No, I’m not! I’m not going to take the drug program for them! I’m just gonna make sure to find a place for them instead of giving them 20 numbers and saying call these when he doesn’t have a quarter in his pocket, I’ll make those calls. But guess who’s going to have to do the lonely work mile alone, it’s him. (ibid.)

On the flipside of the same coin, UPOH has not developed as many activities and norms that appeal to leaders who do not need services or lacked access to them. Victoria, for example, states that, “I don’t participate in too many of Highbridge’s [services] programs, maybe just one, so I don’t think it’s affected how I view Highbridge. But it’s... I’d just... like to be where I will see people that after the same goals that I am, working in the same direction that I am” (Personal communication, July 8, 2004). While she is enthusiastic about UPOH’s work in school reform,

she expresses a much lower level of commitment. For instance, Victoria expressed some doubt that the Lead Teacher program was the best use of Department of Education resources, given the budget cuts existing programs suffered the same year. These sentiments are exacerbated by the fact that, according to her,

The meetings used to be once a week with UPOH, but I don't know why they stopped, or I just stopped getting phone calls. But I would get calls when there were important meetings and they wanted a certain number of people, and they needed me there. So that was the only time I was getting phone calls, then. Like last week, I was like, 'You call me for this one because you need people, but what happened the last week?' You know, so that's why... it's a little... annoying. Because I'm sure what they talked about last week was important, you know, for me to know also. (ibid.)

In other words, she feels like UPOH is taking advantage of her. During the interview, she repeatedly expressed disappointment, along with some resentment, towards Highbridge Community Life Center because she did not know that the summer camp registration deadline for her son had passed. Expressly linked to, "I feel that they only call me when they need me," then, was her opinion that "I can't really see if they are building leaders, because I only know what my experience" (ibid.).

Outside of individual cases, this combination of traditionally distinct activities, of services and organizing, also permeates everyday cultural norms. As Leander explains, "Of course, culture matters. The most important thing is that we set a welcoming tone. That's why we have child care, we have food and dinner, and we make sure that they have everything they need" for all meetings. Gabriela also explains that she is willing to lend Metrocards, mass transit tickets, to local residents so that they can attend meetings in other parts of the Bronx or New York City. While this, too, is 'against the rules,' it eventually became the *modus operandi* of the larger umbrella coalition to which UPOH belongs. This is partly because UPOH brought substantially higher numbers of parents to large rallies for a period of time, and the organizers attributed its mobilizing success to its culture.

Monica, a leader at the NWBCCC and quoted in Chapter 4, has interacted with UPOH and commented that it is “very different... I happen to like [it]... It creates a more familiar relationship between the leaders and the organizers” (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). After being involved with NWBCCC as a politically active leader for years, she left a violent relationship and found a job as an organizer there. Her story is different from that of Leander, Altagracia, or Gabriela, though, in that her personal situation was not discussed in the process. While she is committed to NWBCCC, her loyalty stems from very different reasons. She is committed to the way in which NWBCCC has taught her critical analysis skills to disentangle politics and build leadership in an intensive, democratic way. Leaders are taught to become their own organizers, to become self-reliant and not need any resources. In contrast, she feels that UPOH is “high maintenance, but very effective. I see the relationships between parents and the organizers... They seem to have a formula where it works right away... You can see that there’s personal involvement” (ibid.).

As well as blurring the line between services and traditional organizing, then, the UPOH culture appears to smudge the line between leaders and organizers. Traditionally, organizers tended to be recent college graduates. Yet, many organizers are now people like Gabriela, leaders before they were hired as organizers. Gabriela continues to state her opinion at meetings. Several other leader-organizers have thus complained that, to their understanding, official rules dictate that the organizer remain silent, with the intention that opinions and campaign ideas are truly generated by the constituents. These women claim that this silence is an artifice; they hold opinions and can easily manipulate discussions so that the group comes to a similar decision. In an interview on May 4, 2004, Nicole, another staff member at NWBCCC, complains that the head organizer, a white male, “says, ‘What do you think?’ without thinking about whether it’s appropriate to the situation, thinks that going through the script is the same as having participatory democracy.” Because they are local residents who became leaders and then hired



organizers, these women express wishes to retain the right to speak up during discussions; other leaders can then straightforwardly object to them. Ironically, they feel the latter process would be more just and honest than what they perceive as script-conforming, subtle manipulation. In this way, they exemplify organizers as partners rather than guides, working in a role in keeping with the Freirian tradition.

It is difficult to generalize patterns, based on these interviews. Certainly, Highbridge's combination of services and organizing has not been practiced by all of the settlement house-turned-community organizers in the area; one staff member at a neighboring organization observed that her supervisor did not understand that "rallies are a legitimate use of [her] time" (Personal communication, June 25, 2003). Even within UPOH, Victoria's experience suggests that the cultural norms are not consistent. This is probably at least partly due to the recent division of labor and resulting friction in the organization, in which Gabriela solely communicates with leaders from one school, and Hector, a more recently hired organizer, works solely with those from another neighborhood school, where Victoria is a parent (Personal communication, March 1, 2004, May 12, 2004). Anthony, a head of staff of Highbridge's organizing component, also noted repeatedly that some people in the organization at large do not understand that organizing does not necessarily yield 'satisfied clients' or concrete, 'per person outcomes' the way pure social services do (Personal communication, July 22, 2003, and August 7, 2003).

Yet, Gabriela's work at UPOH has revealed several important strengths and policy implications in a well-developed culture of leadership development *and* services. The power of a culture of obligation in the case study is difficult to overstate. Like model citizens in a small town, UPOH leaders are close, bracingly honest with one another, and collectively view themselves as beacons of responsibility in the community. As the case study that lies between the Alinskyite and Freirian categories, some of its cultural norms emphasize individual capacity-

building, but its activities nevertheless focus on campaign content and recruitment rather than research, book exchanges, etc. While UPOH's mission statement echoes that of other education organizing groups, and the results of their work are primarily described in terms of local education policy, pure resource mobilization and political opportunities perspectives of UPOH would overlook its most striking characteristic, that of long-term, policy-independent personal commitment. The question here, then, is not how to build social glue, but what to pursue with it.

#### Sistas and Brothas United: 'Couldn't Leave if I Wanted To'

Sistas and Brothas United (SBU) works on large campaigns on new school facilities, school safety, and overcrowding. The latter issue is especially salient in an area where many of the high schools are at 200% capacity, and with two students to a desk in some classrooms, as well as classes being conducted in the hallways. These are details well known to teenagers in the Bronx, and the SBU collective action frame presents issues of educational inadequacy and, to a certain extent, inequality as a rallying cry for a new recruits.

#### *Peer tutoring, hanging out, and other activities*

Most of SBU's meetings have agenda specific to one of the education campaigns—the Student-Teacher Alliance to Reform Schools, or STARS (originally an alliance to “Better Schools,” the campaign's name was ultimately changed to avoid the unfortunate acronym STABS); Cross-City Alliance New York, a youth-based alliance with the youth component of Mothers on the Move in the Bronx and Se Hace Al Camino Al Andar/ Make the Road by Walking of Brooklyn; the Leadership Institute, a proposal for a new small public high school focusing on social justice curricula; and Small Schools Strike Back, later renamed Bronx Schools Strike Back, as to be inclusive of students from the regular comprehensive high schools also suffering from overcrowding. Most of the regular meetings for these campaigns are each attended by around one dozen members; some include many more, but most are consistently

attended by seven or eight leaders. Unlike ACORN and UPOH, SBU always schedules preparation meetings, with set agenda, before meetings with school officials. These tend to be rather informal, asking for students' suggestions for other agenda items, accompanied by the organizer's questions about how school, family life, etc. are going in general (Personal communication, June 10, 2004). In this way, meetings explicitly address campaign issues, but they are also more open to member-suggested changes and general conversations about concerns and aspirations than those described in Chapter 4.

SBU's campaigns are designed with an emphasis on 'power in numbers,' calling on large rallies and events to make an impression on public officials. After repeated rebukes, SBU has won meetings with Governor Pataki over school budgets by protesting at his office. The youth were so successful at turnout that for a while, the rest of the Northwest Bronx seemed to rely on them to make an impression at rallies. Every day from 2 to 8 pm, approximately 60 students show up to volunteer on outreach and political strategies for these campaigns. As Lisa, a leader at SBU, explains, they believe in the value of collective efforts. She notes,

Before... I never knew where to start, or where to go from here. I would think, 'This vacant lot is filthy,' but nobody would agree with me, and say, 'Oh yeah, but whatever.' I thought, 'What could I do, here, by myself?' And the truth is, you can't really do anything by yourself; you have to have a crowd of people with you, to make sure you'll be heard. And when I came here to SBU, people said, 'Hey, you think school sucks? So do I! That's great; let's work on it!' (Personal communication, June 21, 2004)

Yet, like UPOH, SBU also emphasizes the importance of close relationships, which are not seriously considered in its collective action frame. Interestingly, it also includes services like peer tutoring in its activities. Here, tutoring becomes a personal rather than organizational activity; Jeremy, a tenth-grader, spoke of how, on his own initiative, "Like with tutoring, I made brainteasers for the members to work before meetings, so that they wouldn't just be sitting around. I think we just come up with these things on our own because we're constantly helping each other, and because we want to be developing leadership skills" (Personal communication,

June 9, 2004). Other leaders like Rosalinda, who first became involved in SBU by being a tutor, became politically active in campaign activities but concurrently emphasized the importance of activities like “hanging out” and peer tutoring (Personal communication, June 15, 2004).

In the context of social networks, Granovetter emphasized the importance of weak ties, people you barely know but who lead you to entire new social circles, in activities such as a job search (1971). While the Alinskyite category’s cultural norms, in some ways, build on the “strength of weak ties” (and strong ones) by tapping into social networks and emphasizing recruitment, it can be argued that SBU is concurrently trying to *build* strong knots. It does this with activities that emphasize talking amongst members and emotional exchange, but are just as likely to *not* be related to campaigns or involve organizers. Lisa states, “Yeah, the campaigns are cool... I liked SBU as soon as I got here, but mostly, it was because of the people... I couldn’t leave if I wanted to... Even if for some reason, SBU were to end tomorrow, I know we’d still all be close, and we’d probably start another organization that we could work on” (ibid.). Here, it is not the school outcomes or organization’s success that drives the leaders’ mobilization, but their social bonds.

As opposed to participants in other organizations, the SBU youth also emphasized the importance of culture and atmosphere more frequently. As stated earlier, the traditional community organizing collective action frame emphasizes the substance of campaigns and winnable issues. By contrast, because the SBU is about much more than the campaigns per se, so that members like Nathaniel also emphasized factors which appear irrelevant at first glance: “We have fun things. We do trips. And, on a personal level, we chill with each other” (Personal communication, June 9, 2004). At the SBU offices, there is always a large amount of activity going on, and the youth are constantly saying ‘hello’ to one another and yelling greetings of affection across the room. Nathaniel elaborates, “We definitely relate differently, because we spend a whole lot more time together... It’s just more of a sense of community. More of a love

thing in our SBU thing. Sometimes, people can get a little too involved... but it's all good"

(ibid.).

*Leadership development with organizer as partner*

The youth organizers state that they operate differently from other NWBCCC staff; they feel compelled to prove to the youth that they care and are friends, not just organizers (Personal communication, December 3, 2003, May 20, 2004). This, in turn, makes a difference in whether the youth is successfully recruited. Therefore, most outreach is not done by organizers, as in most organizations, but by leaders themselves. Nathaniel, for example, got involved in SBU through

[leader] Michael ... Since we were friends already, it was a connection we already had. It was partly because it was *him* asking me... I thought I could relate, so let me go in there, and we can do it together... If it had been a regular Coalition organizer, it would have been, 'Oh, another routine thing, you got to listen to older people do this, and say that.' I would have never thought of the organization. (Personal communication, June 9, 2004)

Even when recruiting is done by an organizer, it is in the context of a friendship. Lisa got involved in SBU through [organizer] Ernest, when, "We were in this group together called NYC, New York Conservationists... We got really close, and talked about our lives... I loved him, and he told me to check it out... I could relate to all the people here" (Personal communication, June 21, 2004). Eventually, Lisa left NYC and spent all her time at SBU. Her reasons partly concern the content of the work, because she feels that SBU is more active and constructive, and partly because she feels the SBU youth understand her better. Nathaniel's and Lisa's comments also reveal the implicit power relations between recruiter and potential participant, and the fact that they were only willing to join an organizations after being invited by people they perceived as friends rather than teachers.

Lest all of their previous intolerance be attributed to age, the SBU youth also contrast their culture to that of NWBCCC as a whole. According to Lisa, "The Coalition is way more immature. They say hurtful things! I've actually had to tell them to be sensitive to each other,

‘Get your act together, and work this out.’ They’ll say really vicious things; it’s horrible! Which is funny, because we don’t do that” (Personal communication, June 15, 2004). Such opinions of the adults were echoed, unprompted, by other SBU interviewees. The adults themselves have also noted that they have begun to emulate SBU norms and styles of interaction and recruiting (Personal communication, March 17, 2004, November 5, 2003). Thus, just as the norms at SBU have been influenced and reinterpreted by the youth; they should not be construed as essentialist or limited to the youth. Rather, the individuals in an organization can play with a collective action frame over time and incorporate cultural norms whose returns are not immediately apparent.

#### *Individual development*

This closeness has forced the SBU youth to confront each other in a way not expressed in the rest of NWBCCC, nor in the other three organizations in the study. This finding also suggests that frame alignment theories, which emphasize the content of recruiting rhetoric and have great explanatory power in some situations, do not sufficiently explain how mobilization takes place in SMOs. Specifically, the youth mobilize each other in a way that feeds upon their personal experiences, activities, overall interaction, and other cultural norms at SBU.

Again and again, the SBU participants spoke not so much of developing the organization as a whole, but of how the individuals *within* the organization had developed and were now contributing to it. A recurrent theme was how their SBU experiences “opened their eyes.”

According to Nathaniel,

SBU made me... more of a person that is open to things and realizes that everybody is not the enemy. At SBU, when people first come here, you have to introduce yourself to them. Me, I was always closed, ‘I don’t know you,’ so I kept my mouth closed, ‘I don’t need to meet you.’ But after a while, you got go up and introduce yourself, you gotta be a leader, and say, ‘Hi, my name is Nathaniel, and I do this, may I help you’... And when I see people on the street, I go and help them, and say, ‘Hello,’ and, ‘You have a good day.’ I just got more like, ‘No one’s against you, don’t worry, nobody’s trying to kill you.’ (Personal communication, June 9, 2004)

Just as he drew lessons from the organizational culture at SBU and applied them to his own life, Nathaniel also listed personal reasons for his ‘closed’ persona and their implications for SBU’s campaign work. For example, his analyses of racial inequalities in the school system, as well as how New York City bureaucracies work, were specifically drawn from his brother’s run-ins with jail; his year in ninth-grade in rural Pennsylvania town with his father, where he was one of five Black students in a school where many students carried Confederate flags; and his subsequent years living with his mother in a poorly run homeless shelter, where drug deals and violence pervaded.

Michael is the son of a gang leader, became involved in gangs himself at an early age, and was briefly placed in a mental institution by age 12. He echoed Nathaniel’s remarks about learning to trust people, and learning about positive collective activity and a sense of agency, via political participation in SBU (Personal communication, June 9, 2004). Lisa phrases the evolution of her outlook this way:

I’ve become more tolerant; I’m trying to see things from other people’s point of views a little more. Just because, before, I really, really want to say something, I’d usually flip out and get angry. And now, I say, ‘Okay, go ahead, speak,’ and I can handle things in the room and make sure one person speaks at a time. I was not a friendly person. (Personal communication, June 23, 2004)

On the other end of the spectrum of high school stereotypes, Rosalinda first got involved in SBU because it seemed like a noble thing to do; at school, she is an honors student and previously went out of her way to avoid people like Michael. She states that SBU has made her a less “judgmental person, to get to know them and know what they’ve gone through, and why they made the choices they made” (Personal communication, June 15, 2004).

Of the organizations in the study, SBU is the only one that regularly holds meetings and orientations without organizers present, giving leaders that much more importance. The interviewees also expressed that they were inspired to become leaders because they had seen others *just like them* in powerful positions. Nathaniel’s story resonates with those of other SBU

youth: “When I first came here for my orientation, I heard a whole bunch of youth speak, and actually, Michael was in charge of my orientation, so I really felt like, ‘Whoa, my homey’s really doing it!’ It challenged me! ‘Wow, they know so much! I want to get to that level!’ And I worked until I got to know that much stuff, too... Maybe, I can be just like them. I want to be a leader, to be called a leader” (Personal communication, June 9, 2004). It is affirmation and respect by peers, rather than the issue work on its own, that makes the campaigns truly special to the youth, so that there is no distinction between the collective and the individual aspects of work. While Nathaniel certainly cares about high schools in the Bronx, he primarily cited social aspirations, not better grades or better schools, as the primary motivating factors for his active participation in SBU.

Finally, the passion for their work trumps the youth’s self-interest as the reason for their commitment. Most of the youth begin working at SBU around age 14; at 17, they continue to work on long-term campaigns, despite the fact that they themselves will not reap the fruits of their labor. This is especially poignant in their efforts to construct a new, social justice-themed, small high school in the Bronx, which at the earliest, will open in September 2005. The leaders say that seeing progress is reward enough. Still, the commitment is remarkable not only because it transgresses usual notions of self-interest, but because it is not obviously winnable. Many of the youth expressed anger at the systemic inequalities in New York education, which they perceived as “a trap.” Ironically, a combination of vision and social cohesion sometimes compels a youth to recognize her self-interests in the work, rather than the other way around. Recently, SBU began a peer tutoring program, which has greatly affected Lisa: “My grades were horrible when I first came to SBU. I had a 60-something average. And I had to bring it up to an 80-something average... because at SBU, they tell you, if you can’t keep your grades up, you can’t really talk about education reform when you’re failing” (Personal communication, June 23,



2004). The opportunity to serve in political campaigns serve as the incentive for her higher grades, rather than the other way around.

Lisa's last statement exemplifies how SBU's cultural norms both abide by and subvert its collective action frame of school reform. The youth do consider whether an issue is winnable, what the politicians' and teachers' self-interests are, and what their schools do and should look like in their work in the organization. Their participation, however, is propelled as much by social relationships as it is by the self-interest described as the impetus for community organizing mobilization. In this way, the 'love thing' is not just social glue but a kind of moral vision and part of a cultural tool kit at SBU. Clearly, alongside the political and financial circumstances traditionally explored by academics, the values and norms created by the leaders and organizers at SBU make a difference. As with UPOH, the interviews attest to the fact that an organizer is rarely seen as a neutral recruiter; rather, participants consider the power they have vis-à-vis the organizer. Thus, several of the interviewees claimed that they would not have joined SBU if the person recruiting them had been an adult or someone from outside of their neighborhood.

#### Mothers on the Move: Transitioning to transparency

In some ways, the cultural norms at Mothers on the Move bear a striking resemblance to those at Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition as a whole. There is intensive leadership development, including research groups and workshops, and the organizers and members have been speaking explicitly about how to build the organization. Also, the organization has a nominal dues system akin to NWBCCC's, of 10 dollars a year per person. Yet, MOM is discussed in this chapter because, on the Alinskyite to Freirian category spectrum, there are some significant cultural norms that place it squarely nearer to the Freirian end. Specifically, activities at MOM are structured as to emphasize the individual at least as much as the organization, and personal growth becomes a focus of many activities and protocols.

Furthermore, other norms, such as intense scrutiny of organizers and all organizational documents, work to shape organizers as partners rather than guides.

### *Individual development*

A good example of MOM's focus on the overall individual and consciousness-raising, even if its activities are not officially labeled so, is the new Social Justice Organizing Training Matrix, which is still being developed with leaders. The matrix includes 10 categories with a list of skills for each, including predictable ones like Relational Organizing (clarifying self-interest, membership recruitment, mentoring new leaders), Public Action Leadership (issue identification, negotiation, celebration), Public Relations (generating press coverage, public speaking), and Fundraising (grant-writing for foundations, benefits for grassroots activities). More surprising might be categories such as Culture and Art Practice, Body Practice (integration of healthy living practices in personal life through diet, exercise, and recreation), Inner Life Practice (development of coherent values statement, reflection), and Leadership for Family, Work, and Life.

Such emphases on individual development were illustrated the day before the Still We Rise march, originally coordinated with dozens of other grassroots groups and the Hip Hop Action Summit headed by record industry mogul Russell Simmons, during the Republican National Convention in August 2004. Sara, the teenager who was supposed to speak on behalf of Mothers on the Move, became sick and was forced to visit the hospital. MOM organizers scrambled to find another youth willing to represent the organization. They found someone, and her speech was well-received. However, MOM staff did not declare the event a success because this speech was not as organically developed, and did not reflect the experience of the substitute, as well as the original one reflected Sara's passion and personality (Personal communication, September 7, 2004). This incident indicates that organizational success is not the only goal; even in cases of emergency, leaders are to be developed in a specific way. The means, then, matter at least as much as the ends. Leaders take great pride in their intensive participation; Isabela, for

example, boasted at the MOM's quarterly membership meeting that out of all of the groups that gathered at New York University for a conference the night before, she had been the only non-staff person who spoke (Personal communication, October 1, 2003).

*Leadership development with organizer as partner*

At a typical education committee meeting, attendees introduce themselves by name and the issue that most interests them (Personal communication, September 16, 2003, October 14, 2003, October 21, 2003, December 9, 2003, February 18, 2004, March 24, 2004). Agenda are usually developed and available beforehand, but most people pick up a summary as they sit down. A projected number of minutes allotted to the topic is listed next to each agenda item. At most of the meetings, there are also informational handouts to pick up. Sometimes, this is an academic article about what constitutes organizing or a case study of a particularly illustrative success or failure; at other times, there are recent newspaper articles about Bronx policies. After introductions, members and organizers break into pairs, spending approximately five minutes on quick one-on-one conversations about a specific topic, such as the pressures most affecting them at that moment in life, or their personal goals for the next 24 months. Different leaders then present updates on different campaigns or events, such as reports on recent conferences, meetings with politicians. Other recurring items for discussion included surveys of people's experiences with new Department of Education policies, persistent problems at specific local schools, the building of a new school, the Capital Plan and city budget allocations for school construction in the Bronx, and different ways to tackle overcrowding. Before each item on the agenda is resolved, each attendee speaks and either approves the protocol or raises an issue. Meeting discussions at MOM was more varied and spanned more topics than that at UPOH or ACORN, and overall, they were less structured than those at SBU and NWBCCC, where each meeting tended to focus on a specific campaign issue.

Still, the extensive and intensive preparation that occurs before all MOM meetings, even internal ones, is striking and obvious. Members rather than organizers usually present all updates, not just overall campaign platforms, and they often intersperse personal commentary in their updates (Personal communication, October 1, 2003, February 18, 2004). At meetings, MOM members are more likely than those at other organizations to cite by-laws from the Department of Education, know off the tops of their heads the names of schools officials responsible for specific grievances, dozens of acronyms for legislative acts and administrative agencies, the names of a dizzying array of governance structures at different governmental levels, rules concerning checks and balances between different administrative and instructional roles, and the names of documents listing all these rules, i.e., the Blue and White Books (Personal communication, October 21, 2003, November 8, 2003, February 18, 2004, March 24, 2004, May 5, 2004). While such information is also displayed by members of other organizations, especially SBU and NWBCCC as a whole, it most permeates MOM conversations. This is partly because some members have recently become Parent Coordinators or begun to collaborate with schools and thus have easier access to some information; this should not be construed as the decisive factor, however, since MOM members who pride themselves for their ‘outsider’ status are just as knowledgeable, while some ‘insider’ members of organizations are not. Rather, education committee meetings at Mothers on the Move emphasize nitty-gritty policymaking, in ways similar to NWBCCC’s focus on policy implications found in research.

In addition, a series of 10 two-hour workshops is held twice a year, usually during the daytime hours, and another seminar series of workshops, held twice a month, takes place at night. These workshops cover topics like political analysis, disentangling the political system in New York City, using the media, and translating big issues into policy proposals. For example, members at one workshop session focused on a specific issue on which they wished to speak out and performed a sequence of exercises, like paring treatises down to soundbites, brainstorming

on the visual and auditory imagery that would support their case, and engaging in videotaped and critiqued mock interviews.

*Research, retreats, and other activities*

More so than other organizations, Mothers on the Move boasts a wide array of activities in addition to typical education committee meetings. Agenda-setting meetings, also open to all members, always precede regular education committee meetings by seven days. Core leaders are most likely to show up at these preliminary meetings, but usually, different leaders attend each time. These meetings usually include a good deal of brainstorming, presentations about potential campaigns ideas, and decision-making about which issues to prioritize for meetings with larger attendance. For example, one such preliminary meeting included a video about parent-teacher home visits, coordinated by Sacramento's IAF affiliate. This video had been previously viewed by one of the members, at a conference she attended with MOM (Personal communication, February 18, 2004). The reception was mixed. While some members were clearly enthusiastic and immediately began throwing out questions about implementation, others doubted that it could work in New York's new centralized system, and still others did not believe at first that the parents portrayed in the video were actually low-income, since they all lived in free-standing houses rather than in housing projects (*ibid.*). Caveats articulated, a consensus emerged to present the idea to the general membership, as long as members made sure to develop a new, MOM-centered home visit plan along the way.

For the month or so before any of MOM's two or three large rallies and events each year, meetings are often held once a week instead of once a month; calendars detailing the specific issues to be discussed are prepared long in advance and distributed widely. During some months, coffee breakfasts were arranged to encourage the interested, or just the curious, to drop by and learn more about MOM. An informal book discussion group meets monthly; this group meets at a local bar on certain Fridays to discuss books that address the Bronx, community organizing, or

usually, both. Books discussed in the past year include *Tilting at Mills: Green Dreams, Dirty Dealings, and the Corporate Squeeze* by Lis Harris, *South Bronx Rising: The Rise, Fall, and Resurrection of an American City* by Jill Jonnes, and *Organizing the South Bronx* by Jim Rooney. Leaders also attend conferences, usually hosted by foundations, community organizing alliances, or social justice groups, around the country. One leader, George, commented that after he asked a Department of Education official a pointed question at a MOM meeting, one of the organizers “asked me if I wanted to go to Chicago for the Cross-City Campaign. I didn’t know at the time what that was. But in meeting people from around the country, it opened me up to looking at education from a different standpoint. A national one, as opposed to my little school” (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Such trips, then, helped George to see his work as part of a movement, transcendent of his school or even the Mothers on the Move organization.

Like Gabriela at UPOH and so many of the SBU leaders, Michele, a long-time leader at MOM, also cherishes activities that do not pointedly relate to the organization’s campaigns. Instead, she suggests that MOM host more events with soul food or wine and cheese, “rap sessions,” and “sister-bonding” events (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Although they do not include suggestions of social services, Michele’s comments suggest that seemingly unrelated activities like “rap sessions” and job counseling can in fact work in tandem with political organizing to build commitment and political leadership in a new way. Like SBU, then, Mothers on the Move has attempted to create cultural norms that encourage members to express their personal interests, even if the political ramifications are not readily apparent. To this end, the organization has also hosted a variety show and incorporated leisurely visits to the park across the street into its meetings (Personal communication, August 4, 2004). Organizers, leaders, and members also trade other books, like *Harry Potter* or beginner’s guides to yoga, informally and regularly. Together, these activities and shared practices form cultural norms that emphasize personal learning for learning’s sake.

Along with NWBCCC and SBU especially, MOM also invests in day-, weekend-, and week-long workshops and retreats, facilitated by consultants and community organizers from across the country. At such retreats, NWBCCC organizers and members tend to focus on workshops and learn new skills, SBU members have the opportunity to write their own by-laws and have uncensored, no-holds-barred conversations about race without the supervision of organizers, and MOM members have the opportunity write the vision and mission, as well as a long-term plan, for the entire organization. They thus create the rules and policies they will live by in the SMO. Although such retreats take place in both Alinskyite and Freirian organizations described in this dissertation, these Freirian SMO retreats are more likely to be centered on the individual, and on discussions about philosophy, vision, and values in general, rather than campaigns, skills, or self-interest per se.

Still, it should be noted that Mothers on the Move has recently gone, and to some extent suffered, through a transition in leadership. Along the way, all but two board members left, and so did much of the old membership. Many of the cultural norms and ways of doing things at MOM, then, are fairly new or inchoate.<sup>12</sup> Michele, who has been a leader for about a decade, describes the new atmosphere at the organization as one in which, “I think the members are little bit more honest now, and I think that most of the members now are not as headstrong, or overly headstrong, not as fiery as most that left. Because I guess, being fiery, even though issues still had to be addressed another way, they still had their heads stuck in the mud, wanting to do the same thing, the same way” (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Specifically, she contrasts these norms with the older one at MOM, where members spoke,

but they spoke more amongst themselves. I don't think they really ever challenged the staff of why this thing is being done like that. If they ever did, they did it one-on-one, the other members didn't know it... I know, because I and the other members have talked, even the ones who no longer come. They might say,

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<sup>12</sup> One can argue, rightly, that cultural norms are always inchoate in that they are never set in stone and always changing, but the ones at MOM feel more so because they are actively debated rather than taken for granted.

‘Oh, I brought that to the attention of the staff,’ [but] ...it was never brought to the membership... never put on the table. They do corner talking. (ibid.) According to Michele, at least, the old staff was able to “get away” with decisions because they were never quite aired in public.

The wide range of activities, then, are important in compelling members to open themselves, especially in an organization criticized by some as in some ways previously confining. This is not to say that Mothers on the Move is not also preoccupied with typical SMO concerns, like recruitment, political mobilization, and fundraising. In many ways, members are still counted in terms of numbers rather than respective passions, interests, etc., especially at larger accountability sessions with politicians. Members also see how the organization’s school reform campaigns are in their self-interest. As Diana recounts, “I also got involved with MOM because of something I forgot [laughs]. MOM is helping me with my school. We, when was it? Like in March? This was when we really got involved in MOM, or I did. The overcrowding. I went to a PA meeting, and there were rumors going around that the Region is going to put a new school in my son’s school, high school, with 200 more kids. I felt my need to go ask somebody to help us... so I said, ‘Let me call [MOM organizer] Katerina,’ to ask her for her opinion. But it wasn’t only me, the principal did, too, and everybody” (Personal communication, July 19, 2004). It is telling, then, that while Diana first approached MOM because of a clear issue, other aspects of MOM had become much more significant, so that she only remembered the original grievance an hour into the interview.

