Reframing the Role of Size in Transformation: A Participatory Theory Development Study with Community Organizers and Activists

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

REFRAMING THE ROLE OF SIZE IN TRANSFORMATION: A PARTICIPATORY
THEORY DEVELOPMENT STUDY WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS AND
ACTIVISTS

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This Critical Participatory Action Research (C-PAR) study built a contextually-based, grassroots-developed, and academically informed theory of transformative change in partnership with five community co-researchers. To do this, I constructed a custom methodology which I have called Participatory Theory Development (PTD). This methodology builds on tenets of C-PAR, the centering of marginal knowledge(s) proposed by Dutta (2016), and literature on the decolonization of research and hierarchies of knowledge (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). The aim was to test an epistemically rich theory development process by centering community knowledge(s) in the construction of transferrable theory. This study empirically examined and built on a previously developed framework for transformative change (Kivell, 2016) constructed from academic literature in Community Psychology.

This study was conducted in six phases and included 10 participatory sessions with co-researchers and 15 individual interviews with grassroots community organizers. The first four phases built an aspirational model of transformation with two parts: a collective vision and practice towards justice and durable and profound changes to context. The final two phases used a critical theorizing process proposed by Weis and
Fine (2004), to disrupt our aspirations and rebuild a model grounded in a critical understanding of practice by identifying a core fracture, composing counter-stories and constructing sites of possibility to address the core fracture. The core fracture identified was the Sisyphean task: organizers and activists are creating a radical vision that they have no intention of achieving. Using a counter-analysis, we constructed three counter-stories from the data to provide alternate explanations for the core fracture including: organizers and activists are too busy due to moral obligation and the urgency of structural injustice, they are giving up because the transformed vision is too far, and, their practices inside of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex are too futile so that no matter how many hands are doing the work, transformation will never be achieved. The study ended with the construction of two sites of possibility to address our core fracture, each of which built on a dialectic relationship between the big and small of transformation; rethinking the role of size in transformation. Findings for this study have implications for community organizers and community-engaged scholars in their efforts to design, support, and document transformative processes and outcomes in order to create more just communities and context.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my co-researchers - my friends, my role models, my teachers, and my partners in this dissertation journey - the hearts and minds behind this research. Thank you, Jeanette, Camilo, Caitlin, Serena, and Jonathan. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you for the work that you do every day to challenge power, question structural injustices, and plow forward in creating and imagining a better, more just world for all of its inhabitants. Thank you for the dedication that you brought to this work. We did it. I hope we can look back on this year together as the beginning of something truly beautiful; and truly transformative. I have to say that there is no one that I would rather sit around a fresh batch of homemade gluten free brownies with and change the world.

- Lifetime member of the ‘Cookie Research Crew’
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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To my dissertation committee members, thank you. To Dr. Dina Birman, thank you for consistently pushing me to be better, to write better, and to think better. I will take your voice with me wherever I go, and I will continue to challenge myself to be the researcher you have helped me to believe that I can be. To Dr. Isaac Prilleltensky, thank you for both providing the theoretical fodder for me to play with in my research, and for being one of the intellectual giants who help me see just beyond the horizon of the possible. And to Dr. Christopher Sonn, thank you for supporting and pushing my thinking from the other side of the planet, for the stimulating conversations that always leave me with new questions to pursue in my intellectual journey. Thank you for continuing to
push the boundaries of Community Psychology with your work providing a path for the rest of us to locate and critique our own politics in our research.

To my husband Kurt, you deserve a thank you as long as this dissertation. Thank you hardly seems enough, but here it is. Thank you. For your love, your support, and your unwavering belief that I can do it all. You are my rock. To my family, Monique, Lee, Jacquie and the rest of you beautiful characters, thank you for helping me to be the me that chose this path, and thank you for all that you have done to make it a beautiful journey.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose Statement</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of Research</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation: The Bounded Definition Informing This Study</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework: What is Transformation?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical Literature Review: Transformative Framing and Action</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 METHODOLOGY AND METHODS</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Participatory Theory Development</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Transformative Paradigm and Critical Community Psychology</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical (Decolonizing) Participatory Action Research</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods: Setting and Participants</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design: Data collection and analysis procedures</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The story: The phases of this PTD process</td>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1: Participatory research design sessions</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 Data Collection/Interviews</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3 Data Analysis – holistic and thematic coding</td>
<td>66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4 Development of dialogical model of transformation – community and academic</td>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 5: Fracture analysis and counter-stories</td>
<td>76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 6: Rebuilding with sites of possibility</td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 FINDINGS: THE ASPIRATIONAL MODEL OF TRANSFORMATION</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Aspirational Model of Transformation: How the puzzle fits together</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational Model part 1 - Moving towards justice</td>
<td>84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational Model Part 2 - Durable and profound changes to Context</td>
<td>95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the puzzle comes up short: The limitations of our Aspirational Model</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Theoretical framework for transformation Kivell (2016)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research Phases for Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thematic coding: pictures of colour coded notes</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Community Theory of Transformation</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dialogically created Aspirational Model of Transformation</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>X marks the spot: Transformation happens in the crosshairs</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Aspirational Model of Transformation</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aspirational Model Part 1: Towards Justice</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Aspirational Model Part 2: Swimming in Context</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The intersecting contexts of transformation: power, ideology and historical and current context</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The fracture between vision and practice towards justice</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The dialectic of big and small practices</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The personal is necessary but insufficient for transformation</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Rebuilding our model grounded in the big and small of context and practice</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Themes from theoretical Framework for transformation Kivell (2016)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Phase chart mapping data sources, waves of analysis and analytic tools</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Organization of Findings Chapters</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overview of findings from chapter five</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study was to build a contextually-based, grassroots-developed, transferable, and adaptable local theory of transformative change, with, by, and for grassroots community organizers in Miami-Dade County. I constructed a custom methodology for this study, which I have called, *Participatory Theory Development* (PTD). I constructed PTD for the purposes of testing an epistemically rich theory development process, which centers community knowledge(s) in the construction of generalizable and transferrable theories.

The current study builds on an academic framework for transformative change that I developed for a previous theoretical study (Kivell, 2016). This academic framework was constructed from literature on theory and practice from the field of community psychology (CP). The current study empirically examined and built on this previously developed framework and explored the PTD process through a critical participatory action research approach (C-PAR). In partnership with grassroots community organizers, this study contributes practice-based knowledge and local context to the academic framing of transformation. This study also contributes to the iterative process of theory development through the establishment of the PTD methodology, to better understand what transformation is and how to do it. By engaging in grassroots theory development, the goals of this study were twofold: first, to contribute to the ability of community-engaged researchers to design, support, and document transformative processes and outcomes that create stronger, safer, and healthier communities and societies; and second, to develop actionable and community-created theory to inform collective action.
Consequently, this study had two important aims. The first was concerned with theory-building: developing a grassroots and community-created theoretical framing of the concept of transformation. The second concerned the development of a theory-building methodology: Participatory Theory Development - a community-engaged methodology that centers the voices, knowledge, and theories of community organizers, activists, leaders, members of social change organizations, and labour organizers - hereafter referred to as grassroots organizers and activists. The center, as discussed below on de-colonizing methodologies and by Dutta (2016) is where we locate power, generalizable knowledge and legitimacy. By centering, I mean actively prioritizing, valuing, and elevating community knowledge(s) in our theory construction processes in order to disrupt this system of power in knowledge construction.

What is Transformation?

Transformation is a particular type of change that focuses on addressing root causes of social problems and challenging or dismantling power structures that reify and maintain oppressive conditions. Transformation can be understood in contrast to ameliorative change (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010); a type of change that stems the metaphorical bleeding but does little to address the causes or structures that maintain such suffering. This binary theory of change, pitting ameliorative against transformative, both negates and simplifies the complexities of undertaking change efforts. First-order change, or amelioration, creates change within a system. This type of change does not alter underlying values, assumptions, structures, or power relationships. Second-order change, or transformation, on the other hand, alters the system itself by altering its underlying structures (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). Holding this simple
understanding of transformation - shifting power and addressing root causes - is helpful in some ways but does little to inform researchers or practitioners on how to go about doing or achieving transformation, not to mention understanding, assessing, or evaluating whether transformation has indeed happened.

Prilleltensky (2014) put out a call for more conceptual work to be done on transformation in CP structured around the who, what, why, when, where, and how of transformation. In Kivell (2016) I answered this call. In my theoretical framework (shared in its entirety in Chapter 2) (Kivell, 2016), transformation includes: (a) critical problem framing of structural injustices (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Sandler, 2007); (b) a shared vision of what could or ought to be (Christens, 2012; Nelson, Kloos & Ornelas 2014); (c) a value driven framework (Prilleltensky, 2011); (d) change at multiple levels of analysis, with the individual level alone being insufficient (Brodsky, et al., 2011; Christens, Hanlin & Speer, 2007), (e) a working with relationship between individuals and groups who are oppressed and researchers (Himmelman, 2001; Montero, 2002) while considering the role and influence of the power elite on change efforts (Riger, 1993); and (f) an awareness of the temporality of change in terms of historical context (Montero, 2002), the necessity of long-term change efforts (Foster-Fishman, Nowell & Yang, 2007), reactive versus proactive change (Prilleltensky, 2005) and an understanding of the current context (Montero, 2002). Finally, the framework includes how to do transformation, which can be conceptualized as a diversity of actions and strategies within each unique transformative process, including: critical participatory action research, community organizing, social movement building, policy change, shifting social regularities, shifting power relations, and shifting relationships to knowledge.
The particular frame of transformation that drove the current study and the development of the PTD methodology is a critical one - a political, anti-neoliberal, anti-racist, decolonial, feminist resistance in our transformative work as community-engaged researchers (Reyes-Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Nafstad, Blakar, Carlquist, Phelps, Rand-Hendriksen, 2009). Further, due to the plurality of the word transformation, this study was framed within the transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2007), called for transformation as a concept to be a phenomenon of interest of the field of Community Psychology (Maton, 2000), and, using the PTD methodology, built an actionable theoretical framework of transformation that can be used in community-engaged research and action.

**Transformation is a paradigm.** Some scholars refer to the transformative paradigm interchangeably with the critical paradigm, and define it as value-laden, power-oriented, with a critical ontology and epistemology, a social justice axiology and a participatory and intersectional methodology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Mertens, 2007). This paradigmatic designation of transformation informs problem framing from a perspective of power, oppression, and liberation with a methodological emphasis on participation, critical dialogue, and centering of marginalized knowledge(s) (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2010). Transformation as a paradigm imbues questions, problem framing, and action in a critical orientation and as a form of resistance against injustice. This study was situated within the transformative paradigm.

**Transformation is a phenomenon of interest.** Maton (2000) put forward a plea to Community Psychology to move the concept of transformation to the “center of our consciousness as a field”, and that, “the goal of influencing, and ultimately transforming,
setting, community, and societal environments should inform all that we do” (p. 48). To address the dearth of empirical research on transformation as a phenomenon or a process, this study centered transformation as its phenomenon of interest.

**Transformation is a theoretical framework.** Some theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain the concept of transformation. The most well-known framework is that of first and second-order change (or ameliorative and transformative change) discussed above. This framework, a binary understanding of a complex set of principles, values, and assumptions, provides little prescription for developing or evaluating the transformative potential or outcome of any change effort. Watzlawick, et al. (1974), argued that “it is relatively easy to establish a clear distinction between first-order change and second-order change in strictly theoretical terms, the same distinction can be extremely difficult to make in real-life situations” (p. 15). This study developed such an actionable framework.

**Why is Transformation Important?**

As they currently stand, our communities and societies do not function for the well-being and justice of the majority of their inhabitants. Current economic and political systems around the world exploit and marginalize the majority for the benefit of the privileged few (Nelson, 2013), and good intentions are not enough to address the complexity of these deep seeded and intersectional issues. An effort to develop a broad and actionable theoretical framework of transformation is one antidote for this problem. If we continue to treat messy social problems in need of transformation as requiring technical, or ameliorative solutions (Nelson, 2013), we will continue to fall short in creating the necessary change. Although, transformation cannot, and should not, be
imposed as a necessary goal for all community-engaged researchers, there is a richness of opportunities for research and action in conducting empirical research on transformative change.

The continued exploitation of communities, rooted in deep structural injustices (Sandler, 2007), provides an incentive for community-engaged researchers to question our role in informing, creating, and working alongside others to provide the space and resources needed to improve collective well-being (Prilleltensky, 2011). Community Psychology is predicated on the fact that our forefathers (and less recognized foremothers) were convinced that addressing change at the individual level was insufficient (Albee 1998; Bennett, et al., 1966). Although much progress had been made on the development of Community Psychology and our foundational theories (Albee, 1986; Kelly, 1979; Rappaport 1977), Trickett argued in 1984, that as a field, we had only achieved a partial paradigm acquisition. We preached one thing, and yet continued to do another. We discussed and theorized about utilizing the ecological model, and yet we overwhelmingly intervened with individuals. A shift towards transformation is a step towards what could be thought of as a full paradigm acquisition - towards a transformative paradigm - pushing for a concerted and strategic effort to undo structural injustice and pre-figure a better world. Therefore, in utilizing a Critical Participatory Action Research approach, this study created a theoretical framework grounded in both academic and community knowledge to inform such transformative praxis.

**Miami and the Social Justice Table: The Context**

The context of this study was The Social Justice Table (SJT), located in Miami-Dade County. I bounded and defined the *community* as a network of social justice
organizations who make up the SJT, which is a network of about 40 social justice-oriented nonprofit organizations, working to build collective power in Miami-Dade County with an emphasis on low income and minority communities. I had been an active partner of the SJT for the three years prior to the beginning of this study and continued to be an active member throughout the study. During my time with the SJT, I worked with partners on their collective processes to work towards equality in the Miami-Dade community through critically-engaged praxis. The SJT holds as its mandate, to build collective power towards transformative social change, thus making it a ripe context to theorize and engage in critical reflection on what transformation is, what it could be, and how we might know it when we see it.

Through my role as a researcher with the SJT, I supported the development of our network mission and vision that drive the work that we do collectively. As the lead researcher for the SJT, in partnership with the Engagement, Power and Social Action Research (EPSA) team from the University of Miami, I have facilitated collective processes to surface organizational and collective theories of change that are informing members practice. SJT partners have developed a rich and interconnected set of relationships based on trust and a collective understanding of what it is we are working towards. As a member of the SJT, I am not an outsider to this project. When I say we, I am referring to the collectivity of the social justice table membership and our work thus far and moving forward (we will represent a more specific group of co-researchers during chapter three, four and five of this document and will be defined at that time). This study was supported and informed by the lead staff member of the SJT, as well as the SJT steering committee members.
SJT members, have working theories for how change happens – some of these
theories are more explicit than others. These theories drive the engaged praxis of the SJT
as we learn from iterative and reflective cycles of action research. The purpose of this
research was to surface and critically reflect on the implicit, and explicit, theories that
SJT partners, who make up the defined community or this study and the boundaries of
my sample, hold about what transformation is, and how to do it in order to capture the
richness of knowledge held in the collectivity of the SJT.

Background

What I mean by ‘theory’: Participatory and Critical social theory.

theory-building discussions seem to proceed as if the principles of theory
building are somehow universal and transcendent across disparate
paradigms of thought and research. They are not. Because different
paradigms are grounded in fundamentally different assumptions, they
produce markedly different ways of approaching the building of theory”

To orient the reader to this study it is important to outline how I understand and
conceptualize the term, theory. For the purpose of this study, I developed a theory
construction methodology entitled Participatory Theory Development (PTD). PTD, is
grounded in the values and methods of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Dworski-
Riggs and Langhout, 2010; Hall, 1992); specifically, Critical-PAR - an approach that
centers dialogue around power and structural oppression, and which takes an
epistemological stance that values the lived experience as equally legitimate and valued
as academic knowledge production (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Fine, 2008; Torre, 2009;
Torre, Stoudt, Fine & Fox, 2012).

Further, I grounded PTD philosophically in Critical Social Theory (CST) defining
it as - a value-infused (Ife, 2002), emancipatory theory that aims to uncover, explain, and
change oppressive power structures (Fox, Prilleltensky, & Austin, 2009). CST is informed by critical praxis (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Fisher, Sonn, & Evans, 2007) in order to understand, assess, or alter a complex social phenomenon, based on both epistemic (conceptual) and transformative (practical) components (Davidson, et al., 2006; Prilleltensky, 2003). CST is grounded in practical knowledge for action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), driven by the goals of emancipation and liberation (Freire, 2007; Martin-Baro, 1994), and informed by a collective social critique of power and domination (Kelner, 1989; Scott, 1990). Furthermore, CST development is participative - engaging community members in critical and reflective processes that are action oriented (Freeman & Vasconcelos, 2010; Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom, & Siddiquee, 2011). Creating theory through dialogue between academic and community knowledge promotes iterative, reflective, and generative critical praxis.

Therefore, the language used in this study from here-on will be Participatory Theory Development (PTD). This theoretical development process is a participative and emancipatory praxis, grounded in the values and processes of critical social theory. It is a living process - iterative, generative, and flexible. This theory development methodology was informed by those engaged in critical action: community organizers and activists. These individuals acted as co-researchers and co-constructors of this methodology and the ensuing theory, as we co-created an emancipatory and value-infused critical theory of transformation in order to inform our continued collective critical practice. Theory is bi-directional, “flowing from theory to practice, and also from practice to the refinement and creation of new theories” (Phillips Smith, Witherspoon, Hart, & Davidson, 2016, p. 15). Therefore, by conducting a process that grounds theory development through grassroots
and practice-oriented experience, this study created an actionable theory of transformation.

**Participatory theory development: Decolonizing methodologies and the decentering of knowledge.** I built and named Participatory Theory Development (PTD) during the process of this study to encapsulate the active process of decolonizing and centering knowledge positioned in academia. The principles and processes of PTD will be further defined in chapter three. Here I outline its foundation in decolonizing methodologies. One way for community-engaged researchers to build on our theories, based in academic knowledge, and to actively decolonize our research, is to move towards centering community knowledge in the theory development process in community-engaged research (Kinzeloe & Steinberg, 2011). Decolonizing methodologies, simply put, means that as researchers, we re-think the role of knowledge, and knowledge hierarchies. For example, whose knowledge is considered *valid* and *legitimate*, and how knowledge(s) can contribute to broader processes of social transformation and emancipatory action (Kinzeloe & Steinberg, 2008; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). Although developed to address the inequities and exploitative history of research on indigenous communities, decolonizing methodologies as a practice in research has also been applied outside the indigenous/non-indigenous divide; this process has the ability to address power inequities and knowledge hierarchies across different ways of knowing between *insiders* and *outsiders* (Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai-Smith, 2008; Dutta, 2016; Fine, Tuck & Zeller-Berkman, 2008).

The intentional process of centering community knowledge in the PTD methodology constructed for this study is about disrupting processes of othering (Fine,
Groups whose identities and knowledge(s) have been othere hold more *truth* than that of academic theory, however, by engaging and prioritizing their voices in knowledge and theory construction we bring a different truth, and different perspective to the foundations of our theory building. Fine (2016) cautions that this inclusion, or this centering and prioritizing of community knowledge does not overcome all of the epistemological issues intrinsic in qualitative and perspectival research - “the very people who have been the “objects” [will] still run into enormous heterogeneity, intersectionality, dissent, conflicts, bruises, paper cuts, and erasures within. To be clear, *the experience of exclusion does not create consensus*” (p. 361).

This study provides an empirical example of centering the knowledge of community voices in the theory development process. Discourses and narratives are “historically constructed regimes of knowledge” (Fisher, Sonn, & Evans, p. 261), and by treating academic knowledge as superior to community knowledge we commit epistemic injustice, where “power-distorted allocations of epistemic authority lead to biased and partial theories that tend to reinforce social inequality rather than minimize it” (p. 262). Epistemic injustice can be addressed with epistemic resistance, targeted at undermining hierarchies of knowledge and differential participation in knowledge acquisition, creation and dissemination processes (Code, 2007).

In Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), the spatial vocabulary of colonialism differentiates between the *center* (the place held by those in power), the *outside* (people and groups positioned as oppositional to the center) and the *line* (used to delimit boundaries between the center and those on the outside). These divisions continue in community-engaged research - between the center (researcher) and the outside (researched) - thus re-creating
hierarchies of power and knowledge. According to Dutta (2016), the process of
decentering knowledge “involves engendering more reciprocal, nonhierarchical relations
between the core and peripheries of knowledge production” (Dutta, 2016, p 329), while
Ife (2002) states that it is about acknowledging the power of knowledge from below,
rather than from above. Knowledge constructed at the center is often understood to be
generalizable, while knowledge procured in the margins, from the community, is
understood as useful only to local spaces (Dutta, 2016; Ife, 2002). Marginal and
traditional community ways of knowing can, and should, be centered in our journey

towards constructing truth and knowledge (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). Ife (2002) states that
“structures of domination of oppression have resulted in the legitimising of the wisdom
of the dominant groups, while the alternative wisdoms of oppressed groups go
unrecognised” (p. 88). Methods that engage more voices are epistemically richer and
produce less biased theories (Fisher, Sonn & Evans, 2007).

Therefore, in conclusion, this study situated itself within a particular perspective,
with a particular goal, by using intentionally decolonizing research practices, through the
centering of community knowledge and theories, and through the engagement with a
PTD process targeted at emancipatory action. This background has oriented the reader to
the paradigm and framing of the study. Now I will share the problem statement, purpose
statement, research questions, and significance of the research to focus this study.

**Problem Statement**

We have a theory problem. Transformation, in community-engaged research,
remains under-theorized (Prilleltensky, 2014). The need for strategic and theoretically-
informed transformative research and action is crucial in the current state of our
communities – both to provide a map to get there and as a process of accountability for when something is labeled as transformative. As community-engaged researchers, we need to better understand how to think about, support, reflect on, and do transformative research and action, to more systematically and strategically build power for transformative movements and change. Without a clear and explicit theory of how change works, we are missing a key component of critical and transformative praxis.

**Purpose Statement**

This study centered the voices of grassroots organizers and activists, to co-create a theory of transformation based on a dialogical process between academic and the community knowledge(s) of SJT organizers and activists. This theory has a practice orientation for building and driving local collective action (transformational concern), and it has an academic orientation for contributing to the discourse on the theoretical foundation of transformative change (epistemic concern).

**Research Questions**

Building on Kivell (2016), where I directed questions to the community psychology literature, I turned similar questions to organizers and activists in the Miami-Dade community, to engage in co-created theory development, grounded in community and activist knowledge.

1. How do grassroots organizers and activists understand and frame transformation?
2. How does the practice of grassroots organizers and activists deepen, inform, limit and re-frame their understanding about how to do transformation?
Significance of Research

This study constructed an actionable theoretical framework of transformative change for community-engaged researchers, community organizers, and activists to critique, interpret, understand, and assess transformative research and action. This theoretical framework was constructed to be flexible in order to be continuously, iteratively, and generatively adapted in other contexts - keeping the same transformative function, while adapting its form to different contexts (Hawe, Shiell & Riley, 2009).

Significance to SJT community. First and foremost, it was important that this research process provided a significant contribution to the praxis development of the SJT and my participant co-researchers. Engaging in a critically reflective dialogical process to co-create theory grounded in community experience and practice aims to have 1) more theoretically grounded practice, and 2) more action-oriented theory. This study has informed the collective action of the SJT in our work to build collective power and shift power structures in Miami-Dade County, as the SJT moves into the next phase of its organizational structure and we come to the end of core funding for the SJT. With the moving pieces of the SJT’s complex multi-year, porous coalition - engaging in critical reflection on how and why we understand change in the ways that we do, has helped to clarify and inform our own work and collective purpose. Additionally, the process of theory development and the centering of SJT members’ knowledge, aimed to rectify epistemic injustices (Code, 2007) by including all of our knowledge(s) and theories into our work together.

Significance to academic theory. Much of the theorizing on transformative change until this point has been created by, and for, academic researchers (Nelson and
Prilleltensky, 2010; Nelson, 2013; Maton, 2000). In this study, the development of a critical social theory of transformation using PTD is positioned to speak back to and challenge assumptions and principles of transformation developed within academic research. As scholars engage in, write up, and review transformative research and action, the outcome of this study provides a theory of transformation that can be used to judge past, and inform future research. Due to a dearth of empirical studies on transformation as an actionable concept, or a process in the community psychology literature, this study contributes to this much needed knowledge base. With few examples of empirical research that builds, validates, or tests a framework of transformation (Evans, Hanlin & Prilleltensky; Perkins, Bess, Cooper, Jones, Armstead & Speer, 2007), the literature is limited in its ability to translate theory into practice.

**Significance to methodology.** Finally, this study created a particular kind of methodology: Participatory Theory Development (PTD). A methodology grounded in the critical paradigm that is intentionally crafted in a way to resist epistemic injustices (Code, 2007). This methodological process (outlined in chapter three) provided an opportunity to learn about the challenges and opportunities that come with grassroots theory development processes.

**Conclusion**

This study was couched in certain assumptions about how power works in the world; about how structures of power maintain and perpetuate structural violence and inequality; about how the lessening of some knowledge(s) over others is an issue of epistemic injustice; and about how this injustice weakens knowledge creation processes and an ability to inform strategic and collective action for transformative change. It is
based on philosophical assumptions grounded in the critical paradigm. That said, this study used a historically constructed ontology, a critical and subjectivist epistemology, and a participatory and dialogical methodology (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011).

In this chapter, the reader was oriented to the concept of transformation with an overview of the current study, and the story and context of the Social Justice Table. In addition, I provided a definition of critical social theory, presented an overview of the philosophical underpinnings of PTD as it relates to this study, and a definition of decoloniality and the decentering of knowledge. This was followed by a problem statement, purpose statement, research question, and significance of this research, where I have outlined the importance of this study, as well as the relevance to the development of theory and empirical examples of PTD and C-PAR. I now turn to the literature before outlining my methodology, study findings and discussion.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In the introductory chapter I oriented the reader to this study. Now, I move the reader's attention to a more in-depth and bounded understanding of transformation. I will also outline the theoretical framework that drove this study before moving to an empirical literature review of transformation. As with any literature review I set boundaries around what was included. According to critical systems thinking theorists the boundaries drawn around an issue or a concept delimit what is inside it and what is outside it - that no one framing can capture all that something is, or can be (Ulrich, 2003). Therefore, the kind of transformation used to inform this study and methodology is a critical one. It is a political, anti-neoliberal, anti-racist, and decolonial kind of transformation. Based on my politics, positionality, paradigm, and previous reviews of literature on the topic, I present the bounded definition of transformation that informed this study.

Transformation: The Bounded Definition Informing This Study

First, the kind of transformation discussed in this study is an intentional one. This was about building an actionable theory; one that can be used by academics, practitioners, community organizers, and activists. This is about building a theory that can be used to develop research, action, community processes, strategic plans, and help make decisions about how change is to be tackled in a particular time and place.

Second, this is an openly political kind of transformation (Bess, Prilleltensky, Perkins & Collins, 2009; Montero, 2009) working towards a collective good. This collective good may differ across groups, but its commonality is about moving towards a more just world.
Third, this kind of transformation is grounded in both *academic and community knowledge*. It is a transformation informed, led, and conceptualized by the people who are most impacted by, and/or engaged in, creating change processes. It acknowledges the validity and legitimacy of diverse knowledges and breaks down hierarchies between academia and the community in resistance against epistemic injustice.

Fourth, it is a transformation that, although grounded at different levels of change, is aware of, and working to *disrupt macro level structures of oppression*, including “attitudes, belief systems and ideologies of culture, as well as social norms and societal values” (Nafstad, et al., 2009, p. 162), power structures (Rodriguez-Ferreryra, 2009; Montero, 2009), and policies (Nelson, 2013).

**Theoretical Framework: What is Transformation?**

In the following section I outline the details of the theoretical framework, which is based on a comprehensive analysis of the theoretical and empirical literature in CP. This framework was constructed not to *limit*, but to *broaden* the collective imagination for designing intentional, political, community grounded, transformational research and action interventions targeting multiple levels of analysis (Kivell, 2016). Using the framework proposed by Prilleltensky (2012; 2014): why, from what, to what, where, who, when, and how of transformation, (Figure 1), I broke it down into two complexly interconnected components which I named ‘levels’: the framing of transformation and transformative action. Details of the framework can be found organized into Table 1. This model is not a reflection of consensus, nor are the many components of transformation discussed at the theoretical level reflected in the empirical literature that was reviewed.
Framework level 1: ‘Why’, ‘from what’ and ‘to what’ of transformation. The first three components of the framework - ‘why,’ ‘from what,’ and ‘to what’ are the foundation of this framework of transformation and include: 1) values of social justice, empowerment, and citizen participation, 2) a problem frame - a deep and complex understanding of the local and broader political and cultural contexts, and 3) a shared vision of what kind of just world we are working towards. Together these create a foundation for transformational potential in divergent action.