Other members, too, speak of how their views of Mothers on the Move shifted as they became more involved. George, a leader who has worked in the education system and perceived MOM as an ‘outsider’-only group, at least at first, noted, “the December meeting is where they really taught me... the concept of organizing. That members count. And also during actions, when you have 200 people come out, and the policymakers come, the politicians are automatically going to be counting votes, ‘They can bring this many people out, to my help or



against me” (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Still, when a leader asked the organizer for an overview for the types of foundation money most available right now, the organizers had to aggressively refuse to answer the question; they insisted that they would find money for whatever the members wanted, no matter how outlandish the wishes were, that “we’re not chasing the money” (Personal communication, October 11-12, 2003, May 1, 2004). In addition, although MOM meetings often turn to the issue of rebuilding a membership base, it is always accompanied by inclusive discussions of personal goals, in a manner distinctly different from recruitment meetings in the two more Alinskyite organizations.

Many of the cultural norms at MOM—the constant discussion, the book exchanges, the time spent on making comprehensive, organization-wide calendars available to all members—may add to a sense of learning, but they originally strike some members as, well, a waste of time. As George describes it, when he first interacted with Mothers on the Move, there would be “a lot of stuff at the meetings, I would have people complaining and making statements about how a school worked, and I’m saying, ‘Well, that’s not what’s going on at my school,’ so there used to be a whole lot of back and forth debate, and I used to be short-patience [sic], because I have a short temper. And I thought they were moving too slowly” (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). As he states it, however, he eventually changed his mind. At first, “I didn’t understand... really wasn’t interested in organizing, I was really looking at it as a means to an end, and I realized that they [Mothers on the Move] were worth it when the city was reorganizing, and they got to sit down with them” (ibid.). In changing his mind then, he also suggests that organizing is an end unto itself, in a way that contrasts ends-oriented cultural norms in this dissertation’s Alinskyite organizations.

A final but important component of MOM’s cultural norms is a convention of transparency. More than other organizations examined in this dissertation, MOM places access to information at the forefront—both literally, displaying archival portfolios and binders with all of

the meeting agenda, attendance lists, reports, foundation documents, etc. at the front of the storefront office, and figuratively, highlighting the importance of transparency in rhetoric and in meetings. The office also serves as a library, with archives, books, and periodicals such as *City Limits*. This way, a leader does not have to ask an organizer for documents; they are already accessible. The latter is done by both organizers and leaders, who have suggested numerous documentation initiatives. Such initiatives, now in consideration, include oral histories of all of the leaders. Some members have emphasized these norms as integral elements of organizational learning, that they have seen too many lessons forgotten with staff turnover (Personal communication, March 17, 2004, May 5, 2004).

In keeping with the Freirian category, cultural norms at MOM emphasize the individual at least as much as the organization, so much so that organizers often act more like partners than guides, and many of the activities are structured to build community rather than contribute to campaigns per se. Altogether, Mothers on the Move has developed a varied and extensive cultural action kit in its activities and protocols. In some ways, the cultural norms send a message of, 'anything for the sake of learning.' Indeed, the organization has acquired the reputation of a hub, or connector, in the foundation world. As such, many of its recent foundation grants are not for social justice or organizing work per se but as the leader of informal research groups or institutes connecting policy think tanks and community organizing groups in the city and around the country (Personal communication, August 4, 2004). According to one of the co-directors, the past year has been one of institution-building, in which the organization's budget doubled and its staff tripled.

If anything, in this period of great transition, Mothers on the Move has expanded its amount of activities and official capacities so quickly that, at the end of the fieldwork period, it had not yet fully developed a model of *how* to use different components of its cultural action kit. Because of this, MOM feels like an organization suspended mid-air, one that has worked

dutifully to build potential and momentum but is only beginning to lunge it into action. As the SMO most overtly engaging in organizational introspection and self-evaluation on a regular basis, the organization is an especially interesting case study for Chapters 7 and 8, which discuss how different cultural action kits help to shape capacities and tastes for political strategies.

The following two tables are Freirian counterparts to those presented towards the end of Chapter 4. They highlight some of the key physical characteristics, norms regarding public access to information, and organization-wide and education campaign-specific activities at the three case study organizations discussed in this chapter.

Table 5-2. *Cultural norms of Freirian category case studies*

	SBU	MOM	UPOH	Themes and patterns
<i>Office setup</i>				
<b>Office locations</b>	Third floor of main office (considered inadequate)	One office, children's room, publicly accessible computers, mini-library	Many offices in neighborhood, main office in storefront, education meetings in Catholic school	Offices are set up to emphasize the activities and contributions made by members, with brainstorming sheets, member-drawn maps, etc. usually displayed.
<b>Office decorations</b>	Youth-centered map of neighborhood, anti-hate posters, scribbles (including 'Fuck you Giuliani')	Political posters, past power analyses	Dry erase board calendars, staff notes, framed front pages of past newsletters	
<b>Calendar</b>	On server	Monthly calendar, distributed	Wall chart, not always up-to-date	
<i>Public access to information</i>				
<b>Documentation</b>	Shelved binders, member memos, notes with staff	Binders, oral histories, archives	File cabinets and informal electronic archives (staff)	Varies, but there is overall emphasis on member access to all memos and organizational documents, and emphasis on documenting member experiences.
<b>Newsletter</b>	With NWBCCC	None	Biweekly	
<b>Website</b>	No	Yes	Yes (entire organization, little emphasis on organizing component)	
<i>Organization-wide activities</i>				
<b>Social services</b>	Peer tutoring, music and book exchanges	No services, various co-operative activities	Classes, food pantry, social services registration	The majority of activities are not campaign-related but instead lie in social services, cultural exchanges, or varied leadership development workshops. Staff meeting protocols are varied, especially for UPOH.
<b>Organizer Training</b>	At least quarterly	Conferences	None	
<b>Leadership training</b>	Organization 101 and 102, workshops (including spoken word), orientation, retreats, coaching	Workshops (days and evenings), informal coaching, development of individual matrix	Informal coaching, some coordination with personal case manager	
<b>Staff meeting</b>	Informal, along with NWBCCC	Approximately weekly, mandatory biweekly plans per organizer	None	
<b>Annual meeting</b>	Leadership retreats in the country	Overview, invited politicians	None	

Even at a glance, the two squarely Freirian category SMOs, SBU and MOM, clearly exhibit a greater range of organization-wide activities than those presented in Chapter 4. Education-specific activities and meetings have set meeting protocols, but these protocols tend to more overtly accommodate differing individual needs and preferences. For example, leaders and organizers make sure that there are numerous official feedback opportunities before an agenda is

set, that there is rotation among leaders presiding over meetings, and that child care is always provided.

Table 5-3. *Cultural norms of education organizing at Freirian category case studies*

	<b>SBU</b>	<b>MOM</b>	<b>UPOH</b>	<b>Themes and patterns</b>
<b>Local education meeting</b>	Meetings almost every day	One a month (varies)	One every 2 weeks	Activities vary greatly and include those not or only tangentially related to campaigns  Decision-making processes involve extensive participation by most or all members, sometimes in different capacities
<b>Meeting protocol</b>	Set agenda, begins with reflections and quick one-on-ones	Food and child care available, set agenda, ends with immediate reflections and evaluation	Food and child care available; agenda not always set; if coalition head is there, ends with chants	
<b>Rotating Chairs</b>	Always	Always	Sometimes rotating, sometimes organizer chairs	
<b>Outreach (by leaders and members)</b>	Door-knocking, music exchanges, book discussions	Petitions, research visits at other local organizations, flyering, talent shows	Petitions, flyering, house meetings, meals	
<b>Agenda-setting</b>	Leaders	Leaders, through informal polling and discussions at meetings	Organizers, through discussions	
<b>Research</b>	Power analyses, internet research, and through Fordham and other organizations	Funded visits to best practice models, reading list, power analyses (by organizers and leaders)	Via affiliated university (by faculty)	

Here, learning and exploration, even if performed as an individual, are seen as social processes; each person's learned lessons contribute to the organizational whole. The challenge, then, is to ensure that simultaneously, the organization's lessons are effectively shared with and applied by individual leaders.

#### Partnerships as individual development

In the Alinskyite category, a local organizer recruits a leader by playing to the resident's self-interest in a specific, winnable issue, and aligning him- or herself with the problems and values a recruit is expected to have. While such cases also exist in Freirian category

organizations, most of the interviewees did not join when prompted by factors of sheer self-interest or policy support. They were not prompted to join by the appearance of a new crack house down the street, the election of an unwanted politician, or even a personal crisis at school or combative run-in with a School Administrator or School Safety Agent. While such events do affect the work in the organizations, all of the members and leaders also spoke of personal circumstances, whereby the organization filled in a gap at that moment in their lives. The youth, in particular, had little rational calculus, or what could be described as traditional notions of self-interest in manifest campaigns, in their original motivations to join Sistas and Brothas United. Most had not joined to list the activity on their transcripts, or because they agreed with the political campaigns, but specifically because someone they admired and trusted spoke of it passionately. Along these lines, all of the members spoke of a lifetime commitment to their organizations, regardless of expected victories, or the lack thereof.

These findings about culture and emotions make some intuitive sense, but they are nevertheless neglected in most academic work (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001). To the extent that cultural norms, rituals, and values are examined in organizations, they are often portrayed as static or taken for granted, as outlined by the elites in the organization. Here, cultural norms are constantly enacted by members and leaders as well as organizers. In this way, the UPOH case reveals social services and personal support can plant a sense of obligation in leaders to continue political organizing work. The SBU youth formed intensely personal relationships that, in turn, shaped their campaigns and helped them to build long-term commitment and sustainability, as well as the capacity necessary to formulate new policy proposals. At MOM, meeting protocols and preparation, conferences and reading groups, retreats and other activities, and the strong conventions of transparency collectively form cultural norms that emphasize pedagogy, learning, and personal development.

The work at each organization reflects a set of shifting practices, rather than values or frames set in stone. What has been interpreted as coddling in the past, for example, was perceived as necessary capacity-building by Gabriela at UPOH. Personal histories and cultural activities usually out of bounds, or superfluous, in other organizing groups were considered integral aspects of political work at SBU and MOM. These practices were heavily influenced by the people in the organization. According to these cases, emotional commitment also helps organizational work to remain sustainable in the face of greater obstacles, because leaders and constituents have something to gain besides concrete victories and policy reforms.

Finally, the three social movement organizations described in this chapter may have different explanations for developing, or falling in line with, Freirian category norms. However, as with the Alinskyite organizations described in Chapter 4, the cultural norms do appear to have been shaped or influenced early on; widespread change of cultural norms appears to be more difficult later in an SMO's history.

UPOH's case is clearest; it would have been difficult for the SMO to reconcile its social services with organizing without rejecting Alinskyite norms. Still, it is not the mere fact that UPOH facilitates services, but that mutual aid and interdependence are so important to its members, that the SMO is not placed in the Alinskyite category.

As with the Alinskyite organizations, then, it appears that a SMO's original cultural norms, those existent when the SMO was first created, do help to set a path. MOM was first developed as a popular education reading course, one that incorporated critical analysis of educational disparities in its curricula, and such an activity falls well within the Freirian category. The fact such classes were an integral part of MOM's cultural tool kit helped it to become a Freirian organization, for, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 7 and 8, it is difficult to abandon cultural tools through which members and organizers have developed strengths and preferences.

SBU emerged from NWBCCC, an Alinskyite organization; yet, it developed into an entirely distinct animal. From the beginning, however, there were informal norms of peer counseling and support; these norms were later institutionalized through official activities (Personal communication, December 8, 2003). The original leaders felt that they operated differently from the parents, and later, organizers were hired to work with this new type of leadership (Personal communication, May 20, 2004). Further, because all of the leaders participate in the SMO during after-school hours, and they are all students, peer tutoring, whether formal or informal, and exchange of advice about school, quickly became an integral part of SBU culture. This latter case, then, suggests that strong cultural norms can indeed exist for a while before they are officially recognized by the SMO.

Once developed, however, cultural norms become less malleable tool kits. It is true that like real hand tools, some become rusty from lack of use, but for the most part, they retain their shape. In fact, it almost appears as if they become stronger or more functional with more use. The ways in which cultural tool kits described here actually help to shape political strategies, then, are the focus of the remaining chapters.



### Part Three: In Search of a Happy Medium

The last part of this dissertation contains analyses on the ways in which the cultural tool kits described in Part Two help to shape political strategies pursued by SMOs. In particular, three tensions are significant, and each is the subject of a chapter. Chapter 6 deals with the ways in which cultural tool kits facilitate dialogues about race and whether an SMO pursues political strategies or campaigns that explicitly mention “race” or address racially-delineated issues. Chapter 7 focuses on the ways in which Alinskyite cultural norms can be harnessed for strategies aimed at policy or program adoption, while Freirian cultural norms build capacities for strategies aimed at policy formulation or reformulation. Chapter 8 describes how cultural norms not only build capacities, but tastes or proclivities, for either collaborative or confrontational political strategies. So that the different tensions are all analyzed using the same data, and to ensure that supporting details are not summoned at random, the signature campaigns for each case study SMO, introduced in chapter 6, also serve as the bases for analyses in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation with lessons for practice inside SMOs and potential lines of future research on culture and social movements.

## Chapter 6: Off the Charts

While Chapters 4 and 5 delved into the Alinskyite and Freirian categories, this chapter attempts to round out the descriptions of cultural norms in the five organizations by focusing on untold stories, contradictions, and other factors not easily labeled as activities, meeting protocols, components of organizer-leader relationships, etc. It so happens that, more often than not, the underlying theme is that of race, and the ways in which norms at the SMOs are (or are not) able to deal with issues of race.

A consistent theme that arises, in both literature on community organizing and in the fieldwork data for this dissertation, is whether an issue that disproportionately affects a specific racial or ethnic population, but which may be addressed by all members in the name of social justice, is automatically labeled as a “divisive issue,” one that is in danger of pitting some members against others (Delgado, 2003, 1994; Wood, 2002). Much of the relevant discussion in the literature has focused on issues of gender and race in the women’s liberation and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Evans, 1970; Jordan, 1981). This tension partly exists because such strategies or campaigns are unlikely to be “winnable” if they do not automatically garner the support of *most* members (Warren, 2001). Since members belong to different racial groups, it appears to risky to confront a racially delineated issue; in contrast, an issue that involves the entire neighborhood or all working-class people is likely to affect, and therefore win the support of, all members (Miller, 1996). This latter statement, however, makes assumptions about whether a member would support a strategy that disproportionately affects members of another racial group, and it is itself vigorously debated (Ostrander, 1999). It is possible, for example, for an African American mother to support a bilingual program for Latino children, or for a Latino teenager to support a campaign to address local racial profiling that primarily targets Muslim men of African descent.

The question in this chapter's analysis, then, is whether the cultural norms of the two categories lead to distinct ways of dealing with issues of race, both within and outside of the SMOs. Each SMO appears to espouse a different definition of "divisive," and these are described in detail later in the chapter. A consistent theme in the literature concerns, unfortunately, the dearth of rigorous analysis on the role of culture in multi-racial organizations (Robnett, 2002; Starrett, 1997), the formation of multi-racial coalitions in general, especially outside of labor or electoral politics (Delgado, 2003; Lawrence, Sutton, et al, 2004), and the role of race and gender in progressive, multi-racial and mixed-gender organizations (Ostrander, 1999). As Check writes, there is "no blueprint for how culture is supposed to be reformed to address race and not perpetuate 'whiteness,' to address belonging to different communities" (2002, pp. 202-3).

That is, to the extent that race, culture, and gender are discussed, they are primarily discussed in the context of mono-racial or women-only feminist organizations (Meyer, Whittier, and Robnett, 2002; Ward, 2004; White, 1999; Starrett, 1997). Where explicit analysis of race and culture in social movement organizations does exist, it is usually presented in an ethnographic case study (Ostrander, 1999; White, 1999) or in the context of training guidelines (Sen, 2003; Shapiro, 2002; Contreras, 1997). While these remain helpful, the latter are limited by their focus on explicit discussion questions and collective action frames, rather than non-verbal as well as verbal cultural norms. Further, "much.... research is reflective of the co-optation and ghettoization of gender, race, and class as mere quantitative variables... This is not to say we are lacking evidence.... Rather, coherent and integrative conceptualizations of the *mechanisms* that (re)produce inequality are lacking" (Andersen, 1996, p. 730, italics in original).

Yet it remains possible to develop a framework, or at least a heuristic, of analysis that includes both quantitative variables of inequality and an examination of social processes. Agocs (2004) suggests that an analysis include 1. a quantitative breakdown of representation of members of "racialized minorities [and majorities]" in the organization, 2. "the policy and

decision making process” that affect everyone in the organization, and 3. what she calls “organizational culture,” including “informal social relations” (p. 2). Others add that social movement organizations in multi-racial contexts need to create “organizational space” that allows members to discuss issues in their own language, or in ways they feel comfortable (Delgado, 2003, p. 104), but there must also be organizational space for substantive conversations between different member groups (Sen, 2003, pp. 34-38). A recurrent motif, then, is whether silence or perfunctory consensus processes necessarily lead to a smothering of race- or ethnicity-delineated issues.

The points of analysis just described are far from deterministic. While they are consistent components of theoretical frameworks, actual case studies suggest, for example, that,

[While] others have documented... the change in decision-making structures of many... progressive organizations founded in the 1970s and originally committed to a collectivist form and consensual process.... people in [one contemporary] organization... modified their structure for a variety of reasons that were often race and gender based. While conflict did occur, people created some measure of organizational solidarity across gender and race around their agreement on the modifications, an agreement that sometimes seemed unstable and transitory (Ostrander, 1999, p. 640)

The tensions surrounding these points of analysis, then, remain salient. Based on these considerations, this chapter analyzes the cultural norms in the case study organizations according to the framework outlined in the following table.

Table 6-1. *Points of analysis regarding race and cultural norms*

<b>Points of analysis</b>	<b>Specific cultural norms examined</b>
Representation of membership and staff by race	Similar membership demographics; primary point of comparison involves race and rank among staff
Decision-making processes	Organizational spaces for different groups; language barriers
Informal norms salient to race	Dress codes, segregation, and conversations about race

Although the differences between the two categories are less distinct here than they are in Chapters 7 and 8, some tentative inferences can nevertheless be made. According to the table above, differences that do exist are more prevalent in the second and third points of analysis, those that are more informal and involve social processes rather than numerical breakdowns. Specifically, cultural norms that emphasize organizational development, such as those in the Alinskyite category, might lead organizers and members to be reluctant to pursue a political strategy or campaign that is likely to influence some members a lot more than others. While Freirian category SMOs desire broad-based alliances as much as Alinskyite ones do, they may be more likely to pursue racially delineated strategies or campaigns because their focus on the individual allows members to discuss race as one of many factors and characteristics associated with an individual.

Simply put, a leader in ACORN might be described as “an ACORN leader fighting for benefits for the working-class, including better schools,” while a leader in SBU might be described as “a black tenth-grader at Walton High School who’s into hip hop, used to live in a shelter in Hunt’s Point, and she’s lesbian, and she’s fighting against overcrowding in the schools.” When many characteristics are emphasized, race becomes an additive rather than substitutive factor in identity formation. The SBU leader is thus described partly because of the cultural norms in the SMO, which allow her peer members know a lot more personal details than ACORN leaders usually do. The fact that she might be described this way, in turn, also means that among other factors, race might be mentioned in both internal activities and external political campaigns. In this way, dialogues that can potentially bridge racial divides may be more likely to occur. In addition, alliances around race-delineated issues might be built along lines other than race alone, such as an alliance joining transgendered people and African American and Latino men against police brutality.

Some of key themes in this chapter are presented in the following table, which expands upon the heuristic introduced in Table 6-1. Overall, the fact Alinskyite category cultural norms focus on organizational development appears to also emphasize the notion of colorblindness, where the color of a person's skin should not matter in SMO activities or, in turn, political campaigns. Ironically, racial divides that do exist may be exacerbated by the inconsistent hiring of bilingual staff and inconsistent use of translation equipment at meetings.

Table 6-2. *Cultural categories and the issue of race*

	<b>Alinskyite category</b>	<b>Freirian category</b>
<b>Representation of membership and staff by race</b>		
<b>Membership</b>	Membership overwhelmingly Latino and African American (see table 3-5)	Membership overwhelmingly Latino and African American (see table 3-5)
<b>Staff</b>	Males and white people more likely to currently be higher rank	Males and white people more likely to currently be higher rank; women of color also represented among higher rank staff
<b>Race and rank in staff</b>	Representation of different groups is important, but controversy remains regarding current directors	Representation of different groups is important, and there is little controversy regarding current directors
<b>Decision-making processes</b>		
<b>Predominant decision-making processes/ mechanisms</b>	Passive consensus, voting, exit, some active consensus (NWBCCC)	Active consensus, iterations of voting and discussion, exit
<b>Organizational space for subgroups</b>	Meetings without staff unlikely to occur; special meetings for race- or ethnicity-delineated groups sometimes occur, but more likely to emphasize recruitment than discussion	Meetings without staff are routine; special meetings for race- or ethnicity-delineated groups are routine
<b>Organizational space for mediation between subgroups</b>	Less likely to exist without staff present; language barriers sometimes exist	Routine and incorporated in everyday norms
<b>Language barriers</b>	Percentage of bilingual organizers varies; Spanish-language classes are provided for staff (in NWBCCC); translation is provided, but sporadically (in ACORN Bronx)	Most organizers are bilingual, barriers remain with Arabic-speaking, Francophonous, and other immigrant groups; translation provided consistently
<b>Informal norms salient to race</b>		
<b>Dress codes</b>	More likely to developed, as to encourage organizational solidarity and not	Not fully developed, but this may be because no one has transgressed informal dress codes that may exist
<b>Dialogues regarding race</b>	Sometimes occur, mostly avoided	Sometimes occur, mostly addressed through in-person meetings between individuals or through humor
<b>Guiding principle regarding race</b>	Colorblindness	Some color-consciousness

In the Alinskyite category SMOs, a focus on the organization means that the notion of race is sometimes raised in conversations, sometimes not; when it is addressed, it is addressed in different ways. In the Freirian category SMOs, racial differences might be explicitly mentioned through dress or in conversation; at the same time, they are also explicitly addressed in agenda during face-to-face meetings or through humorous comments, and translation is more consistently provided to facilitate communication between all individuals.

#### Numerical indicators: The subtext of race and rank

Table 6-3. *Basic demographic characteristics of staff in case study SMOs*

	Alinskyite category		Mixed	Freirian category	
	ACORN Bronx	NWBCCC	UPOH	SBU	MOM
<b>Staff</b>	8 organizers	15 organizers	5 organizers	3 organizers/ coordinators	5 organizers
<b>Education staff</b>	2-4 organizers	2-4 organizers	2-3 organizers/ managers	3-4 organizers/ coordinators	2-4 organizers
<b>Staff turnover (# remaining out of # employed sometime 9/03-8/04)</b>	2 out of 6 (some periods without education organizer)	2 out of 4	3 out of 3	3 out of 4	3 out of 3
<b>Staff racial and gender make-up</b>					
<b>Higher rank</b>	1 white female	1 white female, 1 white male	1 African American male	1 African American male and 1 Latina female	1 white male, 1 Black Latina woman
<b>Lower rank</b>	Latino and African American females	Latina female	1 Latina female and 1 Latino male	1 mixed race female, 1 African American male	1 mixed race female, 1 Latina female, 1 African American male

Because the membership demographics for the case study SMOs are quite similar and were presented in Chapter 3, this section focuses on racial representation among staff. To a certain extent, it is difficult to glean patterns from the staff demographics outlined in the table above. Further, such a small number of cases does nothing to provide statistically significant patterns of inequality. At a glance, one notices that the two Freirian category organizations are the only ones to employ women of color in higher ranks, when the overwhelming majority of

membership in all five organizations (except SBU, which is evenly split among males and females) is comprised of women of color. For a more nuanced analysis, it is necessary to gather other forms of data informing possible subtexts of race and rank.

On one hand, ACORN organizer Edgar stated, “It is no secret that the hierarchy of ACORN is mostly white” (Personal communication, March 24, 2004). This echoes what has been written in the literature about the organization, though none of the organizers interviewed at ACORN had read these books (Russell, 1992; Delgado, 1985).

On the other hand, Edgar also continued, “But in New York, you have Elaine, [an African American woman] who’s [ranked high in the area’s staff], you have Edgar [a Latino male], who’s the lead organizer for [one of the areas], who just happens to be working under Tara, a Jewish-Italian girl from Colorado. And we’re running a staff that’s made up of minority people” (ibid.). This argument is not wholly convincing, however, because almost all ACORN chapters have primarily female, African American and Latina organizers, but few people of color in high-ranking positions. While several interviewees agreed that Elaine’s leadership made the local staffing an exception to national ACORN patterns, they were not so readily convinced that even the local section of the organization was free of issues surrounding race (Personal communication, February 25, 2004, July 26, 2004).

Whether perception or truth, it is significant that Melissa, who graduated from Barnard College and identifies as Iranian-American but is phenotypically white, commented, “Tara does sometimes have a different demeanor with minorities or poor people, even though she would never admit it. I don’t know, some of the comments she makes... She’s clearly an outsider. I think that that’s another reason she was sad to see me leave; I wonder if she thought we would share a bond because we’re from a similar demographic,” both being white, middle-class college graduates from prestigious liberal arts institutions (Personal communication, February 25, 2004). From Melissa’s point of view, other staff, all of whom were African American or Latino, also



occasionally resented Tara because she was younger and yet, she seemed to be promoted more quickly than all of the other organizers, including those who had been there longer. Direct observations of group commiserations appear to corroborate such impressions (Personal communication, March 8, 2004).

Organizers and leaders also state that even if racial inequalities do exist within the organization, they are inconsequential. Edgar, for example, explained that, “[This other high-ranking organizer] is a nice guy. He’s not a racist. I mean, he’s a Jew. Jewish people have been persecuted throughout history. Hitler was not a nice guy, right? I have a lot of white friends, a lot of Dominican friends, a lot of Asian friends... People who blame it on racism... are just lazy” (Personal communication, March 24, 2004). Carried through, this line of argument suggests that minority representation in itself is not necessarily a goal in the high ranks. Still, this high-ranking organizer himself has his share of detractors: “[He]... has strong issues with racism. He makes racial and cultural assumptions. He’s also paternalistic with women on staff. He clearly views himself as a white father” (Personal communication, February 25, 2004, July 20, 2004). At least in this instance, it is difficult to glean whether the crux of the question is a lack of minority representation in high-level decision-making, top leadership, or both. Clearly, however, race does play some role in ACORN’s internal dynamics among staff and membership.

The issue of minority leadership is by no means limited to ACORN. At Mothers on the Move, Stephen has been a head of staff, alongside a Black Boricuan woman, since 2002.

Michele, a leader at MOM, noted,

Now, I did hear that when Stephen first came, I think that people had questions because he was a white male. Now, I know that when we went to other states with MOM, people said, ‘Who’s that white guy?’ and I just tell them, ‘Stephen is a great person,’ there’s nothing to it. I’m glad he’s on board. He brings new ideas and perspectives. We’re very accepting of people from different nationalities. I think people might not know that at first, because people might seem withdrawn, but you can’t blame them, because you can’t trust everybody. (Personal communication, March 29, 2004)

It is notable, however, that Stephen himself has brought up issues of race, stating that it is important to be conscious of its effects on dynamics within the organization, and that it is important to encourage organic, indigenous leadership (Personal communication, July 11, 2003). While organizers and leaders at other SMOs also expressed similar sentiments, Stephen's comments are interesting in that he also implies that colorblindness is impossible; one can only work on issues of race by acknowledging and being cognizant of whatever issues exist. In this line of thinking, it is sometimes impossible for different people to share the same viewpoints or even points of analysis; one of the reasons I received entry into Mothers on the Move was that, according to Stephen and other MOM members, most of the literature on community organizing and cultural analysis has been written by white male academics. In making such a statement, they presumed and hoped that I would bring a new perspective.

At Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, too, the people holding the top two positions of Director and Head Organizer are white, even though most of the membership is African American and Latino. While few members and leaders openly question their leadership, the subtext of race and rank nevertheless flares into the open at times of crisis. At one meeting, when Sam, the Head Organizer, and Ernest, one of the head organizers for Sistas and Brothas United, disagreed about the next strategic move in a small schools campaign, their deliberation quickly turned into a shouting match (Personal communication, March 31, 2004). Ernest felt Sam was interrupting him, and he began to raise his voice. Sam wanted them to talk then and resolve the situation, but Ernest wanted to be left alone, saying, "Don't talk to me right now; it's just making me angrier." Sam and Ernest then went into the hallway to discuss this, but everyone who remained in the meeting room could easily hear the rather loud argument, and Ernest knocked heavily on door to come back in. "You're just like [another supervisor]," Ernest said, "except you don't yell" (ibid.). When Sam and Ernest come back into the room, Ernest angrily

announces that he has been suspended. Because of the incredible amount of tension in the air, the meeting was adjourned.

Ernest's statement about Sam and another supervisor is interesting not only because it names the two highest-level staff members in the organization, but because it pinpoints them as different and accuses them of sharing similarities in faulty leadership. Regardless of whether Ernest's judgment is well-founded, its sentiments are nonetheless shared by other organizers and leaders. Spending time with members of NWBCCC, and especially Sistas and Brothas United, one notices that a particular supervisor's voice in the hallways is accompanied by seemingly automatic, low groans from members. "So annoying," someone usually mutters. Even if the rift between leadership and this supervisor is not always substantive, then, it remains significant in the organization's everyday activities and cultural norms.

Mark, currently the elected president of the NWBCCC, is perhaps addressing similar issues when he expresses some reservations about his ability to represent other NWBCCC constituents, elaborating, "I didn't want to be president, but I believe I was qualified when I was nominated. I'm not going to run again when my term is up, though. Because I'm Native American, and I don't want to be seen as this token Indian, I want the president to be representative of the organization, diversity-wise. [In that the members are primarily black and Latino?] Yes. We have a white [head of staff]... but we have been addressing these issues. The staff is truly diverse, and we all speak Spanish" (Personal communication, March 17, 2004).

While basic demographic characteristics of the staff of all five case studies are generally similar, then, the stories from different organizations suggest that the subtext of race and rank is far from straightforward and, to a certain extent, remains a covert subtext. The subtexts become more nuanced as the analysis moves from numerical indicators of race in the SMOs to issues surrounding decision-making processes and informal norms.

## Decision-making processes: Bonding and bridging difference

Moving onto the second point of analysis in this chapter, we take a look at the decision-making processes that affect everyone in the organization (as per Agocs, 2004), including the grievance procedures meant to handle episodes such as the argument between Ernest and Sam described above. Further, this point of analysis includes the concept of ‘organizational space,’ of which there are two kinds. The first type is that which allows subgroups such as non-English-speakers, for instance, to meet and converse in a comfortable, safe space. The second type of organizational space is that which facilitates communication or mediation between different groups. Finally, this type of organizational space is intrinsically linked to the issue of language barriers. The following table summarizes some of the cultural norms in the case study SMOs along these lines:

Table 6-4. *Organizational space and issues of race in case study SMOs*

	Alinskyite category		Mixed	Freirian category	
	ACORN Bronx	NWBCCC	UPOH	SBU	MOM
<b>Predominant decision-making processes/mechanisms</b>	Passive consensus, exit, forming own project	Active consensus, voting, exit	Passive consensus, voting, exit	Active consensus	Active consensus, multiple iterations of voting and discussion, exit
<b>Organizational space/ norms for subgroup discussions</b>	Exists regularly for recruiting new members, exists at the national level for staff, also informal caucus	Fairly well institutionalized, a focus for the education organizer	Translation does not always occur, dependent on organizers' networks	Very well institutionalized, raised as an issue and incorporated into retreats	Meetings shaped to fit groups' cultural needs are especially scheduled
<b>Organizational space/ norms for organization-wide mediation</b>	Communication between English- and Spanish-speaking members sometimes difficult, especially without staff present	Fewer avenues of inter-member conversations not without staff present	Subgroups strongly defined by their closeness with organizers; others more likely to be isolated	Both peer- and organizer-mediated negotiations between subgroups are routine	Meetings and discussions both with and without organizers are routine, mediation is fairly constant
<b>Language(s) spoken</b>	Approximately half of the organizers bilingual; current education organizer monolingual Spanish-speaker	Primarily English, several bilingual, Spanish classes provided	Both education organizers bilingual	Primarily English spoken, some Spanish	All bilingual, but of varying fluency levels

*Predominant decision-making processes and mechanisms*

The primary types of decision-making processes and mechanisms discussed in this section are active or passive consensus, voting, and exit. As mentioned earlier, active consensus occurs when each participant is directly asked for an answer in the affirmative before a decision is made; passive consensus is defined here as presumed assent by every participant, unless an objection is made verbally. In voting processes, a simple majority determines the outcome of the decision, unless stated otherwise. A person is described as having utilized an exit mechanism if he or she expresses dissent (whether at the meeting or in another setting, such as an interview) and chooses to leave the group, project, or SMO because of this disagreement with the official decision made. The patterns discussed here chiefly emerge from the cultural norms described in detail in Chapters 4 and 5; here, the focus lies on the interaction of these processes and mechanisms with issues of race.

At ACORN, projects do not seem to change course often; rather, differences in direction are asserted when a new project is initiated. In part, this appears to be related to the SMO's emphasis on recruitment; new projects appear to often be accompanied by new members (Personal communication, July 22, 2004). Rather than bringing immigrant issues to the table during a parent meeting, then, organizers are in some ways more likely to encourage members to bring friends, co-workers, or fellow parents with similar grievances, and conducting weekly meetings until this group grows large enough to launch its own campaign (Personal communication, May 11, 2004). It is unlikely, however, that a parent will succeed in convincing an already existing group to launch a campaign on bilingual education if a significant percentage of the group does not feel it is in their interest (Personal communication, June 30, 2003); among the case studies, this is a fairly common scenario involving groups with Spanish-speaking Latinos and African American English-speakers.

The flipside of the pattern described above is that many members and organizers use an exit strategy in voicing their dissent. Akin to its use in Hirschmann (1970), “exit” is not defined here as inherently a physical act or membership withdrawal, although there is evidence of such exits, but as withdrawal from active participation in the SMO. For example, if some members become passive, stop attending meetings, and eventually let their membership expire, their exit is marked when they ended meaningful communication with others in the SMO, before their official departure. Indeed, Table 6-2 from the preceding section, corroborating comments that ACORN relies on a very small percentage of core leaders, suggests that both organizer and staff turnover is relatively high, and exit exists in high volume (Personal communication, February 25, 2004). It remains conjecture, however, whether the high rate of exit reflects dissent or mere ambivalence, especially since most of the people involved are already beleaguered, low-income members of the community.

Based on comments made by organizers and members who left, however, reasons for leaving do include disagreement with the organization’s policy to exclude community residents who wish to participate but feel they cannot pay the \$120 annual dues (Personal communication, June 18, 2003), a clash with the SMO’s chosen political strategies (Personal communication, July 26, 2004), and a feeling that organizers were pressured to emphasize certain cultural norms of recruitment over others (Personal communication, February 25, 2004). A theme that almost appears tangential in some cases and central in others is the extent to which these patterns are delineated by race. Further, the social networks tapped for recruitment at ACORN are almost always ethnicity- or race-delineated, even if this is not overtly mentioned in the content of campaigns. While these leader, member, and organizer interviewee comments might very well come from a biased sample, then, they nevertheless indicate that high exit rates merit further investigation as voices of dissent about race.

Although exit certainly exists in all of the case study SMOs, it is most prominent in ACORN and least apparent in SBU. A prominent exception concerns the change of leadership and staff that took place right before this dissertation's fieldwork period at Mothers on the Move; as mentioned in Chapter 5, this change took place alongside the departure of many board members (Personal communication, July 11, 2003).

At UPOH, cultural norms of friendship and mutual interdependence also mean that recruitment and participation is often dependent upon members' close relationships and rapport with the individual organizers. Those leaders who happen to not be close to either of the main education organizers, then, often feel excluded and sometimes suggest that sometimes do not feel as committed to the organization (Personal communication, July 8, 2004). While this case involves possible exit, it also points to important issues regarding passive consensus.

Specifically, in the case study SMOs with passive consensus, some members may feel hesitant to actively express dissent, and so they either exit or form their own projects when they disagree with existing ones. To the extent that passive consensus is more likely to take place in the organizations that operate with relatively firm organizational identity, campaign goals, and uniform cultural norms already in mind, it is therefore more likely to be prevalent in Alinskyite category organizations. Although it appears that none of the case study SMOs regularly make decisions via voting, it should be noted that voting is most likely to occur when the decision to be made is fairly small, e.g., whether a meal should be provided at the next meeting, and both organizers and leaders who chair meetings consistently state that they try to avoid "having to" hold votes, preferring mechanisms of passive or active consensus instead (Personal communication, June 30, 2003; November 5, 2003; November 18, 2003; December 4, 2003; March 31, 2004).

At the other end of the spectrum, Freirian category organizations appear to be more likely to engage in active consensus. When voting does take place at MOM, then, it is done so that a

discussion always follows, with each dissenter stating why he or she is voting against the proposal at hand (Personal communication, November 8, 2003). Likewise, SBU meetings generally continued until all concerns were addressed, and each person actively expressed support for the final proposal (Personal communication, March 31, 2004; May 27, 2004). Even when it appeared that the dissenting group primarily consisted of members of a single gender or race, then, the discussion that followed was institutionalized, and it did not appear to be out of the norm. In a conversation on school safety at SBU, for example, leaders spoke about their personal experiences, so that one person's negative experience with police officers did not negate another's positive experience per se, but consideration of everyone's feeling of safety in a certain police-heavy school or neighborhood was discussed (Personal communication, May 27, 2004).

Another related, important aspect of decision-making processes explicitly raised in the literature is how grievances, especially those that might concern issues of race or rank, are addressed by the organization (Acogs, 2004; Ostrander, 1999). Regarding this issue, the richest data stemmed from opinions and perspectives on the argument between Ernest and Sam, described above in the section on race and rank. For weeks afterward, the incident served as fodder for both gossip and substantive discussion in the organization. Months later, when I asked one interviewee if race was ever an issue at the organization, she immediately answered, "It plays out on campaign issues, like the decision to take Ernest out of the campaign" (Personal communication, June 15, 2004). She continued,

I don't want to bring this topic up, but since I'm really angry about it. Ernest was the staff leader for the Leadership Institute [campaign]. Ernest's just great; Ernest's Ernest. He's always on top of everything; he's doing his job. But some personal things happened with Sam, who recently joined the [campaign] thing, and was kind of co-staffing it with Ernest. He doesn't have so much time to dedicate to the campaign, to a brainy, flexible campaign that needs a lot of time, and some personal thing, and him and other staff people decided that Ernest was not going to lead the campaign anymore. So Sam stayed on the campaign, and they chose a person that is really active. She's really prepared for the campaign, our Tutor Coordinator. I agree with it, but she doesn't have organizing



experience, just the educator [pedagogy] side of [the proposal for a small school]. She had been helping Ernest, but she wasn't the leader of it; she has other things to do, especially the tutoring program.... Right now, we don't know why he was taken out of it. They did explain the reason why, but we felt that that wasn't a good enough reason. (Personal communication, June 15, 2004)

The leader's dissatisfaction with the situation stemmed not only from the events that transpired but from, as she perceived it, the inadequate staff response. The subtext of race and rank, then, is borne at least as much by each staff person's activities or inactivity as it is by the demographic breakdowns of organization's overall staff. She went on, "[Another leader] and I, as Board members, met with them separately, with the [heads of staff], but there hasn't really been a response. [They] told us the situation three times, [the] explanation, that Ernest had mixed data, mixed facts, that he wasn't as experienced or as adequate as the campaign required, those sorts of things.... To be honest, Sam doesn't have enough time to be dedicating so much time to the campaign. We felt it was personal reasons. And Ernest is not the lead staff person, and he's still doing a lot of the work on the campaign" (Personal communication, June 15, 2004).

Because she feels that the reasons cited by the supervisors were insufficient, this leader attributed Ernest's removal from the Leadership Institute campaign to an abuse of power by the staff, without sufficient consultation with the membership. Because both the supervisors in this case are white, she also then pointed to the incident as a reflection of racial inequalities in the organization. Nicole, whose role in the campaign expanded after Ernest left, felt that it was not a "big deal" in the long run, but that the incident nevertheless marred her perception of staff relations: "They didn't ask me—they told me to lead it—which is fine, but I felt pulled in different directions, without enough support... I was supposed to be the lead educator, with Sam being the lead organizer, but because of schedules and emergencies, different roles were transgressed," and she felt caught unprepared in some instances (Personal communication, May 4, 2004). At the same time, she also felt that there may have been substantive, strategic decisions for Ernest's removal from the campaign, such as the lower credibility he might have on a school

proposal because he does not hold a college degree. Interestingly, such reasoning was not mentioned, let alone cited, by the SBU leaders who were angry about the incident.

Another former SBU leader and temporary staff person commented, “The instance with Sam was embarrassing, to be reprimanded like that in the middle of a meeting. It was undermining his position. Theoretically, the leaders are the boss. So it was insulting. And he said that he was going to another meeting, but you know, I saw Sam march directly into [the other supervisor]’s office...” (Personal communication, May 20, 2004) The comment is interesting because it also highlights a difference between Alinskyite and Freirian category cultural norms; that in the former, the organizer is a teacher, and in the latter, the organizer is a partner. Based on these data, there may have been several reasons for Ernest’s removal from the campaign, but the fairly widespread perception of power inequalities along lines of rank and race clearly exist among membership.

### *Organizational space*

The rights of non-English speakers and organizational space for most race- and ethnicity-delineated subgroups are fairly well-established in all five of the case study SMOs. Such organizational space is used for subgroups of “participants whose first language is not English to have discussions in their language, or to creatively modify tactics to consider the experiences or cultural practices of people with different racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds” (Delgado, 2003, p. 104; Sen, 2003). Among membership, for example, ACORN organizers meet with new constituency networks on their own time (Personal communication, May 10, 2004), NWBCCC allowed immigrants groups to gather and converse amongst themselves for four months before a single campaign developed (Personal communication, November 14, 2003), UPOH allows members to hold meetings in their own language, SBU leaders can shape their own orientation workshops and conduct them themselves, and MOM El Salvadorean leaders can meet when they are free during the day, since they are generally expected to stay home at night (Personal

communication, August 4, 2004). Likewise, some workshops are held at night and others during the day, and introductory office hours and socials take place during breakfast coffee hours as well as during evenings and summer Saturdays (Personal communication, May 4, 2004).

Some issues remain, however. Generally, it appears that only SBU and MOM regularly send leaders to represent the organization without organizers present. In some ways, the constant presence of official staff may lead to member self-censorship. Although safe organizational space exists for members of different ethnic or racial groups, then, safe space does not always exist for members to speak briefly without organizers present. Further, to the extent that issues of race and rank may exist, some issues of race are less likely to be addressed. This is related to the assertion in some groups that issues of race do not seem to be dire, because they were not raised in one-on-ones; critics subsequently assert that leaders are unlikely to raise these issues themselves if organizers are white and do not ask directly (Delgado, 1996).

Ironically, in the context of this dissertation, organizational space for monolingual English-speakers is more likely to be endangered than for Spanish-speakers; furthermore, the heavy use of Caribbean colloquial Spanish makes some discussions difficult to follow for even native Spanish-speakers from other countries (Personal communication, May 13, 2004). The latter may simply be a question of time and demographic shifts; the Bronx has historically housed primarily Puerto Rican and Dominican Latinos, but this is changing quickly.

Finally, there is little evidence of official, safe organizational spaces for different staff members. This might be a function of size; some SMOs have staffs of only five or six. Therefore, this is more likely to be an issue in the larger, federation-oriented SMOs, such as NWBCCC and ACORN. While NWBCCC is quite proactive in allowing members of different groups to have specific times for discussion about race without staff present, there appears to be no equivalent for organizers themselves. At ACORN, there have also been complaints about staff, among staff (Personal communication, February 25, 2004). As a result, Edgar did mention that organizers of

color give one another informal support, forming listservs on free web-based services (Personal communication, March 24, 2004).

*Talking about (and bridging) racial divides and organizational spaces*

Finally, cultural norms also shape organizational spaces in which different subgroups can communicate with one another, and in which mediation can take place if issues of race arise. Such norms in the different organizations are thrown into sharp relief, and they vary according to the extent to which race is ever explicitly mentioned in meeting conversations. While the beginning of the chapter focused on the fact that none of the case study SMOs *always* tackles issues of race when they come up, and there are some issues of race and rank in all of them, a closer inspection still yields nuances in how the five organizations respond to these phenomena.

It is easiest to build upon cases that have already been described, at least in part. To NWBCCC's credit, then, while the quarrel between Ernest and Sam sparked quite a lot of commentary about race and power in the organization, these issues are readily admitted by the organization, to the point that Sam and the organizers themselves have initiated discussions about race (Personal communication, February 19, 2004). Substantively, they have encouraged meetings among leaders and members on the topic. These meetings have been organizer-free, so that members do not feel like they need to censor their comments (Personal communication, March 3, 2004). According to Rosalinda, a Sistas and Brothas United leader, "At the leadership retreat, we talked about race. It's just so complicated. I think it's a power issue, because too much power relies on the staffing. Like I said, the Board doesn't really have as much power" (Personal communication, June 15, 2004).

In other ways, too, NWBCCC staff attempt to face racial and cultural rifts head on. Monica, the education organizer, spoke about how the Latina, primarily Catholic parents had a lot of trouble working with the African, primarily Muslim parents, and vice versa. The cultural rift could be seen along many lines, especially via language barriers and concerning shared views

on proper ways to discipline children (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). After some meetings, held before Monica became organizer, disintegrated with shouting matches some perceived as racially delineated, Monica made concerted efforts to learn about the grievances articulated by all individuals involved. She then worked extensively with each group independently, hoping to gain a more nuanced grasp of each group's dynamics and assumptions, before working on a newer, collaborative project with all of the groups together (ibid.). Interestingly, this slower, more customized approach echoes that espoused by Rachel, NWBCCC's former faith-based organizer, who worked with several congregations, mosques, and parishes (Personal communication, November 14, 2003).

Furthermore, some interviewees readily acknowledged racial inequalities in resource distribution by neighborhood, and some specifically cited the 96<sup>th</sup> Street divide between wealthier neighborhoods with better schools downtown, and poorer schools, serving disproportionately African American and Latino children, where they lived (Personal communication, December 5, 2003). In this manner, NWBCCC's flyers highlight the density, race, and income disparities between two proposed sites for a new filtration plant (Personal communication, March 2004).

On the other hand, to the extent that race is explicitly mentioned, some members are not satisfied about the tenor of the conversations. One leader characterized the head organizers' treatment of race as superficial: "Race, and a lot of racist dynamics, are still alive... There's a lot of manipulative propaganda about race and diversity... [A supervisor] will be like, 'Oh Elena, you're Puerto Rican.' It's like Elena's the representative. And then we have one group that's mostly Korean, so she needs a Korean, and one of those... [There are] certain assumptions about people" (Personal communication, May 11, 2004).

Still, when put together, these stories suggest that while many complaints are lobbed against NWBCCC's treatment of racial inequalities inside the organization, these inequalities are by no means willfully ignored. Nor are they met with hostility or denial.

SBU inherits some of NWBCCC's norms around race, but like its activities overall, it displays its own set of practices. As one of the organizers put it, the issue of "race is internalized during discussions, [but] not formalized, [not] using data" (Personal communication, December 3, 2003). There are real protocols around discussions of race, then, but they are limited. Humor is an important component; when a meeting is disproportionately represented by Latinos, for example, the African Americans who *are* present will usually make a joke about it, and everyone else will use the comment as an excuse to prod him or her to recruit more aggressively (Personal communication, June 15, 2004). Because stories are so intensely personalized and interdependence so emphasized, members do not usually use race as a lens of analysis within the organization; "Culture's a mix. Mostly Spanish and Black. More Hispanic than Black. We're all just helping each other, basically. That's it. You always have someone to depend on, no matter what" (Personal communication, June 9, 2004).

In fact, conversations about race are often prompted by outside experiences.

Nathaniel, for example, stated that,

Actually, when I joined SBU, I was in tenth grade, and I just came from living in... Pennsylvania... It's suburban [sic], mostly all whites... My experience was there was good, but it was difficult, you know, because the school was white kids. And it was tough being a minority even in school. There were 5 blacks in school, and the rest was all white.... My father was already living out there, so I decided to go out there and live with him.... In the trailer park, it was beautiful; all that space! Whoa! ...I just didn't know about all the racism there, all the racists... Just that, you know, I never saw people really change how they treated a person, judge a person, because of the color of their skin. The color of my skin. They would just automatically think I'm one of them, ignorant people, so I just looked at them, 'Wow!' You know, they carried confederate flags, and at first, I never knew what a confederate flag was. It was crazy like that. (Personal communication, June 9, 2004)

Still, it sometimes remains unclear whether a cultural divide perhaps does exist in SBU, and if so, whether it is easily overlooked. For instance, SBU occasionally works with a group of young Muslim women who call themselves the Young Intellectuals. Considering the fact that ‘hanging out’ is such an essential part of SBU cultural norms, and that the two groups have collaborated on innovative political campaigns, it is surprising that they do not work more closely together. When leaders were asked about this, they said that the Young Intellectuals were “real cool,” but that maybe the SBU office was too far for them to visit every day, especially since most of them lived in strict households (Personal communication, June 28, 2004). While the explanation seems reasonable enough, it is also possible that Francophonic and Arabic-speaking members do not feel wholly at ease in an organization that is primarily Spanish- and English-speaking, especially one with a distinct culture of sharing music, books, and personal secrets. As much was admitted by SBU leader Lisa, in an unrelated meeting about their new small school proposal. Lisa wondered whether Vietnamese, Korean, Francophonic African, and Middle Eastern teenagers were not joining SBU because they did not find the SMO attractive, or because SBU was not making enough effort to speak their language, both literally and figuratively (Personal communication, May 3, 2004). This suggests while SBU builds strong organizational spaces for groups such as the Young Intellectuals, it has not completely built organizational spaces for mediation and inclusion across *all* racial divides. Overall, however, it is difficult to notice any racial divides in SBU, even to the mitigated extent found in NWBCCC.

The case is similar at Mothers on the Move, where issues of race are most often raised in terms of macro inequality. For example, Michele has commented that while earlier campaigns dealt with overt racism between school districts, the current organizer manages to address the same issues and raise racially-delineated issues in a different way: “Katerina’s way in directing talk, it’s very cool. It’s very smooth. She asks us, ‘What do you think about this,’ when she tells us about different districts. The way we see different types of money... ‘Why do you think it’s

like that?' ...The way she's doing it, it's not like, 'I'm going to attack you' ... It was just done in good taste. I like the way she does it... Looking at the patterns rather than people to attack" (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Similarly, when a woman at the MOM Annual Meeting stated that she might vote for Bush because her Catholic upbringing informed her stance against abortion, some of the other members in the room, both Latino and African American, bristled or gasped. In response, the facilitators noted her comment as an issue of "different values," rather than anyone having 'more' values than anyone else, and a constructive discussion on the Presidential candidates' education policies followed (Personal communication, May 22, 2004). These were instances in which a person's race was mentioned as part of the person's heritage, and so, as in SBU, there was a positive language with which to raise issues related to race.

Again, UPOH, as the organization that displays a mix of Alinskyite and Freirian category norms, is difficult to categorize and stands as a somewhat maverick case study. While organizational space does not officially exist to mitigate tensions around issues of race, neither do overt racial divides. Once again, patterns instead appear to be delineated along the lines of the close-knit social networks woven by organizers; to the extent that both organizers are Latino and both of the primary leaders feeling isolated are African American, then, a race-delineated pattern may indeed exist (Personal communication, June 15, 2004; July 8, 2004).

### *Language barriers*

It is difficult to extricate issues of race from the notions of organizational space described above. Still, it deserves its own space because one of the most straightforward illustrations of the range of SMO responses to race is the way in which each of the five case study organizations addresses language barriers among members. NWBCCC pays for Spanish classes for those organizers who did not speak the language when they were first hired, at local universities like Fordham, or via immersion programs in the Dominican Republic and other Latin American



countries (Personal communication, November 5, 2003). Sometimes, this is controversial; one African American leader accused the organization of racism when she was not hired as an organizer because she does not speak Spanish (Personal communication, February 19, 2004). Conversational or fluent Spanish is also required at Mothers on the Move, and both education organizers at United Parents of Highbridge are native Caribbean Spanish-speakers. This contrasts the protocol at ACORN, where at least half of the staff is monolingual. For instance, from February through March of 2004, Carol, a monolingual English-speaker, was the education organizer. After one month with Tara as the organizer, a monolingual Spanish-speaker, Paula, took over the job, and she has been the official education organizer since May 2004. Her job is made more difficult, then, by the fact that one of the two public schools with which she is ostensibly closely collaborating serves primarily Francophonic or English-speaking African immigrants (Personal communication, February 17, 2004).

All of the case study organizations have some access to electronic translation equipment; the variance, then, is due to informal norms more than official protocols. MOM just received a large grant especially for this (Personal communication, August 4, 2004). Until now, MOM has vacillated between relying upon the bilingual education organizer for translation and hiring an interpreter for the course of the meeting. For UPOH and NWBCCC, the translation equipment is not regularly used at meetings, except for those sponsored by a multi-SMO coalition. At the same time, there is usually little need for them, since all organizers are bilingual, all agenda are bilingual, and most comments over the course of a meeting are translated. During ACORN meetings, translation is more sporadic because not all organizers speak both English and Spanish. In general, some organizers have received complaints that language issues have not been sufficiently addressed, and these complaints have intensified with the growing number of Francophonic immigrant members (Personal communication, October 19, 2003, March 23, 2004, July 8, 2004).

## Informal cultural norms: Contested colorblindness

At each of the organizations, there has been at least one instance where a member mutters at a meeting, “I’m not racist, but,” and follows this by a statement pinpointing a specific ethnic group as more conducive to engage in some undesired behavior. None of these instances led to immediate discussions about stereotyping or race. In such instances, it appears that racism should be countered by colorblindness, and that comments that explicitly address the issue of race can be interpreted as “divisive,” if not racist. Some critics of this viewpoint, however, argue that to contest colorblindness and be “color-conscious” is not equivalent to being racist (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Crenshaw et al, 1995; Guinier and Torres, 2002; Center for Reflective Community Practice, 2004).

In interviews, most leaders and organizers asserted that race was not an issue. In several instances, interviewees stated that a person’s ethnicity did not matter, since everyone is in the same boat (Personal communication, March 29, 2004, May 4, 2004, June 9, 2004). Sometimes, leaders qualified this statement with the caveat, “so long as they’re from the Bronx” (Personal communication, March 29, 2004, June 9, 2004).

One ACORN leader noted that to the extent that race did appear to be an issue, she was not sure it was justified. The leader, a visiting public school teacher from Jamaica of African descent, explained,

I am, how should I put it, I’m probably too educated to say there is racism. I would say that yes, there are racist people. But I don’t think we must cry ‘wolf’ too early or you know. I think that is the basic nature of the African man. The African man attempts to give each person a chance, and does not stereotype, but other people stereotype very quickly. Because I am very much a personality of education; I’m also a religious person, a strong spiritual person. I tend to see Christ in every person first. So the chance is very low that someone will be discriminated against or is prejudiced against. More or less, because I have grown up in a society where we have two major races, Indians and the Africans. And the Indians, very, very much and very, very often, talk about discrimination in our

[Jamaican] society. When I do not even see it. I don't know, but I think some people, tend to shelter and use it [allegations of racism] very quickly; I'm not saying that it does not exist, and I'm not saying that it's not wrong. But I think we tend to play on that sympathy, cry it too easily. (Personal communication, June 15, 2004)

While others did not go so far in their assertions, the overall cultural norms in some of the case study organizations did reflect similar sentiments, that of colorblindness superceding any isolated incidents of racism. In contrast, other cultural norms encouraged members to assert different, but in a way that was not construed as 'racist.' Some examination of potential patterns and ramifications of such informal norms, then, is needed.

The following table outlines some of the informal norms that contributed to overall cultures concerning issues of race.

Table 6-5. *Informal cultural norms and issues of race in case study SMOs*

	Alinskyite category		Mixed	Freirian category	
	ACORN Bronx	NWBCCC	UPOH	SBU	MOM
<b>Dress codes</b>	Not discussed	Explicit	Sometimes discussed	Explicit (via NWBCCC)	Implicit
<b>Conversations about or avoiding issues of race</b>	Racial segregation and race-delineated patterns played down	Discussions exist both with and without staff present, but tensions remain	Race-delineated segregation in one event unreported; personal social networks may be partly race-delineated	Tensions regarding relations between UPOH and NWBCCC staff	Discussions embedded in analyses of inequality

### *Dress codes*

Another germane aspect of racial dynamics inside the SMOs is that of style of dress. Although no one in ACORN mentioned any issues with clothing styles, and MOM members and organizers occasionally joked about unofficial uniforms, dress codes constituted subjects of debate in the remaining three organizations. In UPOH, clothing, cars, and accessories were considered cultural signifiers of both race and class. One organizer, Hector, commutes to the Bronx from State Island every day in an older car and commented, "This isn't my real car, you know. I have a nice one at home" (Personal communication, May 12, 2004).

Another organizer, Gabriela, objected to Hector's habit of wearing suits to work. She said that despite the fact that he is ethnically Puerto Rican, that if he wears suits, "Even if he's Spanish, he just looks like a cop... No one's going to answer the door" (Personal communication, March 11, 2004). She went further in stating that such dress was, in some ways, indicative of a lack of consideration for the neighborhood. To her, it was fine to have one or two fancy items, pointing out her brand-name purse, "so that people know we have some money in the 'hood." But for the most part, it was important to her that organizers not differentiate themselves too much from the rest of the neighborhood, and that this was a way of showing that they care (ibid.). Hector had indeed worked for the police before and, according to Gabriela, was not cognizant that his dress might be an issue until Gabriela raised it to him. After their conversation, Hector continued to wear the same shirts, but began to leave his blazer behind. While there was no official dress code, then, an informal one developed.

At SBU and NWBCCC, too, at least one person broached dress codes as contentious in the organization. Daniel, a former SBU leader and part-time organizer, complained, "The other thing I don't like is [the] dress code. Have you noticed that all the women at the office, they dress a certain way? [They usually wear large tee-shirts associated with the Coalition, or in plain colors.] That's because of [other staff members' opinions]. Me, I think that sexuality is an important part of being a person and something that gives you power. Like Natasha, she had big breasts, and you'd notice them. She got reprimanded. But not dressing like you want, first of all, you stand out from everyone else on the street. You're not part of the community" (Personal communication, May 11, 2004). The latter sentiment is, in some ways, similar to Gabriela's, where formal dress codes sometimes alienate organizers from the membership, and this undermines solidarity and recruitment.

Daniel expresses another reason he rebels against the dress code, however; he sees dress as a political statement integral to expressing oneself as an individual: "Dressing sexy is not

improper—it’s empowering, intimidating. You can use it. How do you teach empowerment if you’re not empowered?” (ibid.). In this case, it is clear that between the two categories described in chapters 4 and 5, Daniel’s opinions fall closer to those espoused in the Freirian category, where the focus is primarily on individual development, rather than the organization as a whole, and on tying personal factors to political ones. Along these lines, it is notable that organizers at SBU wear rainbow nose rings and other signifiers of LGBT (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Transgendered) identity; although not explicitly tied to issues of race, these details show that SBU’s dress codes conform more to a Freirian approach, which emphasizes individuals, than an Alinskyite approach, which would probably emphasize organizational identity through uniform dress.

*Not talking about racial divides*

Finally, some data do not concern norms easily pinpointed as part of formal decision-making processes or rituals surrounding organizational spaces per se, but they nevertheless inform an analysis on issues of race. These data are more likely to be collected during activities that do not occur routinely in the SMO, e.g., interviews, field trips, rallies, and meals, rather than campaign or recruitment meetings. Far from being data outliers, however, they hint at emerging patterns of informal norms.