Enacting community psychology values in transformation. “Values are central to transformative change” (Nelson, et al., 2014, p.10). Community Psychology is a value-laden

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for transformation Kivell (2016)
field; theories and empirical research are infused with values of diversity (Nelson, et al., 2014), social justice (Christens, Inzeo and Faust, 2014; Nelson, et al., 2014; Freedman & Bess, 2011), empowerment and power (Christens, 2012; Serrano-Garcia, 1994), wellness (Prilleltensky, 2014) participation (Nelson, et al., 2014; Nelson, 2013; Serrano-Garcia, 1994), and liberation (Christens, 2012). These values drive a specific type of transformation. It is a transformation that calls for more justice (Christens et al., 2014), more wellness (Prilleltensky, 2012), more participation (Torre, Fine, Stoudt & Fox, 2012), and more equitable power relationships (Serrano-Garcia, 1994).

**Building a critical problem frame.** Social problems are “time, place, and context bound” (Seidman & Rappaport, 1986, p. 1), and they are “not solvable in the once-and-for-all-you-don’t-have-to-solve-it-again fashion” (Sarason, 1986, p.23). To transform social problems, we must first identify what they are, and then articulate how they are collectively framed. Transformative problem framing is a process that (a) engages in a critical analysis of structural injustice (Fay, 1987; Sandler, 2007), (b) focuses on building a shared understanding of unacceptable social conditions (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007), (c) surfaces root causes (Christens et al., 2014), (d) requires critique and collective reflection on problem frames that co-opt or inadvertently reify the status quo (Christens, 2012; Fisher, Sonn, Evans, 2007; Himmelman, 2001; Ife, 2002 Nelson, 2013; Riger, 1993), (e) acknowledges the influence of culture and worldview on problem framing (Montero, 2009; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Tseng & Seidman, 2007), and finally, (f) articulates a link between problem framing and critical action.
## Theoretical Framework Level 1: Why, From What and To What of Transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHY: Transformative Value Orientation</th>
<th>FROM WHAT: Critical Problem Framing</th>
<th>TO WHAT: Pre-figuring a more Just Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- diversity</td>
<td>- Consider context in its critical analysis of structural injustice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- social justice</td>
<td>- Build a shared understanding of unacceptable social conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- empowerment/power</td>
<td>- Focus on root causes of issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- wellness</td>
<td>- Critique and reflect on problem framing that reifies the status quo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- participation</td>
<td>- Acknowledge the influence of culture and worldview on problem framing, Articulate a link between problem framing and critical action.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- liberation</td>
<td>- shared language and vision that considers altered oppressive structures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit discussion of values that inform transformative work shared values as a way to build shared vision (To What)</td>
<td>- Increased social power for historically oppressed groups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Engage in an iterative process of imagining and re-imagining</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use frameworks that critically expose injustice from a stance of decolonization and liberation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentionally engage with political efforts and neo-liberal ideology</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Theoretical Framework Level 2: The when, where, and who of transformation.

#### WHERE
**Ecological Levels of Analysis**
- The cultural and symbolic level
- Structural and political levels
- Community and systems levels
- Organizational level
- Relational level; and
- Individual level

The ‘where’ with the most emancipatory impact

#### WHO
**The Actors at Play**
- By Whom’ and ‘For Whom’

Three key stakeholder groups:
- Those most impacted by the current structural injustice
- Agents of social change such as Community Psychologists and grassroots organizers and activists,
- Power holders and elites

#### WHEN
**The Transformation Timeline**
- Transformation takes time. There are three temporal consideration.
- Historical context
- Current timing of transformation
- Transformation as long-term process and understand that issues may not be solved during our tenure as researchers (Cornish & Campbell, 2009).

#### HOW
**Transformation in action**
The how is in relationship with each previously discussed component of transformation.
Transformation towards a re-imagined future. Fisher and Shragge (2000) argue that we need a coherent analysis of what is wrong with the world, so that we can build a collective vision of a better one. Imagining this transformed future begins by asking: What would it look like if we were to transform society? What kind of world could we collectively imagine and strategically work towards? How might we blow out the boundaries of our socialization and dominant ideologies to re-imagine, experiment, and dream of a more socially just world (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014)? Neoliberal ideology is normalized as the only way for modern society to be, and “such a massive denial of social alternatives creates a void of imagination” (Ampuja, 2011, p. 296).

This transformed vision of the future is not an end point. Visioning is an iterative process of imagining and re-imagining, individually, and collectively (Sarason, 1986) and assumes that people have the capacity to envision and imagine a transformed future - that we are not limited to what is (Fay, 1987). Re-imagining this future includes, (a) developing a collective co-creation process (Maton, 2000) (b) focusing on the importance of aspirational visioning (Brodsky, Welsh, Carrillo, Talwar, Scheibler, & Butler, 2011), (c) acknowledging the power of shared language (Christens, et al., 2014), (d) developing a shared vision of a just world that considers altered oppressive structures (Christens, 2012; Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007; Nelson et al., 2014), (e) increasing social power in the hands of historically oppressed groups (Chavis, 2001; Maton, Hrabowski, Ozdemir & Wimms, 2008), and (f) an iterative process of imagining and re-imagining, with a need to continually problematize reality by “modifying it, subverting, revolutionizing and correcting it” (Montero, 2002, p. 572). The vision of a just world includes the continuation of the critical framing process (Watts & Flanagan, 2007), taking
intentionally political efforts (Montero, 2009) which challenge neo-liberal ideology and politics (Morimoto and Zajicek, 2012; Nelson, 2013).

**Framework level 2: The when, where, who and how of transformation.** The second level of this framework encompasses the ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘who’ and ‘how’ of transformation. These components, though equally as important, are informed by the foundation provided in the first level. The unique ways in which values and framing play out in each context, will inform the strategic and locally grounded decisions made regarding the ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘who’ and ‘how’ of transformative change.

**Where does transformation happen? Change targets and ecological levels.** The ‘where’ of transformation is not in one place, space and time, or at one level of analysis or change target; it is at many, it is divergent (Rappaport, 1987), and it is focused on all the above. Transformative research and action is needed at multiple ecological levels, including: the cultural and symbolic level (Ampuja, 2011; Bess et al., 2011; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011), structural and political levels (Maton, Hrabowski, Ozdemir, & Wimms, 2008), community and systems levels (Christens, 2010) and organizational, relational, and individual levels (Prilleltensky, 2012).

The individual level of analysis remains insufficient (Albee, 1998; Brodsky, et al., 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007), and a simultaneous focus on the individual and the systemic context is needed (Christens et al., 2007) to address structural injustice. Therefore, the decision on where to intervene, should be based on where there would be the most emancipatory (or transformative) impact (Prilleltensky, 2014).

**Transformation by whom and for whom: The actors at play in transformation.** There are three relevant stakeholder groups to consider in transformation: 1) those most
impacted by the current structural injustice and violence in our communities (Martin-Baro, 1994), 2) agents of social change whose work targets transformation including community psychologists and grassroots organizers, and activists, and 3) power holders and elites who have an interest in upholding the current state of affairs and/or further increasing oppression and inequality.

_Transformation timeline: When does transformation happen?_ “The first bricks needed to be laid in a way that when others built over, it would work” (Brodsky et al., 2011, p. 232). Transformation denotes a temporal process. Three factors require consideration. First, is the historical context of structural injustice and neoliberalism (Montero, 2002; Nelson, 2013), highlighting historical memory to reconstruct narratives of oppression, revolution, power, and identity (Montero, 2007; Reich, Pinkard and Davidson, 2008). Second, the current temporal context requires exploration. Third, and finally, transformation of social issues is a long-term process that may not be solved during our tenure as researchers (Cornish & Campbell, 2009; Speer & Christens, 2012).

_How do we do it? Transformation in action._ How transformative framing and action occurs, according to this academic framework, will differ in every context (Prilleltensky, 2014). With that said, each previous aspect of the framework is a component of how transformation is done. I have outlined _how_ shared values and shared problem frames are built; _how_ participants, and allies are identified; and _how_ decisions are made about the when and where of transformative action. These are all a part of how interventions, actions, processes, or strategies of transformation come to be. Additionally, researcher role impacts how transformation is done or studied. In some cases, community-engaged researchers design and implement transformative efforts (Evans,
Hanlin and Prilleltensky, 2007), and in other cases researchers document change processes through qualitative inquiry, and case studies to document components of change processes emerging from elsewhere.

**Process versus outcome: Transforming and transformed.** The final component of the theoretical framework is the differentiation of the process of ‘transforming’, and the outcome of being ‘transformed’, like Zimmerman’s (2000) differentiation between ‘empowering’ and ‘empowered’ organizations. As Prilleltensky (2012b) has been known to say, “a good process is a good outcome” (p. 7). I expand this to say - ‘a transformational process is a transformed outcome’.

I have outlined my theoretical framework, developed through a comprehensive analysis of the literature on transformation within community psychology. Transformation, however, is not only something to theorize about, it is something that has an empirical base. The following sections provide empirical reviews of the transformation literature across the two levels of my previous framework: 1) transformative framing; and 2) transformative action.

**Empirical Literature Review: Transformative Framing and Action**

Transformative framing and action have been widely researched and documented in a variety of literatures, with deep intellectual histories in community intervention studies (see Trickett, 2009; Trickett, Beehler, Deutsch, Green, Hawe, McLeroy, et al., 2011), social movement theory (see Davis, McAdam, Scott & Zald, 2005), organizational change literature (see Butcher, Banks, Henderson, Robertson, 2007; Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2006; Gill, 2010; Hasenfeld, 2010), and popular education literature (see Freire, 2007; 2013; Martin-Baro, 1994). Each of these areas of literature hold additional
richness for a collective understanding of transformation, but, fall outside of the scope of this review.

This literature review is based in empirical examples of transformation, found in the field of community psychology. A major challenge in conducting this review is that a significant amount of transformative literature is not framed as such. Most of the empirical literature is studying empowerment, prevention, community organizing and organizational change, or some other substantive area of research. With few exceptions (Evans, Hanlin, Prilleltensky, 2007; Perkins et al., 2007), this literature is not testing, building, or validating transformation as a process or substantive area of study. Because of this challenge, many of the articles included were identified through a key knowledge-holder process; a process where I utilized a citation analysis to identify the top scholars being cited on the phenomena of transformation in Community Psychology journals. The assumption of this process being that those who are most cited are informing the intellectual development of community psychologists studying transformation (Kivell, 2016). The remaining articles were found by searching community psychology journals for transformation, structural change and second-order change.

The main learning in constructing this literature review is that there remains a gap between how transformation is theorized and how it is studied. As can be seen in the above theoretical framework, transformation is a hot topic in the literature and is discussed by many. Yet, little is known through empirical studies about how to create change at higher levels of analysis or across different contexts; little is known about how to create change that challenges and dismantles the structures of oppression in a neoliberal world; and little is known about how to capture the complexity of
transformative change processes and outcomes in empirical research. These gaps remain, as it is challenging to study reflective and iterative transformative processes, or to measure and capture whether transformation is happening, or has happened. This makes research on transformation challenging, especially transformation beyond the individual or organizational levels (Perkins, et al., 2007), leaving much to be desired in a framework to inform transformative research and action projects. In the following two sections, I provide an overview of the empirical literature according to the framing of transformation and transformative action. In 1988, Seidman stated that “we talk...about second-order change without a precise description of what is to be changed or how to do it” (p. 185). The review looks at the precise ways that we are talking about and doing it as the foundation for the current study.

**Foundations and framing of transformation.** Nelson (2013), defines transformation as something that, “seeks to fundamentally transform the underlying values, assumptions and power dynamics of a system” (p. 215). Not easily found in the empirical literature, however, is how these values, framing and visioning that drive research and change processes, are identified, nurtured, challenged, or co-created as a process and outcome. One such example can be found in Evans, Hanlin and Prilleltensky (2007), who facilitated a participatory process with organizational participants to clarify and develop shared values as a component of their transformative process. Through this process, the authors learned that although there was a shared understanding of values, such as social justice and egalitarianism, it was the values of caring and compassion that had been the focus of the organization’s work, due to the crisis nature of human service organization settings. The process of working towards the commonly held value of
justice helped to drive their collective process towards the transformative paradigm as an organization. Similarly, the authors facilitated a process identifying root causes of local issues, based on an activity called ‘exploding the issue’. This process documented how organizational members were able to shift their problem frame from one of individual blame, to a more complex and shared understanding of the structural, economic, and political implications in the lives of those they serve, providing an empirical example of how the foundational components of transformative change can be developed.

Brodsky et al. (2011), in their study of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), an underground resistance organization for women in Afghanistan and Pakistan, wanted to better understand the resilience that underpinned their multi-decade long resistance movement. In this study, Brodsky et al. (2011), found that a shared ideology and value system was important to the continued work for justice and social change, even in the face of personal risk to life undertaken by RAWA members. Through critical education programs, initiated through humanitarian and community resources such as schools or hospitals, as well as political resources including underground political publications, RAWA members were able to build a shared understanding of the value of social justice, and what they identified as “counter dominant narratives and values” (p. 225) to keep their movement afloat. These values were found to contribute to the RAWA members’ meaningful and thoughtful action towards transformative change, and the vision that they had for themselves and the women in their communities. Additionally, in a case study by Freedman and Bess (2011), values of social justice and democracy were discussed as the foundation on which their emerging locally-based coalition was built. The Food Security Partners of Middle
Tennessee (FSP) used a shared understanding of democracy and social justice as core values to drive their intervention.

Much of the literature that touches on the framing and foundations of transformation starts after the fact, as if these foundational components exist without intentional development or processes. Values have already been decided, and a problem frame is already there. Much of the literature outlines what the problem frame or vision is, without detailing a process of how it was created, and how it was used to inform the rest of the study. For example, Grabe, Dutt and Dworkin (2014) discuss the sociopolitical context of their research as grounded in national policies of agrarian change and neoliberal agendas in both the Tanzanian and Nicaraguan case study for women’s resistance, but do not explain how they arrived at this framing, and to what extent it is a shared understanding of the root of the issues faced by women in the two countries.

An example of the importance of locally-grounded problem framing, comes from Speer, Ontkush, Schmitt, Raman, Jackson, Rengert, et al. (2003), a case study on the relationship between housing vacancy and drug crime in Camden, NJ. Researchers, in partnership with the Camden Churches Organized for People (CCOP), collected stories from 600 one-on-one organizing conversations to better understand the issues and root causes faced by the community. The coalition found that community members framed the local drug crime as inextricably linked to vacant housing. Facing organized resistance from the power elite, the coalition gathered sufficient evidence to hold local officials accountable for addressing this perceived cause of the problem, and to begin to systematically address the issue of vacant housing. In some case study research, literature
suggests that stakeholder participation in action-oriented processes can help develop this shared critical analysis (Brodsky, et al., 2011; Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011).

Christens, Inzeo and Faust (2014) discuss a case study with WISDOM, a statewide organizing federation that is an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation. This case study provides an example of joining in transformative work after a vision has been decided. The Gamaliel Foundation “is committed to equal opportunities for all people, shared abundance, and stronger communities” (p. 422), and as an affiliate, the WISDOM organizing group relates its programming back to this overarching vision. One process that identifies active collective framing process is presented in Evans and Kivell (2015), where we propose a model for transformation teams (t-teams) in organizations to promote dialogue and provide opportunities to develop shared values and shared framing in change processes. I present a case example of The Helping House, where I, as the facilitator of the organizational change process, created communicative space for vision development. In this example, I share a moment of dialogue between staff members regarding the difference that a vision towards ‘having needs met’ versus ‘thriving’ would have on the organizational culture and strategies.

This brief overview of the empirical literature addressed the first level of my theoretical framework: how transformation is framed in community psychology. This review demonstrates some of the richness of the literature on which the current study is based. Literature on transformative action, the second level of the theoretical framework, will be presented next.

**Transformative action: The when, where, who and how of transformation.**

How we frame transformation cannot be where it ends. Some of the literature provides
examples of transformative action in community-engaged research, with the goal of transformative impact on structural injustice. This next section of empirical literature encompasses transformative action taken within the reviewed studies.

Empirical literature in transformation occurs across different targets and levels of change, with the most common level of change being the individual and organizational level (Brodsky, et al., 2011; Evans, Hanlin and Prilleltensky, 2007; Evans & Kivell, 2015). In Perkins et al. (2007), they broach the community level in their case examples. In that study Perkins et al. (2007) found that organizations that engaged in individual transformation were more successful at organizational change, and that communities that engaged in organizational transformation were more successful at community change.

For example, authors present a case study of the Community Faith Network that had as its goal “developing a network of citizen power in the city” (p. 316) which linked individual, organizational, and community change through the network’s efforts at shifting how decisions are made at the community level through person-to-person training, consciousness raising, and engaging individuals in direct action. Although the community level of change is challenging, Perkins et al. (2007) articulated the importance of making it an explicit goal in transformative research and action. Speer and Christens (2012) argued that, methodologically, community change efforts will always be an N of 1, making causal arguments between change efforts and change outcomes almost impossible. They argue for the power of long-term case studies as a partial solution (see also Flyvberg, 1998), as many change efforts begin long before formal documentation, and change may happen long after a study is complete. In 2012, Speer and Christens documented a detailed case study on housing policy in Kansas City, MO. In this study, a
grassroots community organizing process was successful in getting a portion of the community demands of the local government built into new policy to repair dilapidated homes in their communities, challenge predatory mortgage lenders, and build stronger and safer communities grounded in access to safe and affordable housing.

Identifying the change targets that have transformative potential requires understanding a local context and the relationships between power, ideology and outcomes. Grabe (2012) conducted a study on the relationship between women’s empowerment, and individual and structural changes. Her study worked from the premise that when women’s empowerment came to be in the 1970s, it was a politicized process that was actively working towards transforming political structures for social and economic equality for women. Grabe documents the co-optation of this political process by international development rhetoric and situates her study as addressing the interconnections between social norms, rules, values, and gender ideology and its relationship to power, levels of decision making by women, and community participation. She identified, through community data, the concept of land ownership as a local change target. Ownership of land by women was directly related to their individual and collective empowerment. Targeting land ownership laws and norms to increase access to land titles by and for women was found to address structural issues, including a shift towards more progressive gender ideology.

Miller, Reed, Francisco, Ellen, and The ATN 079 Protocol Team for the Adolescent Medicine Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions (2012), conducted an empirical study looking at the relationship between high stigma issues and low stigma issues in coalitions targeting structural or transformative change in the Connect to Protect
(C2P) coalition. They began with the premise that high stigma groups would be more likely to abandon coalition objectives due to external factors: people with conflicting values and positions of power. The authors discussed the role of groups including parents, school boards, media, and faith groups in wielding their power to delegitimize controversial coalition work for lesbian and gay teenagers, and injection drug users engaged in HIV prevention work. The research found that those coalitions working to address macro level issues including social norms provoked resistance from those in positions of power to delegitimize the work of the coalitions and block them from creating the wanted change.

Using the C2P coalition data, Miller, Reed, Francisco, and The ATN 079 Protocol Team for the Adolescent Medicine Trials Network for HIV/AIDS Interventions (2013), conducted a study on the intermediate indicators of success in coalition work. Due to the long-term nature of structural change the authors outlined the importance of having high quality, clear and relevant intermediate indicators of success to address issues of coalition demoralization and to mitigate wasted effort if the coalition was not making any headway on its mission. Using an exploratory analysis, intermediate indicators of the C2P coalitions across the US were analyzed using SMART criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound), and coded as to whether they were in line with moving the mission of the coalition forward. This study highlighted the complexity of transformational timelines through its articulation of intermediate indicators of success. In addition, this study found that it takes a significant amount of time not only achieve intermediate objectives, but also to design them. This finding outlined the demand for time invested in the beginning of a project to ensure that participants have a shared
understanding of structural change, and that appropriate time is taken to develop SMART objectives with transformative potential.

Each of the studies in this review provide a look into how transformation is being conceptualized, acted upon and studied in community psychology. The empirical research positions community psychologists as creators, drivers, and partners in developing and implementing change processes (Evans, Hanlin, and Prilleltensky, 2007; Evans & Kivell, 2015), and as researchers documenting and learning from these change processes (Brodsky, et al., 2011; Grabe, Dutt & Dworkin, 2014). The literature provides insight into components of transformation as a process and an outcome, as the foundation and framing, and as an action. However, much remains to be learned about developing an actionable framework to inform, evaluate, and study transformative change processes.

**Conclusion**

Transformation is complex; it is an intentional, ongoing and iterative process (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007), grounded in a set of shared values, with a critical problem framing analysis of structural injustices, and a shared vision of a just world that is co-created by local stakeholders who have a “long-term, sustained focus and perseverance” (pg. 418) on working towards transformative ends. This value-based process informs the development of any contextually-based intervention, strategically targeted at removing, shifting, or altering the structures that are identified as maintaining and reifying oppressive and unjust conditions.

Teasing apart the construct of transformation - how it is being conceptualized and how it is being studied - continues to be a challenge for engaged researchers looking to better understand transformation. This study was designed in such a way that it addresses
some of these epistemic limitations of the literature on transformation in community psychology. Delineating an actionable theoretical framework of transformation will provide a foundation for developing and informing transformative efforts more broadly, not in a prescriptive way, but as a form of provocative generalizability (Fine, 2008), proposed as an intentional process of moving towards what has yet to be imagined, what has yet to come to fruition, but that which is grounded in deep analysis.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Methods

The methodology used in this study is Participatory Theory Development (PTD). I developed this approach for this study from a modified Critical Participatory Action Research (C-PAR) methodology as previous approaches were insufficient for the theory development goals of this research. C-PAR provides the epistemological and value-oriented foundation necessary to accomplish the goals of the research. Additionally, C-PAR, constructs research to challenge structures of power and hierarchies of knowledge in partnership with a particular community; in this case, a community of organizers and activists focused on addressing structural injustices in Miami-Dade County. The PTD design was emergent based on the participatory nature of the study, and included two participatory design sessions, 15 individual interviews, and eight analysis and theory development sessions. The analytic approach constructed for this PTD study brought together coding processes that first targeted the construction of a complete whole, a visual and Aspirational Model of Transformation. This was followed by a critical theorizing process (Weis & Fine, 2004) that disrupted the aspirational narrative to provide new understanding on what transformation is and how to do it.

In this chapter, I present my research questions, a description of PTD followed by a theoretical overview of the foundations of C-PAR. I then outline my researcher positionality, paradigm, and detail the research setting, participants, and recruitment plan. Next, I discuss the data sources, data collection procedures, and analysis tools for this study. This chapter ends with the story of this PTD process outlining the six phases of the study, weaving in the four waves of analysis that were completed to build the findings of this study.
Research Questions

As outlined in chapter one, I posed two research questions and answered them in partnership with co-researchers. My research questions aimed to provide insights and specificity to the concept of transformation by asking:

1. How do grassroots organizers and activists understand and frame transformation?
2. How does the practice of grassroots organizers and activists inform, limit, and reframe their understanding of transformation?

What is Participatory Theory Development

Participatory Theory Development Methodology (PTD), is a process that has as its goal the co-creation of transferable critical social theory. This methodology was created during the process of this study to meet the goals of our research; both in process and in outcome. PTD combines C-PAR literature with Dutta (2016) who calls for the de-centering of academic and centralized knowledge(s). Dutta (2016) puts forward a proposal to engage those on the margins in the knowledge construction process in order to generate knowledge and theories that are relevant in these contexts, but also relevant to other times and places. This is the goal of PTD methodology: to construct theory that addresses power inequities and social injustices that is relevant both to the local community and to the construction of academic theory that informs research and praxis.

There are three core principles of PTD.

The first principle articulates the particular uses and goals of the methodology. PTD must be constructed in a way that the knowledge created is useful for and has implications in the community creating the knowledge, hence its roots in C-PAR.
However, it must also be developed in a way that it can be used to inform, disrupt and build on academic and transferable social theory by privileging community knowledge in the process of theory construction. Like C-PAR, PTD is a methodology that centers epistemological issues of knowledge construction and holds a lens of power and the decolonization of knowledge construction.

The second principle of PTD is in the type of knowledge being constructed; PTD asks different types of research questions than C-PAR and PAR research more generally. PTD research questions mirror the types of questions we ask ourselves as academic theorists. In the case of this study, the questions revolve around “what is transformation”; big umbrella questions that require theoretical attention from different epistemological positions to craft rich, community grounded and academically informed theory.

The third and final principle of PTD is that it should pull from a diverse set of methodologies, analytic approaches and analytic tools to meet the needs of the previous two principles. According to Denzin, Lincoln and Tuhiwai-Smith (2008) critical research “must resist efforts to confine inquiry to a single paradigm or interpretive strategy. It must be unruly, disruptive, critical and dedicated to the goals of justice and equity” (p.2). As a critical methodology PTD should be all of these things and look to interpretive tools and approaches that can help to further the goals of the particular study and context.

PTD is not a prescriptive process but one that is grounded in the particular uses as described above, along with the values and epistemological positions articulated in C-PAR research. PTD, like C-PAR, is an epistemology as well as a methodology: it centers a way of knowing and engaging across knowledges to do what Code (2007) calls ‘epistemic resistance’. Each case of PTD, as with C-PAR, will look different in its
methods, analysis and knowledge translation components. However, the core principles of this proposed methodology which drove the construction of the particular methods, analysis and theory development processes of this study include the principles discussed above.

The difference between PTD and C-PAR appears small, but these principles alter the purpose, process and uses of the constructed knowledge. This difference shifts the methodological purpose towards the creation of transferable theory that has impacts both for community and to speak back to the theory being used in literature to inform action research.

**The Transformative Paradigm and Critical Community Psychology**

Now that I have discussed the principles of PTD I present a theoretical overview of C-PAR, the methodological and epistemological foundation of this methodology. As stated in chapter one, this study is based on my philosophical assumptions built from the constructivist and critical paradigms. Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) outline the philosophical assumptions of each paradigm and those in line with my position and assumptions are a historically constructed ontology, a critical and subjectivist epistemology, and a participatory and dialogical methodology. These philosophical assumptions translate into practice, when for example, holding a subjectivist epistemology informs my construction of epistemic injustice, and foregrounds the need for epistemic resistance in my research design to include multiple perspectives in the co-construction of transferable theory.

I see myself as what Kincheloe, McLaren and Steinberg (2011) call a *paradigmatic bricoleur*, bringing together commensurable components of the
constructivist and critical paradigms to craft a connected whole. Having said that, Critical Community Psychology (CCP) provides a useful umbrella and is similarly built from the critical and constructivist paradigms. CCP, as outlined by Evans, Duckett, Lawthom and Kivell (2016), “politicizes and radicalizes community psychology research and action as it now stands (p.107)”. The intersections between CCP, and transformation more generally, are many, and are well suited to bringing these two concepts together to create a contextually based grassroots critical theory of transformation. The goal of CCP is to “bring about a radically better society” (Fox, 2000, p.21), while the goal of transformation is to define what that radically better society could look like and systematically and strategically move us there.

**Critical (Decolonizing) Participatory Action Research**

With a critical paradigm comes a critical methodology. Participatory Action Research (PAR), more generally, has been popularized as a valid and rigorous method of investigation (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Dworski-Riggs and Langhout, 2010; Hall, 1992; Torre, et al., 2012), with a distinctive split between what is understood as the Northern tradition (Lewin, 1946), and the Southern tradition (Fals-Borda, 1987). My application of PAR emerges most directly from the politically engaged southern tradition, and the tradition of C-PAR that has been popularized in Fine (2008). PTD is grounded in the tenets of C-PAR described below.

PAR is commonly understood as a research method that meaningfully engages community in research that affects their lives. C-PAR has as its focus a dialogue about power and structural oppression (Torre, 2009). Torre (2014) asserts that research processes must be used to collect evidence to “speak back to dominant narratives,
challenge unfair policies, and organize for alternatives to injustice” (p. 1). She goes on to define C-PAR as taking an “epistemological stance that values knowledge produced from lived experience as equal to that produced in the academy” (pg. 1). I now define the features of C-PAR theory with mention of my modifications to the model to create PTD.

**Critical and decolonizing.** The “C” in C-PAR, stands for critical, which holds power, privilege, and oppression as the focus of research and action, making it a PAR that is justice oriented and politically engaged (Torre, 2009). Fals-Borda framed this type of work as having revolutionary potential (Torre, 2014). C-PAR is a value driven process and aims to unpack structural injustice and work towards social transformation. Although critical and decolonizing research share many facets, I am including the “D” as a lens in my methodology to support my resistance against epistemic injustice (Code, 2007). PTD, as it emerged from the de-centering of knowledge(s), challenges the idea that academic knowledge is inherently superior to alternative knowledge(s). For this purpose, the critical approach, on its own, is insufficient.

**Participatory.** This study is what Michelle Fine calls small p-PAR (personal communication, June 2014). This is small “p” because the nature of dissertation research is that I own it, I framed the scope and questions, and I wrote it up. In most C-PAR projects participants, or co-researchers, are engaged from the beginning to decide what needs to be researched and are engaged in co-creating the research questions and research design. In this study, my co-researchers were deeply engaged in the project, but the questions that drove the study came from me and the data was collected by me, thus limiting, in some important ways, the organic, emergent, and engaged nature of C-PAR. The “P” for this study was an active participation in the data analysis and theory
construction process. The “P” in PAR asks particular questions of a research design including: “Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p.10). That being said; we, myself in partnership with my co-researchers, carried it out, re-framed it as needed, and will disseminate it together.