For the most part, when some organizers and leaders explicitly talk about the notion of “divisive” issues, one quickly realizes that they are talking about issues that appear to affect one racial group more than another. “Divisive” issues are always discussed pejoratively, and so, it is important to investigate how different SMOs classify which issues fall into the category of social injustice, and which are instead labeled “divisive.” Sam, the NWBCCC head organizer, has spoken about how members are united by issue and “organizational values,” but how it is important to not be “divisive” in terms of race, gender, or immigrant status. When asked for an example of a divisive issue, however, Sam mentioned a proposed protocol to give more

leadership positions to English-speaking members; this proposal was nixed because it would leave out Spanish-speaking leaders (Personal communication, November 8, 2003). In some ways, this assures that a subgroup is not ostracized; on the other hand, such cultural norms also run the risk of avoiding campaigns that disproportionately affect a minority group, such as police brutality and black or Latino males. In their attempts to be race-neutral and form “broad-based” coalitions, race-delineated issues are sometimes left alone rather than tackled. According to some leaders, at least, such issues and those that disproportionately affect LGBT leaders, are unlikely to be pursued by the SMO because they are not perceived as winnable (Personal communication, May 20, 2004). In this sense, support for campaigns appears to partly rely upon perceived personal gains. Such perceptions of expected outcomes are not absent in the Freirian category, but they are portrayed in different ways, and to different degrees of emphasis.

While Tara, the head organizer at ACORN, made similar remarks about “divisive” issues, she put it this way:

We have to be a democratic organization, but we also have to be thoughtful and do our homework... any meeting can deteriorate into people blaming the parents or the teachers, or wanting to organize around issues that are divisive. [For example?] Last week, I got phone calls from parents at 88 about a teacher brought up on charges. It was a popular teacher, some kids were crying. But was it something that our members were ready to jump into? (Personal communication, June 30, 2003)

In this case, it was difficult to decipher how the issue was divisive, except that the organizers were not sure that there would be enough support. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the task of avoiding “divisive” issues is portrayed as a trade-off of being “democratic.” More specifically, Tara also noted that she feels the SMO works by “avoiding divisive issues. Like I can imagine Latino parents organizing because there aren’t enough Latino teachers in the schools, but African American parents would be offended, or would be upset” (ibid.). While one can imagine obviously divisive issues in which one group is attempting to exclude another, like the one Sam cites above, the situation hypothesized by Tara lies in slightly murkier territory. Ironically,

perhaps the notion of racial equality in the school would be bolstered by recruiting teachers from a specific racial or ethnic community. That any issue that disproportionately affects a specific racial group is considered divisive, even when it is cast in positive terms and does not necessarily exclude the participation of others, then, suggests that race is rarely, if ever, overtly discussed.

Perhaps each SMO's cultural norms and their relationship to race are best seen not via the statements of organizers and leaders, but by analyzing unintended events and everyday cultural norms. This section ends, then, with narratives of events at UPOH and ACORN, respectively, that throw into sharp relief the extent to which race is addressed at NWBCCC, SBU, and MOM.

Multiple UPOH leaders state that race is, for the most part, not an issue at the organization (Personal communication, June 2, 2004, July 8, 2004, March 11, 2004). As one leader commented,

I don't think there are any race issues at UPOH... I don't think it's because people are too scared, either. We encourage people to speak up. So there's real consensus. I believe in this. I'll give you an example. One and a half years ago, at the rally then, one child didn't get to speak during the rally. The parent complained, that it was discriminatory because she was Hispanic. But we explained to her that it was because the child didn't show up during the assigned prep time. We don't discriminate. (Personal communication, June 2, 2004)

This may be true, overall. At the same time, others have noted that discussions of race tend to be superficial, and that beyond discussing the need for translators, other issues are ignored (Personal communication, June 25, 2003). Such issues might include the cultural assumptions made about each group, the potential barriers that prevent subgroups from working with one another more closely, and the barriers that prevent the SMO from engaging other communities that have yet to be brought into the fold.

An example of willful silence on the subject of race took place on October 13, 2003, when members of the United Parents of Highbridge attempted to meet with teachers from Intermediate School 73, to take them on a tour of the neighborhood. The tour was cancelled, however, because only a handful of teachers showed up, and so the United Federation of

Teachers (UFT) representative to the school asked the schoolteachers to show up for the rescheduled date a week later. At least 50 teachers did so, filling the cafeteria and listening to Daniela speak of her organization and its efforts in school reform.

Daniela spoke about UPOH's desire to develop stronger relationships between parents and teachers, and about the accomplishments UPOH has achieved in the past few years. She spoke for about twenty minutes in Spanish, with Hector, a UPOH organizer, translating into English. The main activity of the day, however, was a tour of the neighborhood for the teachers. UPOH parents had been preparing for this event for weeks, deciding on the route, writing speeches, and cooking for a meal at the end of the tour. When Daniela's introduction ended, then, everyone stood and marched out of the school and onto the sidewalks. It was a sunny, cool afternoon, ideal for a walk around the neighborhood.

A few blocks away from the school, a child on the street, apparently recognizing the teachers, asks, "What are you doing here?" He looked somewhat shocked. None of the teachers answered, and so I said, "We're taking a neighborhood tour."

"Huh! Not a pretty sight!," the child responded, and several of the teachers laughed.

The first stop on the tour, the Taqwa community garden, was just half a block further. Because it was already mid-fall, the flowers and plants were no longer in bloom, but the primary gardener gave a warm welcome to the teachers. Teachers walked through in single file, talking amongst themselves along the way. The second stop was just across the street. It was the Highbridge Community Life Center Storefront, an office with floor-to-ceiling windows. Rather than taking the teachers inside, an employee of the Storefront spoke about its primary activities: giving social service referrals to anybody who walked in, coordinating organizing campaigns, and running a community biweekly newspaper, of which she is the Editor-in-Chief. A few teachers listened. Most of the teachers, however, paid no attention and engaged in personal



conversations amongst themselves, at fairly loud levels. Daniela and the other UPOH parents looked on.

The Storefront was located next to a shelter for HIV positive people, and a few blocks away from a recently renovated library, but time constraints forbade them from visiting those sites. Rather, the group walked another half a block down a hill, to the main offices of the Highbridge Community Life Center. There, everyone piled into a large conference room and classroom. A high-ranked director of the entire organization spoke about the hundreds of services provided, including GED, computer, and English classes, emergency food, training programs, and child care. During his speech, however, several teachers got up and left, audibly saying that this whole activity was a “waste,” “stupid,” and that they had better things to do. Although most of the UPOH mothers were monolingual Spanish-speakers, some of them, who had spent the entire day cooking, were preparing to serve the food, and had been leading the tour, looked visibly upset. One stated that perhaps the fact that the UFT representative asked the teachers to attend made the event compulsory, and therefore inherently unappealing to the teachers.

Still, when the same parents attended a meeting with other UPOH members the following week, they described the neighborhood tour as a success, and no one mentioned any problems or concerns.

Every once in a while, racial divides are even more overt. This was indeed the case with on March 8, 2004, when I accompanied ACORN Bronx on a bus trip to Washington, DC. The day’s agenda included meeting with ACORN members from all over the country, union leaders, William Gates, Sr. in on the lawn in front of the Capitol, delivering a letter to then-Secretary of Education Rod Paige, and protesting at Jackson-Hewitt Income Tax Preparation Services, which ACORN claims engages in predatory loans.

I arrived at the ACORN Bronx office at 6 a.m. Two chartered buses were leaving from the Bronx. On the bus I boarded, the riders were split by race. In the first three rows sat an African-American organizer, her mother, brother (who rode with us to DC but did not join the subsequent activities, leaving the group upon arrival in DC), and a friend. None spoke Spanish. The rest of the bus was composed of Latinos, most monolingual Spanish-speakers. Several had brought their children with them, including infants. The group was fairly evenly split between men and women.

Before we took off, Tara, the head organizer, came onto the bus and instructed Carol and the other organizers (Carma and Susana, both Latina) to give all members the agenda and go over it, with discussion, 30 minutes before arrival in DC. Tara then left and joined the other bus for the actual ride. We took off between 6:30 and 7 a.m. As soon as we took off, they passed out the agenda and read it out loud. There was no discussion or question-and-answer period. Carol also repeatedly spoke to only-Spanish-speaking people in English, and sometimes went on in her instructions without allowing for them to be translated into Spanish first. For most of the remainder of the bus ride, people slept.

We arrived in DC around noon. There was a scramble for the box lunches and hats; organizers from different buses were arguing with one another for them. The box lunches were distributed by a specific catering company; Carol's friend said that she was frustrated they were not getting food, and, based on her conjectures about the caterers' racial and ethnic background, she made derisive remarks about "Jewish people" that were not rebuked or answered by others on the bus. After receiving our lunches and eating on the bus, we attended an assembly of national ACORN representatives and union leaders at a large church.

For the remainder of the day, the group marched to several actions, primarily asking for more school funding for No Child Left Behind. During some short, ten-minute stretches of the day, marchers plodded against windy, wet snow. Nevertheless, people appeared to be very

enthusiastic. Along the way, I spoke to many marchers, and they were all excited by ACORN. They spoke eloquently in terms of “social justice,” earning a decent wage that they deserved, and distributing this country’s wealth in a more equitable way. However, none had been involved with ACORN for more than a year. One person, from the Responsible Wealth Foundation (associated with William Gates, Sr., against the repeal of the estate tax), asked me what the acronym ACORN stood for. I told her, and she said that she had asked many leaders and organizers that day, and I was the first who had an answer.

As the day wore on, however, ACORN leaders began to look tired. When we met in front of the Capitol and then the Department of Education in the late afternoon, most of the people there were not listening, as it was often difficult to hear. Other than the first few speeches at the Church, there were no translations into Spanish provided, so many Spanish-speaking members had stopped trying to follow the conversations. As we were getting ready to leave the Department of Education, there were organizers from other cities telling us to go to the Jackson-Hewitt protest. Carol kept repeating that she wanted to go back to the Bronx. One (from Pennsylvania) said, “As far as I know, we’re all going to an action at Jackson-Hewitt.” Carol kept repeating, “Well, I was never told of this, so we can go home.” I handed my copy of the agenda to her, but she bristled at this. We got on the highway, to go back to the Bronx.

Approximately half an hour later, Tara called from the other bus. Carol said that the bus driver did not have the directions and was going home, that we were stuck on the highway, we had passed the exit, and it was too late to turn back. The bus driver told her to not blame it on him. Tara told Carol to take a vote on the bus. Carol proposed it to everyone on the bus, and 11 (of approximately 40) people voted to go home. Before she counted the number of people who might have raised their hands to go to Jackson-Hewitt, however, she turned around and said, “That’s it! Call Tara back and tell her they voted, and we’re going home.”

On the ride home, we watched videotapes Carol had brought with her: *Rush Hour 2*, *Barbershop*, a Marvin Gaye concert, and the filming of an African American play about adult sexual relationships, “Madea’s Class Reunion” by Tyler Perry, on the bus. There were repeated requests from the rest of the bus for something appropriate for children, but these were the only tapes brought on the trip. While the first two videotapes were watched by a good number of people on the bus, the latter two were not.

Some of the Spanish-speaking people behind me told one of the organizers that Carol was enthusiastic, but that she was too new and lacked experience. They were disappointed that we were not following the agenda. At the same time, Carol spoke to her mother and her friend about her dissatisfaction with ACORN’s protest strategies. She felt like confrontational events like embarrassing politicians by going to City Hall were rude and wrong; both she and her friend declared that they did not believe in such tactics or strategies; they were “not right.” We arrived back in the Bronx around 8 p.m. A few days later, when I spoke with Tara, she said, “It’s too bad that your bus couldn’t go to the Jackson-Hewitt action because the bus driver got lost, huh?”

A final, very brief anecdote about local graffiti also illustrates the dynamics of some racial divides in the organizations. Last spring, one protester filled the sidewalks on several blocks around the ACORN Bronx with the words “ACORN: Bloodsuckers of the Poor” (Personal communication, May 11, 2004). While this appears to remain unbeknownst to the Staff Director in the office, the choice of diction is also indicative of potential racial divides, in that “Bloodsuckers of the Poor” is a common term in the 5% Nation faction of Black Islam. Specifically, the 5% Nation espouses that any large community, especially the African American community, can be divided into three categories: 85% of the population remains the “ignorant masses,” 5% of the population is enlightened and must lead the rest of the population out of ignorance, and 10% of the population is partly educated and enlightened, but uses this partial knowledge to exploit the 85% as the “bloodsuckers of the poor.” A lack of dialogues about race,

then, can prevent social movement organizations from engaging in more general cross-cultural conversations about political strategies.

Coincidentally, a contrasting conversation about the 5% Nation took place between Nicole, a coordinator at SBU, and Jeremy, a leader. Jeremy talked about a friend who had taught him special code words and handshakes; these gestures and aphorisms were fairly witty, and Jeremy was impressed. A few people in the office knew members of the 5% Nation, especially since the group is fairly well-promoted by certain hip-hop groups and is thus relatively popular among teenagers and young men. Nicole shared what she knew about their philosophies and stated that despite the attractiveness of some of their activities, she felt like they were denigrating to women, imparting what her experiences with them were like. She also wondered if they were anti-Semitic. Jeremy, who did not know what “anti-Semitic” meant, was told to look it up on the internet. They then had a brief discussion about the politics surrounding the 5% Nation’s definition of community, though not quite in those words.

#### Dashed lines

Rarely was racial segregation as clearly delineated as it was on the ACORN bus trip to DC. Although there were no official signs dividing the bus into two groups, an unspoken line, even if not solidly drawn, served as a border between groups. On its own, such segregation is unremarkable, whether imposed, self-imposed, or accidental. The difference lies in the organization’s collective reaction to such racial divides, and whether the relevant issues are ever broached in conversation, or addressed in action. The same question of organizations’ responses and cultural norms apply to issues arising from patterns in race and rank, decision-making processes, organizational space, language barriers, and informal norms such as dress codes. The plethora and variety of relevant norms is quite vast and sometimes difficult to wade through. It remains important to examine them, however, precisely because of their shifting dynamic. As

Ostrander writes, “It is possible to create... organizing across the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity.... solidarity, but most probably in the form of continued struggles... and active ongoing efforts to repeatedly resist and challenge them.... an ongoing and unstable project” (1999, p. 641).

According to the portrayal above, one might deduce that the category that emphasizes unstable and varying processes is also the one that better adapts to shifting dynamics of race. According to the data presented, both Mothers on the Move and Sistas and Brothas United, the two organizations nearer to the Freirian end of the category spectrum, were more consistent in tackling issues of race that were raised than the other SMOs. UPOH, which has been described as a mix of the Alinskyite and Freirian categories, is careful to make sure that organizers and members are not divided in terms of dress and language, but it avoids explicit conversations about race, even when rifts are apparent. Out of the remaining organizations, NWBCCC was associated with more activities, conversations, and rituals attempting to build multiracial alliances and addressing existent racial divides than UPOH or ACORN Bronx. Out of the SMOs in this dissertation, ACORN is the one that, at least according to the data collected over the 2003-2004 school year, does not boast of any training programs, rituals, activities, or official goals addressing racially delineated inequities inside the organization.

What, substantively, might link the Alinskyite category’s cultural norms with certain responses to uses of race, and the Freirian category’s cultural norms to others? In the Alinskyite category’s emphasis on the organization as a whole, at least compared to the Freirian category’s emphasis on individual development, perhaps there are fewer activities where discussion about differences among members might take place. In ACORN’s meetings, for example, recruitment and membership are the focus; likewise, each organizer focuses on door-knocking and building networks of new members, political campaigns, and leadership development for ACORN as a whole. In ACORN’s interpretation of this rubric, there is less room for activities or conversations

that highlight individuals' racial differences rather than the members' common struggles in social and racial justice. NWBCCC, however, was described as an SMO that fit well with the Alinskyite category; yet, it also possesses many activities, workshops, etc. that deal with racial divides, and how racial tensions can be ameliorated. This was partly accomplished through the organization's incorporation of diversity as an integral strength of the organization. The dialogues about race, then, do not so much concentrate on each individual's understanding of others as how the organization as a whole can grow and improve from greater internal cooperation and collaboration.

In contrast, members and organizers of the two SMOs more solidly associated with Freirian category, Mothers on the Move and Sistas and Brothas United, primarily spoke of race with reference to specific people, to individuals and their circumstances. Face-to-face dialogue was an important ritual, and humor was an important characteristic in such conversations. Perhaps these practices allowed members and organizers to broach issues of race more comfortably, or in more intimate settings. Of import is the fact that SBU and MOM leaders joked about disproportionately large representation of certain racial groups at meetings, and that at a protest against a slumlord, one SBU leader joked, "We're here! We're queer! Oops! Wrong campaign!" (Personal communication, March 27, 2004). These jokes allowed individuals to raise or cite notions of "race" or sexual orientation with less fear of sanction. By focusing on individuals, Freirian cultural norms might also have two other implications.

First, such cultural norms might allow leaders and organizers to bring up not only race but the dynamics specific to a black woman, and not African American men or white women, for example, who cannot categorize her issues in terms of either race or gender alone. This possibility is related to what critical race theorists call the belief of "intersectionality," that "individuals or classes often have shared or overlapping interests" that might not be recognized without bringing up the notion of race (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 149).

The cultural norms described in this chapter actively shape political strategies. Even norms that may appear to be superficial or irrelevant at first glance, such as dress codes and music exchanges, turn into cultural tools. Because dress, music CDs and MP3s, and books are rarely race-neutral, the Freirian category in effect permits SMO members to treat racial identifiers as tools for exchange and positive organizational artifacts. The *Autobiography of Malcolm X* and *Soul of a Citizen* are exchanged and then discussed, sometimes informally, as part of the organization's activities. Activities do not have to be as structured or flagrantly pedagogical to shape cultural tool kits. Even when no workshops take place, data show that the member conversations about racially charged issues are different in Alinskyite SMOs than they are in Freirian SMOs. During a long car ride to a retreat, members of Mothers on the Move expressed delight and surprise that Stephen, a head of staff at the SMO, defied their expectations when his radio dial was tuned to a hip-hop radio station, suggesting that such apparently irrelevant gestures are taken as meaningful and symbolic (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). In turn, members develop habits in which such artifacts are not put away, but used to influence their chosen political strategies. By emphasizing heterogeneity and diversity as valued goods and characteristic of their cultural tool kits, Freirian category SMOs use these cultural tool kits to be woven into a patchwork narrative, whereas Alinskyite category SMOs primarily use such cultural tool kits to reinforce and build organizational narratives.

At the same time, one can easily hazard to predict that Freirian 'patchwork' political strategies surrounding race issues are often rather delicate, and they can easily be fragmented. This brings back to the question that introduced this chapter, whether racially charged issues are inevitably divisive.

The second implication of the Freirian category's focus on individual development, then, is that it concurrently becomes more likely that commonalities shared by members of different racial groups are seen or even highlighted. For example, there may be shared frustration with



bilingual programs among Bengali, Vietnamese, Latino, and Korean immigrants in NWBCCC, for example, even as differences among Mexican, Dominican, and Puerto Rican communities, or Christian and Muslim Africans, are not essentialist to, and therefore cannot be broken down by, race or language. In other words, only by discussing issues that appear to be racially delineated do members recognize that ‘race’ is not the end-all-be-all of individual identity. The Freirian focus on the individual would then interact with different categorizations at the group level, different social and political constructions of race. For instance, conversations between the female Muslim members of the Young Intellectuals, who claimed that they were contacted by their guidance counselors for private meetings several times a year, and SBU leaders, who claimed that they could not get appointments with their guidance counselors despite repeated pleas for help, led to new campaigns documenting, protesting, and proposing alternatives to unequal access to academic counseling in two Bronx high schools (Personal communication, February 19, 2004). While differences remain, then, there is evidence that SBU’s cultural norms help the leaders to acknowledge difference in order to walk down the tricky road towards equality. This is one way in which the Freirian category cultural norms may offer one safe means to contest colorblindness.

How do these cultural norms, and the cultural tool kits that they form, shape actual patterns in an SMO’s treatment of or political strategies concerning race? The clearest relevant outcomes of an SMO’s cultural tool kit lie in whether the organization chooses to pursue political campaigns that disproportionately affect a racial, ethnic, or otherwise identity-based minority, and whether the SMO chooses to mention the concept of race or ethnicity as part of its political strategies. This link has been drawn before. Warren, for example, discussed that racial justice issues were viewed by some as “acid tests” in the SMOs, and that “internal” discussions as well as a “relationship building around race,” factors that in some ways resemble this

chapter's notions of organizational space, could help "lead to a greater capacity to address the issue of racism in the public sphere" (2001, p. 252).

While there is no one "acid test" issue here as in Warren (2001), the signature campaigns pursued by the case study organizations suggest that the issues picked for campaigns by the Freirian category SMOs are those that tackle discriminatory practices. They are also those that might involve raise the possibility of race-based inequities, or publicize disaggregate data by race rather than by neighborhood or school district. Even a quick look at the following table suggests that the two Freirian category SMOs have signature campaigns that mention discrimination and more overtly tackle potential questions of race, as well as potential culture clashes delineated by race. Specifically, it is possibly easier to solely focus on issues of adequate funding and numbers in the signature campaigns pursued by the Alinskyite category SMOs. In the Alinskyite category case studies, the locus of attention is not on equal education per se, but adequate or quality education as defined by some sort of universal criteria.

Table 6-6. *Signature campaigns of case study SMOs*

	Alinskyite category		Mixed	Freirian category	
	ACORN	NWBCCC	UPOH	SBU	MOM
<b>Signature campaign(s)</b>	Anti-Edison campaign, No Child Left Behind	Capital Plan, Small Schools Strike Back	Lead Teacher Campaign	School safety and counseling	Parent involvement protocols
<b>Issue(s) addressed</b>	Teacher quality, privatization	Overcrowding, poor facilities, lack of classroom space	Teacher quality	Discriminatory practices by safety agents/counselors, inequities in quality of education	Animosity between school staff and parents, lack of grievance procedures and trust

The overall cultural norms surrounding patterns of race and rank, organizational space and decision-making processes, and informal conversations about race-delineated issues or incidents suggest that in Alinskyite category organizations, race-delineated issues are unlikely to be pursued in political strategies unless the interested constituency builds a large base of its own.

Thus, a group of NWBCCC parents has won major victories winning resources for bilingual education for Bengali students, but it remains unclear whether the entire, multi-neighborhood organization has assumed specific positions on several race-delineated education issues. For the most part, issues like overcrowding and the obvious need for more classroom space throughout the area are pursued instead. Because fewer organizational spaces that mitigate tensions *between* subgroups exist, and because of the emphasis on fairly well-developed organizational identities that do not mention race, broad-based support for a political campaign on race-delineated issues may be less likely to manifest.

In contrast, processes such as active consensus and the accompanying requisite discussions, organizational spaces for both subgroups to meet on their own and to communicate with one another, and emphasis on translation mesh well with the overall Freirian focus on individual identity, room for themes of intersectionality in meeting discussions, and the construction of widespread leader support for political campaigns tackling race-delineated issues. As drawn from the case studies' signature campaigns, such issues include discriminatory practices in school tracking and counseling, as well as school safety and racial profiling (Personal communication, May 27, 2004).

This chapter has endeavored to begin an analysis of the especially poignant incidents and patterns of racial divide or interracial dialogue in the dissertation's five SMOs. Unfortunately, although the Freirian category organizations had a greater variety of activities attempting to bridge racial divides, the cultural norms could not be divided along clean Alinskyite versus Freirian lines. Furthermore, dialogues about race, critical analyses, and new alliances take time to be developed and executed, especially when conducted by leaders amongst themselves. In their extreme forms, just as Alinskyite category cultural norms were criticized for appealing to less poignant common denominators (Delgado, 1985), then, the Freirian category cultural norms

could be criticized for potentially lacking a common touchstone for SMO leaders, and for suffering from weaknesses akin to those that afflict postmodernism.

Thankfully, each organization's cultural norms, or cultural tool kit, relates to other key questions in more straightforward ways. The next two chapters outline clear ways in which the two categories' respective cultural tool kits shape an organization's capacities and tastes in political strategies.

## Chapter 7: What These Tools Can Build

One of the objectives of Chapter 6 was to serve, in some ways, as a transition between descriptions of categories of educational organizing cultural norms and more overt analyses of the processes translating cultural norms in each social movement organization into political strategies. This chapter does not focus on the SMOs' take on any one theme or issue within education organizing, as Chapter 6 attempted to do with race. Rather, it takes a broad, analytical look at how the SMOs' cultural norms help to shape their varying capacities for political strategies. Specifically, the chapter's two main sections outline the ways in which activities and rituals of Alinskyite and Freirian categories, respectively, help to determine the SMOs' ability to primarily pursue readily visible, big impact political strategies that emphasize the approval of a specific politician, policy approval, or program adoption, or instead, political strategies that primarily emphasize policy development and formulation or reformulation. The latter strategies, especially, require active and varied participation by leaders and members in both recruitment activities and decision-making processes.

The following table adds upon the previous one, Table 6-6, to include the strengths and capacities utilized in each case study SMO's signature campaign(s). This chapter focuses on how the strengths and capacities formed by the cultural norms described in Chapters 4 and 5 in turn lead to certain political strategies. Specifically, the emphases on recruitment and organizational identity help Alinskyite SMOs to firmly stand for or against policy proposals and politicians; the SMOs' painstakingly constructed bases are then large enough to compel politicians that the (usually electoral) support of these members is needed and contingent upon approval of the desired policy or program. Similarly, the large membership bases are tapped to intimidate politicians. In contrast, the capacities and strengths of Freirian category SMOs lie in issue analysis, indigenous data collection, varying and wide skill sets among different members, and

sustained attention. In turn, these capacities and strengths of the SMOs' various cultural tool kits better translate not into the strategies that win the adoption of existing policies or programs, but rather into the strategies formulate new policies or programs to be adopted. These cultural tool kits, then, explain why divergent political strategies were pursued by SMOs facing similar political opportunities and resource constraints.

Table 7-1. *Signature campaigns and capacities for political strategies*

	Alinskyite category		Mixed	Freirian category	
	ACORN	NWBCCC	UPOH	SBU	MOM
<b>Signature campaign(s)</b>	Anti-Edison campaign, No Child Left Behind (NCLB)	Capital Plan, Small Schools Strike Back	Lead Teacher Campaign	School safety and counseling	Parent involvement protocols
<b>Issue(s) addressed</b>	Teacher quality, funding	Overcrowding, poor facilities, lack of classroom space	Teacher quality	Discriminatory practices by school safety agents and counselors, inequities in quality of education	Animosity between school staff and parents, lack of grievance procedures and trust
<b>Strengths and capacities in cultural tool kits</b>	Large turnout at one-time events, elections, and rallies	Collection of data from various sources, large turnout at one-time events, elections, and rallies	High turnout percentage at one-time events and rallies as well as meetings	High turnout at everyday events, wide array of skill sets among leaders, including analyses and memoranda	Continued attention to policy proposals and formulation that span over a large number of meetings, wide array of leadership roles
<b>Political strategies</b>	Lobbying against privatization, lobbying against NCLB legislation and underfunding	Lobbying for additional funding for specific proposals in Capital Plan, against small school moves	Lobbying for city adoption of Lead Teacher program (helped to develop goals of program before fieldwork period)	Workshops with school safety agents and teachers, data collection of contrasting homework assignments and counseling advice	Collaborative discussions of parent protocols, workshops for new parent groups on issue analysis
<b>Results</b>	Defeat of Edison contract, new Secretary of Education announced	Additional funding incorporated into Capital Plan, City Council funding on specific proposals	Adoption of Lead Teacher program, election of UPOH leaders in School Leadership Team positions	New school safety protocols adopted, involvement and support of teachers, counselors, and others in campaigns	Opening of new school using policies developed and monitored by MOM members

The patterns that emerge from the above table are, in turn, summarized in the table below, which presents the barebones version of Freirian and Alinskyite category strengths and capacities, and the political strategies most likely to build upon them.

Table 7-2. *Cultural categories and Capacities for Different Political Strategies*

	<b>Alinskyite category</b>	<b>Freirian category</b>
<b>Strengths and capacities</b>	Recruitment, large turnout at events, strong backing of SMO stands	Varied skill sets among members, data collection and analysis, commitment to longer series of meetings and events
<b>Conducive political strategies</b>	Pressure to abandon or adopt a specific, already existing policy or program	Formulation and development of new policy or program proposals, alternatives, visions

### Enabling the clincher

Protests, rallies, and large accountability sessions, assemblies in which members rally for a specific program or policy proposal and hold politicians “accountable” by allowing members to ask “yes” or “no” questions on how political support is imminent, demand the capacity to make a big splash. According to Alinsky, power tended to form around the pillars of money and people (Miller, 1996). Among SMOs with relatively similar budgets, then, the difference in policy adoption strategic capacities partly lies in the number of people attending the organizations’ large-scale events. In this dissertation, the Alinskyite category’s cultural norms, as described in Chapter 4, lay an emphasis on recruitment as the primary organizational activity, a focus on the organization rather than the individual member, and leadership development with the organizer as teacher. This section fleshes out the ways in which these norms work to form cultural tools conducive to strategies that emphasize policy or program adoption.

Usually, each SMO in this dissertation hosts or sponsors at least one or two of events with more than 100 people attending each year. It is important to note that unlike federal associations like the IAF, the SMOs discussed in this dissertation work with individuals rather than congregations, which often have several hundred members each. Indeed, several organizers

who work for the case study organizations previously worked in groups like the IAF or Gamaliel, and they have gone from “turning out,” or recruiting and ensuring the attendance of, 500 people per organizer to turning out approximately 100 people per organizer. For instance, Stephen, the Co-Director of Mothers on the Move, stated, “I have, as one organizer, gotten 300 to 400 people, but working with a federation system. If you work with individual members, then you can call 400 people, get 200 to say yes, and have 100 come. If you have 4 organizers, then you can bring 400 people. But you have to redefine what being a leader means, that it means recruiting. We need to explicitly incorporate it into criteria for leadership” (Personal communication, August 4, 2004). Although the numbers here are smaller than those found in federal, congregation-based SMOs, they remain laudable accomplishments.

#### *ACORN Bronx*

For the most part, the organizations that fall in the Alinskyite category are known to have wide leadership bases and the ability to ‘turn out,’ or successfully encourage and enable the attendance of, large numbers of people. For instance, Jill, who worked with a coalition of community organizations protesting Governor Pataki’s underfunding of the New York City school system, bluntly stated that she had an impression of ACORN as a “powerhouse,” and she based her expectations of attendance upon this impression. Similarly, a head of ACORN Bronx staff, Tara, commented,

Our culture is different [from others]. We act differently because our staff is of full-time organizers. I think that we tend to think a little bigger. When we first got together on one of those retreats for one of those 3-year plans for CC9, I heard, ‘How many parents can we get involved?’ And some people said, ‘50, 100.’ Our members said, ‘Are you crazy? We can get 500, 1000.’ Even compared to MOM and Northwest Bronx, because we’re citywide and national, we have more power to move legislation. And from our [political action committee] PAC [sister organization], we’re multi-issue. (Personal communication, June 30, 2004)

Indeed, ACORN hosts several rallies a year that turn out not just one or two hundred, but 500 to 1000 members. Several of these are cosponsored with unions. In the 2003-2004 school



year, the only rallies that drew solely Bronx members were those for a Bronx-specific education coalition. Otherwise, even if the action concerned a borough-specific concern, such as a proposed stadium, housing project, or local State Legislator, ACORN members from all over New York City attended. A few events were part of nationwide actions or festivities. Furthermore, the signature campaigns initiated by the SMO are not limited to the Bronx; rather, they include protests coordinated with ACORN branches nationwide against No Child Left Behind legislation and underfunding, as well as an older citywide campaign against privatization.

In February 2004, for example, ACORN Bronx began “trying to implement a new organizing model, with less door-knocking, more flyer-ing. Mostly, we’re working on a citywide housing campaign—It’s a moment when we need to start mobilizing thousands of people...[a higher-up] sent out a memo on this” (Personal communication, February 17, 2004). Of note are the facts that the “change” in cultural norms nevertheless focused on similar capacities for large-scale events likely to make a difference in policy adoption, and that roles for members and leaders continued to emphasize recruitment and remained largely prescribed. Because the city ACORN office’s agenda focused on housing at the time, so did ACORN Bronx’s agenda, and its education campaigns received a bit less attention. B

Furthermore, because the events ultimately do not usually last more than two hours, they focus on rather narrow, pre-ordained agenda. The bulk of the work therefore lies not in the execution of the event itself, but in the months of organizing, negotiations, research, and preparation beforehand. During one week, New York’s ACORN participated in rallies in collaboration with unions for health care on the Brooklyn Bridge, sent two busloads of parents to Albany to protest school underfunding, and gathered a couple of hundred Bronx parents for a coalition rally. According to Tara, these three events constituted “three months’ worth of work, right there” (Personal communication, June 23, 2004). The fact that Tara herself considers these events the bulk of her work indicates that they lie at the crux of the organization’s political

strategies. In turn, the strategies that best utilize these skills, tasks, norms, and preparations are those focusing on explicit questions of policy adoption or program approval. They also emphasize support for policy alternatives that have already been articulated, rather than cultivating new policy proposals themselves.

In its recent signature campaign protesting No Child Left Behind, ACORN appropriately drew upon its chapters all over the country to stand against a federal policy (Conyers, 2004). Overall, ACORN's events bear two key characteristics relevant to its capacities for certain political strategies. First, ACORN draws from a base of 25,000 city-wide members, rather than a few thousand Bronx members, even for Bronx rallies. Second, members are less likely to personally connect to the specific policy proposal being addressed at any given event. This duality of quantitative success and relative qualitative weakness illustrates well the overall capacities associated with this case study. Among the case study organizations, the two Alinskyite category ones are most capable of staging large rallies and accountability sessions, making quite an impression on the invited public officials facing these large crowds. Always, the politicians mention what they will do for these constituents, and how much their votes mean. This type of event fits well in larger electoral, judicial, or legislature-reliant strategies.

ACORN's earlier signature campaign, and one of its greatest successes, took place before the time period that constitutes the focus of this dissertation. During Rudy Giuliani's reign as Mayor, Schools Chancellor Harold Levy invited Edison Schools, a for-profit school management firm, to take over a few underperforming schools. The relevant City Charter, however, held the bar for private management rather high. Over half of eligible parents, not just voting parents, had to approve the transfer in order for it to take place. Through a series of court battles, ACORN won access to parents' telephone numbers and addresses, and it used its large number of organizers, members, and volunteers to join with the teachers' union in a campaign against Edison. Edison, who could not rely upon a low turnout to win approval, had to respond just as

aggressively by getting their own message out to the media, attempting to organize parents, and fighting ACORN in the courts. In the end, voter turnout was very high, and Edison was defeated by a four-to-one margin.

This type of victory sometimes has its costs, however. As one organizer described it, the focus on recruitment and membership that served as the foundation of ACORN's cultural norms allowed them to gather large numbers of people at rallies,

They're good at turning out people, but this is not organically developed-- For instance, our 50 people are not necessarily 50 people who deal with schools at an education rally... There was one instance when we got an active ACORN member to facilitate a [coalition] organizing committee meeting, and we just pulled her from totally different, separate activities. I think [another organizer] wasn't happy about that, and mentioned something. Because it was obvious that she didn't know anything about the issues, or [the coalition]..." (Personal communication, February 25, 2004)

In another example, another multi-SMO coalition's coordinator noted that, "At ACORN, I think the key parent leaders are from Brooklyn, rather than the Bronx. Actually there, there's also a UFT [representative], who's actually [linked to people at ACORN].... There, leaders... are very activated. She doesn't ask a lot of questions; she's not like, 'Why are we protesting this person?' She sort of joins in whatever we're doing" (Personal communication, July 28, 2004). In other words, a disconnect between the actual activity and the larger message sometimes transpires, and the substantive content of leadership sometimes suffers in the process. While ACORN's Alinskyite norms helped its policy adoption strategies because of its strengths in recruitment, the SMO's leadership development appeared to be weaker in terms of harnessing leaders for strategies for policy formulation, critique, and articulation.

#### *Northwest Community and Clergy Coalition*

When compared to ACORN, the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition attempts to pursue both policy adoption and policy formulation. In each organization's attempts to strike a balance, however, NWBCCC remains stronger in its policy adoption capacities and

strategies. For instance, it has in the past garnered 6,000 extra seats of classroom space in the South Bronx, roughly a 4% increase in space (Personal communication, March 17, 2004), and it has won Bronx schools Bengali bilingual education for its constituents (Personal communication, November 5, 2003). In this dissertation, its signature campaigns lay decidedly in the arena of overcrowding, specifically for additional construction funds in the Capital Plan for part of the fieldwork period, and against the placement of small schools in large, existing high school buildings. The Capital Plan is the city administration's plan for all school construction and facilities budgets for the subsequent five years. To make anti-overcrowding campaigns successful, an SMO must prove that the constituents being squeezed or left out matter and have a voice. Correspondingly, NWBCCC has succeeded overall in gathering teachers, students, parents, and others in speaking out and holding press conferences about their need for "room to grow and learn," gathering quite a bit of media attention from both television and press outlets (Personal communication, May 26, 2004).

In contrast, NWBCCC's efforts to turn the Kingsbridge Armory, a former weapons storage space that takes up an entire block in the Bronx, into additional classroom space cannot simply argue for a Department of Education adoption of the Armory. This campaign requires that the SMO make a case that the Armory could be better used with small schools and a community center instead of other alternatives. In turn, this campaign entails policy formulation efforts regarding zoning regulations, possible tenants, etc., and over time, it has been primarily researched by SBU leaders rather than NWBCCC-wide leaders.

According to one leader, NWBCCC's focus on policy adoption correlates with an emphasis on recruitment as an isolated activity rather than recruitment as one component of a larger program:

Like, with outreach for the annual meeting. Just two weeks before the annual meeting, she wants us all to go door-knocking and calling to get lots of people to come out. Two weeks, that's not enough to connect with them. If they're not

coming out, just reminding them won't do anything; they won't be the excited ones. You could have a small group of people there, but if they're passionate and top of it, they can make as much noise and make as much trouble as hundreds of people. And politicians are smart. Politicians think in a corporate way. They can see if we're just there, sitting in chairs. So when [a head of staff] asked me, I said, 'no.' And then I was arguing with her, and I kept saying, 'no.' And she said that I have to do this, but I think it's bullshit, and so I said, 'no.' And afterwards, [one of my supervisors] was like, 'Do you realized you just said 'no' to [a head of staff]?' (Personal communication, May 20, 2004)

To others, however, two weeks *is* enough time to convince members of the importance of an event, especially if the event can make a difference, as a signal to politicians and as the beginning of a longer-term relationship between members and the SMO. In the meantime, NWBCCC does stand slightly apart from UPOH and ACORN Bronx, in that it boasts of a wider variety of leadership development activities, including research exercises and values reflections, in addition to the media and recruitment workshops offered by all case study SMOs. Through these activities, core NWBCCC leaders become well-versed enough with issues so that they can negotiate and speak with public officials even when the agenda or solutions remain ambiguous, or when organizers are not present. Mark, for example, spoke of having enough knowledge about school construction codes to bargain with authorities (Personal communication, March 17, 2004). According to leader and now organizer Monica,

We ultimately want our leaders to become their own organizers—leaders that can actually think for themselves. If there's a problem they want to deal with, to understand what they have to solve these problems. That's us. The other models aren't like that. The organizers never pulled out of the equation. Here, we try. We try to let them go with it... Yeah, it may look chaotic from the outside, but these people can go from this point, and if I'm not the organizer involved, they're not going to fall apart, they can still function. And that's my ultimate goal as an organizer. (Personal communication, March 23, 2004)

Even when NWBCCC leaders function on their own, they appear to excel more in policy adoption strategies than in policy formulation. Their capacities primarily lie in organizing large groups of people and in bargaining with authorities, especially regarding what the budget allows or should allow. In the signature campaigns against overcrowding, these capacities are harnessed

in arguments for more construction of schools in an existing budget and program, rather than different, unprecedented programs.

*United Parents of Highbridge*

United Parents of Highbridge, which exhibits cultural norms belonging to Freirian and Alinskyite categories and is classified as a mixture of the two, also excels in policy adoption political strategies. Even when their goals are medium-term, the strategy is not one of on-going collaboration and vision-building so much as a series of short-term displays of political support, such as accountability sessions, rallies, and petitions. In its multi-year signature campaign to improve schools in what was previously District 9 of the South Bronx, UPOH members spent one year writing a platform of their goals, mostly during weekend retreats and via the staff organizers, as part of a coalition. For instance, Gabriela describes how parents demanded that they get “easy access” to the classrooms, and the how she felt like she would be “selling them out” if she did not reverse the UFT representative’s elimination of her easy access clause (Personal communication, March 11, 2004). While she worked hard to abide by the parents’ wishes, it nevertheless remains clear that she was the parents’ primary representative in negotiations, and in some ways, they themselves did not get to participate as much. Ultimately, teacher quality became the focus of the signature campaign, and the SMO became active in lobbying for policy adoption of a peer mentoring program for teachers amidst a budget crisis in New York City government.

Likewise, Chapter 5 included descriptions of UPOH’s meeting agenda, which almost always appeared to set beforehand or by default. Even when UPOH members take part in the larger coalition, “Usually, [the coalition head] creates the agenda. He just puts it down on paper, and checks with organizers to be sure it’s correct” (Personal communication, May 4, 2004). This is not viewed as a weakness in agenda-setting. While the concerns that form the longer-term agenda and help inform the policies advocated stem from what parents tell organizers, the ways


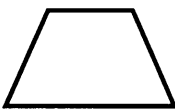



in which parents participate on an everyday basis are so scripted that agenda for meetings do not usually require their input. In meetings before large rallies, for instance, there are decisions about who should introduce each speaker, and who should close the meeting, and what the safety issue at a particular school should focus on for the upcoming two-month long campaign, i.e., getting a new safety bump or increasing patrol to abet drug dealing. Once a topic is chosen or a campaign is launched, parents work hard to build political support for it. They hold house meetings, stand in front of schools when sessions begin and end, post flyers in their buildings, talk to people in the park, and host tables in front of their churches on Sundays, sitting through four sessions of Mass, from eight in the morning till past noon. In such situations, where members and leaders have clear instructions and objectives, the role of organizer as teacher, rather than partner, appears to work well.

The strength of Alinskyite category SMOs, then, lies in political mobilization. The organizations' cultural norms—marked by meetings with limited and set agenda, emphases of recruitment, and leadership development workshops on organizing and further recruitment—bear well on their capacities to mobilize people for rallies, elections, petition drives, and networking. For the most part, ACORN members and organizers are known to 'burn out' easily, in that activities are intensive, with short horizons, and frequent resignations lead to a high turnover rate (Personal communication, February 25, 2004, May 11, 2004, May 20, 2004). UPOH's inclusion of some Freirian cultural norms, such as individualized attention in its social services, help to establish longer-term commitment among core leaders. Still, according to the experiences of these groups, Alinskyite cultural norms, then, are perhaps less conducive to campaigns requiring intensive work detailing policy reforms, program blueprints, impact analyses, and formulation of proposals from scratch.

Before the text turns to Freirian cultural norms and policy formulation political strategies, the following table presents a figurative rendering of membership and leadership at each of the

five case study organizations. According to the table, Alinskyite category organizations are associated with broader membership bases, which they are able to mobilize partly because of their key cultural norms.

Table 7-3. *The shape of SMO membership and leadership involved in education campaigns*

Organization	ACORN	NWBCCC	UPOH	MOM	SBU
Approximate number of core leaders	5-10	15-20	5-10	15	20
Graphical representation of leadership base					
Approximate number of base members	1000 (reported to officially be 25,000 citywide)	2000	150	450	300

No such thing as a snap

Still, in contrast to the organizations that most excel in policy or program adoption strategies, those that excel in policy formulation strategies appear to primarily fall into the Freirian category. The Freirian category cultural norms, as described in Chapter 5, included an emphasis on a variety of activities that have no immediate relevance to recruitment or even political campaigns overall, a relative focus on the individual rather than the organization as a whole, and leadership development with the organizer as partner rather than teacher.

In contrast to most meetings sponsored by the Alinskyite category SMOs, for example, those at SBU and MOM are unlikely to follow similar agenda. Each meeting or activity concerns very different aspects of political campaigns, not just mobilization or recruitment. As mentioned earlier, the members also spend a lot of unstructured time “hanging out.” In some ways, this means that issues are explored in greater depth, multiple perspectives are more likely to be explored, there is lower turnover among organizers, and because activities do not feel redundant, interest can be sustained for a longer period of time. Because policy formulation campaigns



involve so much original data and campaign-specific information (rather than information specific to fairly well-known programs like Section 8 vouchers or HOPE VI funding), and because they are more likely to venture into uncharted territory and therefore entail less foreseeable tasks demanding varied sets of skills, such strategies draw well upon Freirian cultural norms that foster capacities in policy formulation, via individual development and long-standing commitment. Indeed, Alinsky has written extensively on the need to move campaigns along if it appears that members' interest has waned (1947). However, the plethora of activities also means that the entire process is drawn out; those activities that are primarily handled by organizers and core leaders in the Alinskyite organizations in this dissertation are executed by members in the Freirian ones.

#### *Sistas and Brothas United*

At Sistas and Brothas United, then, campaigns appear to be tied together, each a natural outgrowth of another, partly because they are developed holistically by the leaders. Activities for the campaign to address school safety and inequitable counseling services in schools, for example, weave in and out of campaigns for small schools that are placed in freestanding buildings rather than in a few rooms in unsafe large school buildings, as well as campaigns to establish alliances between students and teachers. As such, members might follow different patterns of participation: One leader might always be involved in door-knocking and recruitment, no matter which specific campaign it is; another leader might follow a specific campaign from start to finish, working on recruiting, agenda-setting, negotiating, strategizing, celebrating, and evaluating components; yet another leader might specifically follow the narrower issue of facilities and overcrowding, drawing upon a set of statistics about building overcapacity, through a series of activities and campaigns. There is also so much time being spent at SBU headquarters that leaders have the luxury to pick their activities and hone skills from day to day as they wish.

In other words, the cultural norms at SBU help members to develop as either generalists or experts; in addition, expertise can be based on organizing skills, campaign content, or both. Rather than winning adoption of ready-made policy proposals or existing programs, then, the signature campaign launched by SBU succeeded in winning implementation of protocols developed by the SMOs over a long period of time. Policy formulation political strategies pursued by SBU include those in its signature school safety campaign. This campaign began with a mapping of school crime, harassment, and violence patterns from a student's perspective; the resulting maps illustrated paths that diverged greatly from the beats patrolled by school safety agents. After a productive workshop with school safety officials, the leaders then developed new protocols for student-school safety officer interaction. These new protocols help to prevent racial profiling and ameliorate tensions, leading to an entire series of professional development workshops for school safety officers and teachers. These workshops required research and survey data collection of teacher and school safety officer preferences, protests against overcrowding, meetings with administration officials, and curriculum development by the leaders. Unlike one-day rallies or protests, each attended by a different group of members, this program involved a sequence of interrelated events that involved more than recruitment and isolated speeches, but a mixture of continued protest and collaboration by the leaders themselves.

For better or worse, just as the cultural norms of Alinskyite category SMOs appear to translate to lower capacity for policy formulation strategies, the cultural norms of Freirian category SMOs may be less conducive to effective strategies that ultimately clinch adoption of the policies and programs they so meticulously developed.

The fact that members are so close to one another also allows them to work more independently of the organizers. As mentioned earlier, SBU members were the ones most regularly sent in delegations at external conferences without organizers present, and MOM leaders were often the only non-staff members speaking at national conferences with other

SMOs. The bonds between members also mean that, even when organizers leave, there are still people for whom a member feels affection and emotional commitment at the organization, and less institutional knowledge is lost: “I think the young members and new mothers coming in are seeing that older members are hanging in there; we can express that we’ve been through the things that they’re going through, that they have the ability to make that difference” (Personal communication with Michele, March 29, 2004).

### *Mothers on the Move*

At Mothers on the Move, there appears to be little ‘churning’ of members or organizers; those that become committed to the organization remain so for a long time. As described in Chapter 5, members such as George were frustrated at the campaigns’ slow pace when they first became involved; they were drawn in deeply enough, however, so that they stayed and became convinced that patience would yield worthwhile results (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). The intensive nature of activities at the organization is integral to this type of leadership development and organizer-member partnership. According to Michele, who has been politically active at several organizations for at least three decades, “I think coming to MOMs has made a lot of people attend meetings and become leaders. I think that in developing leaders, first you have to develop trust and communication with that person... It’s at a slower pace, but they can do it, and they’re trying to do it. People have to believe that you’re really committed to doing it, that you’re not just doing it to make a name for yourself. That you honestly believe in what you’re doing” (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). The rituals and conversations between members and organizers are important not only because of the political issues tackled, but because they allow the organizers to convey their honesty and commitment.

Furthermore, Michele specifically points to differences in the decision-making and agenda-setting process before and after the latest ‘regime change’ at MOM:

Before, I don't feel the membership was listened to by the staff on the different campaigns. It just always appeared that the staff worked on the agenda separately from the membership.... Before, the staff set you up to think that you had picked the campaigns. I can tell the difference [between that and real decision-making participation] because I had the experience. They would say, 'Well, what do you think of lots? We have lots of these vacant lots in our community. What do you think is the problem with these lots?' 'Oh, there's rats. Oh, there's something else.' And I thought, 'You know what? It's cool.' I can sell products, too, if I wanted to. (Personal communication, March 29, 2004)

Such a distinction can draw the line between garnering support for a specific policy already in mind on one side, and shaping and forming a whole new policy proposal on the other side. In the fieldwork for this dissertation, there were few instances where organizers were overtly manipulating the discussion or members had total reign over conversations, without any facilitation or assistance from organizers. It is notable, then, that leaders like Michele are nevertheless confident that differences do exist, and that members can discern these differences. Along the way, the heart of political strategies shifts from standing for or against policies or policy proposals to policy formulation itself. Michele, for instance, says that, "Whereas now, our membership also has a voice on the campaigns and agenda for meetings—we're always contacted about it... the campaign is borne differently. Now, I go up to them. And I'm not saying that that [before] didn't need to be done, you know, because MOMs was already existent for a few years before I became a member. So maybe they felt that with the old membership they had to do it, but I couldn't see it, because there were *thinkers* in that membership, who were dynamic" (ibid.). MOM's signature campaign, regarding protocols for parent involvement in schools, attempts to redress parent-school tensions not by demanding that all school officials, teachers, and security guards be replaced, but by partly replicate their own process of decision-making in the school setting.

As a result, political strategies can involve entire series of tactics or moves tailor-made to the policy proposals. One example at Mothers on the Move and Sistas and Brothas United, for example, is the creation of respective small schools with social justice curricula. Consequently,

MOM's signature campaign grew and moved forward when the SMO's carefully considered parent involvement protocols, and its reputation as a consistent advocate for new ideas about school-community partnerships, resulted not in widespread policy adoption among existing schools, but in the development of administrative rules and collaborative projects from scratch, implemented in a new small school as it opened. This small school, then, both grew out of and fell in line with MOM's signature campaign regarding parent involvement.

Does more participatory decision-making only make a difference within the organization, and how much political mobilization is achieved, or does it actually help to shape the SMO's external political strategies? According to data gleaned from interviews and observation, an *overt* and explicit role in issue identification and decision-making not only renders SMO leaders more committed, the campaigns and strategies they embark upon are more complex and span greater periods of time. Furthermore, perhaps because the Freirian category emphasizes the importance of *means* as much as *ends*, members of Freirian category SMOs express a great deal of pride and satisfaction with the more mundane aspects of political work—writing memos, holding meetings, drawing posters—as well as the ones they call 'sexy,' those that throw leaders into the limelight and gain media attention—speeches at press conferences, surprise protests, and recruitment of peers (Personal communication, October 1, 2003, March 29, 2004, June 28, 2004). The less visible, 'mundane' tasks are exactly those that build capacities in policy formulation rather than policy adoption per se.

According to these data, the personal attention and development pay off in garnering commitment to re-imagining policy options, but coordination of policy adoption efforts becomes more difficult. That is, the varied meetings, conversations with organizers as partners rather than teachers, and meals in the Freirian category are different cultural tools than the networking and recruitment activities emphasized in the Alinskyite category. Even when the goal is not recruitment per se, but simply keeping a people abreast on an especially important meeting, news

event, policy idea, or even staff change, the cultural tools used to coordinate large numbers of people are often those associated with recruitment and networking activities. Although some form of all these cultural tools probably appear in all of the SMOs, each SMO has a set activities and rituals, or tools, that are used most. The Freirian category organizations do not have consistently strong tools for ultimate policy adoption, tools like threatening public officials with an electoral defeat or mounting a large-scale protest.

### Building flexible capacity

The previous two sections have highlighted, respectively, how the norms of Alinskyite category organizations can be seen as cultural tools that primarily lend themselves to political strategies aiming for policy adoption, and how the norms of Freirian category organizations can be seen as cultural tools that lend themselves to strategies aiming for policy formulation. Is there necessarily a trade-off? Some of the organizers and leaders argue that, while each SMO does tend to have strengths and weaknesses along these lines, capacities should not be inherently construed as a zero sum game.

An SMO's ultimate goal, then, would be to possess the cultural tools that lend themselves to flexible capacity, to aptly develop capacities for both policy formulation and adoption. As gleaned from the case studies above, this is not an easy task.

To a certain extent, the Freirian category's cultural norms can also be used as cultural tools for policy adoption strategies, such as a display of support for a pending bill on education. Jill, of a multi-SMO coalition, noted that, "MOM's members understand the message, the goals [of our campaign]. You can tell that [Katerina, the main education organizer] spends a lot of time prepping their members, talking about why this rally is important and what the situation is. So they feel like being there is important, and know why they're involved. If I haven't called Katerina to fill her in on what we're doing, she'll call me" (Personal communication, July 28,

2004). This testimony also suggests that, even for policy adoption strategies, mere recruitment is not enough. Regarding ACORN, Jill, who is also an ACORN member, noted that, “I’m sure that ACORN is more than that, [more than a focus on attendance at rallies,] and that organizers, in particular circumstances, talk to people one on one, but I think that people drop off a lot. They think, ‘I’m just a body.’ We’ve lost a lot of parents that way. But I don’t work with the individual parents, and I’m not sure I’ve gotten to know them; they do the turnout” (ibid.).

On the other hand, Alinskyite norms, which tend to emphasize the organization as a whole rather than the individual, may help Freirian category SMOs to build more cultural tools of coordination in policy formulation strategies. Rather than focus on the organization, however, some Freirian category organizations might attempt to build cultural tools of base-building and coordination by focusing on larger visions of justice rather than the organization per se. One reason Freirian category SMOs have not succeeded in cultivating the cultural tools needed for policy adoption as consistently as they have for policy formulation may be that their emphasis on the individual prevents them from conveying the importance of concurrently building the organization as a whole, building the fundamental power base necessary to show that they have popular support as well as substantive credibility.

At Mothers on the Move, for example, so much attention is paid to developing a member’s personal interests that, in addition to distributing books about everything from social justice organizing to musicians, organizers also try to perform tasks like arranging for child care so that a member can regularly swim at the local public pool (Personal communication, August 4, 2004). These norms have the potential to detract attention from solid campaign and recruitment work, and this is one reason MOM’s Leadership Matrix, described in Chapter 5, explicitly includes recruitment expectations. Some of the capacities for policy adoption political strategies can be built by consistently implementing cultural norms like punctuality in meetings, incorporating questions about turnout into regular meeting protocols, so that certain expectations

can almost follow naturally. Also in response, organizers like Stephen, at Mothers on the Move, have begun to focus more intensely on base-building workshops. At the same time, “So far, the workshops have been superficial, on the media, etc., and very disconnected” (Personal communication, August 4, 2004). In order to fit an emphasis on recruitment into the Freirian category, then, “We need to form a theory of change—why do this work? Why is MOM important? What will the neighborhood look like in five years? In 20?” (ibid.) These questions were the focus of a weekend-long retreat in October 2003, where members articulated goals, processes, desires, whims, and complaints (Personal communication, October 11-12, 2003). Still, members express frustration in their ability to amend the disjunction between large-scale, long-term visions and some activities and goals aimed at imminent policy adoption. Repeatedly, both organizers and members also speak of the need for greater reflection (Personal communication, March 29, 2004, May 4, 2004).

Essentially, this is also what Sistas and Brothas United has done with its education activities on notions of citizenship and what it means to think ‘outside the box.’ SBU has succeeded, to a certain extent, in mitigating the tension between policy adoption and policy formulation strategies through sheer effort. Not only is leadership development extensive and intensive and the variety of activities immense, the number of hours students devote to SBU is colossal. Furthermore, one can interpret junior high schools and high schools to be akin to the congregations so important to federalist organizing. In this sense, even if the schools are not official members, SBU can draw upon social networks the other organizations cannot access quite so readily. While this does not, in any way, diminish the significance of the capacities SBU has developed, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which adult members can replicate the results.

NWBCCC, which has been described as an Alinskyite organization that boasts of a great deal of organizer-as-teacher leadership development, has a better track record in policy



formulation strategies than SMOs like ACORN, but it also struggles to maintain the kind of political commitment necessary for policy formulation. According to one organizer,

Something that organizing lacks. After a while, it becomes too corporate... there's a lack of a humanistic approach. Like at the Northwest Bronx, it's too Alinsky-style. There isn't enough trust in the organizer. If the organizer goes off the Alinsky numbers track, they get into trouble. I don't play that, and they haven't bothered me too much because I simply refuse to listen to them. And it's been okay for me, because I present results. But the way they do it, I feel like almost all of it is bullshit. It's contrary to the movement. All those rallies with so many people, they're not into it! And the politicians, they're not stupid. They can tell. We are down to their mercy. You think that they're there and scared, but if we're not all informed, if we're just there for the numbers, they can tell. (Personal communication, May 20, 2004)

That is, leaders must feel like they have a real stake in the policies or programs they are rallying for, and in Freirian category SMOs, this is usually guaranteed because leaders have spent so much time choosing among policy options, or developing their own proposal. As mentioned earlier, many organizers have different definitions of the "Alinsky style," and the IAF especially has taken many steps to move beyond the original Alinskyite principles defining the category in this dissertation; nevertheless, the comments here do seem to mesh with the notion that members at Freirian category SMOs viewed organizers more as partners, and that this type of relationship built a specific brand of trust. While the leadership development is strong enough to harness the potential for commitment to policy formulation strategies, some leaders at NWBCCC have recounted incidents in which members were about to quit, when a peer leader reached out to them in a new way, and interest renewed. In one specific incident, it was a new system of delegate exchanges between different neighborhood associations within NWBCCC, alongside surveys for ideas for new policy proposals, that made the SMO appealing again to certain leaders (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). In this way, then, strategies focusing on policy formulation can only be sustained if norms of trust and some individual development continues; even exciting rallies and substantive leadership development and research activities are insufficient on their own.

Still, especially for SMOs that have achieved mixed cultural norms, there remains the question of depth in mixed cultural tools and respective capacities. An example lies in one inter-organizational coalition's attempts to join forces with UPOH:

With Highbridge, I went through [a coalition in which they are a member]. Them, I don't know; they're not part of the [state-wide, multi-SMO] team... I just felt like there was this long, drawn-out process. That I would have to meet with the organizers, and then the leaders, and that they would need a lot of lead time. I'm the city coordinator. We just don't have the capacity to handle that situation, so it's impossible to get them involved. It's too bad, because you know, they're in District 9! They could benefit so much from what we're working on. (Personal communication, July 28, 2004)

Of note is the fact that in UPOH meetings, the organizers used past rallies with this multi-SMO coalition as examples of the kind of exciting activities for which parents should join the SMO. Apparently, these rallies had taken place around a year earlier, and the multi-SMO coalition coordinator had changed since then. In keeping with UPOH's mixed Alinskyite and Freirian cultural norms, then, the SMO exhibited the capacity to engage in certain UPOH-initiated political strategies that eventually developed new policy proposals as long as they were broken down into clear, policy adoption-oriented tasks, such as its signature campaign for adoption of the Lead Teacher program in the Bronx. This makes sense, as core leaders tended to be committed because of the social services and varying activities in which they participated or from which they benefited, but most UPOH activities tended to focus on recruitment for campaign events arguing for adoption of already articulated policy proposals. Missing here was the kind of decision-making process that allowed for quickly shifting goals.