**Action.** Action research (AR) historically emerged from the work of Lewin (Reason & Bradbury, 2006), a scientific pragmatist (Adelman, 1993). A critical turn for action research emerged when researchers began to apply AR for emancipatory purposes (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008). This occurs both in the emancipatory action that can come from AR, as well as the role of theorizing in AR as “critically oriented researchers want to emphasize the role of theory as a guidance for emancipation and focus on the importance of reflection in this process” (Johansson & Lindhult, 2008, p. 96). Using PTD as a process of theory co-construction, as the action component of this study, I highlight the importance of developing theory for emancipatory goals.

**My positionality: How Who I am Influences What I Do, and How What I Do Influences Who I am**

My position as a researcher is as an insider/outsider, or what Delgado-Gaitan (1993) calls a *boundary crosser*. I hold a subjectivist epistemology, meaning that I understand that my own perspectives, positions, and experiences have influenced this research at every stage, making the process of surfacing and sharing my positionality an important component of my research process. How I have come to understand transformation, social change, and social justice, informs what I see, how I understand what I see, and what I, in turn, do with what I see.
I position myself as a scholar-activist and understand the purpose of my research as taking an explicitly political stance. I understand and appreciate the benefit of contributing to the literature on transformation, but only in so far as it contributes to the collective effort towards resisting oppression and creating conditions for justice. I believe in the power of collective work and collective knowledge. I believe in the power of dialogue within and across groups to create a shared and critical understanding of complex social problems. My beliefs, my experiences, and my understanding of the world impact the research I choose to construct. The implications of my positionality and beliefs about collective work, knowledge and dialogue, led me to construct this study in a way that challenged traditional knowledge hierarchies in community engaged research.

I am an *insider* to the research. I am one of the original members of the SJT and I have been an active part of the network for four years. I am an *outsider* to this research; I am not American, I am not from Miami, I am not an organizer, and I am not doing work on the front lines of the community. I grew up in a very different context - in rural Canada, with a racially homogenous population, and a privileged family. My own political consciousness was sparked during my college years and has continued to develop as I have gained greater understanding of the intersectional nature of social issues and as I continue to learn from those with different life experiences and positionalities. My political consciousness was educative, learned in a classroom, and not from my own experiences of oppression, resistance or struggle. Therefore, if I had done all of the thinking and interpretation for this study alone, it would have limited the richness of viewpoints and analysis.
Methods: Setting and Participants

This study emerged from my long-term research partnership with the Social Justice Table (SJT), and from two projects in particular. The first was an SJT book club based on culture circles as proposed by Freire (2013), which were developed in opposition to traditional schools and structured as engaged, non-hierarchical learning spaces to develop a shared and political understanding of particular concepts, processes, or structures. In 2014, the SJT launched this book club to build shared knowledge on what change is, how it works; what power is, how it works; and how to build, support, and sustain social movements, and collective action. Unfortunately, the book club came to an abrupt halt when the leadership of the group had insufficient resources to support its growth.

In 2015, a similar group re-configured around the idea of developing a culture circle focused solely on power. We proposed reading and critically reflecting on academic literature including Gramsci’s Prison Notebooks, and James E. Scott’s The Arts of Domination and Resistance. In addition, we planned to build in grassroots theories of power. For several reasons this did not get off the ground; but, conversations have continued around the importance of this kind of learning and how it can inform SJT’s collective action.

From these experiences with SJT members, I drafted an outline connecting this identified need for co-created and critical learning based on academic and community knowledge, and my own interest in transformation as a concept and a theory. I shared this outline with key SJT members, followed by a presentation to the full SJT steering committee.
**Setting.** The setting for this study was the Social Justice Table, located in Miami-Dade County. The SJT made up the intellectual setting and Miami-Dade County made up the geographical, cultural and political setting of this study.

**Intellectual setting: The Social Justice Table.** The SJT is a coalition of community and labour organizations working on, and towards, issues of social justice. Members of the SJT are employees of partner organizations and are service providers, community organizers, labour organizers, activists, and researchers who work on issues including: organizing farm workers in Homestead, running electoral campaigns in Miami’s historically black neighbourhoods, organizing workers across retail, service, trades, hospitality, and non-unionized workplaces, building interfaith coalitions for social justice, building coalitions for climate justice, running educational and youth led research to address the school to prison pipeline, collectively resisting deportations of undocumented members of the community, and addressing systemic issues of violence, poverty, housing instability, and access to quality healthcare for low resourced communities across the county. The SJT coalition was brought together at the behest of a local funder in 2012 to address the complex issues of injustice in Miami in a more collective and connected way. Catalyst Miami, a community organization focused on community capacity building, serves as the backbone organization of the SJT, a concept proposed by Kania and Kramer (2011) for building collective impact projects. Catalyst provides an organizational home, dedicated staff, support, and guidance in coalition building and funding sustainability.

The knowledge, experience, and theories of the SJT members made up the intellectual setting of this study. During the now almost five years of my involvement
with the SJT, several processes for collective identity development, individual and collective theories of change, and vision and mission development have been attempted with facilitation and research support from myself and the Engagement Power and Social Action Research Team at the University of Miami (EPSA). Coalition development, iterations of action research from, and with, our research team, along with deep and trusting relationships built between myself and SJT partners, made for a ripe context for a C-PAR study to occur.

**Geographical, cultural and political setting: Miami-Dade County.** The broader setting for this study is Miami-Dade County - a large Southeastern American city with a population of almost 2.7 million residents. Over 60 percent of Miami-Dade residents speak Spanish as a first language with 25% of households being linguistically isolated, and over half of the total county residents are foreign born, with some sources saying that Miami-Dade is home to an additional 150,000 undocumented residents (Chardy, 2015, Miami Herald). Miami-Dade is a unique city in the American context because of its demographics, its political context, and its complex connections with Latin America that impact the flow of people, the flow of money, and the structures of power. Miami is on the forefront of climate justice work, as it is ground zero in America for climate impact, it is on the frontline of black liberation activism and farm/migrant/undocumented workers, making for a complex kaleidoscope of issues, communities, identities, experiences, and journeys to, and within, activism and social justice movements. Historically, Miami has not been known for its activism and social justice movements (although they have existed), and it is only within the last 10-15 years, and more recently in the last three to four years of the SJT that the social justice work in Miami-Dade is becoming connected,
collective and intersectional. It is within this context that the SJT was created. The members of SJT represent the diversity of Miami both in our individual members and the groups and communities that partners organize alongside. Miami, and the SJT, provide a ripe context, time, and place for capturing and constructing theories of change to inform collective work.

**Participants and recruitment.** There were two types of participants included in this study: primary participants, hereafter referred to as the co-researchers, and secondary participants. Five co-researchers participated in 10 sessions and each in an individual interview. Ten secondary participants were interviewed about how they understand and do transformative change. Inclusion criteria for participants included current or past membership of the Social Justice Table and being active working on the ground in their communities as community organizers or activists. During the remainder of this paper, I will refer to each co-researcher and secondary participant using a pseudonym per their request.

**Recruitment.** I used different recruitment strategies for co-researchers and secondary participants beginning with a convenience sampling process followed by snowball sampling. I recruited the co-researchers employing a convenience sample from the SJT steering committee, a group of dedicated organizers working towards social justice goals in Miami-Dade. I began my recruitment process for co-researchers during a presentation to the SJT steering committee with the support of the lead SJT staff member. I was able to recruit one co-researcher from this process. I widened my recruitment process to include past members of the steering committee and identified a group of four long-term past members of the steering committee who had shown interest in research.
and knowledge construction in the past. I reached out individually to these four. Due to my long-term involvement in the SJT up until that point, I had built deep and trusting relationships with each of these individuals. I made connections in these one-on-one conversations between my proposed research and the components of research and action we had conducted together in the past. Doing this kind of PAR study (even if it is small p-PAR as discussed above) requires significant front-end effort in relationship and trust building. During one of my opening sessions one co-researcher Luis, put it like this - “would we even be here if we had not subverted the boundary of the professional and taking it to the personal; and cultivated friendships?” Five organizers agreed to participate as co-researchers in this study. The first was recruited during my presentation to the steering committee, and the remaining four from one-on-one conversations. These co-researchers are my long-term community partners and my friends. Sampling for PTD should focus on being transparent about who and how the knowledge is created rather than an unattainable perfect representation so that it may be critiqued and built on accordingly in other communities and contexts.

I recruited secondary participants using a snowball sampling procedure. The co-researchers generated a list of 25 secondary participants from their networks with the goal of 12-15 completed interviews during our planning phase. I had them intentionally construct a larger list than was needed for two reasons. The first reason was to provide enough names to guarantee we would have enough people agree to participate in an interview. The second reason was to provide a level of anonymity in the interview data as I brought the de-identified interview data to participator sessions with the co-researchers.

I conducted all of the interviews.
The list of secondary participants included a wide variety of people. Co-researchers identified a list of people representing a multitude of characteristics including: age, gender, race, type of organizing work, length of time in Miami, targets of change, labour versus community organizing, and geography of the county. We deemed these important characteristics in secondary participants as they were characteristics likely to impact perspective and experience in organizing and activism in Miami-Dade County. To recruit secondary participants, I sent each person on our list a recruitment email requesting their participation. If they did not respond I sent one follow up email, and finally, if they still did not respond, a co-researcher who knew them followed up by one final email at which point we moved on. Seven people did not respond to our recruitment attempts which may have impacted the representative nature of the sample. For example, both of the linguistically isolated people who speak only Spanish and indigenous languages did not respond.

I completed a total of 15 interviews, five with co-researchers and 10 with secondary participants. Verbal consent was used for this study as the IRB waived written consent procedures since participants were not being asked personal or vulnerable information. Secondary participants were advised during their verbal consent process that a group of their peers in the role of co-researchers in this study would have access to the de-identified interview data. I explained that there was a chance they would be recognized based on the work they do and stories they share. After completing 15 interviews, co-researchers and I jointly determined that we had sufficient data given the parameters of our process and the timeline of the study.
**Participant characteristics.** Participants represented a wide range of races, ages, types of organizing, and targets of change. Of the 15 participants, inclusive of co-researchers and secondary participants, nine were men and six were women. Three participants were African American and/or Haitian American (an important distinction in racial identity in Miami), eight were Latin American (six of whom were first generation immigrants), and four were white. This was an intentional attempt to provide a relatively representative sample from the Miami community. Participants ages ranged from 18-75, and their years involved in justice work ranged from five to over 50. Seven participants were the leaders of their respective organizations, six were senior staff and/or lead organizers at their respective organizations, two were currently unemployed, one by choice as she has left the movement, and one who was actively searching for a job in organizing. All 15 participants were individuals who have dedicated their lives to improving their communities. Participants brought their experiences working with issues including worker, climate, gender, and racial justice, to housing and homelessness, immigration, electoral and political reform, anti-war and anti-imperialism, and building a stronger and more progressive democratic party. Participants worked in union and non-union workplace organizing, political and electoral organizing, grassroots community organizing, activism and leadership roles in social movement work as well as youth organizing. In addition, participants were members of, and advocates for, communities including farm workers, domestic workers, residents of historically black neighbourhoods, undocumented communities, and interfaith communities.
Research Design: Data collection and Data Analysis Procedures

In the following section I define my methods and my analytic approach. I provide an overview of the data analysis tools used, and sources of data. After I have provided these definitional components I move into the story of what happened, weaving together the types of coding and waves of analysis to provide a transparent and detailed story of this PTD exemplar.

The data collection and analysis for this study occurred between June 2017 and March of 2018. Co-researchers were provided a $200 stipend as a fair wage for their time. The nature of this study was emergent, and the ensuing story has many interconnected layers. In the remainder of this chapter I present our process using narrative, figures and tables in an effort to explain its complexity in a digestible form.

Participatory Theory Development: What We Did

The analytic approach described below was emergent based on the principles of PTD. We included iterative and emergent rounds of analysis to construct (Charmaz, 2006; Saldana, 2016) and fracture (Weiss & Fine, 2004) our collective definition of transformation resulting in two chapters addressing my findings. The analysis process is discussed in detail in my analytic approach and ensuing story of this study.

Data collection. Data were collected from four sources: individual interviews, transcripts of participatory sessions, individual reflective writing, and a narrative of the previously constructed academic model. A total of 15 interviews and 10 participatory sessions were conducted during the data collection in this study.

Interviews. I conducted 15 interviews. Co-researchers decided during our research design process that they would participate as interviewees on top of their
participation as co-researchers. They made up the first five interviews. I conducted the remaining 10 interviews with secondary participants. Interviews ranged from 25 minutes to one hour and 30 minutes. I transcribed each interview and then de-identified and collated the data by core questions in the interview guide. I shared the de-identified interview data by question with co-researchers which we used as the data during our analysis sessions.

*Participatory sessions.* Ten participatory sessions were held with co-researchers. I recorded and transcribed these sessions for use in the analysis process. During these sessions we discussed initial ideas and definitions of transformation from each co-researcher, constructed and debated research design and data collection tools, facilitated analytic reflections on interview data, discussed our theoretical reflections on how the data fit together, and engaged in process discussions to learn from and understand the theory development process used in this study. Sessions were broken down into: three planning sessions, four participatory analysis and sense making sessions, and three theory development sessions.

*Academic model.* In addition to the community data collected for this study, I included one archival source of data. This archival data included a visual representation of my academic model of transformation (as presented in Figure 1 in Chapter two) and a narrative constructed to explain the model. This was included as the PTD process of this study focused on developing a community and academically informed theory of transformation.

*Memos and individual reflective writing.* Throughout the data collection and data analysis process I wrote analytic memos and the co-researchers created writing excerpts
during individual reflective writing (discussed and defined in section on analytic tools). These writing excerpts were included in analysis processes to help center the interpretive authority and voice of the co-researchers into the construction of our analysis.

**Trustworthiness.** Multiple methods and voices were included in creating a rigourous analysis to address issues of trustworthiness. Guba’s (1981) concept of trustworthiness includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. This study addresses trustworthiness across all four components. I also speak to Prilleltensky’s (2008) concept of Psychopolitical validity, and Lather’s (1968) concept of catalytic validity.

**Credibility.** This measure of trustworthiness addresses the connection between the research questions and the methods. Do your methods answer your research question? Credibility includes prolonged engagement, triangulation, and member checks. This study included a prolonged engagement. I have been engaged in SJT for four years. Additionally, this research process continued my prolonged engagement in this community. This study included methods of triangulation. I included multiple data sources and multiple participants and negative case sampling to triangulate perspectives. This process had member checks built in.

**Transferability.** Transferability is the measure of how well findings can be transferred to other contexts. In order to create transferable findings, a thick description of the context and the research process is required. The processes of this study are discussed in detail through the remainder of this chapter to provide a detailed narrative of the PTD methodology so that it could be replicated in other contexts.
**Dependability.** The measure of dependability is whether in the same context, with the same participants, and the same methods, you would end with the same findings. In order to address issues of dependability, I built in a detailed discussion of research design, process, and principles of *why* we moved through our analysis in the way that we did highlighting the principles and rationale of decisions in addition to the details of what happened.

**Confirmability.** The idea of confirmability is about researcher bias. Can the findings be confirmed if I am the only researcher that would have come to these conclusions? This is challenging because this was a process of co-creation. That said, my intentional processes of triangulation, sharing my assumptions and politics as a researcher with the co-researchers and having them do the same, all the while using facilitated conversations to help craft a detailed audit trail through data collection, analysis and theory building, I contribute to the confirmability of the study findings and the theory that is built.

**Psychopolitical and Catalytic Validity.** Finally, with the intentionally political stance of this study, I discuss both psychopolitical validity and catalytic validity. Psychopolitical validity, with epistemic and transformative components, was proposed by Prilleltensky (2003) to argue for the need to imbue our research with knowledge on oppression and to “[demand] changes toward liberation” (p. 200). I accomplished this by engaging the co-researchers and imbuing their knowledge of oppression into our research and by constructing this study to theorize about transformation in order to improve liberatory practices. Catalytic validity, a concept proposed by Lather (1986), is “the degree to which the research process re-orients, focuses and energizes participants in
what Freire terms ‘conscientization’ knowing reality in order to better transform it” (p. 67). This study accomplished this as the co-researchers and I had our own conceptions of transformation altered through engagement in this research together.

**Analytic approach: Constructing an aspirational whole then disrupting those aspirations.** The analytic approach, discussed in detail below, was constructed based on the emergent nature of this multi-phase study and is grounded in the tenets of PTD: 1) creating research that is useful for community and builds on and disrupts academic theory, 2) asks theoretical research questions in partnership with community, and 3) pulls from a diverse set of methodologies, analytic approaches and analytic tools to ensure that meets the needs of research partners in achieving participation and leadership of community voice in the theory development process. In this study I used participatory analysis procedures including C-PAR literature (Weis & Fine, 2004), my C-PAR training at the City University New York (CUNY), and participatory group processes for planning and co-construction developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs Canada. This combination of analytic techniques and tools ensured constant and critical participation of co-researchers throughout the process and allowed the space for a critical reflection at each stage of our analysis.

I begin by outlining the analysis tools used during multiple phases of the study which were included to create good group process and to document the thinking of each co-researcher throughout our process. I follow this with a discussion of tools and then the narrative of our study. This narrative weaves together the iterative nature of the data collection, analysis process and theory development through the six phases of the study.
The analysis, discussed during the narrative portion of this chapter, began by constructing an aspirational model of transformation using multiple rounds of qualitative coding informed by Saldana (2016) including holistic coding, thematic coding and codeweaving. Each of these coding strategies are defined below. This was followed by a critical theorizing process designed by Weis and Fine (2004) which was included to disrupt this aspirational model through identifying a core fracture in the model after which we constructed counter-stories and surfaced what Weiss and Fine (2004) call sites of possibility to help address the identified fracture. Fractures, counter-stories and sites of possibility are defined in my analysis procedures.

Together these approaches were combined to address our emergent analysis needs and led to the critically constructed and actionable understanding of the process of transformation discussed in chapter four and five. I planned all aspects of the analysis process that could be defined beforehand, and left flexibility to respond to emergent needs of our collective process. The critical theorizing process was added after we completed our aspirational model, when we decided that it was just that - aspirational. Co-researchers wanted to ensure what we ended with was in fact useful and grounded in the struggles of doing transformative change. In the tradition of C-PAR, the analysis process was constructed with co-researchers. After each round of analysis, we would ask how we could continue to interrogate the data to construct a useful outcome for organizers and activists. Each round of analysis was designed in a way to facilitate group reflection and ensure the voices of each co-researcher was heard. This facilitated a critical engagement with the data. Before beginning the narrative of this study, I present the data analysis tools used during multiple phases of our study.
**Data analysis tools.** During each wave of analysis, we used a set of analytic tools supporting the participatory and iterative nature of this study. These tools were chosen to ensure a process that built in voices of co-researchers at every stage to meet the principles of PTD. These tools included: theoretical and analytic memoing from Charmaz, (2006); individual reflective writing from Cahill (2007) and Staples (2012); share and compare processes from Cahill (2007) and Staples (2012); and constant comparison methods from Charmaz (2006). Much of this process was emergent and as needed we pulled from different methodological approaches to make a connected process.

**Analytic and theoretical memoing.** Memoing is an active journaling process that focuses on documenting the conceptual connections between raw data, research process, and analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Memoing is about developing a conceptual analysis that functions as an early form of analysis. I, as the lead researcher, processed themes and codes through analytic and theoretical memo writing as I constructed the findings.

**Individual reflective writing.** A similar function to the memoing process is individual reflective writing. This is a method of participatory analysis, proposed in Cahill (2007), that provides intentional space for participants to think through what the data means to them individually. This is designed to ensure that all participants have time to process their own thinking before engaging in dialogue. It is used as a tool to address power dynamics in participatory processes (Staples, 2012).

**Share and compare processes.** Cahill (2007), in her paper on how to share power in methodological processes, outlines the concept of a share and compare process to be used after the completion of individual reflective writing. Staples (2012) defines this process further, as having participants share their thoughts with a partner who are then
asked to keep the diversity of their thinking, while identifying common ideas with their partners. Consensus is not the purpose, but rather finding and discussing the diversity of responses. Partners then bring their ideas to the group for further categorizing of ideas. Ideas are clarified and challenged to provide a rich and shared understanding of the concepts, contentions and relationships in the data.

*Constant comparative method.* Using the constant comparative method discussed by Charmaz (2006), we moved in and out of the raw data during each wave of our analysis to continuously compare each new piece of data to the model that we were creating. Using the constant comparison method provided a rigorous process for shifting codes and thematic boundaries as we were able to move pieces within and across our coding structure to provide fluidity and consistency in our definitions and development of coding boundaries. This process is used to discuss subtle differences in our interpretations, constructing counter-stories, and examining outliers in the data in order to continuously re-ground our analysis in interview data in our participatory analysis.

The Story: The Phases of this Participatory Theory Development Process

Next, I tell the story of what we did; I detail how we moved through the phases of the study and what was learned along the way. I weave into this narrative the waves of analysis that were completed to create the findings for this study. The analysis for this study was iterative and used four kinds of coding pulled from Saldana (2016), Charmaz (2006), and Weis & Fine (2004) and since these happened chronologically I have called them *waves* of coding (not to be confused with the phases of the study which include phases of data collection, analysis and theory building). These four waves of analysis are as follows: 1) holistic coding to identify initial broad patterns in the data, 2) thematic
coding to construct rich themes from these holistic codes, 3) codeweaving where we worked together as a group to create a visual model demonstrating the relationships between themes, and finally 4) a critical theorizing process that employed a fracture analysis, the development of counter-stories, and the construction of sites of possibility. During each of these waves of analysis multiple analytic tools, defined above, were used to support the participatory nature of this study. These waves of analysis, along with planning, data collection and theory building are broken down into six phases discussed below.

I begin this narrative with two visuals. The first, Figure 2, provides an overview of the six phases of this study from participatory design, through data collection, analysis, theory development, fracturing and re-building. Each of these phases are discussed in detail below.

Figure 2. Research Phases for Data Collection and Analysis
The second visual, Table 2, provides an overview for each of the six phases of the study including whether the phase included participatory components, which data sources were used, the type of analysis and the analytic tools employed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Participatory/ Solo</th>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>Wave of Analysis</th>
<th>Analytic Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Participatory Research Design</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Holistic Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participatory and Solo</td>
<td>Interviews; Participatory Sessions</td>
<td>Thematic Coding</td>
<td>Analytic Memoing Constant Comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Theory Development: Community and Dialogical</td>
<td>Participatory</td>
<td>Interviews; Participatory Sessions; Academic Model</td>
<td>Codeweaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Critical Fracture Analysis</td>
<td>Participatory and Solo</td>
<td>Interviews; Participatory Sessions</td>
<td>Fracture analysis and sites of possibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rebuilding Phase</td>
<td>Solo</td>
<td>Remaining interviews and participatory sessions</td>
<td>Codeweaving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Phase chart mapping data sources, waves of analysis and analytic tools

During the rest of this chapter I discuss each phase of the research, including details on the waves of analysis used, and weaving in all of my previously defined data sources and analytic tools.
Phase 1: Participatory research design sessions.

I know what I know, you know what you know, people who worked in that movement know what they know, so, how do we bring in all of that knowledge into a conversation to try and design something new, something that opens up some creative energy for this kind of structural work. (Natalie)

In Phase 1, I facilitated participatory research design sessions with co-researchers. Following the tenets of a C-PAR approach, these sessions provided an opportunity to collectively design a process that met my needs, the needs of the co-researchers, and created value for the broader SJT community. The purpose of these planning sessions was twofold: 1) to develop a shared understanding of our positionality as researchers, and reinforce the creation of an epistemic community, “where shared political values become the unifying force and knowledge is shaped collectively” (Fisher, Sonn, & Evans, 2007 p. 262); and 2) to discuss and make decisions about the proposed research design process, the timeline for data collection and analysis, the PTD process, and the proposed interview guide. Because the co-researchers have all known and worked together for many years, it was possible for us to jump quickly into brainstorming, critiquing, planning, and conducting the research together. Planning sessions occurred at the beginning with one planning session in the middle of our process to return to our goals based on what we had learned thus far.

During planning sessions, we discussed our initial definitions of transformation, at which point co-researchers decided that the phenomena of transformation was vague, but had meaning, and was important to study. We reflected on our positionality and discussed our own experiences and identities in our movement work. I asked each co-researcher in
our first participatory session to share with the group why they were there, what they saw as important and what they hoped to get out of participating in this process with me.

Anna: [because] research, reflection and study is undervalued. People are really action oriented and because there are so many fires to put out, they poo poo the work as a waste of time. It’s like ‘ok enough talk, when are we going to plan the next rally, [there is] very little thought to whether the last 2500 hundred rallies actually accomplished anything. It’s a knee jerk reaction. Something bad has happened, we are morally obligated to do something. Let’s plan a march and then let’s plant the next march, let’s plan the next march. Little time for reflection and asking ourselves hard questions. What are we doing? Do we have a theory that is informing our work? I appreciate when people actually want to take the time to do that stuff.

Robert: To be honest I am at a place right now where I don’t have time to think. I don’t have time to be strategic about things. I don’t think in our organizing work we have clear direction; the movement has few winning strategies. I value times to step back and reflect with a group of folks I respect. I hope to get something out of it and I’ve been trying to take these opportunities even if I know nothing major is going to come out of it. Stepping back and re-look at things. At my age in my life I’ve lost a lot of hope for transformative change, but I guess in the little bit that is left. I just kind of want to spend it productively.

Although it took until session seven before co-researchers started collectively referring to this as *their process* or what *we should do*, these initial sessions set the stage for our process and provided time for us to develop a shared understanding of our research plan. Co-researchers approved my proposed research design, planned and approved a timeline, brainstormed a list of possible secondary participants, made the decision that co-researchers would also be interviewees, and added two questions to the proposed interview guide (as discussed in phase 2 interview subsection).

During Phase 1, the co-researchers and I decided to focus the current study on identifying *assumptions and fractures in our collective thinking* to shine a light on local collective practices in order to learn from and if needed, reorient these practices to
increase the potential we have to transform our community. Creating a beautiful model that represents an ideal state of transformation would not be sufficient in improving the practices of organizers and activists in Miami. At the end of the planning sessions Anna, a co-researcher, pointed out that although this research would be helpful, we should remain realistic about the implications of this one localized project:

I think if what we're trying to do is come up with a theory of how [transformative] change happens, I think it is important to be honest about the narrow limitations of what that means. Theory isn't something that is set in stone and then from now on we have all signed our name in blood …I think that … we would take this theory and see how it actually works in real life and …revise it and it would be a living thing. I think it's good to have a limited scope of what we think that we're doing here and just acknowledge that we're not going to represent everybody's voice. I think it's good to bring in other people's voices but to also be honest with ourselves that we're not, if we are taking those interviews and mashing it up and then coming up with our theory of the people in this room, it is still our theory. And we can always change it later.

We began this process acknowledging that whatever we created together in this process is ours. We engaged a broader community in the data collection process, but the analysis was being completed by myself and the co-researchers and was based on our collective sense making.

**Phase 2: Data collection - interviews.** During the initial planning sessions, co-researchers were presented with a proposed interview guide, which they approved with the addition of two new questions (See Appendix A): (1) What would a transformed community look like and (2) what patterns of assumptions about the mechanisms of transformation have you seen in local change work (i.e. if we do [x] we will transform the community?) Co-researchers constructed these additional questions to get at transformation beyond traditional campaign thinking in community organizing. In this conversation, Luis, one of the co-researchers, stated:
I don’t think I’ve ever done anything transformative in my life. But I think I’ve been a part of transformative work, and I think it is a process like you said. But if you ask people [how to do it] they are just going to keep searching the database in their brain searching for the one transformative campaign. And more than likely they are not going to find it.

Co-researchers did not see the interview process as neutral. Similar to how it is framed in Fontana and Frey (2005), co-researchers talked about how the interview responses built on dialogue and positionality and was linked to the historical and political context of participants. They articulated that in my interviewing, I would need to be critical and reflective of my own positions and interviewing style. Luis explained it as follows:

I think a lot of it is going to have to do with the person asking the question than the question itself. It will be about facilitation. Kind of like comprehensive charting, it is a conversation, it is information you need to extract. It could be the most riveting question and you could still not get to the core of what you are trying to get to.

Interviews were conducted in three rounds because of the iterative nature of the data collection and analysis for this study. The first eight interviews were conducted after the planning sessions. These included interviews with the five co-researchers, who proposed that I interview them first to test the interview guide. The remaining three interviews were conducted with those who were the first to respond to my recruitment email. During the first round of holistic coding in phase three (discussed next), co-researchers analyzed data from these first eight interviews and found that there was significant overlap in answers and in stories. We decided that this was likely because the eight participants worked very closely together, rather than due to theoretical saturation.

At that point, I conducted two more interviews. Interviewee nine and 10 made up round two of interviews where we sought out voices that were more removed from our core of SJT steering committee members to try and identify different perspectives. The final
round of interviews was targeted at missing voices including: youth, organizers working on racial justice, and anyone who responded to follow up emails for data collection from the original list. This made for a total of 15 interviews.

**Phase 3: Data analysis - holistic and thematic coding.** Data analysis was done through iterative rounds of participatory and solo coding processes. This phase included the first two waves of analysis: holistic coding and thematic coding.