ACORN Bronx remains an interesting case study because it does not boast of a wide variety of activities, and yet, it remains an incredibly powerful organization. How is this achieved? As described in Chapter 4, the organizational identity at ACORN is intense and marked by membership dues, and strong language about ownership and sacrifice. As stated earlier, these norms lend themselves to large-scale capacities conducive to policy adoption

strategies, and ACORN's political strategies do appear to be focused accordingly. In some ways, the SMO simply pursues fewer policy formulation strategies overall. Overwhelmingly, its strategies focus on holding politicians accountable via protests or elections, rather than hashing out the nitty gritty details of policy proposals. When showing support, the strategies still involve a series of tactics like rallies. When the SMO pursues strategies that might involve proposals of policy alternatives, such as legal reform, the work is primarily tackled by regional or national level staff or consultants (Personal communication, June 30, 2003). As most of its political campaigns deal with citywide or statewide issues, longer-term work does not suffer as much from a lack of local involvement in activities other than recruitment or one-day rallies or elections. Put bluntly, ACORN also has the luxury of an incredibly large base, so that a small percentage of core leaders is sufficient for most meetings and policy formulation strategies.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, leaders and members of Freirian category organizations were more likely to describe themselves as 'activists,' and to claim that they had remained committed to their respective SMOs because of the mission and because of overall ideas about social justice. This was especially true for Sistas and Brothas United and Mothers on the Move. In contrast, members of ACORN stated that they had remained committed to the SMO because of the victories gained, and as a whole, interviewees from NWBCCC and UPOH did not appear to fall into one category or another. Interestingly, MOM members also stated that in the organization's earlier years, they had stayed because of victories (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). This apparent pattern has major implications here. First, the labels of 'activist' and 'social justice' are in some ways connected to what Paul Lichterman calls a 'life-way' of political work as an entire lifestyle, in which a person's political activities are associated with the individual's self-perception and identity (1996). This is contrasted with a 'life-way' in which political work is not 'personalized'; it is rather a discrete, separate activity from the rest of the individual's family, recreational, and work life. According to Lichterman, a personalized

lifestyle is correlated with higher socioeconomic status and education levels. If true, then the fact that Freirian cultural norms helped low-income persons to identify with ‘personalized politics’ is significant.

According to the data in these case studies, some SMOs have an easier time than others in striking a balance between the capacities best used by policy formulation political strategies and those capacities best used by policy adoption strategies. At some organizations, a delicate equilibrium is struck simply through division of labor. At UPOH and ACORN, then, even when members are committed; staff members and organizers are those who coordinate events, do research, and help to investigate the policy and program proposals advocated by the SMOs. In addition, certain choices are made between local and city-wide work. At UPOH, what might constitute policy formulation strategies have parceled into smaller campaigns that demand support or opposition of specific policies, so the chances of enacting a series of protests or collaborative meetings with the same people, on the same topic, appear to be small. The social services help to build emotional commitment, but the primary activities for leaders remain regular meetings, events, and recruitment. Furthermore, leaders focus on local work. Partly because the organization does not have the social services, research activities, or meetings variously present in other SMOs, ACORN cannot depend on the same members to pursue a series of policy adoption-conducive strategies the way UPOH does. Still, it succeeds because it focuses less on local work so that it can rely on the same leaders and expert staff to work on different political campaigns, especially if these campaigns involve some policy formulation and research.

If MOM is able to draw a link between activities and a larger vision of social justice, then it might have an easier time incorporating recruitment and collective struggles into its work on school reform and individual-based activities. Likewise, if NWBCCC is able to integrate more trust-building and personalized rituals into its cultural norms, then it may have the tools to elicit

commitment to development of robust policy proposals. While it is already strong in its capacities for policy adoption strategies, it has attempted to strengthen its policy formulation strategic capacities through newer activities like the “strength in unity” and diversity get-togethers, Thanksgiving services, and research groups. Such cultural norms emphasize the multiplicity of perspectives already existent in the organization as an asset. As one leader noted, even though the SMO had consistently yielded large turnouts to rallies, “We don’t know how to use the political structures, and we’re studying that as a Coalition. We don’t understand all the dynamics of power. We’ve realized that because of certain defeats” (Personal communication, March 23, 2004). As a result, NWBCCC is also looking to replicate cultural norms at SBU, which in some ways stands out as a model organization, at least among the SMOs here.

Even as all of the case study SMOs attempt to strike a balance between different political strategies, some lessons about the strengths of each category can be gleaned. If no politician or federal program were to be offering a palatable policy proposal or solution at a given point in time, an Alinskyite category SMO like ACORN would be temporarily stuck. Given the poor state of public schools in the Bronx, however, such Alinskyite organizations have enough clearly needed campaigns, like those simply asking for funds for the programs already on the slate, to keep their hands full. Concurrently, however, Freirian category SMOs can more probably excel in ensuring that, when proven ineffective, the same policy proposals are not churned and spouted again and again. In the eyes of storms of policy-making, Freirian category SMOs can also negotiate new policy proposals when opposing proposals seem to be intractable.

Taken together, the case studies indicate distinct ways in which the cultural norms of two key categories are linked to divergent capacities and emphases in political strategies. Given the fact that the five case study SMOs face similar political and resource constraints, this alone suggests that cultural norms play a role. According to resource mobilization theory, for example, ACORN’s emphasis on recruitment certainly appears to make sense given its reliance on

membership dues, Yet, resource mobilization theory could also have predicted that ACORN focus on maintaining a constant membership base, rather than concurrently seeking new members and losing old ones, thus suffering from high turnover. On its own, resource mobilization might also struggle to explain why SBU and MOM pursued political strategies emphasizing policy reformulation, since it is usually easier to win foundation grants when policy proposals are already articulated.

Likewise, it would have been difficult to predict, at the beginning of the fieldwork period, why SMOs would demand adoption of a new, expensive program in the middle of a New York budget crisis, as UPOH did. It certainly did not look like any political opportunities were pending. Yet, UPOH utilized its strengths, and one might even argue that subsequently, a political opportunity opened when the city saw UPOH's proposal as one opportunity for good news amidst constant, pejorative headlines about cutbacks (Personal communication, July 22, 2004).

The 2003-2004 fiscal year also marked the rare (well, quintennial) opportunity to influence the Capital Plan, the only official budget for new school construction, yet NWBCCC but not ACORN vigorously pursued the adoption of new construction programs in the Capital Plan budget. The Capital Plan looked like a great political opportunity to use policy adoption strategies, since it is the kind of program that responds to numbers-oriented constituency muscles, the kind Alinskyite category SMOs like NWBCCC and ACORN like to flex. So why did only NWBCCC utilize its cultural tool kit for this anti-overcrowding campaign? NWBCCC possesses more of the cultural tools necessary in developing proposals for specific construction sites or facilities repairs in the Capital Plan, and it was more likely to perceive the localized Capital Plan preparations as a political opportunity. ACORN's avoidance of school-specific organizing, rendering multi-borough or multi-state campaigns its signature ones instead, stem from its unique configuration of Alinskyite category cultural norms, including its supra-borough

organizational identity and the shape of its leadership-membership base, as figuratively rendered earlier in this chapter.

Therefore, this chapter suggests that resources and political opportunities certainly matter, but they are partly shaped and used according to the capacities shaped by the SMOs' cultural tool kits. The next chapter ventures a bit further away from theories that emphasize any form of rational decision-making in political strategies, arguing instead that strategies are partly shaped by the biases, preferences, and sometimes irrational tastes developed in SMOs' cultural tool kits.

## Chapter 8: Favorite Hits

This chapter explores the ways in which the SMOs' cultural norms shape the tension between collaborative and confrontational political strategies. If the SMOs' political strategies were shaped based purely on structural factors such as resources and political opportunities, then we would expect the different case studies to adopt similar political strategies. Yet, not only do they pursue wildly different political strategies, they continue to pursue them after both 'successes' and 'failures.' The extent to which culture can be a significant factor, then, is even more apparent in the organizations' tastes for certain political strategies than in their capacities for them. Specifically, the norms of the Alinskyite category, which help to build strong organizational identities and a sense of mission and unity, translate well into the cultural tools used in more confrontational political strategies. Those of the Freirian category, which emphasize the individual and in turn, multiple perspectives on the same issue, role-playing with partners rather than teachers or adversaries, and the creation of alternative institutions and lifestyles, translate well into the cultural tools used in more collaborative political strategies.

Again, while none of the case study organizations is archetypal, the pairing of categories' cultural norms and political strategies remains a useful analytical and theoretical tool. To the extent that each SMO falls closer to one category or another, then, its tastes for political strategies emerge accordingly. In a sense, the political strategies they pursue fall in line with internal cultural norms, thereby reinforcing the preferences and tastes already formed in the organizations.

While both Alinsky and Freire categories attempt to build power, neither views power as necessarily corrupting or negative, and both cultural tool kits leave room for questioning authority, the Freirian emphasis on the individual might lead members to question institutions in a way the Alinskyite category does not. Sometimes, not all of a category's cultural norms are



present; nevertheless, SMOs choose among overall sets of tool kits in pursuing their political strategies. Specifically, because the Freirian cultural tool kit bases its activities on institutions outside of the political system (meditation, ball games, GED classes, food co-operatives), it encourages members to tie political ends to alternative social institutions as well as elections, political parties, and politicians. The category includes activities not usually construed as civic engagement. Still, sometimes, participation in these alternative institutions leads members to question the political system as a whole.

The fact that these SMOs are working in education organizing, specifically, is also important. Those organizations that fall close to the Alinskyite category have primarily worked on housing campaigns in the past; leaders and organizers state that education is different partly because continuous monitoring and some rapport with teachers and administrators, the targets of their political campaigns, are required to assure a quality education (Personal communication, May 14, 2003, November 5, 2003, March 29, 2004). It is much more difficult to villainize and squeeze policy changes from teachers than it is from slumlords, for instance. Beyond reducing overcrowding and improving facilities and funding, it is also sometimes difficult for Bronx SMO parents and leaders to agree on the pedagogical policies they would like to propose (Mediratta, 2001, p. 42).

Some of the organizations that fall closer to a Freirian archetype have primarily worked with social services provision in the past; leaders and organizers emphasize the changes they needed to make to translate services provision into a political and power issue. In these ways, education organizing overtly demands nuanced political strategies, which simultaneously work within the school system and challenge it.

The following table builds on Tables 6-6 and 7-1, further drawing upon the five case study SMOs' signature campaigns to draw links between the cultural tool kits described in

Chapters 4 and 5 and tastes for collaborative or confrontational political strategies. Components of the analysis discussed in this chapter are introduced in the fourth row of the following table.

Table 8-1. *Signature campaigns and tastes for political strategies*

	Alinskyite category		Mixed	Freirian category	
	ACORN	NWBCCC	UPOH	SBU	MOM
<b>Signature campaign(s)</b>	Anti-Edison campaign, No Child Left Behind (NCLB)	Capital Plan, Small Schools Strike Back	Lead Teacher Campaign	School Safety and Counseling	Parent involvement protocols
<b>Issue(s) addressed</b>	Teacher quality, funding	Overcrowding, poor facilities, lack of classroom space	Teacher quality	Discriminatory practices by school safety agents and counselors, inequities in quality of education	Animosity between school staff and parents, lack of grievance procedures and trust
<b>Strengths and capacities in cultural tool kits</b>	Large turnout at one-time events, elections, and rallies	Collection of data from various sources, large turnout at one-time events, elections, and rallies	High turnout percentage at one-time events and rallies as well as meetings	High turnout at everyday events, wide array of skill sets among leaders, including analyses and memoranda	Continued attention to policy proposals and formulation that span over a large number of meetings, wide array of leadership roles
<b>Preferences/tastes from cultural tool kits</b>	Excitement of participating in major events/happenings, 'turning up the pressure', being part of a large SMO	Seeing concrete changes in the immediate future, participating in major events/happenings	Participating in major events/happenings, friendship-building, giving back to organization and friends	Display of knowledge and substantive credibility, mediation, friendship-building	Doing everything from the bottom-up, proving grassroots credibility, display of knowledge, utilizing hard-won relationships
<b>Political strategies</b>	Lobbying against privatization, lobbying against NCLB legislation and underfunding	Lobbying for additional funding for specific proposals in Capital Plan	Lobbying for city adoption of Lead Teacher program (helped to develop goals of program before fieldwork period)	Workshops with school safety agents and teachers, data collection of contrasting homework assignments and counseling advice	Collaborative discussions of parent protocols, workshops for new parent groups on issue analysis
<b>Results</b>	Defeat of Edison contract, less public support for NCLB (difficult to measure)	Additional funding incorporated into Capital Plan, City Council funding on specific proposals	Adoption of Lead Teacher program, election of UPOH leaders in School Leadership Team positions	New school safety protocols adopted, involvement and support of teachers, counselors, and others in campaigns	Opening of new school using policies developed and monitored by MOM members

As with issues of race in Chapter 6 and capacities and strengths in Chapter 7, the tastes and preferences to be discussed can be fairly neatly summarized into archetypal categories, as

shown below. Each of these categories stands for an overall manner or approach in an SMO's cultural norms.

Table 8-2. *Cultural categories and tastes for different political strategies*

	<b>Alinskyite category</b>	<b>Freirian category</b>
<b>Preferences and tastes</b>	Excitement of large events, self-styled reputation as the 'most militant', getting a 'straight answer', standing up to obstinate or corrupt officials	Seeing one's ideas come to fruition, using local knowledge and presenting the 'people's choice'
<b>Conducive political strategies</b>	Place pressure on politicians to meet specific demands, vote 'yes' or 'no', threatening to vote someone out of office, protest and shed negative light on unsupportive officials in confrontational meetings	Exchange information and collaboratively formulate alternative policy proposals, create and implement alternative institutions or mutual aid

### Shouting truth to power

#### *ACORN Bronx*

Sylvia, a leader at ACORN Bronx, described her initiation into the SMO this way:

When I found out about ACORN, I was taking English classes at the community college. I heard screaming in the cafeteria, all this noise. I thought there was a fire... Then I heard, 'You have to vote!' I asked someone who worked at the cafeteria what was going on, and she said, 'That's ACORN. They fight for social justice.' And I was very interested, so I signed up and went to the meetings.

(Personal communication, May 11, 2004)

From the beginning, Sylvia knew that participation in the SMO would be exciting, and it was

something for which she had a taste. Again and again, the stories relayed by leaders inevitably

had a large number of actors, crowds of people, recognizable antagonists, and endings that

emphasized the power of raised voices. One example is Sylvia's tale about a protest at 110

Livingston Street in Brooklyn, the site of the old Board of Education: "If I'm in the front and

they tell me, 'You're making too much noise! You have to quiet them!' I tell that I can't quiet

them. There are too many people! And they ask, 'Who's the leader?' 'All of us!'" (ibid.). Put

bluntly, Sylvia is clearly exhilarated by the experience, and she appears to feel that the collective

identity of 'all of us' is surely greater than the sum of its parts. Such sentiments can feed upon

themselves, so that Sylvia's tastes for political strategies are akin to those she first formed in her initiation at ACORN.

After a while, then, a surprise protest action becomes an automatic rather than a considered strategy. Even when the SMO's capacities for different political strategies are not in question, the preferred strategy's strengths are assumed, while the strategy's weaknesses are not weighed nearly as heavily. In fieldwork observation, one saw that newcomers sometimes offered alternative ideas for political strategies; after a few meetings, however, these members would suggest the same strategies that happened to coincide with the organization's primary repertoire. Tara at ACORN, for example, recounts an instance in which several local SMOs gathered for a brainstorming session on several hypothetical situations. In one, the local parents felt that there was a need for an additional safety bump in front of the local school, or an additional crossing guard. "We wanted an action at City Hall: The [other] people said, 'When we [had a demand], we just wrote a letter asking for it!' ... We're more militant than the other groups," Tara said, smiling (Personal communication, June 30, 2003). Even when capacities for alternate strategies (such as slow negotiation, beginning with a letter of request) exist, cultural norms help to shape tastes in choosing the default strategy.

Thus, in ACORN's two signature campaigns, the thrill of confrontation clearly pervaded. In the anti-privatization campaign, Edison proved to be a nemesis with moves that demanded loud, confrontational responses each step along the way. In ACORN's signature campaign against No Child Left Behind legislation, a letter of grievance was delivered, but it was delivered with confrontational flair (Personal communication, March 8, 2004). Hundreds of protesters expressed dissatisfaction with the legislation not by asking for certain changes, but by staging a large protest in front of the national Department of Education headquarters in Washington, DC, outside then-Secretary of Education Rod Paige's office. While most of the leaders present found

it difficult to follow specific statements about the legislation, they eagerly joined organizers in chanting and demanding that Paige come down from his office and meet them outside.

The leaders' sentiments and the confrontational political strategies also correspond well with the SMO's cultural norms, which emphasize not only recruitment but activities that focus on the organization as a whole, rather than each individual in it. In turn, repeated or familiar suggestions are met by immediate signs of recognition—nods of heads, smiles, applause—rather than the considered silence or confusion met by new or divergent ideas. In some ways, then, repertoires simply appeared to products of positive reinforcement, or vicious cycles, depending on one's point of view.

Is there something about ACORN's cultural norms that makes them conducive to confrontational strategies? It is impossible to discuss the SMO's taste for confrontational political strategies without mentioning the emotional stimulus organizers and leaders associate with crowded protests and accountability sessions. Edgar, for example, recounts an especially relished victory from a few years ago: "There's no better feeling, than those people announce that you can stay, nothing like the pain that I felt when everyone is crying and smiling and jumping on me and pinning me down, chanting, 'We won! We won!'" (Personal communication, March 24, 2004). The fact that Edgar continues to point to that event, even years later, points to its power as a rallying symbol and to its importance in the organizer's cultural tool kit.

#### *Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition*

During NWBCCC's Annual Meeting, the excitement appeared to be palpable and contagious as leaders chanted outside Governor Pataki's mansion in midstate New York, arguing against overcrowding and for greater funding money for classroom space and city schools. The willingness of leaders of all ages and devout religious backgrounds to participate and chant vigilantly, even after police arrived and threatened arrest for trespassing, is significant because it was highly unlikely that each of these individuals would have felt similarly on her or his own. In

some ways, the cause became more righteous and the confrontation more attractive because of their participation in NWBCCC activities that emphasized group identity and recruitment. The Annual Meeting they had just come from, which included a retrospective of thirty years of NWBCCC work and some of the spoken word chants quoted at the very beginning of this dissertation, would be a good example of such an activity. This is also consistent with extensive literature on group psychology and sense-making in organizations (Weick, 1995).

In its signature campaign for more school construction in the Capital Plan, teachers, leaders, and students met to list their grievances (Personal communication, November 6, 2003). Together, they then put pressure on City Council members to successfully garner moneys in the Capital Plan budget or, using individual politicians' discretionary powers, in other city administration budgets. In this way, NWBCCC worked to present a cohesive set of demands to both the School Construction Authority and to elected officials; it then pursued confrontational political strategies for these demands to be met. Two months after the Annual Meeting described above, it appeared that the campaign was yielding results. Again, part of this success lay in the leaders' excitement in having participated in press conferences that were covered all over the news, by network stations as well as local ones (Personal communication, April 29, 2004).

At another protest against the relocation of a small school into an already overcrowded building, a similar kind of anticipation and restlessness could be given credit for leaders' stamina in continuing efforts despite a location switch at the last minute. They leaders looked forward to speaking to major network news crews and confronting officials about the resentment and anger they felt about the impending move (Personal communication, May 26, 2004). In this signature campaign, the political strategies pursued by NWBCCC were so confrontational, in fact, that some constituents perceived the SMO as pitting small schools against big ones, and NWBCCC later altered its language to include both big and new small schools in a fight against overcrowding overall (Personal communication, May 27, 2004). Furthermore, SBU's affiliation

with NWBCCC jeopardized its relationship with certain Department of Education officials, so that SBU leaders sometimes distanced themselves from the reputation and preferences built by NWBCCC's previous confrontational strategies (Personal communication, June 10, 2004).

The large-scale events hosted by these SMOs are primarily associated with electoral strategies (to reelect the politician or vote him or her out) rather than other forms of mass resistance, such as riots, boycotts, sit-ins, or strikes. To the extent that the electoral system assumes participation in established institutions, these SMOs' confrontational strategies continue to uphold to primacy and power of electoral politics and organizational identity—whether in the name of an SMO, a political party, or a socioeconomic class. Such large-scale, confrontational events help leaders to feel as if they are members of a movement and a collective identity, in ways similar to how the cultural norms inside the Alinskyite SMOs operate. At the same time, such political strategies do not require leaders to know one another well. Thus, they provide comfortable venues for new leaders to participate in a visible but relatively accessible way.

To the extent that protests are essentially dramatic, they are stuff of legends. Mark of NWBCCC recounts the time when he and an entire team of NWBCCC leaders approached the campaign staff of Republican Senate candidate Rick Lazio, pretending to be students from Lehman College (the City University of New York college located in the Bronx). They professed that they wanted to volunteer for the Lazio campaign, and they were warmly received, with Lazio campaign buttons, hats, tee-shirts, etc. When they arrived the next day and entered the office en masse, Lazio's staff did not realize until too late that these NWBCCC leaders were in fact shedding their Lazio gear and executing a surprise protest at their office (Personal communication, March 17, 2004). The political context was markedly different, and the original context of the confrontational strategy had nothing to do with the school reform campaign at hand. Yet, NWBCCC leaders suggested the same strategy of surprise and humiliation in their campaign for more funding and against overcrowding. Months later, a representative from an

organization of various school reform SMOs expressed dismay and awe at Mark's story and suggestion that this coalition organization employ a similar strategy for other politicians (Personal communication, July 26, 2004). In the process, the representative was also propagating NWBCCC's confrontational strategies by reinforcing its image and giving it attention.

On the downside of steadfast adherence to cultural norms, one NWBCCC leader states that the SMO's Alinskyite emphasis on numbers and noise has prevented it from adopting flexible political strategies:

I was having a conversation with Sam, and I said, '[NWBCCC] has become too pussy<sup>13</sup>.' And he said, 'Pussy how?' I don't believe in formal speaking. We aren't willing to really push things—Yeah, we fight for social justice and all that, but we are still trying to get to the same politicians and only working within social norms. And sometimes, social norms aren't right. We aren't opening the lines of communication and trusting our organizers, our leaders. (Personal communication, May 20, 2004)

According to this person, then, tastes for political strategies are about more than simple dichotomies such as confrontation versus collaboration, shouting or negotiating. Even when the political strategies pursued by SMOs are not fulfilling their original purpose of scaring or intimidating politicians into acquiescence, for example, they nevertheless often remain.

This has as much to do with the acquired tastes of members as it does with their capacities. Leaders at these organizations readily admit that some political strategies are considered 'sexier' than others, and that, rather than considering all the factors specific to a situation, leaders look forward to those situations where they can appropriately pursue their favored political strategies (Personal communication, May 20, 2004). When these strategies are "appropriate," then, is sometimes up to debate.

Deciding on what to do for overcrowding—choosing between negative or positive pressure, between figurative carrots and sticks, and among press conferences, marches, rallies,

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<sup>13</sup> According to this leader, this remark's conscious use of arguable diction is meant to act as a rhetorical weapon, as a means of forcing issues of gender, sexuality, and race to be contested. The fact this others may disagree, then, is indicative of some of the embedded issues towards gender and race discussed in Chapter 6.



boycotts, and letter deliveries—raises the point that either collaborative or confrontational strategies can be romanticized. The delivery of the underlying tones of the political strategies matter as much as their overt forms or content (Personal communication, March 17, 2004).

### Negotiating truth to power

In addition to helping leaders and members choose between different political strategies, then, cultural norms also help to shape strategies because they provide the underlying themes, moods, and key messages for any political strategy. That is, even when the same tactic, such as an accountability session with several hundred members in front of a politician, is used by different SMOs, the cultural norms help to set the tone for the underlying message projected and the larger strategy executed via the accountability session. Freirian category SMOs also host accountability sessions, but these are less confrontational in nature. At the same time, Alinskyite category SMOs also host small meetings, but these are typically less collaborative than those hosted by Freirian ones.

#### *United Parents of Highbridge*

Substantively, the content of political strategies and policy proposals often reflect the internal cultural norms of different SMOs. At United Parents of Highbridge, for instance, leaders attend many of the recruitment meetings and workshops marking the Alinskyite category, but leaders also participate in social events and take advantage of classes more representative of the Freirian category. In turn, UPOH's political strategies primarily emphasize the magnitude of support garnered by the SMO through large-scale rallies and events, but the manner in which these large-scale rallies are conducted is decidedly different from those hosted by ACORN or NWBCCC. They are more likely to celebrate negotiations that have already taken place, and they are less likely to have question-and-answer periods that put the politician on the spot. While all of the SMOs' accountability sessions incorporate the ritual of having the politician (or a staff

member sent to represent the politician) sign a symbolic contract, meeting the group's demands, those in which UPOH participates are much less likely to invite politicians whose commitment is truly in question.

Furthermore, while UPOH's political strategies partly depend upon demonstrations of the electoral prowess the group can wield, the SMO's large-scale events are less dependent on organizational identity than would have been predicted if UPOH fit squarely in the Alinskyite category. Rather, political strategies are dependent upon personal relationships and notions of mutual support and encouragement, rather than more straightforward subscription to the overall goals, mission, victories, or values aligned with the SMO. Gabriela, an organizer at UPOH, cites "one [of the practices she] got into trouble for" as disobeying the Alinskyite norm that,

The parents have to make their own ways to the meetings. That was very vague to a point, right? What about the meeting if it's in Albany? ...Just, parents should make it to the meeting, cuz it's for them. It's for them, and they should meet. This is how every CBO [community-based organization] feels. Well, Highbridge changed that for all of them... These people, you ask them to go to Northwest, that's 196<sup>th</sup> Street and Grand Concourse. These people live on 117 dollars a week. Welfare checks. You think they got four dollars? Plus they got bring the kids? No, they don't! So, Highbridge took the extra step where we actually gave them Metrocards to get to the places, so Highbridge always had a large number of parents. 'Oh, the parents only come because you pay for the transportation.' Man, there's no four dollars in the world that could get me out of my house, out of bed, on a rainy day, or snowy day... Those people who you offer Metrocards to and they say, 'Oh, I can't make it,' they didn't really want to be there, did they? ...I decided to get a car and I would make it a station wagon I became a good organizer, because I would bring my parents. And they [the other SMOs' organizers'] said, 'that's not fair.' (Personal communication, March 11, 2004)

The cultural norms of combining services and political organizing, then, were not limited to recruitment or the organization's internal affairs. They also led to different ways of interacting with politicians and different policy proposals. A neighborhood tour for local teachers, for instance, included a home-cooked meal by UPOH mothers and introductions to social services providers and social gathering places in the neighborhood, while the tour by ACORN Bronx included no components aimed at encouraging continued extra-curricular or social interaction

per se (Personal communication, October 14, 2003, October 20, 2003). Rather, the ACORN Bronx tour had focused on potential pedagogical sites, such as the Bronx Museum of Art. Just as social services subvert the notion of ownership, self-help, self-empowerment more prominent in the Alinskyite category, the welcoming tone, free meals, and social services emphasized in meetings and events with outside officials, teachers, and politicians set forth a different set of political strategies by UPOH.

Even at meetings and rallies that, at first glance, appear to be similar to those hosted by other SMOs, then, the mentality and underlying culture at UPOH's events are those of mutual aid by individuals, rather than organizational identity per se. Leaders and organizers are readily willing to ask "personal questions" about one another in order to get a better sense of a member's situation (Personal communication, July 8, 2004), even if "that's against the rules, getting involved in the life, the private life, of parents... Other organizers who all say the same thing aren't real. Anthony [a head of staff] told me I could be real. There are other people, who are always interested in the by-laws... I'm not interested in that. [Other people in the multi-SMO coalition] think I'm crazy" (Personal communication, March 11, 2004). In turn, the political strategies advocated by UPOH members are much less likely to reflect typical community organizing proposals. Instead, they are more likely to revolve around notions of mutual assistance. For example, what originally began as a proposal for graduate school training for principals turned into a proposal for peer mentoring among teachers. Although this proposal was advocated by several other SMOs and should therefore not be analyzed solely as an outgrowth of UPOH, it nevertheless reflects the unique, services-oriented type of collaborative culture at the organization. Indeed, it fits well with other UPOH campaigns, which aim to increase trust of institutions among neighborhood residents by forcing existing program officials and teachers to meet with one another and collaborative more effectively and with less redundancy (Personal communication, May 12, 2004).

*Sistas and Brothas United*

At Mothers on the Move and Sistas and Brothas United, which lie a bit more squarely on the Freirian side of the Alinskyite-Freirian spectrum than UPOH does, the link between cultural norms and political strategies is clearer. Put bluntly, at SBU, when leaders learn about and reap the rewards of cooperation and friendship, they are eager to replicate the process. At times, this may come down to something as simple and real as unabashed enthusiasm. This notion is not meant to be some nebulous, innate quality like a leader's 'charisma,' however. Here, the seeds of an SMO's taste for collaborative strategies do not necessarily lie in a particular leader, but in the cultural norms that bind them together.

In keeping with the Freirian category, cultural norms are filled more with narratives about individuals and their friendships than in statistics about macro-inequalities. While the statistical data is used by all of the case study SMOs, it is only the focus at some of the organizations. When SBU's signature campaigns wanted to address the issue of disparities among leaders' schools and educational experiences, especially regarding access to counselors and a sense of school safety, leaders recited statistics about how the high schools were oppressively crowded, percentages of leaders got access to counselors upon first request and who did not, and rates of disciplinary action and violence at the schools. At the same time, they were most excited about the politicians experiencing firsthand the crush of teenage crowds and long lines of irritated students in guidance counselors' offices, so that they could feel the tension of imminent violence themselves, and they solicited evidence about the lived experience of overcrowded schools through details like girls' bathrooms without stall doors, third-story floor-to-ceiling windows missing glass panes and bars, and strange smells and powders emanating from classroom closets, again so that the politicians could feel the dangerous conditions for themselves. According to the leaders, it is this personal observation of the contrast between uptown and downtown that can

plant the seeds for collaborative, productive discussions and campaign success (Personal communication, April 1, 2004).