**First wave holistic coding.** We began with participatory analysis using holistic coding. Holistic coding is an exploratory analytic process that is also called “macro-level coding” (Saldana, 2016, p.166). Saldana (2016) defines holistic coding as a *lumper* rather than a *splitter* code which is meant to provide coding processes for broader patterns. Holistic coding is a first-round approach in qualitative analysis that requires a follow up and detailed coding process. I used holistic coding during analysis sessions with co-researchers as a structured tool to capture broad principles and patterns of transformation in order to bound further rounds of analysis. During these sessions co-researchers were presented with interview data, which was collated by interview question and de-identified ahead of time. The three rounds of interviews outlined above continued during the holistic coding process. The entirety of our holistic coding processes was participatory.

Participatory analysis tools used during this phase of analysis included individual reflective writing, share and compare processes, and the constant comparative method. Before beginning the analysis, I conducted a brief training on Saldana’s (2016) holistic coding procedures with co-researchers. This involved an overview of coding procedures, and a discussion about our assumptions and positionality as they relate to the data.
At each session we looked at a different set of interview data. Co-researchers decided that identifying and highlighting assumptions in the data would be a helpful contribution to their practice since there were many shared assumptions that kept surfacing and limiting how they did their work. Therefore, the focus of the initial read of the data was on pointing out and discussing assumptions. Co-researchers were asked to read for patterns and assumptions in the interviews that speak to different components of what is transformation. For every idea in the data they were asked to write something (i.e. a code) that captured its essence, underline and circle words that jumped out as being interesting and highlight ideas that provided clarity on the phenomena or process of transformation. They were encouraged to be critical of their own thinking and of each other.

Next, co-researchers engaged in individual reflective writing where they were asked to write down their initial reactions, patterns emerging from the data, ideas they found surprising, and divergences in the data between interviewees. Once they had been given sufficient time to reflect individually they were asked to share and compare their initial reactions with partners and then with the group. Instructions during the share and compare process asked that they hold onto the diversity of their answers while looking for commonality and contentions between their ideas and those of their partners (ICA Canada). Finally, after discussing the data collectively we developed a list of six holistic codes.

In order to continuously refine our analysis and ensure it represented the entirety of our data, we continued this process as new interview responses were introduced at each follow up analysis sessions. Our conversations focused on new learnings, ideas that
challenged our original holistic codes, and responses that challenged our assumptions about transformation. We revised our codes to be more specific and representative of the data. We had critical and analytic conversations about each holistic code, the transcripts of which I used during theme development. During this time, we began to highlight negative cases where there was contention or divergence in the data.

There was insufficient time to allow for coding of all of the interview questions as co-researchers were unable to do coding outside of our participatory sessions due to time limitations. We had to be intentional with how we used our time together and what interview questions we collectively analyzed. In total, co-researchers looked at the answers from all 15 respondents to the first three questions on the interview guide: what is transformation? what would a transformed world look like? And, how do you connect your work to your vision of transformation? To alleviate our timing issue, the co-researchers asked that I share the remaining de-identified data for those who wanted to take the time to read outside of the sessions. Additionally, in the final analysis session, I adjusted the process of analysis to allow time to dive a little deeper into the responses. In previous sessions, co-researchers were asked to read all responses from a particular question at one sitting. I adapted this after co-researchers discussed this process as daunting and overwhelming. In the adjusted method we looked at one interviewee response at a time and discussed before moving onto the next response. I did this to help co-researchers articulate the differences between respondents and to better understand the breadth and depth of each holistic code we had developed. Below, I share the holistic codes and a brief definition of each to show where we were when this analysis began.
**Holistic codes.** The first round of analysis left us with six holistic codes: surface level and broad principles requiring a deeper analysis that emerged as important in understanding transformation.

*Direction of change.* Transformation is not neutral. It can move towards a more just or a less just world;

*Power.* Transformation involves knowing about, embracing and shifting power for a more equitable distribution of power;

*Shifting worldview and ideology.* Transformation requires a shift in worldview. If you change enough hearts and minds transformative change will stick, and be hard to turn back;

*Multi-level process.* Transformation happens in and across multiple levels of analysis from the personal to the structural and is an active process;

*Magnitude of change.* Transformation is big, revolutionary and radical; and

*Permanence.* Transformation is permanent.

At this point we moved to develop a deeper analysis of each facet of transformation to get below some of the surface level ideas of transformation that were identified with the holistic codes. To differentiate the categories I call this deeper analysis of each category *themes.*

**Second wave thematic coding.** For the second wave of analysis, I began with a solo analysis process followed by a participatory process to build rich themes. During this wave of analysis, I used transcribed analysis session conversations, individual reflective writing from co-researchers, holistic codes and the original raw interview data. This process was used to build rich thematic categories as discussed in Charmaz (2006). This
process moved us from the *lumper* coding of holistic codes to a more detailed *splitter* analysis as discussed in Saldana (2016) with the goal of building a nuanced understanding of the themes within each original holistic code. In order to refine the development of our themes, we used constant comparison and analytic memoing. I chose these grounded theory techniques and thematic analyses to help create a rich analysis of the data.

Because the majority of this phase was done as solo analysis, I intentionally constructed the process in a way that centered the words and voices of co-researchers. To do this, I printed a hardcopy of the transcript data (collated by interview question) and overlaid co-researcher notes (the words that they circled and underlined in the transcripts and notes that they took in the margins during the coding process). Next, I added my own notes down the margin of the transcript. Once the transcript had all of our notes, I colour coded each piece of data into one of the six holistic codes as previously identified by co-researchers and highlighted any pieces of data that did not fit into these codes for further investigation. I also included relevant parts of the participatory session transcripts where we discussed the data and engaged in analytic conversations. This provided all relevant data colour-coded by holistic code. Next, I put each piece of data onto colour-coded notes (according to its holistic code) and included the line number and document name on each note in order to track the source of each piece of data in further rounds of analysis. I differentiated between interview data, and reflective sessions on each note.

It was an intentional decision to hand code during this phase, rather than use qualitative software. I did this for two reasons: 1) the analysis did not feel like it could be contained on a computer screen. I took up complete walls of a house to map out the
details of each theme and required the creative ability of being literally hands on with the data, and 2) this allowed me to bring the analysis to the co-researchers in a format where they too could touch it, play with it and move it as needed.

Once all of the data was coded onto notes according to their holistic code, I conducted a thematic analysis with all of the pieces of data from the holistic codes. I did this in two rounds, beginning with the data from the first 10 interviews and the participatory sessions conversations about those interviews. I used a constant comparative method to build each holistic code into a rich theme including sub-themes. Afterwards I added in the data from interviews 11 to 15 to solidify boundaries of the themes using a constant comparative method with new pieces of data and to check to see if we had reached some degree of saturation in interviewee responses.

After I had completed this, I brought the themes with their corresponding colour-coded notes for the co-researchers to work with. This allowed me to keep co-researcher voice deeply built in to the process without requiring them to participate in all of the heavy lifting of the detailed thematic coding process (See Figure 3). I presented each of the themes with their sub-themes and related notes on the walls of the room and had co-researchers reflect on them, move notes around, and flag components of the themes where they had questions, concerns or additions to make.

During this collective process we engaged in reflective conversations. This process helped us to differentiate between what is in the data and what co-researchers saw as helpful for this theory. Co-researchers raised questions about whether we are simply re-creating the same [failed] hypotheses of change and falling into the traps of
simplifying a complex phenomenon and stunting our ability to frame transformative praxis that would have lasting impact. For each theme we engaged in critical dialogue about how it represented the data, how it helped in our understanding of transformation and where and how it re-created assumptions co-researchers were hoping to challenge in the collective framing of transformation.

![Figure 3. Thematic coding: pictures of colour coded notes](image)

The thematic coding process developed seven themes from the original six holistic codes. The boundaries of the codes remained similar, but the themes reflected our deeper involvement with the data. One holistic code was broken in two (multi-level and process) and the rest were contained in the same bucket, but with a rich thematic analysis. The themes defined transformation as: **durable and fluid, profound evolutionary and revolutionary change, that shifts and re-imagines power, shifts worldviews and ideologies, has a bi-directional relationship between the personal and the structural, and which is a value driven process.**

These themes are the basis of the theory we constructed in phase four and will be discussed in detail in chapter four as they make up the foundation of the Aspirational Model of Transformation. These themes were also used to inform the development of our
core fracture, counter-stories and sites of possibility that make up chapter five, my second findings chapter. These themes provided the foundation for building a nuanced understanding of the phenomena of transformation to answer my research questions. It was at this point that I entered all of the raw data as well as our coding up until this point into the qualitative software NVivo so that I could use the features of the software to further refine and document our analysis.

**Phase 4: Building the aspirational model of transformation: Community and academic.** After constructing our detailed themes as outlined in phase 3, we employed a *codeweaving* process where we visually mapped out the relationships between themes to construct a complete picture of how transformation was being discussed in the data. This moved us from a disparate list of themes to the beginning of a model. This model development process began by focusing on the data we had collected and analyzed from the community. Once constructed, we introduced my previously constructed academic model to create a model that was created and driven by the community and informed by academic literature.

**Community model development: Codeweaving.** In our third wave of analysis we used an active process of visualizing data called *codeweaving* - we literally drew the relationships between themes, connecting them, combining them, and creating a hierarchy between them to construct an Aspirational Model of Transformation. We used a constant comparative method where we continued to go back to the data and facilitate analytic conversations as we questioned and clarified these relationships and worked to construct a coherent *whole* of the process of transformation based on the community data. Codeweaving, is designed to surface and construct the relationships between themes to
paint a picture of a phenomena that is representative of the data; a process to integrate themes together into a whole, or to “see how the puzzle pieces fit together” (Saldana, 2016, p. 276).

Clarifying transformation by invoking how its components fit together helped to visualize the complex phenomena. Saldana (2016) considers codeweaving a “post-coding” process, however, for the participatory nature of this study, this process was used to provide a structure to the process of constructing a model to represent a visual of the community data. It was from this that we could ground critiques, contentions and relationships between themes (fourth wave coding). This process ended with the development a community theory of transformation (Figure 4.)

*Figure 4. Community Theory of Transformation*

**Dialogical theory development.** In the second part of phase 4, I introduced the academic model (found in chapter two) that describes transformation as constructed from
the literature in Community Psychology. We engaged in a dialogical process between what we had created with the community data and what was represented in the literature-based model. I presented the image of the academic model and had the co-researchers code the narrative of the model, as secondary data, using the same instructions for their holistic coding: look for patterns, assumptions and ideas that support or challenge our current community construction of transformation. Luis, when presented with the academic model said “I think maybe [the academic model] is easier to follow for me. It is simpler.” with Robert responding, “but that [grassroots model] is closer to reality”. The academic model validated parts, contradicted parts and built on the coherence of the community model. This process ended with the model of transformation that was community driven and informed by academic knowledge (Picture in Figure 5.), or what we came to call the Aspirational Model of Transformation.

Figure 5. Dialogically created Aspirational Model of Transformation
Phase 5: Fracture analysis and counter-stories. Ending at the aspirational model would have left us with a picture of transformation that was far too simple to capture the complexity of this phenomena. In addition, when reflecting on our model we found that much of the responsibility of successful transformation was being placed on the shoulders of people and social justice organizations working for change - sending the message that if we just work harder and do better we will transform the world. Beth, one of the co-researchers, highlighted this issue during our reflection on the Hurricane Irma aftermath and its differential impacts on communities of colour in Miami: “Do you feel like you're not doing enough? That's how I feel. Like I should be doing more, and I'm at the can-barely-remember-what-I-did-yesterday- space, and I still feel like I should be doing more”. No amount of doing more of the same was going to transform the structural injustices faced in our communities. The critical theorizing process described below surfaced key narratives to understand this lack of forward momentum towards transformation. Anna explained that our aspirational model did little to challenge “our reference point [of] what exists. So, we can only think in terms of it being different or the same. Or more or less of what already exists”. This was the beginning of our fracturing the aspirational model so that we could construct a theory of transformation grounded in the reality of practice. This final phase of analysis asked what about the ideal of transformation was stopping organizers and activists from actually creating the change.

Fourth wave coding: Fracture analysis and counter-stories. In line with the C-PAR foundation of PTD, we incorporated a critical theorizing process proposed by Weis and Fine (2004) to help craft an analytic approach which would “destabilize the representation of coherence” (p.xx) in our analysis; or, in other words, challenge the
simplicity and coherence of our aspirational model. This process was designed to identify fractures in a whole with the intent of “suggesting where mobilization can begin, and radical change is possible” (p. xxi). A fracture is a contradiction or a disconnect which can be identified in the model. These fractures, on the surface, are interpreted as fact and have deeply normalized narratives of why they exist. By naming and surfacing these fractures through a process that works to challenge these well-established facts, this critical theorizing process looks for fault lines and tensions in the model to better understand the complexity of this issue and to wrestle with new ways of thinking about and doing transformative change.

**Core fracture.** I paired the concept of a fracture with the premise of theoretical coding, which according to Saldana (2016) “functions like an umbrella” (p.250) to capture a snapshot of your analysis by identifying the primary narrative or theme. This is what Charmaz (2006) would call a core category. We used the fracture analysis to identify one core fracture in the data; one fracture that tells a story of the data. To construct our core fracture, we asked *how do the interview responses disrupt the aspirational model and surface a fracture in the model that we can explore further?*

**Counter-analysis and counter-stories.** Once we identified our core fracture and the narrative that surrounds it, we moved to a counter analysis. This counter analysis process used the data to construct provocative counter stories that provide alternate and grounded explanations as to why the core fracture exists. These counter stories are created to re-frame and disrupt the narrative to create energy and a new perspective to construct sites of possibility.
Phase 6: Rebuilding with sites of possibility. According to Weis & Fine (2004), it is unethical to simply disrupt dominant discourse; this disruption must come with identifying possibilities and sites of resistance which can address the fractures and help move our imagination and action forward in new ways. “Sites of possibility”, according to Weis and Fine (2004) are theoretical statements specifically meant to surface “spaces for resistance, agency and possibility” in response to the fracture and counter stories created. Constructing these sites of possibility helped move our theory building process into something that provided use to our community in informing their collective practice and could speak back to our understanding of transformation in academic literature. Our analysis connected these sites of possibility back into our aspirational model to address the core fracture and provide a critical theory of transformation grounded in practice.

Finally, once we had collectively constructed the two sites of possibility, I analyzed the remaining data. Due to time restrictions we were unable to collectively analyze all of the interview questions. During this final solo analysis, I analyzed the remaining interview questions and the transcripts of the remaining participatory sessions. This was a similar process to the detailed thematic analysis I detailed in phase three. I coded the remainder of our data to specifically add richness to our core fracture, counter stories and sites of possibility from the critical theorizing process.

Conclusion

In this chapter I presented an overview of PTD which I constructed from literature from C-PAR, decolonizing methodologies and the centering of community knowledge in theory development processes. I began with my research questions, my positionality and my paradigmatic assumptions arising from the Critical paradigm - namely Critical
Community Psychology. I then provided a detailed overview of my research design including setting, participants, data collection and tools, analysis procedures and tools. I ended this chapter with the narrative of the six phases of my study including participatory research design sessions, interview data collection, data analysis including holistic and thematic coding, theory development including identified relationships between themes using codeweaving ending with my overview of our the core fracture or contradiction in the model, counter-stories to provide alternate explanations for the existence of the fracture and rebuilt our model through the identification of two sites of possibility. In the following two chapters I present the findings of this study. In chapter four, I present the Aspirational Model of Transformation. In chapter five, I present the findings of the core fracture, counter-stories and sites of possibility to rebuild a critically informed theory of transformation for practice.
Chapter 4 Findings: The Aspirational Model of Transformation

I have organized my findings into two chapters according to my research questions. In chapter four, I present the findings that make up our Aspirational Model of Transformation to answer the question: What is Transformation, and how do grassroots organizers and activists understand and frame it? In chapter five, I present the second half of our findings which resulted from employing a critical fracturing of our Aspirational Model, where we constructed a core fracture, counter-stories, and sites of possibility to answer my second research question: How do the practices of organizers and activists re-frame and inform this understanding of transformation? In Table 3, I break down these two chapters beginning with an overview of the Aspirational Model, followed by an overview of our core fracture, counter-stories and sites of possibility. To begin this complex set of findings in plain language, the theory presented throughout the following two chapters is as follows: In order to create a profound and durable change in context that moves towards justice (the definition of transformation), we must redefine size through an enactment of the small in a dialectical relationship with the big. This redefinition of size applies to how we develop practices and where we target efforts of change (the way to do transformation). Each component of this theory of transformation is discussed in this chapter and the next.

A Note about Voice: The We, the I, and the They

Writing my findings in line with the epistemological assumptions of this study required an intentional centering of the voices of my co-researchers in the process. Knowing that the writing of this chapter was a solo project, I have intentionally included co-researcher voice and ideas in a few ways. First, I use we, us, and our when what I am
sharing is something constructed in partnership with co-researchers. Second, I have included longer excerpts pulled from participatory sessions to keep these findings as close to our collective analysis as possible, infusing the words and analysis of co-researchers directly into the writing of the chapter. This study played with the line delineating where participant voice ends, and theory begins, and I do my best to be clear and transparent throughout the findings to delineate ownership of ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Research Question #1</th>
<th>Research Question #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Aspirational Model of Transformation</td>
<td>Core Fracture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 1: The Center Moving Towards Justice</td>
<td>Sisyphean Task: Organizers and activists are creating a radical vision that they have no intention of achieving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Part 2: The Context Durable and Profound Changes to Context</td>
<td>Counter-stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too busy: Urgency and the Moral Obligation to act</td>
<td>Too far: Giving up in the face of an unattainable vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Too Futile: ‘dirtiness’ of working inside the Nonprofit Industrial Complex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sites of Possibility: Dialectic of the big and small</td>
<td>Connecting the everyday details and the Revolutionary practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal is insufficient but deeply integral to transformation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3. Organization of Findings Chapters*
Overview

In this chapter, I detail our co-constructed model of transformation which provides insights and specificity into the phenomena and practice of transformation. This chapter answers the first research question of this study: How do grassroots organizers and activists understand and frame transformation? I first answer this question by sharing a Venn diagram of transformation comprised of the themes of transformation, to provide a clear visual to begin this complex set of findings. Subsequently, I present the Aspirational Model of Transformation; a model which paints a picture of what transformation is or should be according to the participants in this study by showing how the themes in the Venn Diagram relate to each other. This model is built from our community and academic dialogical process, outlined in chapter three, and is broken into two parts: 1) The center: moving towards justice and 2) The context: durable and profound changes to context.

This Aspirational Model outlines how organizers and activists are framing the phenomena and process of transformation in Miami-Dade County. This chapter ends with a reflection on the limitations of this Aspirational Model in informing transformative practice. In Figure 6, found below, I begin with our Venn Diagram constructed by a co-researcher to define transformation as something that occurs at the intersecting point of the components of our model. This image provides a visual to begin this complex set of findings and argues that each facet of transformation is necessary, but alone each is insufficient.
Transformation is durable, but durability is not enough. Transformation is profound, but profundity is not enough. Transformation is towards justice, but direction of change is not enough. Transformation is about altering context, but this alteration is not enough. This diagram demonstrates how co-researchers and I have constructed our definition of transformation: transformation happens at the intersection of each; it is a process of actively moving towards justice; it is a durable and profound change; and it addresses contexts of injustice across multiple levels of analysis.

**Our Aspirational Model of Transformation: How the puzzle fits together**

In this study, our goal was about more than identifying the facets of transformation. It was about constructing an actionable theory to understand how to do transformative work. To do this, I will provide a detailed presentation of our Aspirational Model and its component parts built from our thematic and participatory modeling process (Figure 7).
Figure 7. Aspirational Model of Transformation

This model of transformation is broken into two parts: 1) vision and practice towards justice: ‘the how’ of transformation and 2) durable and profound changes to context: ‘The What’ of transformation.

The Center of the Aspirational Model Part 1: Moving towards justice: The
vision and practice of transformation. The first part our Aspirational Model of Transformation defines what organizers and activists mean when they say, ‘towards justice’. Part 1 of the model is broken into two categories: a vision towards justice and a collective practice towards justice (Figure. 8).
Figure 8. The How: Zooming in to the center of our Aspirational Model

If transformation is not a neutral tool and can move in any possible direction at any moment, articulating what it is we are trying to move *towards* becomes central in an actionable framework for transformation. Transformation is an active and value-laden process of creating profound and durable change to context, as will be defined in the second part of this model. To identify what kind of change, and what kind of world, organizers and activists are working towards, I asked interviewees to define the kind of just community they were envisioning when they imagined a transformed world. The vision that we hold informs the practices that we choose to enact, and vice versa; as we learn from our practices, we in turn re-inform our vision. At the center of the Aspirational Model we have placed *vision and practice towards justice*. The vision, defined below, is the collective definition of what it would mean to move towards justice according to our participants. The practices, discussed after the vision, were found to be disconnected
from this vision, laying the foundation for the core fracture identified and discussed in detail in chapter five.

**A vision towards justice.** Right from the first conversation, the co-researchers made it clear that they thought transformation could be a change for the worse: towards less justice, towards more oppression, and towards more inequality. The direction of change was consistently discussed and questioned. During a conversation on the definition of transformation, Anna discussed the neutrality of transformation:

> It is neutral in a sense because it doesn't define the outcome of the transformation, because we talk about how transformation can be in any kind of direction. So, in order to use this [model], you would have to define the context. Could be Miami-Dade County, the country, or the world. And then the change that you are trying to make in that context has to do with what your vision is. It has to do with your ideology. It could be that you want to transform society into something terrible.

In order to be clear about the kind of transformation we were discussing for this study, we added a question to the interview guide to ask interviewees to share their vision of a just world. We constructed a collective vision from this question to include facets of interviewees definitions of ‘justice’. This is not a prescriptive vision that all groups will identify as transformation, but a local vision of what it would look like if organizers and activists transformed what they believed needed transforming. This definition is built on the following sub-categories from the data: a world where there is *enough for everyone*, where *human rights are centered* over profits and privatization, where *communities are sustainable, connected, and organized*, where *institutions are just and accessible* to all, where there is a *shared and liberatory consciousness*, and where *justice is continuously redefined and led by those most impacted by injustice*. Each category of the vision is discussed below.
**Enough for everyone.** There are enough resources to meet everyone's basic needs: enough land, enough time for family, community, and love because we have a more equitable distribution of wealth and resources. Beth, an interfaith leader and organizer, explained it in this way:

So, I feel like you go, and do your job, and do it well and you are treated well...and to me you go home, and you are with your family and you have at least a little disposable income. You know, you may not be going on Caribbean Cruises, I’m not, but you have at least a little time to go to a movie with your family or go watch your kids play soccer or something. Gabriela added that this idea of *enough* would come from the re-distribution of the wealth accumulation of the one percent:

I feel that there is enough land and resources for everyone, and the reason why so many people live in poverty and have food insecurity and have to migrate and all of that is because there is so much accumulation of wealth in the hands of so few

**People and their human rights are centered over profit.** A transformed community would have shifted priorities and values so that human rights are given the “highest value in our society,” and the earth and all living creatures are treated with dignity and respect. Education, healthcare, water, food, and housing are “sacred” and a certainty like we currently see with military spending. People are driven by love and community rather than money and materialism, and all public goods are de-privatized including healthcare, education, and prisons. Zane, an organizer who came up in the black liberation movement, defined it in the following way:

Things like healthcare and education, those are given because those are the things that people need to fulfill their fullest humanity. So, it’s not just a question, you know, we live in a society where these commodities are basically people which are sold in the market and so the goal is to de-commodify basic human needs and have them, you know, because they are not commodities, they are rights.
Further, in a participatory session we debated the legitimacy of the current framing of human rights, as defined by international organizations, asking who benefits from them and to what extent they push a particular agenda in-line with a neoliberal ideology. Luis articulated it as follows:

The assumption, I think, is that whatever human rights organizations say we take as truth. And I have found that a lot of what rights organizations say it's pretty much in line with the western power agenda. Not that they get it wrong all of the time, but I do feel like there is this kind of agenda. So, like the principle of human rights, everybody is entitled to, you know, rights of life, not just human, I extend that to animals. But that is not to say that when Amnesty International or when Human Rights Watch says to do this…. we should always question. And potentially, by having a statement about the decommodification of Human Rights, it’s actually a stance against [these organizations].

Communities are sustainable, connected, and organized. In this vision of a just world, community members and workers feel a sense of their own power and hold enough power to drive policy and change that works in their interest. Systems are responsive to community needs, rather than to lobbyists and the elite. Citizens, residents, and undocumented people have the ability to live safe and connected lives. Nonprofits would not need to exist as people will have the tools to organize themselves and can break out of the relationship to capital reified in the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC). Gabriela, in her critique of the NPIC and its relationship to Capitalism argued the following:

Capitalism is not sustainable. It needs to be dismantled. It just creates inequality and injustice and breeds racism...I think that for me, transformative means that we create another system that allows for communities to sustain themselves without the dependency of the capital and corporate greed. And are able to just love and live and play in their own community in a way that is sustainable and happy and successful.
Although not all participants were overtly anti-capitalist there was a consistent thread in the responses that communities need to be built on relationships, values of sustainability and be organized to be able to withstand any negative impacts of capitalism, gentrification, development and so on.

*Systems are altered, and new ones are created which everyone has access too.* In this vision towards justice, providing access to corrupt and broken systems was not enough. Luis explains why creating access to corrupt systems is both necessary and insufficient:

> When we look at structures, like the second chances [the campaign to restore voting rights to 1.2 million previously incarcerated felons in Florida] of course, I support the Second Chances campaign, of course I support people getting their rights restored. Of course, I support the concept of democracy, however it has been hijacked, I still support it. But the structure in which it happens is so corrupt, but no matter what changes we make with in it, it is still not going to be transformative. because it happens within a deeply corrupted structure…. so, to me, we need to rethink the structure or rethink all of the other aspects of it. I am not saying that we should abandon the nonprofit corporate golden hen. There is work that we are doing that is good for people. we are helping people break out of debt, starting lending circles, that help people fix their credit, within a deeply corrupt system of credit - within a deeply corrupt financial system. But we are still helping people within that system to have a better chance. So, it's not transformative, but we are helping people in some way. We are helping people enroll for health care, we are helping people do their taxes and get a little money from the government. But in terms of transformative change, are we going to change the power dynamics that create the inequity? That is keeping so many people oppressed? Absolutely not. We can't, not when we are taking money from Chase, or Bank of America.

This vision looks beyond making democracy and systems more accessible, even though it is still important to transform systems of education, economy, criminal justice, immigration, healthcare, and climate justice into systems that truly represent the people. Systems are altered or re-built in such a profound way that they are now sources of
support for people, provide status to undocumented folks, do not criminalize black and brown bodies, and find that all people feel safe to stand up to injustices that continue to seep from these systems. Luis argues that this all happens in conjunction with making these systems more accessible to all, broadening democracies, and creating participatory and deliberative democracies where everyone is able to participate in the decisions that impact their lives.

**Based on a shared liberatory consciousness towards justice.** Through participation in the struggle towards this vision, communities will develop a shared liberatory consciousness that aids them in standing up against new and ongoing injustice. This is articulated by Conrad, a youth and racial justice organizer, who works on the school to prison pipeline, when he asks that we reimagine a power structure where, there is “nobody reigning over nobody”. This liberatory consciousness was defined by Sofia as she acknowledged that no matter how successful our transformation, injustices will continue to arise, and we will need this collective consciousness to recognize and resist injustice:

I feel like the consciousness, like a liberatory consciousness regardless of the system, the situation, the conditions is really important and valuable. Because that will make people take ownership over an abusive relationship at home. Or you know, an injustice at the schools, or the workplace, or solidarity in the neighbourhood.

**Continuously redefined by and led by those most impacted by injustice.** Most importantly, this vision can, and should be, redefined and adapted by groups most impacted by injustice. Gabriela continuously highlighted the need to ensure that our work is being “led by the people most impacted”. The visions of groups impacted by oppression and injustice should be central to the vision of transformation.
Vision disagreement. Although there was significant overlap in this vision across interviewees which make up the sub-categories of vision discussed above, there was a degree of disagreement in the ways that visions were constructed, in the understanding of their uses and shared value and in the role that a vision plays in informing practice. I include here a discussion of these disagreements and vision contentions, which I will pick up again in chapter five as this vision disagreement goes a long way to informing the core fracture discussed in that chapter. Included here are three types of contradictions that challenged the coherence of the vision in the aspirational model and include: 1) the belief that there is no use in creating a vision, 2) agreement with the vision but a disbelief that there is a shared understanding of this vision driving the work, and 3) visions which conflicted with the categories identified above. Each of these vision disagreements add dimensionality and contention to our model and are an important reason that the analysis did not end after constructing the aspirational model discussed in this chapter.

No vision. Manuel, when asked what his vision of a transformed world, he responded, “Just no” and went on to say that transformation is ‘vague’ and “is used a lot in the social justice community but it doesn't mean that much to me. It's too vague to me”. Rather than creating a broad vision, Manuel stated that he would rather identify that which he has the power to change and make that happen: local policy on transportation, education, climate change, and housing. Manuel stressed pragmatism or realism rather than believing in the relevance of any kind of aspirational planning or action. Anna, in co-researcher discussion on this response identified why this contradiction could prove problematic in transforming structural issues:

These are really key issues. And superficially I agree with [them]… You just cannot solve any of these problems without dealing with National
policies. Like the bulk of funding comes from the federal government, you can't deal with education without dealing with the federal government, you can't deal with sea level rise without dealing with the federal government. It is completely preposterous to say 'I'm going to disconnect, I'm going to ignore national politics, I don't really know enough about them, but we ourselves in the state of Florida are going to solve these' that's just utterly absurd.

Manuel’s doubt that a vision improves the outcome of practice was a clue that our aspirational model fell short. The findings come back to this in chapter five.

*Disconnected vision.* We identified another set of responses from interviewees whose own visions of a just world contributed to the categories above but did not believe that this was a shared or connected vision in their organizations or across the movement. Sofia highlighted that this disconnect makes her own vision ‘just [feel] like words’ rather than an actionable vision we are working towards:

I don't think that we have collectively envisioned and articulated that in a way that makes me feel really confident. It feels like we don't have the language, we have policy agendas, we have legislative agendas, we have big values, but we don't, it's like we haven't found the middle ground of being able to, I don't know, it just feels like words to me. You know 'sustainable, healthy, vibrant, joyful' communities where everybody can contribute to their maximum potential and everybody gets their basic needs met. And we go from survivor to thriver, from being a subject of history to a protagonist of their own lives and of our collective lives. It is just words.

This disconnect between and across visions, or the general assumption that organizers and activists do in fact share a deep and critical vision of what they are working towards was the second clue that our aspirational model required further review. This perspective opens up the conversation about what people might agree or disagree about, including values, ideology, goals of practice and the particular practices that are needed in transformative efforts.
Conflicting vision. The final contradiction in the vision regarded particular components of a vision that were categorically incommensurable with the vision being constructed. These included Carlos, who stated that the answer to transforming communities was top down policy change rather than grassroots power building; while Ernesto stated that we had much to learn from China who had centered economic growth over human rights and was now a case study in successful transformation. Co-researchers saw the China example as conflicting with values and ideologies of the rest of the research making it an abrasive example of so called transformation. This final example demonstrated a need to understand how vision and practice can be disconnected. These participants were doing good social justice work according to co-researchers or they would not have been in the sample in the first place. Yet they held incredibly divergent perspectives on how to do it and which examples to look to understand it. These two cases demonstrate that the vision is not always the driving force informing practice making up the third and final dimension of visioning that pushed our analysis towards the fracture analysis in chapter five.

Overall, the construction of this vision, based on the data found in our interviews helped to construct clarity in our Aspirational Model of Transformation by identifying what it was we were aspiring to. The next component making up part one of the model includes practices and actions that move us towards justice.

A practice towards justice: “Oh, you're calling me emperor who has no clothes! Caught me, caught us!” The title of this section on practice is a quote from Sofia, the executive director of a major immigrant rights organization. Just before this quote, she described a well thought out vision of change, and showed me their
organizational theory of change, and their strategic plan in which the practices and strategies they would employ to transform the fabric of immigration and immigrant experience in Florida were highlighted. Of all of the interviews, she provided the most thorough response to explain what transformation is, and how she proposed being a part of it. Yet, when asked how she actually did this work, she laughed and yelled ‘caught me!’. Here is an excerpt from a conversation between Sofia and I during her interview demonstrating the clear, and admitted, disconnect between her vision and practice:

Sofia: Our mission is connectivity and that has a lot of levels, connecting people with each other, with their organizations, with their communities, with influence and policy makers. So, connection is big...ultimately as organizers that is what we do. And that is how stuff gets done, through connections, human connections. But also connecting the dots between issues, between systems, so we are not dealing with the...symptoms, we are dealing with the systems, so that leads to consciousness, and so for people to have an awareness of root causes of migration and you know paradigm shifts, like 'it’s in not my personal problem it is a social situation' or 'I do have power, I'm not just you know a disposable laborer' so consciousness is really key to that, and then capacity. So, you know if you're connected and you can have an awakening moment of consciousness, then you have to have the skills to impact, do we want to impact the elections because our leadership is failing, and do we want to impact new economies and build alternative or parallel economic models, do we want to impact culture because we need to get humanized because of the narrative. So, connection, capacity, and consciousness. ...You can really see it here [hands me strategic planning document] this is our theory of change around power. And systems of power, systems of oppression and who has power, who doesn't have power, and how we understand exclusion and inclusion. And then this is from symptoms to systems, because sometimes we are addressing the symptoms and not the system. And we have to go a little deeper and do the Buddhist four whys - Why, why, why, why? And then this is around our I don't know, now they call it intersectionality, but just you know, we as a movement fit into a historical lineage, but also in a broader local, state, national political context.

Natalie: my question is, are you actually able to do this work, or are you still kind of here (symptoms)?
Sofia: Absolutely still at the very surface of the work. I mean it is ridiculous...Oh, you're calling me emperor who has no clothes [laughter]

GOTCHA! Caught me, caught us!

In general, participants found it much easier to articulate where they wanted to go then how they were supposed to get there. It was much easier for organizers and activists to agree that Nazi’s are bad, then to agree on how their practices may get them to a transformed community where justice and compassion for all is the prevailing context.

Our discussions of practices became more fruitful during and after our fracture analysis of the model which is presented in the next chapter. What was clear, however, during the construction of our Aspirational Model was that the practices that were being used were not targeting the components of context, or intentionally moving towards the kind of justice we had defined in our vision. There was a disconnect. Next, I will describe the second part of our Aspirational Model of Transformation focusing on the domains context, followed by their relationship to ecological levels of analysis and the construction of a critical problem frame.

**Aspirational model part 2 - Durable and profound changes to context**

I was trying to figure out how [all the data] connected because we have talked about that a lot, but what do you do with it? So, I thought of a model that could be used to talk about transformation, or to evaluate transformation because I was thinking about when you're up close we've talked a lot about like 'we measure things in wins' but that is so micro level. You have to take a step back and over the last 20 years, other than the little wins, [ask] what has changed or you kind of have to step back from your small community to look at the bigger community. So, you need a bigger lens. I tried to draw this little map [a precursor to the final dialogical model] that helped me think about it. The circle is the context. That would be all the structures that exist, the cultural norms, the expectations of society, all those institutions would be the kind of context. And then in the middle of the circle there is like power, change, ideology and vision. Which are all related to each other and influence each other in both directions.…. And the context influences all of these things in the
middle but then the transformation is how these things influence the context. It was kind of interesting for me, because usually if I were to draw something like this I would be like 'power is the bigger superstructure' and then everything else is less than that. But I was thinking about how, now I'm thinking more like context is the thing that is the overarching idea and that if you were going to measure transformation, ... evaluate it, reflect on it, you'd be like 'have we changed the context that we are overall living in, are we now living in a different context and how do these things relate to each other. (Anna, participatory session)

In our Aspirational Model of Transformation, context makes up the outer circle (Figure 9), visualized as what we are swimming in. Participants defined context, or settings we are trying to transform, as having three domains categorized as important in creating durable and profound contextual change. The three domains of context include: structures of power, ideology and the dominant narrative, and historical and current contextual factors. The domains of context can be understood, for the purposes of these findings, as both the targets of change as well as a source of knowledge. We need to study, know, and understand the domains of a particular context and their influence on our current reality, and we need to use that knowledge to inform our practice as we target shifts and changes in those contexts.

Figure 9. Aspirational Model Part 1: Swimming in Context
This duality of context, both learning from and working to change it, weaves its way through the entirety of this part of the model. I end this section with a discussion of what participants mean when they say that transformation was durable and profound change to context.

**Domains of context: Power, ideology, history and the current moment**

Here, I dig into the three domains of context (Figure 10) that are identified in our Aspirational Model of transformation: structures of power, ideology and the dominant narrative, and the historical and current context.

![Figure 10. The intersecting contexts of transformation: power, ideology, and historical and current context](image)

As described above, there are two sides to this finding of context: 1) the identified context needs to be *deeply studied, understood, and considered* in the construction of any transformative change process, and 2) context is the *target of change* of that
transformative change process. This model proposes that in order to create transformative change, all three domains of context need to be addressed. Favoursing one domain over another may limit the transformative potential. Next, I define each domain of context and their requisite parts.

**First domain of context: Structures of power.** Power functions in ubiquitous and insidious ways to uphold and reify injustice within contexts. *Understanding* and *altering* the structures of power is a key domain in transforming context. By structures of power, participants focused mainly on formal structures of power such as policy, economic and political structures, and according to Robert, changing structures of power would create “changes in how society functions”. While Beth defined this as “institutional and structures that we have and how decisions are made within society”. These discussions of power are defined below according to the following categories: shifting and building power, understanding and re-imaging how power works, and owning and using the power that we already have - all of which together would lead to a profound and durable shift in context.

**Shift power imbalance and build power.** One of the most common phrases in the data is about *building* and *shifting* power. In the majority of cases when asked to define what this means, interviewees were unable to define further. So much of the work being discussed by organizers and activists had as a goal this abstract idea of building power: building power for those who are perceived to have none or building power for those who have less than what is needed to actively pursue their own interests. Shifting the context of power, for many, was synonymous with transformation. During his interview, Robert,
a co-researcher, and long-time leader of a nonprofit that focuses on organizing immigrant
and farm worker communities, defined transformation in the following way:

Transformational change means that either a group or social class has been
able to create a change that favours their interests...A shift in power
meaning that folks who opposed it no longer have the power to prevent it
from happening.

Shifting power was discussed as a way of ensuring that power is more equitably
distributed so that those being most impacted by an issue have the power to rectify that
situation. Robert went on, in his definition of power in transformation, to say:

People have enough power, enough vis a vis their employers. So that they
could get living wages, fair treatment, have a system of redress where their
interests will be fairly dealt with. It could mean unions, but not
necessarily. But basically ... the human rights of workers would be
considered to be the part of the social compact of society and fundamental
sort of value. And it would be real, there would be real mechanisms to
implement them.

Building power was framed as something beyond electing a progressive official or
winning an electoral campaign. This domain of context was about altering the structures
of power in such a way that they become systems and structures that work for the benefit
of those they serve. Conrad framed the need to build power as a way of getting us to the
point where we can construct our government as a representative and accountable system
of power:

I don't think we need to be targeting people with power, I think we need to
be mobilizing our people in the community. Because they... have votes,
and we can start [electing] people locally, and then statewide, [then]
nationally it's going to be easy. All our community representatives, all our
state representatives look like us, now we have this federal law, and this
federal government that doesn't look like us, we can easily just, you know,
we vote you out, we vote you out, we vote you out.
Anna, while agreeing that shifting power was indeed important in creating transformative change, was concerned that we are quick to overstate successes in building power and need to be wary of assigning shifts in power after any slight change is created. Anna said:

> Just because you won something, and you exercise some amount of power, that doesn't mean that you've actually built power, right? Like you had power in that one moment perhaps, but will you have it next year, or 10 years from now? You know? Not necessarily. So, building power is something very, it can be very ephemeral I think.

Power is a complex phenomenon, and participants were excited to think about power beyond simply building and shifting it. The next section outlines the concept of understanding and re-imagining what power is and how it is used.

**Understand and re-imagine how power works.** Power, in all of its complexities requires those trying to change it to know what it is and how it works. This, according to participants, will provide the skills and knowledge necessary to re-Imagine ways that we can enact and relate to power. On re-imagining non-hierarchical leadership structures of shared learning and knowledge, Conrad explained that:

> whoever is in power we need to know all about them. If we know all about them and we get the same knowledge to our young people, and they're on the same page as us, now how do we all make decisions. Not ‘we make decisions for you’, not ‘we give you an example’ and they say, ‘yea I like that’, no. How do we all come together and think critically about how do we change things. And that I think is the most important thing about transformation, is how do we have a Martin Luther King, and a Martin Luther King gives this Malcolm X's idea, and this Malcom X gives this person this idea, and we keep giving and we keep bringing people up to our leadership so there's not anybody that's following, there's not anybody that's not knowing what the plan is, everybody is on the same plan, so when a Martin Luther King passes away, when a Malcolm X passes away, you still have these other people that are still on the same track and fighting for the same thing and can lead spaces the same way.

The interviewees generally talked about *flipping power* as the only way that they were able to understand a change to the structures of power. Similarly, in our
participatory sessions, co-researchers talked about how time and time again when power is successfully shifted from one group to another, it becomes a new context of power where the old oppressor is now oppressed by the new oppressor. This narrow definition of flipping power was disrupted by the category of re-imagining power where participants discussed the need to create structures of power that are non-hierarchical and to create structures of power where everybody's knowledge is important and legitimate.

For example, Zane, a labour and grassroots organizer, discussed the necessity of creating a deliberative democracy, and not one limited to our government representation, but creating opportunities to hold real power in all aspects of our lives. He explained deliberative democracy as a “broadening of participation and democracy, extended democracy into the workplace and the community life. [Creating] more opportunities for direct deliberative democracy. As opposed to just representational democracy, all the way down to community level”. To transform the context of power it requires an imagination of ways in which power can, and should, play out within and across groups and classes of people. Anna was unsure if this re-imagining process was even possible:

I was going to say, that at the same time I think there is a good reason why revolutions have that dynamic. Like if you just say, 'ok we are all equal now, then the people who were in power before are like 'ya right, I'm going to take my guns and kill all of you and take power back’, like that is why that always happens. I don't know a way that you don't oppress the previously empowered class because otherwise they I mean like the CIA funding Cuban dissidents in Miami to try and overthrow the government in Cuba. It’s like ya, you have to tamp down on that otherwise you lose everything you fought your revolution for. So even though I would like a world in which no one is oppressing anybody. I'm also like ‘there is a reason why these things play out over and over again’. And I think, I want to be realistic when we talk about power. The reality is that so far, we haven't seen a situation in which somebody doesn't have power over somebody else.
Although there was no consensus on what power should be re-imagined as, there was significant discussion highlighting the importance of getting outside of the idea that all we can do is ‘build’ or ‘shift’ power from oppressor to oppressed and back again, in a constant pendulum of recreating structures of power that oppress a particular group of people.

**Own and use power we already have.** One assumption in the discussion of building and shifting power, is that those impacted by injustice do not already have power. Another key component of power that makes up our Aspirational Model is focused on the need for individuals and groups to understand that they already hold significant power, whether that is in the ballot box, or in using their collective voices to hold people in power accountable to change. Sofia highlighted this when she said:

> I think we would be able to... [tap into] our true power and potential, our skills, our capacity, our courage, our effectiveness, you know?...But I think ... in general we are underperforming. And we are not expressing the real power that we potentially have. Whether that is civic engagement, organizing membership development, or whether that is electoral, you know, impact or even narrative wise. So, our base, poor people, people of colour that are marginalized ...we need to really shore up and cement that in a better way and then we need to break off. ...I think that we need to take the county and take it neighbourhood by neighbourhood and figure out who is working there on what issues and we need to bring together.

In one story of transformation, Gabriela outlined the Janitors for Justice campaign at the University of Miami where janitors, underpaid and undocumented, found the power to fight back and make change by embracing their own power as a collective:

> To see how folks who were really at the very bottom of the ladder, of the totem at the universities power dynamic, slowly but steadily they were able to see that they actually held a lot of power. And that they could wield that power. And ... really exercise it, from being super scared to sign a [union] card, to saying .... 'We are shutting this down, we are going to get what we want, because we are powerful' so that took months but it happened and we saw it and then more people were coming forward and
joining as people were actually stepping up and getting empowered. So that process was super, just to see how an undocumented woman that never thought she would ever be able to exercise that level of power through this process was like, 'it goes down with me, if it's not for us, it's not happening'.

In another example, Roseline, a front-line organizer who has a long history of working for immigrant rights, electoral politics and civic engagement, and who recently switched sectors to be able to work across issues and break down social justice siloes, talked about the power people have in community to hold politicians accountable, and vote them in and out of office. This power is something people in formal seats of power are afraid of. She explains that:

Sometimes you actually creating that kind of tone where you create those enemies which are actually ways that you leverage power. Because people fearing you and feel what you can do and how that is going to impact them in their lives and in their positions of power they tend to cower very quickly. And so, what does that then mean for the communities that are to come together? You're not going to get re-elected if you don't do what you need to do, and we are actually going to find someone to represent us the way that we truly feel that we need to be represented as opposed to electing the incumbent that is just there and has never been doing anything for the community...there is nothing more beautiful to watch than people accept their own power and understand that your voice matters in this process. But until we get them to understand that they have a voice and that voice is powerful and that people will be held accountable by this. It's not going to change.

Above, I have outlined the components of transforming the structures of power as the first domain of context. This included shifting and building power, understanding and re-imaging how power works, and owning and using the power that we already have. Although this framing of power included critiques of our current practice and our limited success in understanding and altering the structures of power, they remain integral to our understanding and framing of the proposed Aspirational Model. According to participants, shifting and embracing structures of power is only one type of context that
requires attention. Without understanding and shifting the ideological underpinning of the formal power structure, we will continue to recreate the same injustices in the new structures.

**Second domain of context: Ideology and the dominant narrative.** Ideology, or what participants also referred to as the dominant narrative, is another domain of context that reifies and reproduces social injustices in movements, communities, and society as a whole. Ideologies, and our dominant narratives, are less visible than the structures of power discussed above, and if left unaddressed, can reify oppression even as organizers and activists work tirelessly to shift structures of power. Surfacing, studying, and shifting the ideologies that drive the injustice being targeted for transformation, represents the second domain of context for creating profound and durable transformative change. Shifting ideology away from the dominant ideology of neoliberal individualism was defined by participants as: changing *collective* hearts and minds, and the collective narrative that informs and upholds decisions, policies, behaviours, and resistance.

The following section on ideology is broken down into two parts to outline the ways that participants discussed ideology. The first, underscores having the power to create and drive the ideology or dominant narratives, an important connection to the previous context of power. This is followed by understanding and shifting the ideological context of different groups of people who reproduce the dominant narrative in ways that recreate systems of oppression: agents of change inside the movement, people in power, and the societal ideology of the masses. One co-researcher explained, that on top of any work targeting formal structures that he still believes that “we need to go after changing minds, we have to create political will. Chang[e] narratives”.
Power to create and drive ideological context. Ideology was a hot button topic shared by many participants. Other words used when describing this included worldview, narrative and dominant narrative. More work would be needed to develop a nuanced analysis of these terms and the meaning attributed to them by participants but for the purpose of this section, I refer to ideology interchangeably with worldview and narrative as they were all used by participants as words meanings the underlying belief system driving behaviour and change practices.

In their discussions of ideology, participants highlighted the importance of being able to construct and drive alternative ideologies. Ideologies that derive from social equity, ideologies which at their root open the imagination and possibilities of an equitable society. Multiple interviewees identified that in the past two decades, especially in the context of Florida, the power to drive ideology has been squarely in the hands of those pushing a neoliberal and conservative agenda. The components that make up the current dominant ideology of neoliberalism facing social movement workers are those of privatization, individualism, and global imperialism, and they have positioned activists and organizers consistently in a defensive position. In order transform the injustices produced and reproduced by this ideology organizers and activists are tasked with creating the mechanistic and transactional changes needed in their communities, while simultaneously challenging neoliberal ideological dogmatism in both the political left and the political right.

Examples in the interviews help to differentiate between transactional changes and the underlying ideologies driving the problematic policies in the first place, which would lead to more transformative change. These policies include: working to close the
Medicaid gap in Florida while pushing a human centered ideology that would frame healthcare as a human right, fighting against anti-TPS or Temporary Protected Status, and anti-DACA, or the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, policies while simultaneously constructing a narrative of undocumented people as humans, and pushing for fair wages, wage theft ordinances, and worker safety regulations while challenging the underlying ideologies of capitalism. On the other hand, Luis points to the ideologies driving global imperialism and U.S foreign policy which are directly related to global forced migration, a root cause of people coming to America from countries embroiled in war. Sofia spoke to this idea in her reference to shifting worldview to one that fits with the experiences of our communities:

> For me it has to do with consciousness and power and whether we are able to you know create a worldview that is more reflective of our experiences and that addresses the imbalance of power in its many manifestations.

Overall, ideology and the dominant narrative were discussed as the root of what is driving the policies that those in social movements are reacting to and fighting to stop. Without addressing the underlying ideology, organizers and activists will remain in a reactionary stance constantly fighting new iterations of harmful policies and limits on their ability to create profound and durable change.

**The groups reproducing and challenging ideology: agents of change, power holders, and the masses.** Ideology plays an important role across different groups working for or against transformative change. Ideology plays out differently in different groups. As discussed earlier, it is important both to study and understand the ideological context, as well as to shift it. In the Aspirational Model we frame ideology not as something that we as a group can construct and impose as the ideology, but as something
we need to surface and study in order to understand how and where ideology is re-creating systems of injustice inside our movements, within and by people in power, and how they are normalized within the broader population or masses in society. By highlighting the role that ideology plays inside different groups of people, interviewees articulated different ideological targets to consider when addressing transformative change.

*In the Movement: ‘An anarchist, a communist, and a democrat walk into a bar-and reach the lowest common denominator’.* There is no coherent shared and explicit ideology found in the interviews regarding participation in local social movements. However, participants discussed the need to co-construct one as an important precondition to transformation. Again, this does not mean creating and imposing one all-encompassing and pure ideology on others, but is about consistently surfacing, discussing and re-framing ideology and understanding the role that ideology is playing in our construction of practice. Most participants referred to themselves as “being a part of the movement”, “from the left” and “believing in a just world”, with some labeling themselves as socialists, communists, democrats, or anarchists. Anna, during a participatory session, argued that if you put an anarchist a communist, and a democrat in a room, each coming from a very different ideological home, and expect them to find common ground for action, you would end up with a watered down or muddled plan. Although homogeneity is not the likely goal, surfacing, understanding, and openly discussing these ideologies within the movement, to better understand how and why groups of activists do the work that they do, would be a good start.
Interviewees did not believe that there was a shared ideology within the movement in Miami, even if some did feel that there were shared goals. The lack of dialogue and study at the ideological level within the movement was seen as limiting to their transformative potential as they consistently, according to both Matt and Anna, seemed to arrive at “the lowest common denominator”. It was much clearer that people ‘in the movement’ agreed on the bad things that they do not want - Nazis are bad - but it was much harder to find agreement on what good things they want to work towards. For example, some participants discussed immigration reform, while others argued for open borders. Some participants discussed the necessity of dismantling capitalism, while others were working to flip Florida to the Democratic Party.

There is a near ubiquitous assumption emerging from the data around community practice, that we have to work together to create change, that there is power in numbers, and that we need to break down issue siloes in our work. Matt and Anna, however, pointed out that people continue to work together for the sake of working together, even when there is little basic trust or ideological alignment between groups. Understanding, surfacing, and interrogating the many ideologies within the movement is an important step in constructing transformative action that is not about reaching the lowest common denominator.

*For people and institutions in power: Political will, not political maneuvering.*

The next group of people discussed, in terms of ideologies that drive injustice, are the people in positions of power. People in power were defined as *any group or individual that has the power to obstruct transformation, and who are the drivers of the dominant ideology*: developers, politicians, lobbyists, leaders of business, nonprofits, and
foundations. Shifting the ideology of those in power, for example from ideologies that would support charity to those that call for liberation, was seen as a much more transformative outcome than pressuring power holders to change one policy, or compromise on one deal. Policy decisions were seen as temporary, likely to be overturned, and hard to maintain. While ideological shifts were seen as having more longevity and transformative ripple effects; and that when there was enough of an ideological change, transformative changes would be much harder to shift back.

Political maneuvering, defined as transactional wins, were not considered by participants to be enough for transformative change. Rather, a shift in the ideology, of those in power, away from a neoliberal ideology permeating economic, development, political and social policy and norms, towards one that embraces and believes in the humanity of all people. Conrad argued, that we needed an ideological shift where people in power saw themselves as civil servants and behaved as such: “[I am not] over you, but connected and equal with you”.

That said, co-researchers were very clear that changing the collective hearts and minds of the powerful would never be enough. Luis was concerned that Conrad’s sentiment assumed that people in power are “nasty”, and that making them nicer as individuals would have an impact on structural injustice. Below is an excerpt of a conversation between co-researchers during one of our sessions:

Luis: first of all, you are assuming that all nasty people are nasty people to other people and they are not. A lot of these oppressors, a lot of these one percenters go to church, they donate money to the poor, and in their personal interactions they are nice to others. They probably have a genuine feeling of empathy

Anna: But they believe in trickle-down economics. They think 'oh this policy will ultimately benefit' people who don't have a job. Will create
more jobs and that will be better for working class people' it’s not just like 'I hate poor people' I mean some people are like that or maybe they don't realize that that is some of the ideology is driving their actions. But I don't think consciously people are just like 'I hate these factory workers'

Luis: Right. But even like the people who are nasty, like KKK type cases, even if they turned nice it is not going to change anything. Yes, we need to treat each other with love and respect and all of that, but if we don't challenge the structures and the systems it is not going to change. So, everybody will be charitable. Everybody will be nicer to each other, you know, have empathy and things like that.

Anna: transformative change has to address ideology. Because ideology informs the way that we operate.

Therefore, in this component of our Aspirational Model, participants called for the surfacing, challenging, and reorienting of the ideologies of those in power to open up the space for transformative change in context.

*Ideology of the ‘masses’.* The majority of our discussions, both in interviews and participatory sessions, focused on *us* or those inside the movement, and *them* or those in positions of power. But what about everyone else? Robert, during a participatory session, asked - what about those people “who might not have a clear direct interest but could take sides, what role can they play in transformative change?” Many abstract comments about “shifting ideology or worldviews” were shared during interviews, however, the broader populations in our communities were not discussed. During our participatory modeling process as Robert pushed us to think about this, we discussed the role of different groups of people - agents of change, power elites, and those most impacted by an injustice - where does ‘everyone else’ fit in upholding or challenging injustice to create durable and profound change.

At a broad level, interviewees and co-researchers discussed the need to change the ideology of a large enough number of people so that it would be deemed unacceptable to
undo a transformative change. One example, raised by Sofia, the executive director of a state-wide immigrant rights organization, and an immigrant herself, looked to shift in the dominant narrative of the LGBTQ movement in the past thirty years. Similarly, Luis discussed this same shift in relation to Universal healthcare in the United States. If an ideological shift occurred at the societal level, either towards the LGBTQ community being able to love who they want to love, or towards healthcare as a human right, then it would become untenable for things to keep going the way that they are. In one of his references to the Nicaraguan Revolution, Luis summed up the importance of changing the ideology of a people:

I think that once [Nicaragua] got to that revolutionary moment people had already evolved in their thinking, ‘police as an institution is not going to help us, courts are not going to help us, the military is the problem, the government is behind the military’. There was a radical change in the understanding that these institutions and the structures, and these systems of the society don't work for the people.

In another statement, Luis goes back to the example of healthcare as a human right and the role in societal narratives:

I also saw another recurring thing being ideology. How we think about things - it’s not just the power dynamics [that] change but how does that change our mentality, how does that change our ideology… If the power dynamics change, like for instance the healthcare, if there is a change in healthcare because politicians are afraid that they are going to lose their base and become irrelevant... they make a concession, which equates to a political maneuver. Rather than there being a change in our ideology, that healthcare access is a human right.

In this section, I outlined ideology and the dominant narrative as a component of context that requires attention in transformative change efforts. The key finding discussed is that the invisible nature of ideologies must to be surfaced, challenged, and shifted
across different groups of people holding different amounts of power in order to create transformative change.

**Third domain of context: Historical and current context.** The third domain of context is the historical and current context. Understanding and re-framing the zeitgeist of a context, made up of its history, and reflected in its current moment, is important in creating transformative change. Depending on the scope of the transformative effort, this might mean the historical context of a particular issue like global forced migration, mass incarceration, or the historical context of a particular geographical scope, such as the city of Opa-Locka or the State of Florida. Historical and current context is broken into two categories: historical memory and histories of injustice, and the current moment.

**Historical memory and histories of injustice.** Each context has a history, histories of injustices and histories of resistance. The concept of a historical memory is the idea of a group or society constructing or relating to a particular narrative. Constructing a historical memory is an active process of reconstructing narratives of oppression, revolution, power, and identity, through engaging in critical analysis, re-telling of histories, and surfacing the root causes. Creating a shared understanding of the root causes of injustice from a historical perspective is the third domain of context identified in our Aspirational Model of transformation.

Luis, during one of our participatory sessions, highlights the importance of a historical memory in understanding the injustices faced today in his analysis of root causes of global forced migration. He argues that we cannot address issues of immigration in America, or immigration in Miami, if we do not have a historically
grounded understanding of how and why the migration crisis is happening in the first place. An excerpt of his analysis is included here:

To me, it’s not just about making it easier for people to come here and live with dignity and have the ability to work and pursue the American Dream etcetera. But people don't leave their country and their family and everything they love because the grass is greener. People come here because situations at home turn to shit and oftentimes it is caused by larger systems like trade, and war, and so to me the question, the real transformation will not come in the shape of 'how are we nicer to immigrants', 'how do we integrate them more' but looking at the root causes of that forced migration and then addressing that. Addressing the way that the US interacts with other countries in commerce and diplomacy, and culturally.

Historical memory is not a passive engagement with history, but an active re-writing and critical engagement with the narratives and stories that have reified and normalized injustice in communities. These same patterns of reification play into and inform community action when not grounded in a critical and historical context.