As described in Chapter 5, in the process of becoming friends with SBU leaders they would not have approached or spoken to otherwise, SBU members not only learned about but became invested in rituals of conflict resolution, negotiation, and exchange of favorite music and favorite books. The SBU leaders have the capacity to successfully execute collaborative strategies; more than that, though, the leaders also look for opportunities to sit down and force opposing parties to air their disputed opinions or conflicting perceptions of the situation, simply because they enjoy it (Personal communication, June 9, 2004, June 15, 2004). Having gone through the process of sustained collaboration internally, SBU members are clearly enthusiastic about applying similar principles to their external political strategies. At one meeting with a city-wide Department of Education official, the chair of the meeting encouraged each person in the room to speak up about his or her grievances and ideas about the public school system, and potential follow-up steps were discussed for each grievance (Personal communication, June 10, 2004). This differs greatly from the protocol in a confrontational meeting or accountability session, where public officials are primarily told to answer “yes” or “no” to each demand, grievance, or questions, and details or potential steps are hashed out later.

The substance of SBU’s campaigns has also been shaped by their close relationships, and not just rational self-interest or the prospects of a winnable campaign. The intimate relationships amongst the youth have practical implications for SBU as a whole, just as the culture at UPOH affected its campaign work. The leaders are able to portray a united front to politicians in a way most groups cannot; in important meetings, even off-the-cuff sentences by one youth are often finished by another, and one can see the politicians’ responses noticeably change (Personal communication, 14 June 2004). At such meetings with other organizations, politicians often succeed in turning one of the leaders against another, so that the politician states that their

demands are either unwarranted or unclear. As their comments in Chapter 5 suggest, the youth are also incredibly committed to SBU. Several stated that because their closeness sowed the seeds for their collective passion and the substance of the organization, which would remain even if the official organization did not.

This emphasis on solidarity and understanding applies to their vision of school.

Nathaniel, who lived in Pennsylvania for a year, spoke excitedly about how different it was there,

They had a good sense of community in the school, too. They had Homecoming, they had a football field, they had basketball games, they had concession stands, they had Pajama Day, when you wore your best pajamas there, they had Halloween parties, Christmas parties, parties all the time..... These things made a *big* difference because schools are kind of like a home; you're there most of the time... I never knew what field hockey was until I got there. I was like, 'What is that?' I thought it was a new sport they just made up when I got there. (Personal communication, June 9, 2004)

While most of the SBU campaigns continue to address traditional educational issues like poor facilities and teacher quality, it is clear that these students do not think that community development activities, like sports or pep rallies, should be perceived as auxiliary or superficial. Further, issues of school quality were not considered absolute; rather, these issues were rendered especially significant because they contrasted the quality of schooling received by other students. The quality of one's education, then, is partly measured by comparative as well as absolute criteria. It was in this way that the SBU leaders explicitly linked all of these issues again and again to their signature campaigns against discriminatory policies and inequities in schooling, and to the manner in which they attempted to execute political strategies that emphasized connection and collaboration between parties.

The SBU leaders also spoke about the tone of their campaigns in a different way than leaders from most of the other case study SMOs. While chants are ubiquitous at most grassroots rallies, several SBU members also described how spoken word shaped their work, and how

cultural symbols in the campaigns, like certain musical traditions, fit into their larger political visions. As Lisa told it,

As soon as I found that I could write, and [Daniel] could help me, we just clicked immediately... We mainly talked about how things are so unequal in our society... And music in general, not so much the music that we listen to, but agreeing that commercialism has taken over... He showed me that there was poetry, that was kind of boring to me because it didn't rhyme or tunes to it, but I love rap, and when you find spoken word, which is right in the middle of the two, where you can talk about issues that will blow people's minds! You're talking about social equality, racism, anything. (Personal communication, June 21, 2004)

None of the SBU youth had adopted music as a campaign component before Daniel proposed spoken word as an activity at the organization. As a result, Lisa, Jeremy, and several other SBU youth have begun to work extensively on a hobby outside of public speaking, chairing meetings, and other skills commonly described in stories about organizing.

Partly because the internal cultural norms focus on individual relationships, the interests or creative expressions of unique high school students, or a group of individually unique high school teachers, were fostered but not assumed. Consequently, in alliances with teachers or safety agents, SBU leaders begin every campaign not with a set of demands or a presentation of the students' self-interests, but with a survey of the preferences, opinions, and habits of all parties involved. This type of approach attempts to validate the views of everyone involved. The youth's school safety campaign, for instance, involves not the common demands of more school safety officers, but conducting a forum whereby school safety officers and SBU youth formed respective teams and performed skits about how they perceived the others. In this way, the signature campaign addressed issues of racial profiling in the schools, an aspect of school security often overlooked or avoided overlooked in community organizing campaigns. Later in the forum, the youth and school safety officers came up with a new, official protocol for respectful, "open-minded" interaction in schools.

Likewise, the guidance counselor reform proposal mentioned in Chapter 6 was the result of a collaboration between the Young Intellectuals, SBU, and school officials is also part of a larger political strategy of collaboration via increased documentation and transparency. After consulting with education experts from local think tanks and universities, the leaders have taken to extensively documenting every homework assignment to illustrate that they are not being prepared, challenged, or evaluated at grade level. They are also documenting every failed or successful attempt to reach a guidance counselor, in order to illustrate unequal access to counseling services in their schools (Personal communication, February 19, 2004).

SBU recently decided to expand its campaign with counselors by initiating a similar process with teachers. Along these lines, SBU proposals took a considerable period of time to evolve and finalize, and they almost always eventually revolved around notions of quality rather than quantity, with the significant exception of campaigns against overcrowding. When students and teachers expressed their respective frustrations with overcrowding at a recent meeting, the students recited relevant school construction codes and by-laws, as leaders at other community organizations might. Even then, the work was different from that of other SMOs in the way that SBU replicated their intra-organizational norms, of personal relationships and continuous communication rather than policy changes per se, in their campaigns.

It is ironic, then, that SBU members have had some trouble in collaborating with external experts in creating certain policy proposals precisely because their Freirian cultural norms valued everyone's opinion equally, with the organizer as partner rather than teacher. While these cultural norms mostly help SMOs engage in collaborative strategies because they encourage compromise and negotiation, they also attempt to establish a level playing field. Nevertheless, campaigns sometimes require that SBU leaders sometimes defer to experts, and at least one person stated that this type of institution-building was very difficult for the students (Personal communication, May 4, 2004).



*Mothers on the Move*

Finally, at Mothers on the Move, the notion of accountability is also applied on a person-to-person, rather than institution-to-institution or SMO-to-SMO, basis. As mentioned earlier and described extensively in Chapter 5, the organization has been undergoing a critical, and in many ways painful, transition in leadership and cultural norms for the past two years. In this case, the taste for certain political strategies was so strong that directorship changed before the SMO attempted to cultivate any alternate cultural tools or pursue any alternate political strategies. According to leaders, earlier suggestions to look into Section 8 vouchers as well as housing projects or to attend Community Board meetings, for example, were rebuffed partly because they involved some collaboration with outsiders (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). If these comments are accurate, then even participation or attendance in external events outside of rallies or accountability sessions lends approval, rather than accountability, to public officials. MOM's newer cultural tool kit, which includes more trainings and retreats than before, accessible binders and archived documents, and individualized plans of action for members, helps to build a system of accountability in the SMO. As with any cultural tool kit, there are tools for both confrontational and collaborative strategies. The difference is that now, the underlying impetus is a bit more likely to tilt towards collaboration.

The consequences of such a transition on political strategy are obvious. While the SMO was previously known to engage in one protest after another, many of them surprise 'hits' at politicians' homes, both leaders and organizers have readily admitted that the SMO has had a bit more trouble keeping power and working with public officials in a sustainable way. As one leader put it, "[B]efore... we would go out and campaign against [public officials], put a hit on them. But now... MOM has already made a statement of who we are, and how far we're willing to go to bring about justice... So agencies are more apt to sit at the table with us than they originally did 12 years ago" (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). With an automatic seat

at the policy-making table, MOM has developed new cultural norms to decide when to sit down and when to walk away. By focusing on individuals and demanding accountability, extensive documentation, and negotiations at the micro level, MOM leaders hope to become more flexible in their external political strategies.

This is not to say that Mothers on the Move leaders and organizers are never confrontational. At one demonstration, a MOM organizer addressed a politician's staff members by chanting "alcaguete," a colloquial term that means "shameless" but, according to leaders, roughly translates to "ass-kisser" (Personal communication, June 8, 2004). The mood here was different than that at an Alinskyite SMO's demonstration, however, in that chants were less likely to have been developed beforehand and distributed; rather, emphasis lay on a diversity of styles under a single banner. At a press conference with several State Legislators, parents and public officials presented typical testimonials, and MOM leaders presented "grades" on the progress each Legislator had then made towards school funding goals (Personal communication, May 13, 2004). These grades were not meant to shame the officials, however, but to encourage them to get 'better grades' next time; the fact that none of the politicians failed is significant. It is also noteworthy that these events were officially co-sponsored by MOM and other groups in a statewide coalition. Presently, MOM's strengths in its own political strategies appear to lie in collaboration or, more specifically, collaborative strategies that rely on honest criticism in intimate settings.

While accountability and confrontation exist, then, they have important but nonetheless limited roles in larger, collaborative strategies. For instance, the SMO's signature campaign regarding parent involvement protocols was advocated in somewhat confrontational ways at some points of the larger campaign, especially after specific incidents in which MOM leaders were egregiously mistreated in the schools. Yet, MOM leaders also incorporated lessons from these incidents in creating new institutional procedures and considering what their ideal school

would look like (Personal communication, May 1, 2004). Along the way, accountability sessions resembled not confrontational protests with ultimatums, but give-and-take informational sessions about potential levers of power for parents in all levels of government. Such sessions focused parents' rights in legislation from No Child Left Behind to the Bloomberg Administration's Children First. MOM has, in the past, helped to oust hostile officials through confrontational strategies, only to fail in winning campaign proposals from subsequently elected officials because it had not yet learned effective collaborative strategies. Because of this history, it has since developed tastes for taking as much advantage of political opportunities as possible, through collaborative strategies.

It is explicitly through the kind of leader-to-leader interaction that underlies many Freirian category cultural norms, rather than leader-to-organizer or leader-to-organization interaction, that Mothers on the Move attempts to tackle some of the divides like those mentioned in Chapter 6, and to couch confrontational tactics in larger collaborative strategies. In mending rifts between different leaders and in successfully mediating conflicts at schools along the way, MOM leaders believe that the SMO has developed both the credible reputation and the substantive policy proposals necessary to successfully pursue collaborative political strategies (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Its signature campaign may include protests against public officials, but these protests then become part of a larger strategy to promote collaboration or policy-making levers in multiple ways.

Out of the five SMOs in this study, Mothers on the Move is the only one thus far that has successfully sponsored an open and functioning small, social justice-themed school.

Interestingly, the SMO was approached by interested teachers and other community-based organizations, rather than the other way around. To the remaining older members, this strategy was not "selling out," but the expenditure of political capital they had painstakingly built over the years (Personal communication, March 24, 2004). At the same time, these leaders were wary

of the fine line between legitimacy and co-optation. Collaboration, when superficial, allows SMOs to become highly vulnerable and run the risk of being ‘strung along’ (Personal communication, June 10, 2004).

#### Fair-weather friends

The term “fair-weather friend” is usually pejorative, describing a person whose selfish aspirations give loyalty the short shrift in friendships. In education organizing, members and organizers remain loyal to one another (in Freirian category SMOs) or to the organization (in Alinskyite category SMOs), but they aspire to be fair-weather friends of all external parties. Interviews with both current and past Bronx Borough Presidents suggest that SMOs’ confrontational strategies are looked down upon (Personal communication, July 22, 2004; September 28, 2004). This could just be political rhetoric, however, and confrontational strategies are considered essential, if not the end-all-be-all, to all SMOs. For an SMO to stick with a specific politician through thick and thin is not so much being fiercely loyal as shooting oneself in the political foot. As smart strategists, leaders from all five Bronx groups attempt to be efficient fair-weather friends. All case study SMOs succeed to some extent, but in strikingly different ways.

A more nuanced overview, then, might suggest that the SMOs need to be threatening, but they also must be able to speak eloquently when negotiating or engaging in policy talk. ACORN does this by sending affiliate Political Action Committee representatives or staff researchers to high-level meetings with the teachers’ union, for example (Personal communication, June 30, 2003). While NWBCCC leaders have also succeeded in doing this, especially with its latest overcrowding signature campaign (Personal communication, June 28, 2004), it is also sometimes reprimanded for alienating or antagonizing certain officials; it can be argued that this kind of

pressure is sometimes done more successfully than others (Personal communication, July 26, 2004).

SBU has managed to have it both ways, as both a fierce, confrontational SMO, especially when the leaders feel that officials might be dismissing them because so many of them are still minors, and as a conversant, collaborative one, partly by playing its affiliation with NWBCCC up or down, as it sees fit. UPOH has operated similarly with the coalition in which it participates, focusing on local campaigns in a highly collaborative manner and demonstrating numbers power at large, coalition-sponsored rallies. Finally, MOM has both participated in coalitions, through which it participates in large rallies, and continued to ride on its *past* reputation as a confrontational SMO capable of disabling politicians when it needs to. It has also launched and hosted “Candidates’ forums,” evenings in which MOM leaders as political candidates tough questions that demonstrate the SMO’s potential electoral power. These differ from Alinskyite accountability sessions, however, in that they are less scripted, questions are unlikely to have ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers, and their intimidating nature stem as much from leaders’ informed questions and eloquence as from the size of the audience.

While none has been *wholly* successful, most of the case study SMOs in this dissertation do show general tendencies towards holding public officials, teachers, and other SMOs accountable when these parties have not yet lent the SMO full support, but at other times, helping these parties on constructive, collaborative projects or alliances. As with policy adoption and policy formulation strategies, then, the SMOs attempt to strike a balance between collaborative and confrontational strategies. Once again, however, most of the groups tend to pursue one category of political strategies more than another.

Because organizers in all five case studies have been employed in Alinskyite category organizations or gone through training in Alinskyite norms, the Freirian category SMOs in this dissertation are more familiar with confrontational political strategies than the Alinskyite SMOs

are familiar with collaborative strategies. Organizers and leaders at NWBCCC and MOM, especially, speak about the need to alternate or combine confrontational and collaborative strategies; teachers are necessary in successful implementation of political strategies in a way ‘slimy’ politicians or greedy slumlords are not (Personal communication, November 8, 2003, March 29, 2004). On the other hand, neither are teachers and principals automatic friends or family, because in those relationships, “you let things slide” (Personal communication, March 18, 2004).

The SMOs’ greater reliance on street-level bureaucrats therefore renders education campaigns a bit different than affordable housing or employment campaigns, where continued interaction takes place over at least nine months out of every year. Mothers on the Move responded to these challenges by overtly discussing and changing some of its cultural norms, adopting new activities and rituals, and revising goal statements. NWBCCC is in some ways attempting to do the same thing through its new research workshops, through new ambassador groups that act as liaisons between neighborhood associations, and through its slow and deliberate adoption of admired SBU cultural norms.

SBU clearly alternates between the two, using the threat of confrontation as a way to gain the attention of various public officials. Like Mothers on the Move leaders, those at SBU enjoy protests but also relish personal connections. The latter tendency is reinforced by the fact that it is sometimes difficult to find the most powerful narratives for large groups of people. Rightly so, MOM, NWBCCC, and SBU leaders are also proud of the significant bodies of knowledge they have acquired on the different strengths and weaknesses of various school reforms and policy proposals, and they are keen to show off this knowledge, brainstorm, and engage in the nitty-gritty of policy-making. Even amongst Freirian category SMOs, however, tastes for collaborative strategies are qualified; SBU’s experience in developing a small, themed school suggests that to

such SMOs, collaboration in which leaders must defer to so-called experts may not constitute true collaboration at all.

Out of the five groups in the study, ACORN is the one that most consistently pursues confrontational strategies, and it prides itself on this pattern. Although NWBCCC's stories about sabotaging Rick Lazio's campaign is just one piece of evidence belying ACORN's assertion that it is the *only* confrontational SMO in the Bronx, ACORN's self-perception is at least as important as reality. According to one organizer, even as "direct action is special for ACORN... The other groups you're working with are not into direct action," those in the SMO also "understand how important UFT is in New York City. We understand that when we work with a group like the UFT, there are things that may not look all the well to the membership, but the fact of the matter is that they're a powerful group" (Personal communication, March 24, 2004). As with strategies emphasizing policy adoption versus ones that emphasize policy formulation, ACORN mitigates the tension between confrontational and collaborative strategies through division of labor. For example, ACORN's previous collaboration with the UFT was primarily the work of staff (Personal communication, June 30, 2004). For the most part, leaders and members are unlikely to engage in collaborative strategies, which are less likely to consistently engage large numbers of people, mesh with rhetoric about high dues and "ownership," and follow internal cultural norms whereby the organizer is a teacher rather than a partner. This delegation of strategies also allows ACORN to, for the most part, maintain the militant image it so carefully cultivates.

UPOH does not alternate between confrontational and collaborative strategies or divide and conquer; rather, it creates its own hybrid set of political strategies by taking components of each. Thus far, its political strategies have consistently maintained collaborative undertones. Its large-scale meetings echo the threat of electoral turnover so prominent in other SMOs' accountability sessions, but its own rallies tend to be celebrations. While it adopts tactics that

appear confrontational, then, they are actually steps towards collaboration. Unlike other SMOs, it has not fought the seemingly ubiquitous budget cuts and overcrowding problems that constitute the focus of other SMOs' campaigns. Rather, its confrontational strategies have been limited to small-scale campaigns; its most visible campaigns all instead involve suggested programs it would like to see implemented. It is remarkable, then, that in a policy cycle of endless budget cuts, UPOH and the coalition in which it participates have won a new \$1.6 million project. To some, such as former Bronx Borough President Fernando Ferrer, the SMO was the beneficiary of a Kingdon-style window of opportunity (Personal communication, July 22, 2004). According to this hypothesis, UPOH benefited from Mayor Bloomberg's need for some good news after the third-grade retention policy proved to be quite unpopular. Even as representatives from a coalition complain that collaboration with UPOH is difficult, then, UPOH has successfully negotiated with the city's Department of Education by limiting its campaigns and pursuing collaborative strategies with tactics perhaps orchestrated to run the risk of, and thus attain the street credibility of, confrontation.

Overall, according to these schemas, the more Alinskyite SMOs are more likely to pursue confrontational strategies, and the more Freirian SMOs are more likely to pursue collaborative strategies. The Alinskyite category's emphases on recruitment and leadership development with the organizer as teacher lend themselves to large-scale events, where confrontation, demands, and questions with 'yes' or 'no' answers are more likely to dominate, and in-depth discussion is less likely. To the extent that negotiation is also less predictable and usually involves several exchanges of information, members of Alinskyite category SMOs might also feel uncomfortable with strategies that cannot be scripted. At one small meeting between leaders and a politician, an SMO member read a speech outlining her demands for education funding. The politician responded by asking how many of the schools and parents involved were located in his district. The parent, unable to answer the question, ignored it and simply picked up where she had left off



in the speech. The anecdote is also revealing in how the leaders later reacted to the meeting: Some felt that the meeting was a disaster, and others felt that it had been a learning experience (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Cultural norms appear to shape not only capacities, but tastes in and reactions to different strategies.

Leaders at the Alinskyite organizations express great enthusiasm for the exhilaration inherent in large, confrontational events, where they can list their demands and force public officials to give clear answers. They convey confidence in the power they feel as ‘many’ in the face of ‘one,’ no matter how powerful this one public official appeared to be just moments before. The cultural norms inside the organization encourage members to identify with the SMO, whether ACORN, NWBCCC, or another group. With little interaction between leaders, these members feel comfortable with the structure of accountability sessions, and with the division of labor that delegates negotiation to a small number of leaders or staff.

Such confrontational strategies help Alinskyite category SMOs to address straightforward, more macro-oriented issues such as overall school funding, school construction, and to a certain extent, teacher quality. They enhance participants’ roles in more traditional forms of civic involvement, such as elections, rallies, and letter-writing for or against a bill. They ultimately help to win more resources for severely underprivileged communities such as those in this dissertation.

In contrast, leaders at Freirian SMOs interact with each other extensively, have grown close, and are more likely to view organizers as partners rather than teachers. With every one participating in the SMO in different ways, there is less likely to be a single mantra, chant, or slogan that applies to everyone. While leaders at SBU and MOM also get excited about rallies and protests, they also express strong desire for collaborative strategies, to come to mutual understanding with politicians in ways akin to how they came to work with one another. Lest this be perceived as “sleeping with the enemy,” they are careful to note that true accountability

requires honesty and knowledge that only comes with relative intimacy and collaboration as well as confrontation.

Such collaborative strategies may eventually help Freirian category SMOs to expand their repertoires overall. To the extent that their strategies are a bit less based on calculated moves and countermoves, it follows that their strategies as well as their policy proposals hold the potential to incorporate the idiosyncrasies of various players and innovate. When successful, they ultimately help to not only change the balance of power in a policymaking community, but alter, even if only in small ways, the way in which power is henceforth distributed.

The fact that for the most part, SMO leaders might enjoy what they know best, and that they might improve upon what they enjoy most, seems to make sense in hindsight. Yet, the fact that SMOs have a taste in political strategies runs counter to the notion that they calculate the costs and benefits of different strategies, and that they then automatically choose that which appears to be most effective. Furthermore, SMOs' political strategies are more than randomly entrenched path dependence. That is, the case study organizations are not sticking to certain political strategies for no apparent reason. It is difficult to predict what would happen in a crisis or the political strategies prove to be obviously ineffective for prolonged periods; in the meantime, leaders are eloquent about their SMOs' respective tastes in strategies.

Rather, tastes in external political strategies are partly shaped by the internal cultural norms in two ways. First, when choosing among different political strategies, SMO leaders have an affinity towards those that replicate their internal rituals, in a way that later renders certain strategies more automatic and reified than others. Second, political strategies, even when incorporating tactics that appear to suggest otherwise, tend to reflect underlying themes of either confrontation for Alinskyite category SMOs or collaboration for Freirian category ones. For example, Mothers on the Move press conferences and accountability sessions are more likely to be informative, include back-and-forth discussion, involve debates between public officials from

different political parties, and be part of larger collaborative strategies than those sponsored by NWBCCC or ACORN. ACORN meetings with public officials or the teachers' union are more likely to be part of a larger confrontational strategy, such as an electoral campaign against a third party, than those sponsored by SBU or MOM.

The cultural analysis presented in this chapter helps to unravel some of the ways in which SMOs mitigate the tension between the collaborative and confrontational strategies available to them. Resource mobilization theory emphasizes the importance of membership dues and foundation funds, and indeed, some organizers and members explicitly speak of the appeal and exhilaration of large, confrontational rallies and victory marches, just as some foundations see such events as great culminations of campaigns and photo opportunities. Friendship-building mediation, activities that do not seem to be integral to campaigns, and well-produced reports and policy proposals are also appealing to some members, organizers, and foundations, however. The disparate choices made by the SMOs relate well to the two categories forming the crux of this dissertation. Therefore, resource mobilization sometimes goes hand in hand with cultural tool kits, and the preferences that are shaped by them.

To the extent that political opportunities are partly perceived as good ones when they take advantage of an SMO's strengths, one can anticipate parallels between this chapter and the preceding one. Still, one would have had to carefully scrutinize the political landscape to find political opportunities in the middle of a budget crisis, or in the antagonistic relations between school safety agents and students that became the foundation for SBU's collaborative signature campaigns, especially when school safety agents are already subject to thousands of regulations and procedures. Accounting for the perspicacious observation or creation of specific political opportunities by some SMOs and not others, then, is the taste for certain political strategies acquired alongside cultural tool kits.

## Chapter 9: Commitment and Commencement

Even as this dissertation is being written, we see some of the rewards sown and reaped by the SMOs in this study. As part of a larger coalition, three of the organizations, but UPOH especially, have been basking in media attention from outlets as varied as the *New York Post*, the *New York Times*, and *City Limits*. The Lead Teacher program received several hundreds of thousands of dollars from private foundations, in addition to \$1.6 million from the Department of Education. Perhaps most importantly, it has earned the relatively new coalition a reputation for substance and success in the city. Leander, one of the leaders interviewed in this study, was named one of 10 leading “mid-career” activists willing to “break the rules” for grassroots success in *City Limits*.

Another leading ‘mid-career’ activist highlighted in the same magazine issue, Lisa Ortega, began her career at Mothers on the Move and is now director of an SMO for incarcerated and disabled city residents. Within the last few months alone, MOM has been the subject of pieces in the *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, and National Public Radio’s *On Point*. Better yet, new members took leadership roles in all of the events and roundtable discussions covered by the media, and the small middle school co-sponsored by MOM opened in September 2004. After a public official admonished the school principal for daring to submit a proposal as “radical” as parent-teacher home school visits, MOM and the school were able to secure funding for the “radical” program (Personal communication, November 18, 2004). MOM’s latest major development in its education campaigns, completed a full year after the end of this dissertation’s fieldwork period, is a comprehensive “Platform for Excellent Schools” that confirms a strength in policy formulation, as articulated in Chapter 7. For example, rather than opposition to No Child Left Behind legislation, the platform argues for an overhaul of certain provisions, such as the military recruitment clause in public schools. The Platform also echoes other Freirian

category themes in its calls for “cultural competency training,” better use of city administration institutions such as “C-30 committees,” parents and teachers as “co-educators,” and schools as “community centers,” so that education reform is not a campaign topic deemed as mutually exclusive of other community issues (Personal communication, March 3, 2005).

As usual, ACORN sponsored large-scale events regionally and nationally. While the Presidential election results were disappointing for the organization, which endorsed the Democratic Party candidate via its Political Action Committee affiliate, ACORN succeeded in registering over one million new voters, hosting numerous rallies, and helping to approve a referendum raising the minimum wage in Florida (ACORN, 2004). Locally, ACORN Bronx continues to participate in CC9, citywide campaigns for affordable housing and the Westside Stadium, and regional alliances for New York City school funding. Recently, however, ACORN has also gathered some negative attention, with articles about its tenuous role as a HUD-sponsored landlord as well as a tenant activist organization in media outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *New York Sun* (Gonzalez, 2005; Kugel, 2004; Gerson, 2004).

Finally, Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy continues to integrate its education and immigrant campaigns across neighborhoods and official issue categories, scoping out and promoting community-based land use on vacant lots and the Armory. Recently, the organization won the backing of every relevant borough- and city-level public official. After a small, music-themed school was forcibly moved from one large high school building to another without notice, the parents contacted NWBCCC to help them negotiate for a permanent, adequate space for the students, who take upright basses, cellos, et cetera to and from school every day. NWBCCC has helped the parents at Celia Cruz join forces with other parents, at both small and ‘regular’ comprehensive high schools, in fighting overcrowding overall, and this received coverage by all of the New York television news organizations, as well as major periodicals (Personal communication, May 26, 2004; Gootman, 2004b). The larger SMO also collaborates

with Sistas and Brothas United in overcrowding campaigns. SBU led a neighborhood tour for teachers, showing them both local resources and social gathering places, in order to further cement the student-teacher alliance. They have also begun to gain official participatory roles in new decision-making groups at several Bronx schools. It continues its work on a small school proposal of its own.

The ceremonies that mark commitment and participation in Alinskyite and Freirian category SMOs, primarily described in Chapters 4 and 5, form overlapping but distinct cultural tool kits. When put into action, these cultural tool kits reveal different capacities for policy formulation-oriented versus policy adoption-oriented political strategies, different tastes for collaboration or confrontation, and different ways to address (or not) issues around race and ethnicity. Through dynamic activities like extensive recruitment or conflict resolution, intense shared experiences like accountability sessions or intense and deeply personal conversations, and high dues payments or GED classes, the five Bronx education organizing groups in this dissertation reveal not only disparate cultural norms, but different assumptions, preferences, and strengths in their political campaigns.

Despite their similar missions and goals in local school reform, these social movement organizations pursue divergent political strategies partly because of their cultural norms. Theoretically, this is important because it forwards a clear factor sometimes ignored and often muddled by researchers who focus on structural determinants, such as levels of funding and the larger political context, of SMO political strategies.

#### Regaining a sense of agency

Such themes have normative consequences. Tastes for political strategies certainly play a role in this dissertation's cultural analysis; at the same time, cultural norms should not be construed as so petrified as to constitute yet another structural constraint. Rather, the cultural

norms described in this paper remain mutable. They are not simply reflections of the organizations, nor are they necessarily ossified. If anything, the analysis here should instill hope in leaders and organizations at social movement organizations: what these individuals do, and the activities in which they participate, make a distinct difference in the political behavior of the SMOs overall. Funding and political contexts cannot be ignored, but they are not the end-all-be-all of strategic planning.

Such agency is best enacted when it helps social movement organizations to address and bridge racial divides, and to strike a balance between collaborative and confrontational strategies, as well as policy adoption versus policy formulation ones. There appears to be a consensus that no single set or narrow repertoire of strategies—whether confrontational or collaborative, for example—is in the organization’s best interest. As stated earlier, this is, to a certain extent, specific to the field of education organizing, which requires longer-term monitoring and political involvement than housing campaigns do.

Yet, there is no monolithic model of education organizing, or dominant means of striking the balance between different types of political strategies. It appears that Alinskyite category SMOs are more likely to strike a balance via division of labor, and Freirian category SMOs are more likely to alternate between political strategies. Overall, Alinskyite category organizations are associated with cultural norms that, in turn, develop capacities for policy adoption strategies and tastes for confrontational strategies. The category’s overall cultural tool kit tends to encourage large-scale events, with limited participation by large numbers of people. In contrast, Freirian category organizations are associated with cultural norms that develop capacities for policy formulation strategies and stronger tastes for collaborative strategies. The category’s activities and rituals tend to encourage intense, deep participation by what turn out to be, for the most part, smaller numbers of people. Specific to this dissertation is the theme that SMOs’ cultures are not defined only by ideology or overriding mission—such factors were held constant

in the case studies—or whether the SMO is “faith-based.” Rather, the SMOs’ cultures are composed of activities, meetings, services, rituals, etc., forming cultural tool kits. Cultural tool kits might sound somewhat pedestrian at first, but therein lies their strength. Cultural tool kits are real, accessible, and moldable. By considering them carefully, SMOs can re-infuse agency into their internal work.

If ACORN would like to have less “churning” of organizers and leaders, then, it could better sustain policy formulation strategies by devoting more individual attention to leaders, and incorporating a greater number of workshops that deal with skills other than recruitment. The dues-paying system and ownership model appear to be remarkably efficient means of encouraging quick emotive investment in the organization. This is less likely to be sustained, however, unless leaders have other consistent means of participation. While its strategies work well for large-scale, one-time events such as elections, ACORN may face greater obstacles in local education organizing. Thus far, ACORN Bronx has chosen to largely bypass local education organizing in favor of participation in either citywide campaigns or coalitions.