Construction of a historical memory is a major initiative in and of itself; and because of the large amount of work to make this happen, many initiatives move forward without deeply engaging in this historical process. Robert, during a participatory session, highlighted this issue when he said:

I don't want to put names to it. But there is one [social movement] in particular that I think had a vision and popularized that vision in a way which was great in a way, but it was bad because it's simplified things so much that I think it just leads to crazy ahistorical action, needing constant action without a framework that ...doesn't meet people where they are at, doesn't engage with power and any kind of practical way. and it was just crazy shit that is going to fail - by people I love.

Building a critical and shared historical memory to provide this counter-story to historical injustices is an important domain of context in creating transformative change.
Current context: the moment. The second part of the historical and current context domain discussed at length in the data is the current moment. What is happening right now in the context we are working to transform. Participants discussed the importance of particular moments, leveraging these moments, and being prepared for future moments, all as a way of working to decipher when change initiatives may have a better chance of working, or when they are doomed to fail. The idea of the current moment integrates all of the previous domains of context, asking what is happening right now in terms of power structures, ideological pull, and historical context. Participants discussed a need for an intentional engagement with research and study as a continuous process due to the ever changing and shifting nature of a particular context. Understanding any particular moment and its complexity of context in order to identify what kinds of changes may have a chance at success was important, while simultaneously being wary of chasing moments that derail strategic and historically grounded transformative action.

Anna discussed the nature of chasing a moment. Even after groups have studied a local context, have built strategic action around that knowledge, they still get pulled into crisis mode when a contentious moment happens. She explains that since Trump has been elected, strategic efforts have been put on the back burner to address those groups who have become active in their communities:

There are millions and billions of people who need to be organized. And I think too often in social justice movements we chase the unitarians and liberal middle-class people who have been activated by Trump and we forget about everybody else who still aren't being organized but are actually more directly affected by what is going on and were already pissed off before the election. And I think NGO organizations because they have to be chasing funding and they are so dependent on constantly proving that they are doing something and like turning out people to an
action, whenever there is a moment like now post-election, it's like 'oh all of these people are engaged? Let me spend all of my energy now figuring out what to do with that' when really concretely what has changed for everyone else? Like things have changed for so many people, just like politically consciously, but like materially what has changed for all of the other people that you were supposed to be organizing beforehand?

In closing, historical memory and the ‘current moment’ make up the final domain of context to consider, study, and target in transformative efforts. Structures of power, ideology and the dominant narrative, and history and the current moment are the three domains within any context that create, maintain, and reproduce systems of injustice. In our Aspirational Model, transformative efforts would consider and target each of these components of context to increase the potential of any transformative effort taking hold.

**Domains of context: Different levels of analysis:** The three domains of contexts - structures of power, ideology and the dominant narrative, and historical and the current context, exist and intertwine within and across multiple ecological levels of analysis. Participants discussed change initiatives at personal, relational, organization/institutional, political/structural, and cultural. More discussion on these levels of analysis will be included in chapter five.

The co-researchers and I discussed how these three domains of context are present at all levels of analysis. Within an organization there are particular structures of power, there is an ideology and dominant narrative driving the work of the organization, and there is, of course, a historical context and a context of the current moment. This can also be said about organizations as an institutional structure, or of a political structure, or a particular culture. These three domains of context are present in the political/structural level, within global social issues, as well as the neighborhood level, and the relational
level. At each level or scope of analysis, these three domains of context limit, inform, and provide opportunities for transformative change that are unique to this context.

**Building a contextually based problem frame.** In wrapping up the contextual domains of our Aspirational Model, I close with a short discussion on the concept of a problem frame. A problem frame understands that problems are ‘time, place, and context bound” (Seidman & Rappaport, 1986, p. 1), and they are “not solvable in the once-and-for-all-you-don’t-have-to-solve-it-again fashion” (Sarason, 1986, p.23). How we choose to transform a particular injustice relates back to time, place, and contextual factors. By deeply engaging in the study of a particular context across the three domains of context discussed above, the co-researchers argued that we could construct a structurally, ideologically, and historically grounded problem frame to inform the construction of a collective vision, and an intentional and transformative praxis.

Finally, I come back to the original description of context that makes up this part of our Aspirational Model. Transformation is about durable and profound changes to these domains of context.

**Profound change to context.** Profound was constructed from the original holistic code “magnitude of change”. Challenging the idea that transformation is big, we are arguing that transformation is profound; regardless of its size. At the crux of this was the understanding that big changes are not necessarily transformative and small changes possibly can be transformative. Shifting the conception that ameliorative changes are small and transformative changes are big, the idea of profound change holds that regardless of size, profound changes to the contexts in which people live are the root of transformative change.
In the data, it was articulated over and over again that any change, in order to be defined as transformative, had to have real impacts in the lives of real people. Simply constructing and implementing new policy or new structures was insufficient. If those changes do not benefit the people or groups most impacted by injustice they would not be considered transformative.

Therefore, the most important part of our model of transformation is to create change that makes a profound difference in the context of the lives of real people. Profound changes, as discussed by interviewees, were described as “paradigm shifts” that create something fundamentally different from what was there before. Miguel, a frontline worker with previously undocumented status, has dedicated his life to organizing. His current efforts are focused on electoral organizing to protect undocumented people, immigrants, and people of color against systemic racism, voter disenfranchisement, and structures that restrict civic engagement. He described transformation in this way:

I guess it would be a sort of like a paradigm shift, like an uprootment of what is the conventional wisdom of the political context...And sort of engaging in campaigns that are not transactional and short sighted, but are you know it's not just flipping a senate district but actually transforming the electorate so that that you know that change is long term and deeply rooted.

**Durable and fluid.** Beyond being profound, participants stated that for a change to be considered transformative it had to be durable and fluid. First, durable was defined by the majority of interviewees as change that lasts a long time, or which has a durable impact. In her interview, Anna explained that “if you are constantly having to fight to keep what you've won, it's not really transformative”. Durability was discussed as changes that could actively withstand a crisis and/or opposing pressures that are pushing
to revert back. Durable change was defined by interviewees as “when it really sticks” or is “hard to turn back”.

The fluid nature of change is an additional component of durable and long-lasting change; Transformation is simultaneously durable and fluid: ongoing and never-ending. Sofia, pointed to early goals of the LGBTQ fight being limited to marriage and military, changes that seemed impossible 20 years ago, and which have now been achieved. Due to the fluid nature of our understanding and goals of change, marriage and military, although important in the transformation process, are no longer good enough. Holding these wins (durable), while working towards further changes in ideological, historical context, and structures of power (fluid) in the LGBTQ movement, require adapting to new contexts and needs. This tension between durable and fluid captures the messiness of change processes that must adapt to shifting contexts. The fluid nature of durable change challenges dogmatism about one particular win: i.e. ‘if we win $x$ we will have transformed the community’ at which point you can stop because you have won it all. Transformation has no beginning and no end, organizers and activists are constantly working towards something, holding onto the wins that they get, and re-imagining and fighting for more. Luis, a co-researcher, has been organizing to close the Medicaid gap and address healthcare access in South Florida. He illustrated the fluidity of transformation well during one participatory session:

I think it also has to do with going back to transformation being fluid that, ok there is a ceiling [of change]. But if we do understand transformation being this ever-changing change...so if you try to look at something that could be an example of that, Obamacare for instance. Obamacare has not shifted the balance of power. You go to a hospital. They will still charge you 2000$ a night to stay there. They will charge you 100$ for a Tylenol. But there was a change in mentality in that we went from thinking that universal healthcare was not ever going to happen in the US, that it was
welfare for the lazy. And people didn't want to work and unfair to those that did want to work. And the whole narrative around healthcare changed. Even though the balance of power has not changed in that we basically just opened up a pool of 40 million new customers to the pharmaceutical and medical industry and the hospitals and what not. But that shift in mentality is transformative and I think if we understand, but we could very easily say 'well that is not transformative because you know the pharmaceuticals and the medical industry are still making a killing ... but if we look at it in the larger contexts and if we understand transformation being this fluid, then it is transformative. We just need to keep working on it.

Profound and Durable changes to context are at the crux of ‘what’ is being transformed. In closing, in this second part of the model durable and profound changes to context: ‘The what’ of transformation I defined three domains of context: structures of power, ideology and the dominant narrative, and historical and current context followed by. I then discussed the differing levels of analysis, the resulting contextually constructed problem frame, and ended with a discussion about the definition of profound and durable.

How the Puzzle Comes up Short: The Limitations of our Aspirational Model

The story of our Aspirational Model is helpful in outlining the domains of context important in creating durable and profound change to context and providing tangible examples of what organizers and activists mean when they discuss a just world. It provides a solid frame for measuring and evaluating transformative efforts and informing new ways of doing. However, in the majority of our interviews, participants who were clearly able to articulate their vision, and their ideas of transformation, which make up this model, were far less able to use this knowledge to create practice that would create the transformation they were talking about.

After completing our Aspirational Model of Transformation, we looked to these practices and stories of transformation being shared by participants. As discussed during
part one of our model, we found that the practices were not lining up with how organizers
and activists were framing transformation. We had two choices. Our first choice would
have meant using our Aspirational Model to construct a tool to help organizers and
activists to be better, work harder, be more strategic, or recruit more organizers to ensure
we had more hands-on deck to deal with the urgency of structural injustices. This was not
the path we chose, however, that does not mean that we do not believe that better
training, connection, and recruitment for this kind of work is necessary and important.
Our second option, which we chose, was to critically question how our Aspirational
Model of Transformation may be setting us up to fail. Herein lies our core fracture, what
I am calling a Sisyphean task - where organizers and activists have constructed their
collective practice in a way that they will never transform the injustices they fight. This
core fracture, along with counter-stories and sites of possibility make up the next chapter:
the fracturing and re-building of our Aspirational Model.
Chapter 5 Findings: Fracturing and Rebuilding our Aspirations

In this chapter, I present the findings that were constructed to disrupt, fracture, and rebuild our aspirational model into something critically grounded in practice and organizer experience. This chapter addresses my second research question: How do the practices of organizers and activists deepen, inform, limit, and reframe their understanding about how to do transformation? I first answer this question by outlining the core fracture of our model which highlights the Sisyphean nature of participants transformative practice. I follow this with a discussion of three counter-stories constructed from the data to provide alternative and critical narratives to our core fracture which include: being too busy due to the urgency of injustice, feeling too far with the unattainable nature of the vision, and their current practice feeling too futile in the face of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex. Next, I present our two sites of possibility where we have constructed a dialectical relationship between the big and small of transformation as it relates to our practice and the context of change. These sites of possibility were constructed to create energy and spaces of resistance in the current collective practice, and to provide tangible pathways for improving practice. I use these sites of possibility to present an updated model at the end of this chapter. An overview of these findings is presented in Table 4.

Participants and the co-researchers identified a gap between the kind of world they were dreaming up for our collective future, and the kind of work that they were doing to get us there. In short, the work being discussed was not getting us to a transformed world, was not creating profound and durable changes context, nor was
much of it even trying. But why? And do we have the power to change it? That is the focus of this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Fracture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sisyphean Task: Organizers and activists are creating a radical vision that they have no intention of achieving</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counter-stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too busy: Urgency and the Moral Obligation to act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too far: Giving up in the face of an unattainable vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Futile: ‘dirtiness’ of working inside the Nonprofit Industrial Complex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites of Possibility: Dialectic of the big and small</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The big and small of practice: Connecting the everyday details and the Revolutionary practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The big and small of context: Personal is insufficient but deeply integral to structural transformation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Overview of findings from chapter five

This theory of transformation built on the findings of the following chapter in simple language is as follows: In order to create a profound and durable change in context that moves towards justice, we must redefine size through an enactment of the small in a dialectical relationship with the big. This redefinition of size applies to how we develop practices and where we target efforts of change. That said, the rest of this chapter will present the findings of the core fracture, counter stories and sites of possibility that led us to this theory.

Core Fracture - A Sisyphean Task: Organizers and Activists are Creating a Radical Vision that they have no Intention of Achieving

The core fracture of this study identified a gap between the radical vision held by organizers and activists and the practices being implemented to get there. I have called this fracture A Sisyphean Task: Organizers and activists are creating a radical vision that they have no intention of achieving. Sisyphean, because practices are being implemented
in such a way that transformation will never be the result. No amount of doing more of what is currently being done will ever create the profound and durable change in the context towards a more just world - our Aspirational Model of Transformation presented in chapter four.

This is not to say that the current practices of organizers and activists are not providing positive outcomes in their communities, nor that they are not transforming the conditions and contexts for some people, for some issues, sometimes, and in some places. Rather, there is something in the essence of how transformation is being defined, that limits and restricts practice and the potential to transform social injustices. This core fracture disrupts this essence of our Aspirational Model by surfacing the tensions implicit in it, which work to restrict the construction, implementation, and success of practice. This disconnect is not due to a lack of caring and compassion, or a lack of drive and dedication on the parts of the organizers and activists. In Figure 11, I present a visual to show the core fracture of this study

![Figure 11. The fracture between vision and practice towards justice](image-url)
Co-researchers and I constructed the core fracture by questioning why, with so much effort and knowledge, organizers and activists are not able to address the root causes of injustice or transform communities and society into something markedly more just. Anna, in her interview, got to the crux of it when she stated that even though in our visions of transformation we have entirely new systems and structures that work for the benefit of the people, no one is actively trying to overthrow the local government to build those new systems. The fault lie in our Aspirational Model was constructed along the line of the vision and the outliers in the vision discussed in chapter four. Manuel, for example, did not believe in creating or having a vision, but rather on focusing on the tangible policies in front of him which he felt he had the power to change. There is nothing in our data to demonstrate that his work was less transformative. Manuel was admitting to himself what others were not able to do - pragmatism and reformism are the underlying features of our local practice and there was a distinct cognitive dissonance experienced by most participants who were unable to redress the gap between where they wanted to go and how they spent their time trying to get there. Therefore, the outliers or disconnects in the vision helped to lay the ground work for the construction of this core fracture.

Next, I define the three counter-stories that we constructed to speak back to our core fracture to understand the reasons why this core fracture exists.

**Counter-stories: Creating Narratives to Disrupt Coherence**

Once we identified the core fracture of this study, we used the interview responses about practice and stories of transformation to construct counter-stories that could explain the fracture. We used this intentional re-framing of the fracture to disrupt the very narrative that those working for change simply were not trying hard enough. Our core
fracture is made up of the following three counter-stories: 1) too busy: urgency and the moral obligation to act, 2) too far: giving up in the face of an unattainable vision, and 3) too futile: the ‘dirtiness’ of working inside the Nonprofit Industrial Complex. Each provides an alternative narrative to explain the existence of our core fracture and to disrupt the narratives of individual failure.

**Counter-story #1 - Too busy: Urgency and the moral obligation to act.**

Participants shared stories during interviews and participatory sessions about how they are driven by a moral obligation and an urgency to change the injustices they are fighting against; this urgency leads to practices that are reactive and only address surface level symptoms rather than the profound and durable change to context as outlined in our aspirational model. This sense of urgency, and feelings of personal responsibility to fix the ills of our communities, has created a culture of urgency, a need for constant productivity, and busyness - the assumption that we must be in constant motion if we are going to address social injustices. Participants discussed how this culture detracts from their ability to reflect, create and stick to a transformative strategy. This counter-story is made up of two categories: perceptions of the urgency of an injustice, and a moral obligation to act in the face of that injustice.

**Urgency of social injustice.** There is so much to be transformed, and so little time. The co-researchers felt that they have no time for reflection or strategy. One co-researcher, Robert, in our opening session said, that because of the horrors in his community around detentions and deportations that requires immediate action, “I am at a place right now where I don’t have time to think. I don’t have time to be strategic about things. I don’t think in our organizing work we have clear direction; the movement has
few winning strategies.” Most interviewees stated that they are simply reacting again and again to new waves of untenable social injustices, to new bad things. With each new injustice incurred in a community, or an old injustice repackaged and incurred all over again, they react, and hopefully manage to hold off the bad thing. These bad things include a private prison company trying to build an immigration detention center in Pembroke Pines; Janitorial staff at the University of Miami working with toxic chemicals with no access to safety gear like gloves; the City of Miami asking to fund more community police, yet the current community police are making black residents feel unable to not stand outside of their own homes for fear of being arrested for loitering; or, the 1.2 millions citizens of Florida (the majority of which are people of colour) who are permanently disenfranchised from voting as previously incarcerated felons. All bad things, lead to negative and oppressive outcomes in our communities, and therefore require an urgent response.

This urgency surfaced a quagmire: even if the bad things that we are fighting against are stopped, little is being done to address the underlying contextual factors that will continue to create these bad things. For example, when groups came together to fight against the nation’s largest prison detention center being built in Pembroke Pines by a private prison company, they stopped this bad thing from happening here. They did not stop that prison from being built somewhere else, nor did they stop private prisons from being built more generally. They did not stop the private sector from profiteering off of the bodies of incarcerated people, nor did they address roots of mass incarceration. And what was most surprising, was they knew they were not trying to do this. They were reacting to a symptom, over and over again, ad nauseum. They were far too busy acting
in the face of individual injustices to fight the root causes they so clearly wanted to address to reach their transformed vision.

Beth, a co-researcher and leader of a grassroots interfaith organization focused on worker justice, pointed out in our sessions that urgency is driving our collective practice. She argued that we already know a lot of the answers on how to change context and transform communities, as is evident in our aspirational model. We are, however, not taking the time to do that because the pain being incurred in our communities is so great that we need to urgently quell it in order to sleep at night. Put simply, there is no time:

Beth: but...we know [why we are reacting] already too. *The why was 'it was urgently moving and there wasn't time for that'*

Natalie: Right, we are always reactive. That's one of the things that comes up a lot

Beth: Because of how fast things are going.

Natalie: We never get to be proactive

Beth: ...because it is urgent, and we are reacting we come out with a rally as the only solution.

Beth also stated that after Hurricane Irma hit, things were simply “untenable”. The urgency being faced by people who have lost their housing, their jobs, or faced racial discrimination during evacuation and shelter processes simply reinforced for participants that their work is never complete.

*Moral obligation to address injustice.* There was also a moral obligation in the face of social injustice which leads to a culture of busyness that restricts the ability of organizers and activists to take a step back, think about where they want to go, and test and measure practices that they think will strategically move us forward. Anna explained it as follows:
People kind of talk about being so busy and overworked and feeling frustrated with the work that they are doing….and I think part of that is the emotional impact of the work and you feel like 'how can I not be trying it is so important'.

Kamila, a board member and front-line organizer for an organization that predominantly works with undocumented workers, farm workers, and immigrant families on economic justice, laid it out by saying her organization is too small and too busy to be working towards transformation:

I don't think that the work that I'm doing, to be honest, particularly is moving forward. Because...we are on the defensive. We are preventing bad things from happening...like fighting anti-immigrant bills, whether they are at the local level with the county commissioners and mayor, fighting anti-immigrant stances and policies and recuperating workers’ wages, assisting people with their paperwork, supporting things at the national level like TPS and Dreamers, you see? So, I don't think we are pushing anything...that is transformative. But it is more like reforming…I don't think that is necessarily bad. I think that is just what it is, and hopefully it will move to something that is actually transformative.

Participants shared that they cannot let injustices go unchallenged, they are simply morally obligated to react. In one participatory session, Anna said “It's a little bit Sisyphean. I think there is a sense among people who do social movement work that there is a moral obligation to try even if we don't even feel like we are changing anything”. In an earlier session Anna had argued that “It’s like a knee jerk reaction. Something bad has happened, we are morally obligated to do something. Let’s plan a march and then let’s plan the next march, let’s plan the next march.”. To this, in agreement with Anna, Beth responded with: “I think part of that for a lot of folks, is that is how you overcome the feeling of hopelessness. Feeling like you are doing something, even though that may not be the most effective thing that you're doing”.
A collective moral obligation felt by participants consistently derailed any intentional and strategic practice. Any number of bad things were happening every day in their communities, each time pulling attention, resources, and support into reaction mode.

**Counter-story #2: Too far: Giving up in the face of an unattainable vision.** The second counter-story of this core fracture is giving up. Giving up occurred when participants perceived that we were so far away from any kind of transformative change, or transformed community, that we needed to be realistic and do what we can with what we have. This giving up restricted participants ability to create practices that can get us to transformation. In many of the interviews, people talked about how in the context of Florida, and at the federal level, we are so far from anything that resembles the vision articulated in our aspirational model, that there is indeed no hope of getting there. Organizers and activists are not giving up on trying, they are working as hard as ever, but the vision of the future is so far that they have given up on using their practice to intentionally move us there. There is a focus on tangible wins and addressing people in crisis rather than taking on the long-term effort needed to create profound changes to context, what Beth called “working hard, not smart”. One interviewee Matt, put it harshly when he said:

In my work right now, we are in a state of extreme inequality, you know of power being completely directed by the right, of you know just bad outcomes in every sense of the word. You know to even get the democrats to do something even mildly progressive is the state that we are in. And you know like I feel like we've got a lot of thinking to even kind of move the ball 10 yards down the field.

Even when interviewees did have strategic plans that were informing clear and profound change, another crisis would hit their communities and they would drop what they were doing to address this new crisis. For example, Hurricane Irma hit Miami in the
middle of our data collection timeline and everyone was pulled into the crisis work. Crisis work, however, is never going to change our components of contexts into something more just. Anna, in reflection on the work that was happening to address Irma stated fatalistically, that “people were in crisis before the crisis. Even if you help them with getting back to normal, their normal is still shitty. It's just you can never do enough”.

Expectations were tapered to fit the context of injustice and interviewees felt the need to be pragmatic to help stop the bleeding. Organizers and activists are overwhelmed by how far away and seemingly unattainable their vision of transformation is, which limits their belief in our ability to get there. Robert explained that “people are ultimately realists and unless they see that there's a chance they’re not going to stick their necks out and get them chopped off”.

Counter-story #3: Too Futile: the ‘dirtiness’ of working inside the Nonprofit Industrial Complex. Finally, making up the third counter-story, is the futility and limitation of transformative practice from inside the nonprofit industrial complex (NPIC). Futility, meaning transformation will not be achieved no matter how many people are doing the work. This counter-story also includes a category of what co-researchers called a ceiling of change.

The NPIC and its cultural and functional limitations. The NPIC is a framework proposed to explain the connection between capitalist interests and the development and control of nonprofit organizations. The framework suggests that organizations function first and foremost to remain in existence, and historically to legitimize particular kinds of service and social change activities over others. The funding restrictions and
organizational structures stifle radical movements and are framed as perpetuating deeply entrenched community issues (INCITE, Women of Color Against Violence, 2007).

All of my interviewees are either currently working within or have generally worked within a nonprofit structure. Many were unsure as to whether the kind of vision that they were imagining would be possible from inside this formal and regulated structure of nonprofits. Luis defined it as feeling ‘dirty’ doing the work inside the nonprofit world, while others defined how the NPIC sets up their work in a way to perpetuate organizational and funding structures. Gabriela, during her interview put it like this:

So that you know that the NPIC as they call it, is sort of set up in a way that I think perpetuates a way of doing the work that is really not going towards that vision. It is still about giving a lot of money to a much more centralized and much more top to bottom kind of mode.

While Roseline argued for alternative funding structures to get beyond the reach of the NPIC on our work:

I feel one of the other things around the movement is the NPIC, that's just, at the end of the day, if we could actually raise our own money and do what we need to do we wouldn't have to rely on funders who limit the work in very particular ways, unfortunately which doesn't really allow us to make real impact. And I wish we could step away from the NPIC because it is just money, money comes in, the money comes out. But what impact did you truly make.

Four participants named the NPIC as the problem, while many others discussed the limitations of funding and organizational structure more broadly. Luis disrupted this conversation by saying “what if we are marching towards this conclusion - that a bunch of nonprofit or freelance advocates and organizers end up making the case that in order to be transformative our work has to happen outside of the nonprofit world. I mean that
could very well be where we are headed” and Anna responded “I'm already there. So, let me know when you get here”.

_Ceiling of change._ Additionally, to the understanding of the NPIC, there was a _what is the point_ attitude, there was a perceived _ceiling of change_ in any transformative effort. Participants shared that there is only so far that change can go within a neoliberal system; only so far immigration reform can go without addressing the root causes of global imperialism, war, and structures of trade that contribute to forced migration. There is only so far, a city, state, or country can go to change their economic and political systems without being reoriented, either with economic sanctions or war, by world powers or international organizations. Anna argued, that in the current power structures of the world “there is only so far you can take it because there is a global capitalist system”.

One example was discussed in a participatory session - what would happen if a city like Opa-Locka was deeply transformed across structures of power, ideology and a dominant narrative, and a re-telling of the history to alter its historical and now its current context:

_Gabriella:_ Say for example the Dream Defenders are in Opa-Locka and they are campaigning in a very small context and they are just working with 2000 people. But those 2000 people take over the city council, and up elected mayor and council women and men and... completely transform the city of Opa-Locka. That was transformational, that was powerful, that changed the power dynamics and impacted people.

_Beth:_ Even if in a small universe in that point in time...

_Anna:_ On the other hand, if the governor still has the power to remove the mayor which happens sometimes when there is a financial emergency and they are like 'well I know you were elected democratically but you are out of there then I think there has to be, that also has to be represented. So, yes
power was increased in a small context, but the bigger context still exists so all of that can be undone, so it is not as durable…

The ceiling of change and the NPIC both made participants feel like their efforts were futile. No amount of community organizing or work that can be done from inside a nonprofit organization were going to be able to break down the barriers of the NPIC or address the ceiling of change perceived as coming from imperialism, neoliberalism, and the weaponization of democracy.

**Concluding Reflections on the Core Fracture**

In the first part of this chapter, I defined the core fracture of our Aspirational Model as the Sisyphean task of current practice. It was surprising the amount of people who admitted that they were not really working towards transformation, even though on the surface that is how they were positioning themselves. There was a lot of aspirational rhetoric that we built into our model, but when it came to the examples of transformation barring a few examples discussed in the sites of possibility, that is not what people were doing. Now, the second portion of this chapter focuses on the sites of possibility developed to heal the fracture and provide some tangible ways of re-framing collective practice for transformative change.

**Sites of Possibility - Size Does Matter: The Dialectic of the Big and Small**

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the two sites of possibility constructed to heal the core fracture of this study and to “imagine where the spaces of resistance, agency, and possibility lie” (Weis & Fine, p.xx). The two sites of possibility are linked by one common narrative: *the dialectic relationship between the big and the small*, which is pushing for a re-imagining of the concept of *size* in our understandings of transformation. This re-imagination is targeted directly at creating a practice of
transformation that disrupts the outcomes of being too busy, too far and have practices that are too futile as discussed in our counter-stories. These sites of possibility reintroduce the necessity and enactment of the small in our transformative efforts and shed light on how the details of transformation dialectically relate to the big sweeping changes organizers and activists so desperately want to make.

There was little consensus among co-researchers on the words or semantics of big and small. Some preferred evolutionary and revolutionary, with some in our group critiquing this as an explanation that framed the idea of small as a chronological and cumulative effect of the small steps, which was not how we were defining it. What we were clear on, is that the smallness was different than how we had previously understood it; this was not about small wins or being more realistic with big goals. This was about intentionally rethinking how the small things we do are an integral component of creating and maintaining transformative change. Semantics aside, this narrative for our sites of possibility helped the group move past the core fracture that highlighted the Sisyphean nature of our practice to discuss and construct a clear understanding of how smallness in both practice and context need to be injected into our understanding of transformation. We had reached consensus that working harder, having more people working in the same way, or being trained better, although perhaps all necessary, would do little to address the structural injustice we were working to transform. We used the stories in the data to reframe how we need both the big vision, strategy, and goals in partnership with the small steps, and details to systematically and strategically engage in transformative practice and move our contexts towards a more just and transformed world. Luis explains his understanding of the relationship between the big and the small
as relating to all of the small but important pieces that were necessary leading up to and during the revolutionary moment in Nicaragua:

I think revolution needs this incremental change, and this grassroots organizing, and this defense of institutions that are good for society even if at present they're hijacked, by the elite... if we look at the revolution in Nicaragua... you had the wealthy, you had journalists, you had the student movement, you had peasants, you had Marxists and intellectuals, you had guerilla commanders, you had faith based leaders and priests, drop out seminary students like my dad. They did a lot of this work that we do here. My mom did community organizing to try to understand the needs of the Nicaraguan people and connect those to the work of the Sandinistas. My dad, as a musician, organized the student movement. And I think that once they got to that revolutionary moment, people had already evolved in their thinking - police as an institution is not going to help us, courts are not going to help us, the military is the problem, the government is behind the military. There was a radical change in the understanding that these institutions and their structures, and these systems of the society don't work for the people. And the work that the Sandinistas had done, the grassroots work that they had done, place them in the best position to take power over the bourgeoisie the other sectors that contributed to that. They had to broker a deal between the three factions of the Sandinistas movement so that there would be peace once they obtain power and overthrow Somoza. There were so many different lines of thought and so many different strategies and whatnot. Had they not laid down the groundwork and done the ideological work and the grassroots work, and they're working with institutions in creating alliances and things like that, once that revolutionary moment was there and there was a power vacuum they would not have been able to see the revolution flourish.

The concept of the big and small will be further defined as they relate to each site of possibility. But first, I discuss the limitations of focusing solely on the small, and the problem of focusing solely on the big. I then define why, and how, we are framing this as a dialectic relationship before presenting the two sites of possibility.

The problem of the small: If we just focus on the small, then ... Transformation requires more than the cumulative impact of many small things. If the practices of organizers and activists remain at the level of small, then they lose sight of the end goal. There was a reticence around embracing the idea of small among co-
researchers, - a group of people who have been fighting for big change for decades. In response to a discussion on how smallness and the everyday things that organizers and activists are doing to transform their communities was showing up in the data, Anna shared her fear that by including the small we were constructing a model through which anything could be defined as transformative and would validate for many doing non-transformative work, that their contributions were in fact transformative, she explained it as follows:

Do we don't want people to feel like 'oh ya like I know I'm not meeting the full vision but if I could just be more intersectional in how I am talking about this then I am moving in some micro way towards transformation. I think there does need to be a way in which this can, this model shows that things are not worthwhile and not transformative even if you can make the case, you can make the case that what anyone does in some small way it is transformative because you have changed one person’s life.

She went on to say that:

If we don’t end up changing at the highest of high levels, then everything else is just tinkering. The idea that without actually like upending capitalism, that you are going to stop globalization and the effect that that has on the depressing effect on workers’ wages, and the working conditions is to me preposterous.

Overall, there was a concern that by embracing the smallness of transformation it would provide a release from the obligations to create more robust change with the big of transformation. Yet, in the end, it was through how people were framing the big as problematic that we were finally able to include, in good conscience, the importance of the small. Next, I define the problem with focusing solely on the big.

The problem with the big: If we just focus on the big, then… The problem with a sole focus on the big of transformation is that we are setting ourselves up to fail big and fail hard. Organizers are constantly fighting for change for which they are
unprepared, and for which our communities are unorganized. If we focus on the big we do not accord the time necessary to build the foundation needed to deeply organize people in the face of everyday crisis or crisis moments.

The other problem with the big, is that if the big is good (i.e. we live in a democracy) we are less likely to see or tackle the inequality in the small. Beth discusses this as the weaponization of democracy, using something like democracy to argue for moral superiority of democratic nations, even if in the details they are not enacting democratic values and beliefs. Bringing democracy to countries around the world is seen as good. It is a big change both in the kind of practices used, and the level of context targets. However, as Beth points out it is hard to critique something that at the big is seen as inherently good. She explains this problem as follows:

The problem with big – democracy is good. You have it, you win…well maybe not.

A huge pet peeve I have is democracy being used as a weapon. I've seen in conversations, the organization of American States. The countries in the Western Hemisphere. I've been at the events when... my friends were all protesting, and I got to come in as one of the two people representing Civil Society. It was fascinating to hear people talk, everybody except for the exception of two countries - Cuba and Venezuela [asked] how do we bring the benefits of democracy to our people. We have democracy but what does that mean? And I remember one of the representatives from Mexico, saying ‘my people would accept a more dictatorial regime if they could feed their children’. It was like democracy is this silver bullet or something. It just fixes everything, and it was so obvious that that is not the case.

Other examples were also discussed, such as how ideas of bigness and a focus on structural and policy level change can lead to the development of nice policies and little impact in the lives of the community. Luis explained a situation involving a community
policing policy and the negative impact it was having on poor and historically black communities:

The police chief was talking about millions of dollars that the city of Miami could save by accepting a federal grant to put more cops in the streets. The rationale behind that was that we get 2 million from the feds and 2 million from the city, so they get 4 million worth for 2 million dollars. It was an interesting rationale. But challenged by the commissioner of District 5 Keon Hardeman which includes Overtown and Liberty City and other really poor African American neighbourhoods. And apparently the cops would be community policing cops, so these are people who are in the community and are supposed to be cultivating relationships with residents. The commissioners said 'I support the community policing program, but these community policing cops that show up at the neighbourhood in Overtown they tell people who are standing outside of their building that they do not have the right to congregate, that they need to go inside of their apartments. And the way that they show up in the community it is incredibly aggressive and violent, and it seems like this program is...having the opposite effect of what it should have originally have been. The reason I say that is because we were talking about the macro and the personal. At the policy and structural level, we need policy and investment in programs that are going to address disenfranchisement, discrimination, etc., and we have that. We have policies in place so that police officers can go into a community and cultivate relationships with members of that community. We have investment, grants, and the standard operating procedures. And I haven't read all of it, but it looks good on paper. But if those police officers do not change the way that they look at residents of Overtown and other communities. If there is not transformation in how they feel about certain communities, certain races, certain socioeconomic brackets, you can have all the policies and all the investments, and all the programs, and all of the services but without that transformation at the personal level it is never going to make a difference...yes you need the policies and the training and the money and all of that….transformative change at the societal level cannot happen unless there is transformative change at the personal level

Overall, the key to this dialectic is understanding that the opposing forces of small and big changes must be embraced to overcome the Sisyphean nature of transformative practice. Next, I define the dialectic nature of this relationship

The dialectic of the big and small. We have framed this relationship between the big and small as a dialectic. Not as a spectrum, not as a cumulative process of building to
something bigger, and not as a list of options for which you can choose just one.
Transformation is made up of a complicated, and dialectic relationship between the small and big, a yes/and understanding of the size of our change. As a dialectic, our sites of possibility focus on the enactment of the small in our transformative efforts to shed light on how the details of transformation dialectically relate to the big changes we traditionally think of as transformative.

**Site #1. Big and small practices: Connecting the everyday details and the revolutionary practices.** The first site of possibility is the dialectic between the big and small of our collective practice; these are the big and small things that organizers and activists do to create transformation and their dialectical relationship to each other. This site of possibility was constructed from the set of practices shared during the stories of change during the interviews. Bringing different practices discussed together through this lens of big and small provides direction and agency for organizers and activists as well as researchers, funders, and other institutional structures to ground and support practice in ways that increase the potential to transform communities and overcome our core fracture. This site of possibility is about more than the individual actions of organizers, but also about reframing the kinds of actions that can and should be supported by funders and organizational leadership

Everything from the mundane details to the revolutionary action make up the kaleidoscope of transformative practice. I stated during one of our participatory sessions that there are already a lot of different models for social change in existence. Our goal was not to provide the sole road map, but to deeply theorize about the phenomena and process of transformation to inform practice. What we did want was to be able to create a
tool that could be helpful for people, groups, and movements to use in constructing their own practice. Co-researchers wanted agents of change to be able to look at our tool and be able to ask *what is my role in this* - if they see transformation as only revolution, agrarian reform, or when we have completely flipped how government responds to people in the community, then they will struggle to see how the things that they *do or can do* every day connects to that outcome.

*Figure 12. The dialectic of big and small practices*

This site of possibility is not about identifying the best practice, but rather understanding the dialectical relationship between the details of transformation and the revolutionary actions, or what Sofia refers to as “interdisciplinary strategies,” where we push beyond usual suspects such as planning a march or lobbying for a particular policy change and re-orient to a *yes/and* perspective. Practices both big and small can be found in Figure 12 and are described in the following section.
What is the Small in our practice? Transformation is in the details. What was clear across the stories discussed during the interviews is that the details of change are just as important as the broad and sweeping plans to transform injustices. One example discussed by multiple interviewees, and during the participatory sessions, was the Every Voice campaign, which collected 128,000 petition signatures to create a ballot initiative for citizens of Miami-Dade to have the opportunity to vote on the issue of campaign finance reform. The purpose of this campaign was to remove the influence of the elite class over politicians by reforming regulations on campaign donations through capping and matching campaign contributions. This story was generally shared as an example of failure. As a tactic it was a success: local groups collected more than the goal of required petitions with a total of 128,000 signatures. As a profound change to local electoral and structures of power it was a failure; it was lost in the details. Both the critics of the campaign, and members of the campaign team, discussed the shortcomings of this campaign in my interviews. It was a case of feeling the urgency to shift a harmful policy which left no time to be mindful of the details. They knew they were not doing right. For example, it was not being funded locally, citizens from outside of the voting districts for whom local politicians do not care were pushing the initiative, and the wording on the ballot initiative was weak and potentially infringed on first amendment rights. And so, the whole campaign was lost - after an incredible amount of time was put into constructing the initiative and collecting the signatures. They did not win; the petition was struck down in court. Not only was this example a failure, it has had lasting impacts on the trust between community partners, with implications for disengagement for those who believed that this would create a change and lost hope when it did not.
What this example shows us is that small is not about making or justifying every small effort from organizers and activists as something transformative, but instead it is about using a critical understanding of transformation to develop and inform how small components of practices contribute to, and are necessary for, transformation. These ‘small’ things are sub-categorized and discussed below as: 1) living/enacting transformation, and 2) laying the foundation and tactics.

*Living and enacting.* When discussing how they ‘do’ transformation, some interviewees and co-researchers talked about *living their values* and enacting change in small but intentional ways to build and expand the kind of world they were working towards. The small practices of *living* and *enacting* transformation were outside of any official work participants were doing and was about how they infused their thinking into their own lives as one necessary way of creating and maintaining change. Luis, in a reflection on *what is transformation* stated the following:

I’m a non-conformist. It doesn’t matter what I’m doing. I am always going to be raising hell. Raising my daughter to be fiercely independent is activism. My writing is all about change, injustice, war, migration. It all leads back to change. It all leads back to questioning the status quo.

His beliefs about the importance of transforming unjust global systems of imperialism, war, and forced migration were alive in his everyday life, in his parenting, and in his constant questioning of the status quo in all facets of his life. Zane, one of our grassroots labour organizers, argued that to transform communities, we need to live in them and be an active part of them:

If you're going to lead something, you need to become a part of that community. I don't believe that you come in and then you go back in to suburban home. There are people who do that. … if you are not personally invested with your own blood to some extent, then I'm not sure how effective you can be. And I know that is really kind of controversial. … I
always lived in the communities that I worked in. I know when I lived in Jersey, I [organized] in a factory in Jersey City, I lived in a Puerto Rican community, and so I started speaking Spanish, everybody spoke to me in Spanish. So rather than me saying 'oh don't speak to me in Spanish speak to me in English' I was like 'I’m going to figure this out'.

The way that organizers and activists relate to each other, relate to those around them, and enact their values in their own lives, their work, and the movements in which they participate in one of the integral ‘small’ things necessary in transforming. Finally, it is these small details people can avoid reproducing the same power dynamics that they seek to challenge.

Living and enacting the values of the transformed world organizers are working towards - building relationships, raising children, engaging with neighbours, working in their organizations - in all facets of their lives this enactment becomes a core component of successful and durable transformative changes. But it cannot stop there. Next, I define the smallness of planting seeds and laying the foundation for transformative changes.

*Learning and leadership: planting the seeds for a strong foundation.*

If you are planting seeds for people to take more decision-making authority and you are changing the way that we understand things and the ideologies, and we start questioning our place in the world. And the way that we approach the economy and consumerism and our relation to other beings and the environment and the elements etcetera, then I do think that there is change that leads to structural change. (Luis)

The second component of smallness that was constructed from the data included participants talking about practices that lay the foundation, or plant the seed, for transformation. These practices center learning and leadership development. This is different than arguing that change is cumulative or incremental. It is about starting now, knowing that only through consistent effort to lay the foundation of a movement will we ever create the conditions, power, and connected communities needed to transform
contexts. One participant said that we are not “going to wake up tomorrow with a new
global economic and political system with capitalism in our rearview mirror. But if we
don’t start now, plant the seeds, or lay the foundation for larger transformation” then we
will never get there.

Planting the seeds is about grassroots, bottom up power building; significant
discussions were had about the need for social transformation and social movements to
be led by people with lived experience; indigenous leadership. This requires intentional
relationship and trust building, community building, popular education, building a
leadership pipeline, and building shared and intersectional knowledge of the context and
injustice that is the target of transformation. In many examples shared in our interviews
there was an assumption that those most impacted by an injustice should be leading the
transformation. But this is far more complicated than simply identifying who these
people may be and telling them they are leading a movement. In our participatory
sessions we discussed this at length and what kept coming up was the amount of front
end work required to make this happen. This is what Gabriela referred to as the not sexy
work of the front-end work required through learning and leadership development.

Coming back to the Janitors for Justice example Gabriela outlined the many small
ways that they laid the foundation for a successful campaign:

So, the janitors at the University of Miami who were subcontracted by
another company were making minimum wage, many of them were
undocumented workers. And you know just working the worst conditions
with minimum wage, just being exploited, and uh the university was really
not addressing any of these things and so the union I was working out of
the SEIU wanted to bring the justice for janitor’s campaign that they had
successfully run in other places to the University of Miami. To organize
the janitors and win a union contract for them. And so you know I was
part of that campaign since the beginning, and we started that campaign
which is going during lunch breaks and talking to workers one by one and
kind of like planting the little seeds of possibilities and you know it was a hard campaign, we lasted like 6 months of just going at the night shift, at the end of the shift, during lunch, sneaking in and trying to talk to workers, forming a committee of workers to having workers saying 'you know what you're right, this is messed up, we need better' to just filing grievances, just like going and having actions and sit-ins at the bosses office and the president of the university was Donna Shalala, which was like a super powerful woman, national recognized woman, powerful, supposedly progressive woman who refused to recognize the humanity of the workers and stood against the campaign throughout the six months. And so the workers were like not going to have it and so they decided to actually take it all the way to a hunger strike. Until they were going to win.

In closing, this framing of small in transformative efforts aims to get beyond the idea of cumulative change, or smallness as tinkering around the edges. This is smallness reimagined to understand how the details of the everyday link to the revolutionary or transformative goals laid out in the vision in chapter 4. Next, I discuss the big of transformative practice.

What is the big? Transformation is in revolution - it is creating something new.

Big practices are hard to define, because naturally every practice is made up of the individual things being done by individual people on any given day. That said, ‘big’ practices, in Figure 12, have as their goal transforming contexts, including: organizing and community development, and building radically different structures.

Organizing and community development: Connecting tactics to strategies.

Although organizing as a practice is built on the smaller practices discussed above and heavily relies on organizers that live their values and who actively work to plant the seeds for social change, organizing as a strategy is included under the ‘big’. A broader strategy for organizing or community development is built on a multitude of these smaller tactics. Anna described the relationship between strategy and tactic in the following way:
I guess I'm going to say it one more time, [the big and small] is tactic and strategy, because it is the relationship between the tactics that makes it a strategy. Like if my vision is to grow a plant and the strategy is you need seeds and water and sunlight but I'm watering a pile of dirt that has no seeds and then I'm putting another pot out in the sun but it has no water and no seed and I have a seed in the corner in the dark then it doesn't matter that I am watering this thing every day even though that tactic is true for growing plants, but I'm not watering the seed. So, it is like how they work together as to whether they are transformative or not.

Tactics and strategies became one component of our first site of possibility. Although the small to big practices are not chronological or cumulative, one example that demonstrates the power of this kind of work does indeed emerge from strong foundation building work on the part of the Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC). Sofia shared a story of something that she felt was transformative that provides a tangible example of this site of possibility - she told the story of the Trail of Dreams. The Trail of Dreams was a 6 month walk from Florida to D.C where a group of undocumented students who were working on local activism, who were developing their own leadership made a decision after much learning and leadership development to pivot their work and developed a national strategy to bring awareness to what, at that point, was an unknown term: A Dreamer. This interviewee walked me through how this strategy not only raised awareness of dreamers across the country, but changed the national narrative around these young people who had been brought illegally to the United States as infants, and who knew no other home than the U.S. This is Sofia’s story:

We started an organization called Students Working for Equal Rights. And so, then they went to the Broward transitional center and they were like 'we are tired of protests we need to do something bigger' and they decided to take a walk. And they walked from Miami to D.C and the trail of dreams. And as they were walking they were talking and telling their stories. And then we got a national group called Presente.org to be the communications and so you know four undocumented people walked through the hardest parts of the south, were confronted by the Klan,
engaged sheriffs, went to churches every night, and they became, it became a national story and you know other youth were awakened and the clamor was 'we are undocumented, unapologetic and unafraid' and then later declared themselves, 'undocuqueer' and then a Pulitzer prize winning reporter from the NYT, Washington Post saw the story of them walking and felt embarrassed and ashamed because he was undocumented and he was not unapologetic and so he decided to tell his story in, I think it was a NYT article [a journalist] came out as undocumented and so it just, the next thing we know Dreamers are on the cover of time magazine. From a very short period I witnessed, nobody knows what a Dreamer is, Dreamers are on the cover of Time Magazine.

Sofia went on to say that this was intentionally about pushing Obama to do executive action as it was clear that no amount of pushing or organizing would lead to comprehensive immigration reform. This example provided a clear view to what big can look like in the context when the small was and continued to be an important focus.

*Building radically different structures.* The big in practices also includes developing and winning radically different policies at the local, state, and federal level while building infrastructure in communities that provide alternative economic, political, and social structures. This type of practice was one of the most discussed, and least attempted. Creating radically different structures was the goal driving the transformative vision discussed in Chapter 4, yet it was not represented in the stories of transformation. Participants did not know how to do this part because it always felt too big, and too impossible to reach.

**Site #2: The dialectic of the big and small contexts - Personal is insufficient but deeply integral to transformation.** The second site of possibility is the dialectic between the big and small of context; these include the big and small ecological levels of analysis for which activists and organizers target their change efforts. This site of possibility was constructed from the targets of change discussed in the stories of
transformation during the interviews. During participatory sessions we debated and discussed the relationship between personal and structural, thus creating this site of possibility. This site of possibility is about reframing how size is understood in relation to our contexts to disrupt the continuum of targets discussed in the data: *the personal level of change is integrally necessary but insufficient for transformative change.*

As stated in chapter four, there are different levels of analysis where change can and should be targeted, each level having its own structures of power, influence of ideology and the dominant narrative, and a particular historical and current context. These change targets include the personal, relational, organizational, structural, and cultural. In this site of possibility, I bring in the data from our interviews and participatory session which highlight the important, yet insufficient nature, of personal change. Enacting the small in our quest for the profound.

*Figure 13. The personal is necessary but insufficient for transformation*
This site of possibility is not about identifying the best target of change, but rather it is about understanding the dialectical relationship between the smallness of personal and relational change, and the bigness of organizational, structural, and cultural change. Contexts of change can be found in Figure 13 and are described in the following section.

**What is the small in our context: Transformation is in the personal and relational.** When we began this analysis, we had intentionally defined personal transformation as outside of the boundaries of what we were talking about. The transformation for this study was focused on an intentional, political, and macro level kind of change. Our data, however, pushed our understanding to embrace the necessity and integral nature of smallness in terms of personal and relational change. Below I define both personal and relational transformation and discuss examples to demonstrate their importance in doing transformative work.

**Personal.** Personal transformation, like the smallness of practice, is generally the antithesis of transformative change. Yet, time and again personal transformation came up in the stories of participants as an integral component of creating durable and profound change to context. During one of participatory sessions Beth shared her story of personal transformation, and how she uses her position as an interfaith leader to gently push others, in their personal transformation, towards workers justice and social transformation, and away from charity. This is an excerpt from her story:

I don't see how you could start with revolutionary. It doesn't work that way. You need to be primed and ready for that or it doesn't happen. I think that most people start at the incremental and the evolutionary. ... when I started working at [organization] I started to ask myself, am I not radical enough to work here at first? Because there was concepts and things that were so new to me. And I had to think that through and I cared about people, but I wasn't sure. You know I'm from the Northeast. Raised a northeastern Republican. I had been told unions were bad, and people lost
their jobs and businesses closed because of unions. I didn't understand that, but that's what I have been told. So, I started seeing all of these things, and I had to think it through. But even had to think about gender relationships. There were so many people at [organization] that were gay. I started assuming someone was gay until I knew otherwise. So, I use gender-neutral terms when referring to partners. But just the way that they talked about things, I was like huh! And in that first year somebody called me an activist. I had an image, like what you were saying about radical. And I was like, but I'm not that that I don't own any Birkenstocks. And then I started thinking it through because I'm a logical person. Ok, well wait -so activist as opposed to inactivist? Yeah sure. I can go with that. When people talk disparagingly about these young people, these activists, well do you want them to be inactive? Their school was just shot up. Like I have a whole different view of that now. But it was an adjustment for me. I just kept kind of talking to people... I was talking to real people about their real lives. But I did start out with these preconceived things that I'd heard around me my whole life. So, I just was doing stuff without thinking about it, it wasn't revolutionary. But it was definitely evolutionary...nobody starts revolutionary. We don't come kicking out of the womb, it's the product somehow in our lives, to how we got to where we are. And I'm a big proponent of the sometimes I got to meet people where they are. Particularly in faith communities. It kills me, how they call, and they want to donate some old clothes, and I'm like well that's not really what I do. But I'll go and have that conversation. And then I'll say can I bring a worker to talk to you? Have you heard of Labor in the pulpit? Because I need to move them away from that. I need to get them to a different place, this isn't charity. Those may be good clothes for the field. I'm all for it but I've got to get them past that. So, I recognize that they don't start that way. Sometimes I've got clergy, I talked to them about workers, and they think unions 'oh no socialism and communism' that's what they think. So, I'm like okay. Especially with Conservative Christian churches - I start with these workers, they are people of faith, I say ‘I think it would mean so much if you came out to this action. could you come and just pray with them?’ it would mean so much to them to see that the community is with them. If I can get them there with Ministry in which they understand, and they actually start having conversations that person ends up being the person that is standing with those workers the whole way till the end. But you had to get them there. I just feel that for most people, you've got to start with those things. because most people aren't ready for that.

Beth’s story, along with others, focused on participants personal transformation, and their work with others on their own personal transformations were integral to this site of possibility. Luis, in the story about the ineffective and harmful community policing
policies being used to police social life in Overtown and Liberty City, previously highlighted this idea. Personal transformation is necessary if policies are going to be implemented in the ways that they are meant to be, to support and build broader transformative changes.

Relational. Relational, the second component of small context highlights the ways in which we relate to each other. The relational aspect of transformation includes how individuals relate to each other within movements, within and across nonprofit organization, and within and across communities. Changing how we relate to each other by disrupting the reproduction of social power is an integral and necessary component of broader transformation. One example of this was shared by Matt, where he shared a story of transformation that was addressing relational dysfunctions found between groups working for transformation. This story was about a group working at the state level who came together to work on an alignment of organizational visions to shift the structures of power of the entire state. To do this, he highlighted a story of how this alignment group spent a significant amount of time reorienting the relational aspects of their member groups to build trust in each other, and shift from a culture of competition between nonprofits to a united front if they were to succeed at changing their bigger goal. In the following excerpt Matt outlines a group exercise that he facilitated in the alignment group that surfaced the importance of the relational level of change:

One of [the exercises] was to get to trust, and even though some of us had known each other for a long time, we told personal stories of how we got into the work and why we got into the work and spent like an hour and a half just telling stories. And that like literally, people who used to be this cold war between..., like who was encroaching on each other’s turf and who was really like the leader of Florida and it totally shifted pretty quickly where people at the end of the meeting, at least we haven’t fully ever done this, but we have changed a culture around fundraising, but
there was even like a 'how about at the next meeting we all bring our budgets and all bring our foundations and be totally open' you know? It just totally changed the dynamic like that. Because then people got into an honest conversation. When they said and felt like they could say to each other like 'we don't want to fake anything anymore, we just want to do the work without having to go to a funder and like try to put on show' you know? We want to be real about the work and real about our deficiencies and you know we are doing our best. But I know that we are not doing it perfect. Right? And I don't want to be doing that alone. I don't want to be going through that struggle alone.

Personal and relational, the focus of the smallness of contextual change, alone are not enough. These levels of change are dialectically related to the big context: organizational, structural, and cultural change - which I define next.

**What is the big context: Organizational, political, structural and cultural.**

Finally, the big of context makes up the final part of this site of possibility. The goals of transformation and the vision outlined in chapter four speak to these ecological levels of analysis. Transforming the organizations, political institutions, the structures of society and the cultural context are what is generally understood as the tangible wins of transformation. Separating the big out into sections was a challenge because they all were seen as overlapping in significant ways. For examples, organizational change and changing the structure of organizations as a whole (such as nonprofit organizations) required both structural change and cultural change at the level of organizations. That said, in general there was a difference delineated between organizations, political, and structural change on the one hand, and cultural change on the other.

*Organizational, political, and structural.* This level of context encompasses the organizations, political institutions and structures of society. This includes the policies and norms that make up government bodies, nonprofit organizations, political parties and societal institutions. Participants discussed changing policies, altering political structures,
building political structures outside of political parties, and altering the structures of funding. Structures, like power, was another concept that participants struggled to define. In a session with the co-researchers we had an extensive conversation about structures and although they found it challenging to define, they understood it as everything from the policies at their own organizations, through the political systems of the county, state and federal level all the way to the structures of capitalism.

This level of analysis was not about changing one organization, one policy or one structure, but was about changing organizations, changing how policies are made, and changing how the structures of government, economics, education, healthcare, and the criminal justice system work. Transforming them to be systems and structures that function for the benefit of community, constituents and groups who have been oppressed and marginalized by the current systems and structures.

Cultural. We have framed culture (different than big C culture) as the largest level of change, however, it is also understood as permeating each other level. For example, organizations have a culture, systems of politics have a culture, families and groups of people, social movements, and schools have a culture. And these are all influenced by and interconnected with the broader level of culture. Culture, like ideology, is hidden and understood as natural, and therefore can keep the vestiges of oppressions alive and well even after organizational, political and structural change has occurred. When culture emerged as an important context for transformation, the co-researchers and I had a conversation about the ethicality of changing culture. Anna had this to say about it:

I don't think there is anything wrong with saying that part of transformation is going to change culture: a) we are not saying we're going to change someone else's culture, we're not like 'hey we need to change the culture in Saudi Arabia, and so we are going to take this and change it'.

We are saying we want to change our own culture that we live in and that affects us. We want to change the fact that we live in a pretty misogynistic culture, and if people had said 'traditionally, in the colonies only sons could inherit land and that's my culture'. It's not neutral, like well that's our culture okay you can't change that' that would be pretty f***** up. So, I think it's okay, we aren't going to force people to eat a certain kind of food or prescribe to a certain kind of religion. But there are elements of our culture that maybe we do want to change.

Sofia connected culture to the more insidious and invisible nature of a culture of organizations, of communities and of nations, when she said the following: “I do believe that consciousness is really important. Culture and consciousness, it is not just about systems and structures, but it is really around the invisible, the infrastructure, sub structure, whatever super structure”.

**Conclusion: The dialectic of big and small, making the context of people’s lives better.** In closing, transformation calls for both the small and the big. The little everyday ways that we live and enact and lay the foundation for those big strategies, shifts in ideology, and power structures. The ways in which we target personal and relational transformation while addressing organizational, structural, and cultural transformation provides different pathways and entry points into the transformative effort. Throughout the entirety of our collective process, co-researchers reiterated that the outcome of this study must be something of use, something where those working to transform communities can see how what that they do, how they relate to people, how they enact their values, how they strategize, and how they imagine, craft, resist, challenge, and maintain structures in our communities’ matter. *To accomplish the big things we identified, you need to focus on the small things, yet to make the small things meaningful you have to engage with the big things; herein lies the dialectic.*


Rebuilding the model: Placing the sites of possibility into the Aspirational Model. These sites of possibility - the dialectic of the big and small of practice and context - were constructed to reframe our collective understanding of the size of transformation to overcome the counter-stories in order to heal our core fracture. In Figure 14, we have placed our sites of possibility into our Aspirational Model to ground our collective understanding of transformation in the practices and experiences of organizers and activists - informing and re-framing our model. This final picture makes up our actionable theory of transformation, built from a combination of our Aspirational Model and critical theorizing process.

Figure 14. Rebuilding our model grounded in the big and small of context and practice

This theory of transformation which I shared in the opening of this chapter but will reiterate here can be read as the following: In order to create a profound and durable change in context that moves towards justice, we must redefine size through an enactment of the small in a dialectical relationship with the big. This redefinition of size applies to
how we develop practices and where we target efforts of change. These sites of possibility, although targeted at healing our core fracture, are not, and cannot, be the only solution to the current issues faced in any transformative effort. They cannot fully address the issues surfaced during our counter-stories. In the following section we are not claiming to have solved the NPIC, nor have we provided a prescriptive change to shift the culture of urgency and productivity along with our perception of being too far away from the transformed outcome. We are, however, proposing that these two sites of possibility are ideas that we can inject into our aspirational model to challenge our assumptions about how to design transformative practice and to use the reflections and stories contained below to begin to address the Sisyphean nature of our current practice.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented our core fracture, three counter-stories, and two sites of possibility which we constructed using a critical theorizing process to disrupt the Aspirational Model presented in chapter four to form our actionable theory of transformation. This chapter answered my second research question: how do the practice of grassroots organizers and activists informs, limits, and re-frames our understanding of transformation? Through a reframing of size in transformation we used the concept of small to illuminate the complexities and dialectical relationship between the big and small of practices, and the big and small of target of contextual change.

These two findings chapters presented a complex set of findings meant to provide specificity to the phenomena of transformation. I turn now to my final chapter to discuss the importance of this study and the potential contributions of these findings to community organizers and activists and to community engaged researchers.
Chapter 6: Discussion

“It is time we drew direct links between our research and action and their transformative potential. Tenuous connections cannot undo the damage of globalization, violence, and internalized oppression” (Prilleltensky, 2008, p.133).