NWBCCC, an Alinskyite category organization with a wider variety of activities, appears to be in a state of transition. Admittedly, it has greatly diversified its rituals and activities; its Thanksgiving services, research groups, faith-based reflections, and individually focused activities have greatly expanded over the past couple of years. Overall, then, the SMO appears to be succeeding in its attempts to develop diverse and balanced cultural norms. Although some leaders continue to criticize the organization as “too Alinskyite,” the organization also appears to have strong norms of self-evaluation, and leaders appear open to change. The one consistent theme of concern is that of race; while NWBCCC’s leaders and organizers are much more willing to speak of racial divides than those at ACORN, for example, they nevertheless (and perhaps ironically) highlight racial divisions within the organization in the process. The SMO has been attempting to address this by explicitly setting aside time for open, staff-free



discussions. Until the underlying patterns of race and rank are addressed, however, it is difficult to conjecture whether members and leaders will be satisfied.

MOM and SBU have been more successful in tackling issues of race by developing opportunities for members to confront one another as individuals, rather than representatives of racial groups. Partly by being “race-conscious” rather than colorblind, these SMOs have successfully developed ways to dissolve tension and racial divides among leaders. These two organizations, along with UPOH, have also built impressive norms of trust- and commitment-building. Yet, SBU and MOM continue to struggle, to a certain extent, with building capacities for large-scale, intimidation-dependent strategies like walk-outs and rallies. Mothers on the Move has addressed this through new political strategies like the “Candidates’ Forum,” which allows a relatively large audience, but not necessarily on the scale of some Alinskyite organizations, to ask multiple and competing political candidates in-depth, hard-hitting questions before an election, as in a town hall meeting (Personal communication, November 9, 2004). Such an event differs from the typical accountability session, but it nevertheless works to build on Freirian category strengths in a way that might lead to electoral strategies usually associated with Alinskyite category organizations. Notably, Mothers on the Move has also succeeded in helping to open a small, themed school with remarkable ease and speed; the entire process took a few months. In comparison, several other organizations took several years to propose, win approval, secure funding, negotiate logistics, and help to open a small school.

As with UPOH’s multi-million dollar deal for its Lead Teacher campaign, some may interpret MOM’s windfall as luck, or as something akin to Kingdon’s “window of opportunity” (1984). A question that remains, then, is whether cultural norms allow some SMOs to be better “policy entrepreneurs,” or better prepared to take advantage of such windows of opportunity, than others. To a certain extent, it appears that UPOH forwarded the same policy solution, the Lead Teacher campaign, they would have given other political opportunities, even in a

disheartening political context of budget cuts and great flux, in the form of new governance structures under Mayor Bloomberg. Still, there is substantive to the group's ability to offer a collaborative strategy in the guise of political tactics that resembled, and therefore threatened, confrontation.

Ultimately, the demonstration of the threat or potential of confrontation is essential to all of the SMOs. Collaboration appears to be a bit more difficult to execute, since the mere pretense is not enough. Probably, division of labor is needed in addition to alternating between collaboration and confrontation. Such division of labor could run along the lines of staff versus leader, as it is done in UPOH and ACORN, or key leader versus regular member, as it is done in the remaining three case studies. Indeed, Sistas and Brothas United, a Freirian category SMO, has been working towards such an internal system, and Mothers on the Move is also working towards a more uniform matrix of what it means to be a "key leader." At the same time, these Freirian category SMOs would like to maintain their overall cultural norms of deep participation by all, or almost all, of their members.

Substantively, the case studies here suggest that there are concrete means of honing cultural norms towards more flexible political strategies. First, the careful and appropriate use of social services such as GED classes and job training can be complementary rather than antithetical to political organizing. In addition to building capacity, these cultural tools can harness empowerment and a sense of obligation. The use of services, then, offers a model of fostering commitment that does not rely on high dues, as in the case of ACORN, or more traditional notions of self-interest, as in some Alinskyite category organizations. This might help SMOs to build unlikely constituencies and alliances in their political campaigns.

The strong upsurge in the number of social services agencies and settlement houses in the Bronx that have ventured into organizing is an important phenomenon, one which could influence both organizing movements and community-based organizations. Right now, half of

the organizations working on education organizing in the Bronx started as social services agencies (Mediratta and Fruchter, 2001). Most of the literature on social movement organizations focuses on how and why these organizations gain popularity and support. The inclusion of services in a growing organizing model is significant both empirically and theoretically, for little current research examines how the nature, effectiveness, and quantity of the services influence political mobilization, and how different sectors of the organization, like that of pure social services versus that of organizing, or that of management versus that of the street-level workers, shape the organizational culture. These issues are traditionally addressed by organizational studies, which in turn tend to focus on firms (McAdam and Scott, 2002). Yet, a combination of these literatures in future research may shed insight on SMOs like United Parents of Highbridge.

Second, the flipside of the first lesson also applies. Specifically, Freirian category SMOs must address the issue of recruitment in their cultural norms. While SBU and MOM have begun to make recruitment one of the centers of their attention, it has not yet been incorporated as an organic component of the category. They might do this by emphasizing recruitment and networking in their workshops as more Alinskyite category SMOs do, or more likely, they might more greatly emphasize the importance of recruitment in existing activities and rituals, as part of the process of becoming a peer leader. Certainly, Mothers on the Move's ability to implement a greater emphasis on accountability and transparency was partly achieved through the introduction of new cultural norms, such as new binders with attendance sheets and memos at all meetings, but it was also partly achieved through a newfound emphasis on exchange and openness in all of its dialogues and discussions. Thus, it may be possible for leaders and organizers to jointly underscore the need to bring friends and recruits to meetings by acting as exemplars rather than giving instructions. As with the Candidates' Forum, Freirian category leaders will also be more satisfied with large-scale or confrontational strategies if they have the opportunity to demonstrate their in-depth knowledge of policy proposals and do more than ask

bluntly worded questions. Together, all of the SMOs need to strike a balance between wide, conspicuous publics and narrower, well-informed ones.

Third, the experience of Sistas and Brothas United suggests that making room for youth-based organizations will do more bring new constituents into the organization and present a more unified front to public officials. Certainly, having students as well as parents present at SMO events helps the organization to gain credibility as ‘real’ stakeholder representatives. High school students have the potential of being active and representing grassroots interests at a level of schooling with traditionally low levels of parent involvement (Bryk, 1998). Furthermore, to the extent that students have even more of an ‘insider’ perspective in schools than parents do, they are more likely to bring with them the traditional benefits of participatory democracy: a keen sense of real-life, street-level problems and school strengths, the ability to help with the execution and the monitoring of implementation, and a stamp of stakeholder approval and legitimacy. In addition, and more relevant to the core of this dissertation, is the fact that youth might bring new cultural tools, new cultural norms, to the organization. This is what SBU has been doing in NWBCCC, and as Youth on the Move appears to be doing in Mothers on the Move.

More difficult are the remaining suggestions for potential practice, such as a greater focus on individuals in Alinskyite category SMOs, especially so that racial divides can be explicitly addressed and bridged. An activity more likely to fit in with other Alinskyite cultural norms might involve the introduction of workshops on the issue of race; such workshops, however, might have facilitators or include lectures from “experts” on race, and would continue leadership development norms with organizers as teachers rather than partners. In the end, there may be irreconcilable differences in opinion, for there are some community organizers who believe that

as long as organizers are teachers rather than partners, members will not critically analyze issues of race (Facundo, 1985).

#### Pragmatic applications

Based on case study data, this dissertation can include strong assertions for theory and hypothesis generation, and it seeks to show some ways in which culture matters in social movement organizations, but it cannot make strong assertions about the effectiveness of the different categories. Nevertheless, some lessons about the strengths and weaknesses of the Freirian and Alinskyite categories, as well as points for further research, can be drawn here.

Capacities and tastes discussed in previous chapters included an Alinskyite category SMO's strength in clinching the local adoption of a federal program, versus a Freirian category SMO's capacity to fully develop and advocate for a wholly new policy proposal, as well as accompanying overall tastes in confrontation or collaboration. In addition to these lessons, there are also more holistic themes emerging from the two categories. Specifically, the Alinskyite category excels in politics as is, and in personal empowerment and civic capacity. Even the language is reminiscent of Alinskyite-related maxims to deal with the world as it is, rather than as it should be. This works well with bread and butter issues, such as overcrowding in the schools and facilities repairs. It helps the otherwise disenfranchised to gain policy wins and funding for programs that are known to work. In sum, it gets them a bigger slice of the pie.

In contrast, the Freirian category is about personal and social transformation, rather than civic capacity per se. Such SMOs strive for education reform, but they also attempt to restructure the policymaking structures that determine which policies "are known to work." By allowing leaders to become steeped and conversant in policy, they alter policy-making relations by challenging technocratic domination of policy proposals, especially in education, especially in the recentralized New York City school system. Too often, social transformation and legitimacy

are rendered as dichotomous. While it is true that the line between legitimacy and co-optation is indeed as fine as leaders agonize it to be, it should be possible for an SMO to advocate for social change and act as legitimate policymakers, for challenging SMOs to take on active, mainstream roles. Such social change SMOs do not have to be relegated to ‘alternative institution-making,’ running their own small programs and hoping these programs will become models, even when they operate without allies in the political system. Here, then, Freirian category SMOs would endeavor to create a whole new kind and shape of pie, rather than capturing a greater slice. However, the shape of this new pie is not pre-determined; it is not worker-controlled or necessarily anti-capitalist or ideologically driven. In keeping with Freirian category cultural norms, it would instead grow out of collaborative research and policymaking. New parent involvement protocols and new school safety and counseling standards, as developed by MOM and SBU, help to address socially embedded, behavior-dependent issues like high drop-out rates and patterns of violence in the schools. In the meantime, while Freirian category SMOs appear to have greater potential for innovative repertoires and strategies, Alinskyite category SMOs currently have a narrower but more reliable repertoire of strategies for certain types of policy adoption campaign wins.

Another related, important question is that of scale. The Freirian category organizations in this dissertation are anything but ‘structureless’, if such a thing as ‘structurelessness’ can exist in real life. The Freirian category SMOs in this dissertation did not rely upon passive consensus or wait for leaders to volunteer for specific tasks, for example. They very consciously assigned tasks to leaders on a rotating basis, systematically recorded everyone’s opinion, and built kinship networks based on interest and capacity, rather than the other way around. Nevertheless, some of the same questions rightfully lobbed at ‘structureless’ women’s liberation groups from the 1970s have been raised regarding Freirian category SMOs (Freeman, 1973): Can

these organizations mount national campaigns? Put bluntly, can they achieve campaign successes on a greater scale?

First, theoretical extrapolation indicates that Freirian category SMOs on a large scale are possible. Freirian category organizations leaders suffer from much lower rates of burnout. Further, both SBU and MOM have mounted large efforts to train leaders themselves to recruit and organize; since these two organizations are also more likely to send delegations without staff present, be already reliant on and prefer peer networks, and already run orientations without staff present, there is reason to believe that expansion will not be accompanied by a loss of focus on individual members. It does appear that Freirian category SMOs can succeed on a large scale.

Second, drawing upon empirical evidence, both SBU and MOM are growing quickly; they were the two case study SMOs with rising membership rolls. MOM's annual budget has also almost doubled in the past 18 months, from approximately \$250,000 to over \$450,000. Since the increase in funds has gone towards capacity-building, in the form of a full-time fundraiser, as well as expanded campaigns, this growth can be seen as part of a pattern rather than a fluke or outlier. Further, it is also worth repeating that both ACORN and NWBCCC, to a smaller extent, are federation-style SMOs. The last 'C' in NWBCCC does stand, after all, for 'Coalition.' Another possible step for Freirian category SMOs, then, is to join forces with like-minded organizations. This is indeed what UPOH has done, and what SBU sometimes does with NWBCCC. A relatively new citywide alliance has been formed by SBU, the still inchoate youth component of Mothers on the Move, and Brooklyn-based Make the Road by Walking, itself an SMO that draws its name from Freire's writings and appears to follow Freirian cultural norms (at least according to the small amount of direct observation and literature available). Together, these groups could easily achieve the scale necessary to be a citywide presence. While coalitions are sometimes mere information exchange networks rather than alliances in political strategies,

the citywide youth alliance has already launched campaigns and engaged in issue selection, press conferences, and deliveries of grievance letters together.

Tying together overall themes like social transformation and practical considerations such as scale, one of the strengths of the Freirian category is its capacity to build broad-based interests among members, when and where none were apparent before. Through its cultural norms, it helps to create tight-knit social networks, instead of tapping into existing ones. The construction of political power among existing, marginalized social groups is necessary and important. Still, a remaining niche for Freirian category SMOs is to organize those who are left behind, who do not already belong to any conspicuous community, and to bridge and reveal new, cross-cutting denominators interest between social groups. By building these ties that bind, Freirian category SMOs can rely on committed members even when obstacles seem daunting, and wins seem anything but imminent. Through such a process, Freirian category SMOs can build constituencies, tackle controversial issues not pursued by others, and strengthen collaborative relationships and social bonds.

While the Alinskyite category helps to mobilize citizens to win the policy debate, then, the Freirian category aims to help citizens reframe the debate as a whole. When we reconsider the context of local school reform, we see that Progressive Era reforms, such as those mentioned in Chapter 3, did not come in obvious, watershed moments. When reforms did take place, they no longer seemed radical. If one takes the Freirian category seriously, one predicts a time when deep-seated policies advocated by groups like MOM and SBU—even ones that may seem a bit offbeat, like school safety protocols primarily based on student-generated maps of school violence—will appear as logical and ‘rational’ as adequate school construction and overall notions of teacher quality, issues marking the other case study SMOs’ signature campaigns. Still, while the Progressive movement unfurled in some ways as a technocratic one, the social transformation proposed by Freirian SMOs is inherently grassroots. This key caveat in this far



from perfect historical analogy, then, is also one that could enhance the public reception and longevity of proposed reforms.

### Regime change begins at home

When desired, how can change take place? Or do organizations just die, as ones with different cultures develop? To the extent that a good cultural tool kit can lead to more balanced and flexible sets of political strategies, how does an SMO adopt a different set of cultural norms? Can an SMO simply adopt an activity in an official capacity, or must it be implemented in specific ways? As seen in the data for this study, a one-on-one at an Alinskyite organization does not necessarily look anything like a one-on-one meeting at a Freirian one. The default script differs, both in terms of the content of the likely lines and in terms of the stage directions for organizer and for leader.

According to the currently dominant theories of culture in social movement organizations, the most obvious way to initiate change is to change the collective action frames, or messages used in recruitment, espoused by organizers and key leaders. Just as this is a limited means of measuring culture as described in Chapter 2, however, it is also inadequate in instilling a sense of agency in the SMO. Even if the organizers and key leaders espoused a new recruitment message in a coordinated way, this new collective action frame would do little to counter or reinforce the subtler messages, inter-member trust, default tastes, and strengths and weaknesses formed by activities, rituals, and other existing norms. The case studies, especially those of the Freirian category, demonstrate that often, social services, ‘hanging out,’ and other activities can foster emotional bonds that broaden notions of self-interest beyond the instrumental, yet build a kind of strong commitment to the SMO that encompasses political organizing. In addition, the Freirian category norms are notable because they appear to help build social capital and trust, as well as tap into existing social networks. The latter type of

mobilization, which can also be described as cultivating existing social capital, is more often found in Alinskyite terrain, and it works well with the federalist structure found in many Alinskyite category SMOs.

The explanatory power of cultural norms partly stems from the fact that they do not appear at random; rather, they are fairly stable, and they can be analyzed according to categories and themes. As a result, the political strategies of SMOs can be partly predicted by their fairly path-dependent cultural norms. According to the case studies in this dissertation, then, change is difficult. If it is possible, it can primarily be initiated in two ways: through top-down introduction of new cultural norms, as was the case in Mothers on the Move, and through the adoption of cultural norms already existent in a subgroup, as was the case in Sistat and Brothas United and Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition.

Top-down introduction of new cultural norms is probably more difficult in Freirian category organizations; at MOM, it was incredibly painful for the organization and accompanied new directorship as well as high turnover of overall staff, leaders, and members. To a certain extent, this falls in line with Swidler's (1986) argument that there are actually two models of cultural action and cultural tool kits, one for settled cultural periods, and one for unsettled cultural periods. In unsettled periods, change is more likely to occur, as new, coherent ideologies that are presented give individuals and SMOs a full set of instructions, thereby guiding direct lines of action, instead of just producing potential cultural tool kits. Still, it remains unclear whether this "unsettling" of the culture necessarily occurs in the overall society, within a social movement organization, or both.

Furthermore, there is less existing theory on how change might take place in situations where there is *not* a crisis (Lichterman, 1996; Hall et al, 1996; Steinberg, 2002). Indeed, a less painful means of introducing change appears to be the SBU/ NWBCCC model, where transition is slower, but leaders often initiate new cultural norms themselves. In all of these organizations,

cultural norms of self-evaluation, accountability, and introspection also create opportunities for smoother, more organic initiations of new cultural norms or suggestions for new rituals, activities, and messages.

Existing academic literature also suggests that cultures can change via the addition of a new group that becomes more dominant within the SMO. For example, Whittier describes how each new generation of the feminist movement has reinterpreted goals and implemented rituals that become dominant as the newer members move up the ranks and form the majority of their respective groups (2002). Others highlight internal division, where severe rifts within an SMO can lead to compromise, or to a new set of goals being adopted (Polletta, 1998). Incremental bottom-up changes within the organization can occur when members suggest not new values per se, but when new rituals become popular or valued through repetition.

In addition, this dissertation's data concretely suggest that to facilitate organizational learning, SMOs must also make greater efforts to both prevent and prepare for organizer "churning" and high turnover. Trusting relationships between organizers and leaders are sometimes simply dependent on the amount of time spent or passed; when an organizer does leave, lessons and skills learned are frequently lost. This is not just wasteful; this pattern also angers many key leaders, who do not want to see organically developed vision statements lost or old victories forgotten (Personal communication, March 29, 2004). Well-documented archives of case histories, lessons, and leadership development models can help both leaders and new staff to draw upon organizational traditions and cultural norms. What differentiates MOM's new documentation system, then, is that it has been designed not for occasional audits, but for everyday, recurrent use. Pragmatically, this cuts down on the amount of time organizers have to spend explaining the history of the SMO to new members. Culturally, it helps new leaders to more quickly draw upon a tradition and legacy of cultural norms, and it helps older leaders to

explain themselves and to express pride in the knowledge they have acquired over the years (Personal communication, May 5, 2004).

### Start spreading the news

One of the obvious limitations of this dissertation is inherent in its study design. Examining five case studies helps us to flesh out whether and how culture matters, but not to what extent, and how often. Although the case study SMOs were carefully selected as to hold several factors constant, including mission, staffing levels, political context, and overall ideology, there is no guarantee that these SMOs are representative of the entire field of education organizing. Whether representative SMOs exist in the first place is open to debate; in any case, once a workable definition is found, the need for field-level studies remains. While the Alinskyite and Freirian categories developed in this dissertation should continue to be helpful, institutional field-level studies can more readily gauge the prevalence of each type of SMO cultural tool kit. With this, it can also measure the level, shape, and extent of isomorphism that takes place among social movement organizations.

Do SMOs adopt cultural norms that appear to be effective in peer SMOs? Are these adoptions substantive, or do they, as predicted by researchers of new institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), lead to loose coupling, superficial conformity for the sake of legitimacy (Weick, 1976)? Future lines of research might include field-level analyses to both investigate isomorphism among social movement organizations and the dialectic processes via which SMOs' cultural norms and messages interact with those of counter-organizations. For example, a researcher examining school reform in New York might look not only at education organizing groups, but conservative and liberal think tanks, charter school corporations such as Edison, and pro-voucher political action committees. Finally, future research might also include analyses of multiple political contexts. Under what contextual circumstances do an SMO's cultural norms

lead to collaborative, institutional strategies instead of confrontational, social attempts at policy reform? Is there something about New York that makes SMOs, no matter what their cultural tool kits, different in Chicago? What cultural norms are more adaptable across space as well as time? By bringing the world back in, so to speak, such research can highlight the ways in which an SMO's cultural norms are constructed and interpreted by outsiders as well as insiders, synthesizing the dynamics of both structural and cultural factors without conflating them.

### An elliptical ending

As Hart (2001), Wood (2002), and others have described, moral values, such as those found in faith-based organizing, make a difference in binding people together and giving them the cultural tools necessary to build power and engage in education organizing. This dissertation adds that these cultural tools are molded in different ways by different faith-based groups, that they might be molded by groups that are not faith-based, and that many of these tools are more about walking the walk than talking the talk. In the long struggles toward sustainable school reform, this dissertation tells not only that culture matters, but that there is no monolithic model. Each category comes with its own strengths and weaknesses, and social movement organizations must make difficult choices in developing the cultural tool kits that lend them greatest dexterity and flexibility. While the state of our schools, funding levels, the political context, and the stances of external actors are all palpable factors in mobilizing and shaping an SMO's political strategies, it is up to leaders, organizers, and the public at large to connect the lines between the dots.

A final lesson lies in the fact that leaders and organizers at all of the case study SMOs emphasized the importance of being "real," and this authenticity lends not only legitimacy but substance and emotional commitment to their cultural norms and, in turn, their political strategies. The parents and high schools students are not only fighting politically on behalf of

younger students, they are also teaching future leaders how empowerment takes place.

Sometimes, this appears to occur with little effort. For example, earlier this year, a young boy named Eddie went on a class trip to Albany. He wandered off and got lost, and, according to this mother,

They thought they would have to leave without him. But he went into the Legislature building, and he passed [the Legislator's] office. He had come just for one action with me, against her in [the city], and I didn't know that he even remembered the name, but he passed by her office, and he asked to speak to her. And she wasn't there, but he spoke to her secretary. And he asked to leave a message, that she needs to give more funding to the schools in the city. And he was speaking about it, and the class teachers, they said that they didn't even know he was into this, and they didn't even know he knew what he was talking about! And he told them that he worked with Katerina—he didn't say "Mothers on the Move" or "MOM"; he said "Katerina"—and he got to make a speech about it, on the steps of the Legislature. Everybody was impressed! (Personal communication, July 20, 2004)

If this anecdote is any indication, political engagement can be as infectious and gratifying as, well, the opportunity to attend well-funded, caring, challenging, and intellectually invigorating schools. Ultimately, the source of frustration in education organizing is also the root of its hope. School reform seems at once insurmountable and infinite, and so the horizon lies taunting, in wait.

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## Appendix A. Interview Protocol

The following 10 questions were used as starting points for discussion in semistructured interviews.

1. How did you get started with [name of organization]?
2. How long have you been involved?
3. How do you feel about the school system? (Teachers, Board of Ed, Chancellor, Mayor)
4. Do you think of yourself as an activist?
5. Has your experience with [name of organization] changed you?
6. What strategies or tactics were used?
7. How did your organization decide upon those strategies?
8. Has your personal experience influenced your thinking about education reform?
9. What keeps you going here, at [name of organization]?
10. Are there other unexplored topics or questions?

## Appendix B. Timeline of Public School Governance in New York City

The following timeline, an excerpt from *The Encyclopedia of New York City*, shows that the structure governing New York City has vacillated between centralized and decentralized forms since its inception. Bracketed updates for 1996-2004 are my own. The details of the Brooklyn-specific Board of Education, from 1835 to 1898, have been omitted from this timeline.

- 1842 First Board of Education for New York City: 34 commissioners popularly elected, 2 from each of 17 wards (later increased to 2 from each of 22 wards). Board of 5 trustees popularly elected in each ward to appoint teachers and manage most affairs of the schools; 2 inspectors elected in each ward to inspect schools and certify teachers' qualifications.
- 1853 Board of Education acquires schools of the Public School Society. Board has 59 members: 44 commissioners popularly elected (2 from each of 22 wards) and 15 members transferred from the former board of the Public School Society for a transition period until 1855.
- 1855 Board has 44 members: 2 commissioners from each ward. Ward trustees and inspectors as in 1842.
- 1864 Board has 21 members: 3 commissioners elected from each of 7 school districts. Districts contain from 2 to 7 wards to produce roughly equal number of pupils in each district. Board of 5 trustees elected in each ward. Trustees retain major role in appointing teachers and managing schools. Each school district has 3 inspectors appointed by the mayor with responsibilities for inspecting schools and certifying teachers' qualifications.
- 1869 Board has 12 members, appointed by the mayor to serve to the end of 1871. Ward trustees and inspectors continue, locally elected.
- 1871 Board of Education replaced by a municipal Department of Public Instruction under direct authority of the mayor, who appoints its 12 members. Ward trustees and inspectors also appointed by the mayor.
- 1873 Board of Education reestablished with 21 members appointed by the mayor, from each of 7 school districts; 5 ward trustees in each ward, appointed by the Board of Education; 3 inspectors in each school district, appointed by the mayor.
- 1896 Ward trustees abolished. Most direct powers of appointment and management of schools transferred to a board of superintendents composed of professional educational managers. Board of Education has 21 members appointed by the mayor; 5 inspectors in each of 15 inspection districts also appointed by the mayor.
- 1898 Consolidation of greater New York and confederation of school boards. Borough school boards retain powers of appointment and school management. New York City Board of Education (21 members) is retained and becomes School Board for the Boroughs of

Manhattan and the Bronx, future appointments to be made by the mayor. Brooklyn Board of Education (45 members) is retained and becomes School Board for the Borough of Brooklyn, future appointments be made by the mayor. School Board of the Borough of Queens (9 members) and the School Board of the Borough of Richmond (9 members) also appointed by the mayor. Board of Education of the City of New York ("Central Board") comprises 19 representatives chosen by the borough boards (11 from Manhattan and the Bronx, 6 from Brooklyn, 1 each from Queens and Richmond).

- 1901 Full powers transferred to citywide Board of Education and superintendent of schools. Borough boards abolished. Board has members appointed by the mayor (22 from Manhattan, 14 from Brooklyn, 4 from the Bronx, 4 from Queens, 2 from Richmond); executive committee has 15 members; 46 local school boards that are largely advisory each have 7 members (5 appointed by the borough president, 1 each by the Board of Education on and the district superintendent).
- 1917 Smaller Board of Education reflects trend toward streamlining urban school systems. Board has 7 members appointed by the mayor (2 from Manhattan and Brooklyn, 1 from each of the other boroughs).
- 1948 Board enlarged to reflect shift in the population: 9 members appointed by the mayor (2 each from Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, 1 from Richmond).
- 1961 Former board removed during scandal; 9 members now appointed by the mayor from names submitted by a screening panel.
- 1968 Decentralization: board acquires authority to delegate powers to local boards and expands to 13 members appointed by the mayor; 25 local school boards appointed by the Board of Education have 9 members each.
- 1969 Further decentralization: community school boards acquire powers of appointment and management in elementary and junior high schools. Interim Board of Education has 5 members, 1 appointed by each borough president; 32 school districts each have 1 community school board with 9 members, to be popularly elected in special school elections from 1970.
- 1973 Expansion of central board to 7 members (2 appointed by the mayor, 1 by each of the borough presidents).
- 1996 [The New York State Legislature gives the NYC Board of Education Chancellor power over the employment of community school district superintendents, and strips budgetary powers from school boards.]
- 2002 [The New York State Legislature gives the Mayor recentralized control of the schools. The central board is expanded to 13 members (8 appointed members, including the Chancellor as Chair, and one appointment chosen by each of the five borough presidents). The 32 community districts are abolished and replaced with 10 regions. A

Panel for Education Policy has 8 appointments by the Mayor, and local, advisory Education Councils are in construction.]

- 2003 [The Board of Education shuts down in Brooklyn, and a new Department of Education sets up shop in the Tweed Courthouse next to City Hall, in downtown Manhattan.

Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein's Children First Initiative makes elementary school curricula uniform, unless the school is exempted. Furthermore, Parent Coordinator positions are announced at each school, to act as liaisons between schools and parents.]

- 2004 [Mayor Bloomberg and Chancellor Klein announce a policy ending third-grade "social promotion" and fail to garner a projected majority vote by the Panel for Education Policy. The Mayor dismisses and replaces 3 of the appointments on the night of the vote, bringing controversy to the governance structure.]

(Ment, 1995a, pp. 121-122)



## Appendix C. List of Interviewees

*United Parents of Highbridge*

- |             |                   |
|-------------|-------------------|
| 1. Anthony  | Head of Staff     |
| 2. Gabriela | Leader, Organizer |
| 3. Hector   | Organizer         |
| 4. Daniela  | Leader            |
| 5. Victoria | Leader            |
| 6. Leander  | Leader            |

*Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition*

- |             |                   |
|-------------|-------------------|
| 1. Sam      | Head Organizer    |
| 2. Monica   | Leader, Organizer |
| 3. Yonathan | Organizer         |
| 4. Rachel   | Organizer         |
| 5. Mark     | Leader            |

*Sistas and Brothas United*

- |              |                   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| 1. Ernest    | Organizer         |
| 2. Elena     | Organizer         |
| 3. Michael   | Leader, Organizer |
| 4. Nicole    | Coordinator       |
| 5. Daniel    | Leader, Organizer |
| 6. Rosalinda | Leader            |
| 7. Jeremy    | Leader            |
| 8. Lisa      | Leader            |
| 9. Nathaniel | Leader            |

*Mothers on the Move*

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Stephen  | Head of Staff |
| 2. Katerina | Organizer     |
| 3. Michele  | Leader        |
| 4. George   | Leader        |
| 5. Isabela  | Leader        |
| 6. Diana    | Leader        |

*ACORN Bronx*

- |            |               |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. Tara    | Head of Staff |
| 2. Carol   | Organizer     |
| 3. Melissa | Organizer     |

- |           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| 4. Edgar  | Organizer |
| 5. Paula  | Organizer |
| 6. Angela | Leader    |
| 7. Sylvia | Leader    |
| 8. Helen  | Leader    |

*From other institutions (in alphabetical order)*

- |                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. Adolfo Carrion  | Bronx Borough President                          |
| 2. Fernando Ferrer | Researcher, Former Bronx Borough President       |
| 3. Elaine Frazier  | Chief of Staff, Bronx Borough President's Office |
| 4. April Humphrey  | Coordinator, Alliance for Quality Education      |