In this final chapter, I bring the narrative back to where I began, by reiterating that the process of constructing an actionable theory of transformation is a timely line of inquiry, predicated on the assumption the current state of affairs in our communities and global society is untenable, structurally unjust, and organizers, activists, and community-engaged researchers have an important role in understanding and transforming these contexts. Sandler (2007), describes this inequity as structural injustices which she argues manifest differently within different contexts, yet the pervasiveness and implications of injustice reach across these contexts and require a concerted and theoretically informed set of actions to address them. That said, the effort being put into addressing these injustices is colossal, and participants in this study have seen few transformative results. Something's got to give. In the opening words of his essay Decolonizing the Revolutionary Imagination: Values Crisis, the Politics of Reality, and Why There’s Going to Be a Common-Sense Revolution in This Generation, Patrick Reinsborough (2003) states, that “our planet is heading into an unprecedented global crisis. The blatancy of the corporate power grab and the accelerating ecological meltdown is evidence that we do not live in an era where we can afford the luxury of fighting merely the symptoms of the problem” (p.1). Transformation, in its essence, is about getting beyond these symptoms to address structural injustices, and constructing actionable theory is way to do it.

In chapter one, I defined transformation as a particular type of change that focuses on addressing root causes of social problems and challenging or dismantling power structures that reify and maintain oppressive conditions, capturing the essence of
the transformative framework in Community Psychology. Nothing in this study negates this definition of transformation. On the contrary, these findings add a level of specificity to the concept of transformation and propose a refined way of understanding it and framing how to do it.

The goal of this study was not to provide a road map for or to develop a prescriptive theory of transformation, but instead I set out to deeply theorize about the phenomena and process of transformation to inform, critique, and reorient the assumptions driving transformative practice. In the findings, presented in the previous two chapters, I shared our Aspirational Model of Transformation, made up of two interrelated parts: 1) an intentional and strategic move towards more justice, and 2) a durable and profound change to context. The findings that make up this model define what transformation is, from the perspective of local grassroots organizers and activists. Using my second research question to critically interrogate this Aspirational Model, I ended the findings by building the resulting sites of possibility into our Aspirational Model to address the core fracture and create our theory. This led to the articulation of the following theory of transformation: in order to create transformation that moves towards justice, we must enact the small in a dialectical relationship with the big in how we frame our practices and how we choose our targets of change. This theory helps articulate how transformation is done, from the perspective of local grassroots organizers and activists.

**Participatory Theory Development: Impacts on the Structure of my Chapters**

To ensure a constant integration of the epistemological tenets of my Participatory Theory Development (PTD) methodology, my chapters have followed a non-traditional
path. Most conspicuously, the process impacted how my findings were developed and how they were written up. My findings were presented in two chapters. The first, constructed a model of transformation, which could have marked the end of my findings. When constructing my academic model for instance, that is where I ended. At the behest of the co-researchers and their continuous push for ensuring that the outcome of this study was a useful one, we continued our research process and developed the contents of the second findings chapter.

Although chapter five was based on a close analysis of our data, the co-researchers and I also spent a significant amount of time articulating what our findings meant and articulating how we made sense of the findings from the Aspirational Model. During this time, we challenged, expanded and situated the aspirational findings in the co-researchers grounded understanding and experiences of community practice - similar to what I would do in a traditional discussion chapter looking to other literature to integrate and build on my findings. Therefore, as I begin this final chapter, I feel as though the findings have already been processed, reflected on, and discussed heavily in their implications for transformative practice ending in our proposed sites of possibility. I see chapter four as our traditional findings, chapter five as the so what of our findings, and this final chapter as a higher order so what to synthesize all that we have learned and integrate these learnings into a broader literature.

**Overview of Findings: What did we learn about transformation and how it is done?**

In this chapter, I synthesize my findings and the significance of this study into Community Psychology literature on transformation as they relate to, Giddens’ (1979) theory of structure versus agency, and Gaventa’s (2006) three forms of power. These two
theories along with CP literature help synthesize the complex set of findings of this study and center the importance of reclaiming an intentional and contextually informed *agency* in creating, convoking, and catalyzing transformation to help address the core fracture in the findings. Before I discuss particular findings, I first present an overview of how the findings are positioned in the CP literature.

First, there was significant overlap in the findings of the current study with other sets of literature and fields of study, which deserve a deep exploration in future research. As stated in the empirical literature review, transformation has been widely described in a variety of literatures, with deep intellectual histories in community intervention studies (see Trickett, 2009; Trickett, Beehler, Deutsch, Green, Hawe, McLeroy, et al., 2011), social movement theory (see Davis, McAdam, Scott & Zald, 2005), organizational change literature (see Butcher, Banks, Henderson, Robertson, 2007; Chetkovich & Kunreuther, 2006; Gill, 2010; Hasenfeld, 2010), and popular education literature (see Freire, 2007; 2013; Martin-Baro, 1994). Each of these areas hold additional richness for a collective integration of these findings of transformation, but, they fall outside of the scope of this chapter.

Second, the findings of this study were generally consistent with and in support of previous literature on transformation in Community Psychology. Utilizing a PTD process, this study created an understanding of transformation from the perspective of community organizers and activists, resulting in a form of dependability, between academics theorizing about transformation, and community organizers doing it. The core of transformation in Community Psychology theory addresses the need to tackle root causes and shift the structures of society (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Nelson, 2013),
the findings constructed by organizers and activists concur and highlight structures of
power, ideology, and historical context as three domains of context that need focused
study and attention in transformative practice. Transformation, in Community
Psychology literature also articulates the need for a contextually based critical problem
frame and vision (Christens, 2012; Fisher, Sonn, Evans, 2007; Himmelman, 2001; Ife,
Reich, Pinkard and Davidson, 2008), and the integration of personal and structural
change (Albee, 1998; Brodsky, et al., 2011; Christens et al., 2007; Watts & Flanagan,
2007). Each of these boxes was checked in the findings of this study. Therefore, the
discussion of these findings starts from a place of commonality and builds on the
literature to contribute a nuanced understanding of transformation from both an academic
and community lens.

Third, components of the theory of transformation constructed in this study
contributed to our understanding of the relationships between key concepts in the field of
Community Psychology as they relate to transformative change. For example, the
concept of social justice was centered in the Aspirational Model and was built into
relationships with additional concepts like ideology, historical memory and context and
power structures. Additionally, the relationships between concepts centered social justice
in the context of multiple levels of analysis as Prilleltensky (2012) does in his theorizing
about justice. Social justice is already a highly defined concept in the field of community
psychology (Prilleltensky, 2012) and this study found both overlaps and inconsistencies
with how it is defined in the literature. The vision of social justice as defined in chapter
four reads as follows: a world where there is enough for everyone, where human rights
are centered over profits and privatization, where communities are sustainable, connected, and organized, where institutions are just and accessible to all, where there is a shared and liberatory consciousness, and where justice is continuously redefined and led by those most impacted by injustice.

Looking to the CP literature, this definition addresses two core components of social justice as outlined in Prilleltensky (2012), who draws on the theoretical foundations of Miller (1999) and Rawls (1971). These components include: distributive and procedural justice. However, this vision does little to articulate aspects of the outlined sub-categories such as retributive justice or cultural justice (Prilleltensky, 2012), or concepts such as transformative justice which have been constructed as a push back to retributive and restorative justices (Coker, 2002). Prilleltensky (2012) argues that “justice is about the fair and equitable distribution of resources and about the fair and equitable treatment of other human beings” (p. 9). Our collective vision in the Aspirational Model in some ways falls short of this, and in some ways assumes more than what traditionally fits into a conception of just world. Fondacaro and Weinberg (2002) argue that different epistemological paradigms will inherently define and apply social justice differently, and as this study was couched in the critical paradigm this is an important consideration. In their paper proposing a social ecological epistemology, Fondacaro and Weinberg (2002) argue that distributive justice is central in prevention and health promotion research, procedural justice is central in empowerment research, and that the critical paradigm centers social justice as the core focus or goal of its research and action. Fondacaro and Weinberg (2002) go on to argue that each paradigm falls short of a comprehensive and empirical conception of social justice. Integrating our findings with the literature in this
case, offers a different dimensionality to the proposal of PTD to engage in an epistemological centering of community knowledge and builds on Fondacaro and Weinberg’s (2002) proposal for a social ecological epistemology. PTD asks the question of how *knowledge integration* and *legitimization* from academic and community perspectives and positions can and should happen for concepts that have a theoretically rich history, rather than an insistence that the theoretical knowledge that has been built trumps processes of theory construction from community perspectives.

I have organized the rest of this chapter according to the core finding of this study which reframes and adds theoretical specificity to the concept of transformation in the field of Community Psychology: redefining and enacting the small in transformation. In addition, I discuss two secondary findings including: interpreting the role of context through Gaventa’s theory of power, and the understanding the limiting factors of a radical vision.

**Core finding - Re-defining and Enacting the Small: Putting Agency in the Hands of Organizers and Activists.** Where the findings deviated the most from my expectations, based on previous literature, was in the reframing of our understanding of size in transformation: embracing the small, enacting the small, and redefining the small. Everything in the academic model constructed in Kivell (2016) pushed for bigger - thinking bigger, acting bigger, and targeting bigger levels of analysis. Previous literature articulates what that big change might be.

Prilleltensky (2014) had previously proposed that transformation may fall along a continuum: from co-optation, through amelioration, towards transformation, while Robinson, Brown, Beasley, and Jason (2017), built out the dichotomy of first and second-
order change by proposing the concept of third order change. Third order change was defined as “an essential shift in the social fabric” (p. 22), and articulates transformation beyond a particular setting, school, neighbourhood, or community; it is change that targets the broadest level of analysis. While Prilleltensky (2014) and Robinson, et al. (2017) help to be specific in our naming of particular change outcomes, each of these frameworks could benefit from more specificity by integrating the current framing of the small, while holding, pushing, and acting towards these bigger changes.

This finding is dialectic in its nature. We need to embrace the small. But we cannot get lost in the small. This is the challenging task faced by organizers and activists fighting for transformation. In the CP literature, this idea of small, has previously been framed as small wins (Foster-Fishman, Fitzgerald, Brandell, Nowell, Chavis, & Van Egeren, 2006; Weick, 1984). The concept of a small win is defined as the success needed for participants to see the results of their hard work and to keep them involved and energetic about a longer-term goal (Foster-Fishman, et. al. 2006). According to Weick (1984), small wins are “a concrete, complete, implemented outcome of moderate importance. By itself, one small win may seem unimportant. A series of wins at small but significant tasks, however, reveals a pattern that may attract allies, deter opponents and lower resistance to subsequent proposals” (p.35). Small wins are not linear but are “scattered and cohere only in the sense that they move in the same general direction or all move away from some deplorable condition” (Weick, 1984, p. 36).

Small wins, however, should not be conflated with how small is being defined in these findings. Small, is instead defined in terms of the details: in the enactment and foundation building processes necessary to create movements and catalyze social
transformation. This concept of small is not about complementing transformative efforts but is about being an active and integral part of any transformative change. The idea of smallness was constructed in our sites of possibility as a way of reclaiming agency in the hands of organizers and activists, thus the importance and integration of Giddens’ (1979) Structuration Theory which outlines the dialectical relationship between agency and structure.

**Structuration Theory.** Giddens (1979) proposed Structuration Theory as a way of understanding the dialectic relationship between agency and structure. His theory defines and articulates what he calls “patterns”, “rules”, and “resources” that create, reify and reproduce structures in society. Structures and systems in Structuration Theory, according to Giddens are made up of “deeply layered structures” which have been and continue to be produced and reproduced until the rules and patterns which are creating systems of power, are seen as normal, and the structure becomes a durable and historically situated institution that reproduces society. According to Althusser (1971), these institutions make up the *ideological state apparatuses* and are used to reify the dominant social narratives of any current social order.

If structures and systems are created through these historically durable patterns of social reproductions, resulting in what we call institutions (Giddens, 1979), and these ensuing institutions reproduce societal ideology and the dominant social narrative (Althusser, 1971), this provides credence to the integration made between the big and small of our practices and the big and small of our context. Understanding the role of ideology and the primacy we give to structure as somehow the natural state of the world may explain why participants in this study have given up on achieving transformation.
Participants defined the current political, social, cultural and economic context of Florida as so incredibly far from their vision of justice, and the dominant ideologies of the opposition as so powerful that an intentional re-engagement with agency, or in our case, *the small*, can help organizers and activists collectively locate their practice to intentionally disrupt these patterns of social reproduction.

Structuration Theory provides the theoretical support for this reframing of size, by articulating a framework that underscores and connects both of our sites of possibility: the big and small of practice and the big and small of context. Structuration Theory dialectically relates both agency and structure, as well as micro and macro levels of context (Giddens, 1979; Reason & Bradbury, 2006). Applying Structuration Theory to these sites of possibility provides support for their importance in articulating the need to balance the dialectical nature between structural injustices and the agency of organizers and activists as a collective to do something about it. Christens, Hanlin, and Speer (2007) integrated the structure versus agency dialectic in a CP perspective. The dialectic of individual versus system, or agency versus structure, speaks to the current study’s core finding redefining and enacting the small in transformation.

Two additional findings are discussed below and make further links to Structuration Theory: Gaventa’s (2006) three forms of power and the limiting factors of a good vision. I have framed them as secondary findings because the core findings of big and small weaves its way through both, and additionally because they are not as central to the theory constructed for this study.

**Secondary finding: Interpreting context through Gaventa’s theory of power.** Context, in Community Psychology, generally refers to ecological levels of analysis and
the settings in which we live. Context, as it was discussed in this study, was similarly framed as this idea of settings nested within different levels of analysis from the personal and relational, to the organizational, political, structural, and cultural. Context was also discussed as having multiple domains integrated into those settings: structures of power, ideology and the dominant narrative, and history and current context. While synthesizing these findings for this chapter, it became clear that context and power were deeply interconnected as the domains of context in the findings overlapped nearly perfectly with Gaventa’s (2006) three forms of power: visible, invisible, and hidden forms of power.

Our first domain of context is made up of the structures of power. Structures of power were defined in the findings as the way that society works, built up by institutions, policies, norms, and the powerful elite, and each setting across levels of analysis has its own contextually based structures of power which would play a role in transformative efforts. Gaventa’s first two forms of power, the *visible* and *hidden* power capture the breadth of this domain of context. Gaventa defines visible power as the “definable aspects of political power - the formal rules, structures, authorities, institutions, and procedures of decision-making” (p. 29). Next, he defines hidden power, as *setting the political agenda*. Both visible and hidden power demonstrate our definition of structures of power.

The second and third domains of context represented in these findings include: ideology and the dominant narrative, and historic and the current context. These remaining domains of context overlap with how Gaventa defines the third and final form of power: invisible power. Gaventa (2006) states that invisible power is the most “insidious” of the three forms of power. This invisible power is what drives ideologies
and narratives. Both the ideology and historical context are made up of dominant narratives; simply the way things are. According to the findings of this study, changing the dominant narrative, whether that is ideological or historical, makes for durable transformations which are hard to turn back. The historical implications and context of structural injustice, while highlighting historical memory to reconstruct narratives of oppression, revolution, power, and identity (Montero, 2007, Reich, Pinkard & Davidson, 2008) are a necessary domain of context to be disrupted in change processes. According to Gaventa, and complementing our findings here, “by influencing how individuals think about their place in the world, this level of power shapes people’s beliefs, sense of self, and acceptance of the status quo” (p.29).

**Secondary finding: The limiting factors of a good vision.** Constructing a contextually grounded vision for transformation, is proposed as a central component of much of the literature on transformation in Community Psychology, (Brodsky et al., 2011; Christens, et. al., 2014; and Sarason, 1986). The findings of the current study do not negate the importance of holding or creating a shared vision, and in fact, our Aspirational Model does center the need for a vision. Our findings do however reveal limiting factors of a radical vision on the ability of organizers and activists to move towards transformation. These limiting factors were represented in the findings as counter-stories. The counter-stories stated that when the symptoms of social injustices are perceived as urgent, when the context is perceived as incredibly far from the vision, and when people feel limited by the forces of the Nonprofit Industrial Complex (NPIC), any attempts to move towards that vision are impeded. Participants, in the face of these limitations, are settling for amelioration, while stating that they are fighting for social
transformation. Weick (1984) stated that by defining problems as too big, we may actually be framing them as unsolvable. In the findings of this study, the sites of possibility were constructed as a way of addressing these limitations. Integrating our core finding of redefining and enacting the small in transformation and my previous synthesis with Structuration Theory, this limitation of a radical vision highlights what could be perceived as a pendulum swing towards defining problems too heavily in the structure.

The Radical Imagination, defined by Haiven and Khasnabish (2014), is an active process of working with organizers and activists to blow out the boundaries of our socialization and dominant ideologies to re-imagine, experiment, and dream of a more socially just world. Ampuja (2011) argues that a neoliberal ideology has been normalized so deeply it is perceived as the only way to be, and “such a massive denial of social alternatives creates a void of imagination” (p, 296). Therefore, the Radical Imagination pushes beyond the construction of a vision to include the necessity of creating that vision as an active and collective process, while simultaneously radically re-imagining the practices and strategies needed to get there. In the Radical Imagination, Haiven and Khasnabish argue that even if “the system as a whole can be changed through gradual institutional reforms, those reforms must be based on and aimed at a transformation of the fundamental qualities and tenets of the system itself.” (p. 5).

Our findings demonstrate that if we keep doing things the way that we are doing them, we are not going to get very far. This is cause for a reality check on the limitations surfaced in the creation of a radical vision. Participants have a vision, but it is not doing much to help. No matter how much we envision, or how far that vision spans, the participants in this study literally have no intention of getting there. The primacy of
structure over agency in the framing of the NPIC, urgency, and the distance to the vision is leaving organizers and activists feeling hopeless and disconnected from their transformative visions. Engaging with the idea of agency versus structure and the concrete nature of the Radical Imagination is a necessary antidote to shifting the culture of organizing by introducing the new definition of small.

Second, the construction of counter-stories from these findings provide alternative narratives for organizers and activists, who in this study truly believed that they were not working hard enough. Yet, our findings highlight that working as hard as they do, combined with a reactionary stance to the urgency of problems, is in fact one of the mechanisms getting in their way. This speaks to the importance of creating enabling structures (Evans, 2015; Evans & Kivell, 2015), and spaces for organizers to reflect and learn even in the face of urgent structural injustices as we did in the participatory nature of this study.

Rappaport (1987), in his analysis of the dialectical nature of social problems, called on CP to embrace *divergent* rather than convergent thinking in our research and action, and Kreiss and Tufecki (2013) warned us that action researchers must remain balanced in our institutional and individual transformation efforts. These findings contribute to our understanding of personal transformation and small practices as inherently necessary but insufficient in creating transformation (Brodsky, et al., 2011; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). In community psychology literature, there are calls for addressing multiple levels of analysis, and engaging with the dialectic of structure versus agency, driving home the point that we must focus simultaneously on individual and the
systemic context (Christens et al., 2007), simultaneously focus on the agency and the structure (Giddens, 1979) and simultaneously focus on the big and small.

Overall, these findings reach deeper and farther than what has been integrated above. So many more questions left to be answered, literatures to be integrated and critiqued, and so many concepts to define and weave together. To capture some of this richness, I next discuss implications from this study and future research necessary to keep moving us forward in increasing the transformative potential of research and practice.

**Implications**

Community psychologists have an ethical obligation to redress social injustice and to work actively to transform social, cultural and institutional arrangements that foster social injustice.  
*(Monterey declaration of Critical Community Psychology)*

The findings of this study have implications for practice, theory, and methodology. These implications are significant for organizers and activists as well as community-engaged scholars. Many of the implications cross the boundaries of these groups, but for the sake of clarity I have separated them in the discussion below.

**Implications for social change practice.** This study has implications for co-researchers, secondary participants, the SJT, and organizers and activists more broadly. This study revealed a barrier in the how organizers and activists in Miami plan and implement transformative practice. The core fracture, or, *the Sisyphean task*, is built on the prevalent assumption that if you work hard enough, and care enough, you will succeed in stopping bad things from happening and, as a result, create a transformed community. To counteract this assumption, or at the very least collectively hold it up for critique, these findings suggest that slowing down, engaging in a deep study of injustice and context, and reframing conceptions of size in the development of strategies and
tactics can help to overcome and heal this fracture. This study has built the necessary foundation to develop a tool to be used in conjunction with organizer training to find new ways of collectively imagining practice. The co-researchers and I have already committed to creating this tool together based on our findings and have applied for funding to be able to fund collective sessions where we bring in the broader SJT to challenge and collectively reframe our practices.

A further implication of this study on practice is an integration with pre-figurative politics through engaging and enacting the small. Pre-figurative politics is a core tenet of the Radical Imagination literature (Haiven & Khasnabish, 2014), and it is about imagining and creating the kinds of communities, structures and norms of power which breed egalitarian relationships in small ways, when the envisioned society cannot yet be achieved (Cornish, Haaken, Moskovitz, & Jackson, 2016). Cornish et al., (2016) refer to pre-figuration as identifying “sites of psychological social change” (p. 114), reminiscent of the sites of possibility from this study, which identify the small ways in which profound changes can take root. Connecting prefiguration to findings in this paper of the dialectic between the big and small provides plenty of space for organizers and activists to create and re-imagine their practices.

**Implications for theory and community-engaged scholars.** In this study we constructed an academically informed and community driven theory of transformation. This theory has implications for informing scholarly research and practice. First, this theory can be used to measure, design and, evaluate future transformative efforts now that we have proposed the composite parts of transformation. Second, this theory would benefit from being tested out in different contexts, with different groups of change agents
to identify when and how it is helpful in informing research and practice for transformation.

By continuing to refine our understanding of what transformation is, we can identify what it is not. An important implication in this theorizing process is to identify that not all changes are or should be transformative, and that as community-engaged researchers, we need to embrace this fact and be comfortable saying “we made something better or we changed something”. Changes that are not transformative are not bad. There are positive ameliorative changes that address the what Prilleltensky (2014) articulates as personal, interpersonal, organizational and communal well-being. Rather than naming every change effort as a transformative one, this study contributes to our ability as scholars to be more specific in what transformation means. Clarity and specificity of the concept of transformation is necessary in helping to convoke it.

Implications for Methodology: Participatory Theory Development and the development of a methodological approach. Finally, this research constructed and is proposing a new methodology: Participatory Theory Development. This methodology fits with the values of what Kagan et. al (2011) call “pre-figurative action research” (p. 60) where the design of the research itself is created with the intent of invoking “emancipatory social relations” (Cornish, et al, 2016, p. 117) and prefiguring a different way of relating across structures of power and hierarchies of knowledge.

The implications of this methodology are twofold. First, by prefiguring equitable relationships of knowledge and centering the voices and knowledge(s) of community organizers and activists, it benefited the co-researchers in their conceptions of their own power and understanding their role in knowledge construction. Through the creation of
communicative space (Kemmis et al., 2014), a process based on Habermas’ (1984) theory of communicative action, critical methodologies work to challenge assumptions, unsettle power relations, and work to ensure that the process of research does not re-create oppressive power structures. Secondly, the findings of this study went deeper than anticipated through the constant pushing of the co-researchers to challenge assumptions, dig deeper and continue to analyze our data through multiple rounds of analysis. The implications of having those most impacted by the development of a theory involved in the theory construction process proved to be fruitful in our understanding of a complex concept and has implications for similar research processes for different theories.

Limitations

Three limitations should be considered when engaging with the findings of this study. The first is the bounded nature of unboundable questions, second, the time limitations of co-researchers which limited their ability to be fully active throughout the analysis and theory building processes of the PTD process, and third, the substantive nature of the theory that we have created which will require future research to build out in different times and places.

**Limitation #1: Bounding the unboundable.** Although my research questions were bounded to understanding transformation from the perspective of organizers and activists in Miami, it was a constant challenge to keep that in mind. I found myself constantly trying to answer more generally “what is transformation?” Co-researchers were uncomfortable with being experts on transformation as they, rightfully so, argued that in many models and theories before us, false assumptions were built into frameworks leading to a re-creation of practices that so far are not having the impacts that people
would like. Therefore, we had to acknowledge that an inherent limitation with asking such big and unboundable questions about the nature of change, is that transformation is far messier, more contextual, and out of our control than any model or theory can capture.

Our questions, while bounded in nature, were still very big questions. To answer them more fully, would require significant inclusion of interdisciplinary knowledge, including the integration of a number of academic disciplines and community knowledges(s) beyond the scope of what we could include in this study. In general, studies on a particular phenomenon go from the general to the specific. But instead, due to its exploratory nature both substantively and methodologically, this study went from the general to the specific, only in some ways. This is what happened in creating the Aspirational Model and moving to the sites of possibility illuminating a theory of transformation orienting around the idea of size. While in other very important ways, this study went from the general to the more general. We have identified what we believe to be core components of transformation, each of which have their own literature bases and disciplinary theories: ideology, context, power, history, structure and so on. So, instead of one topic where we began to converge on its meaning to be able to articulate its boundaries, this study demonstrated the divergent knowledge(s) needed to more fully answer questions about the phenomenon of transformation.

One positive outcome of this limitation is that I find that I have a more structured framework through which to engage with other disciplinary knowledge(s) and future research on the components of transformation. Rather than beginning with the pieces: power, ideology, context, and structure, and then attempting to build a theory of
transformation, we started from a bird’s eye view and built a theory of transformation that can now be used to interpret and interrogate these other literatures.

**Limitation #2: Study logistics.** Second, and more focused on the logistics of the study, was the limited time and compensation I had built in for co-researchers. This limited their ability to be fully active throughout the analysis and theory building components of the PTD process. I requested and paid a fair wage for 20 hours from participants. In actuality, co-researchers participated for 35 hours across ten sessions. Even with this additional time, we had to make difficult choices about which components of the data were analyzed during our time together, and which waves of analysis were participatory, and which were not.

Two main areas of the research were limited due to this time restriction. The first being the need to identify when and where we would be participatory and when I was working alone. I created processes to integrate the co-researchers voices into the analysis even when they were not in the room, but this limitation made it clear that to do PTD in future studies, more time will be required for intensive participation from co-researchers and more funding needed to ensure fair recompense for their labour. The second area limited due to time restrains is a need to spend more time ensuring that the language that we use holds the same meaning in academic spaces as it does in community. For example, words like *culture* and *ideology* have specific meanings in Community Psychology, or in other fields of study. And one issue that came up during the analysis was potential disconnection in meaning of terms. We spent a significant amount of time as a team reading and discussing the concept of *power* and could have benefited from
similar attention to discuss culture, ideology, structure, and social justice among other terms.

**Limitation #3: Substantive or transferable theory.** Another important potential limitation of this study is that what we have developed may be interpreted as something closer to a substantive theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1965) than a formal theory as it was developed in a particular location with this particular organization. Future research can both determine the extent to which these theoretical assertions transfer to other settings.

**Future Research - More Questions, More Literatures, More Empirical Examples**

*If you expect to see the final results of your work, you simply have not asked a big enough question.* - I.F. Stone

As discussed in my limitations section, I asked big questions for this study. I, along with other scholars of transformation, have barely scratched the surface of what there is to know about the phenomena, let alone how we can use this knowledge to increase the transformative potential of research and action. I have not arrived somewhere with an answer, but rather have arrived at somewhere with more questions than when I began. For instance, the findings touch on so many words that bring a lot of theoretical baggage with them: ideology, power, context, structures, values, etcetera and because there was so many, and so much, they were skimmed over rather than being given their due in terms of theoretical contributions. Much more research is required to attain this degree of theoretical integration of transformation.

Second, an important line for future research will be to pivot from the focus on defining transformation, as significant previous studies along with this study have given framing to the concept of transformation. What is much harder to define and requires
significant theoretical and empirical energy is answering questions related to how to do it. This will require identifying case studies of successful transformations (and deciding what success would even mean) to engage in a deep process of learning from these cases to inform our own theories and practice. *Upping the Anti*, a peer reviewed activist driven journal which publishes anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and anti-neoliberal theory and action has closely documented the past ten years of learnings from Canadian social movements by, with and for activists and organizers across Canada. Examples, such as these provide a good start for taking our theoretical understandings of transformation and seeing how they play out in practice. Once successful transformations are identified, conducting detailed case studies, such as those created by Flyvbjerg (1998) to develop a more complete understanding of the role of the dialectic of big and small in these efforts will provide more empirical examples for us to work with in defining and creating future transformative efforts.

Similarly, an interesting line of research will be to actively engage as academic allies and partners in current transformative efforts to. Haiven and Khasnabish (2014) in the *Radical Imagination* position themselves as active participants in “convoking” a radical imagination, in constructing and catalyzing transformative efforts through participatory action research processes. Creating our own case studies as active parts of the research will also build the empirical repository of transformative practice.

This study has identified new directions for research on transformative change, particularly in its relationship to other theories and disciplinary knowledge bases. The implications for research - if we are going to play in this domain of transformation - require tearing down interdisciplinary boundaries and academic and community
boundaries to integrate knowledges, and to critique, interpret, understand, and assess transformative research and action. Our understanding of transformation would benefit from an integration with research on social settings. According to Tseng and Seidman (2007), attempts to change social settings have been hindered by inadequate theory on how social systems work. Similarly, we have a lot to learn through theory development about the connections between context and power. Both have deep theoretical and empirical histories and a further exploration of the theoretical connections would be a benefit to our understanding of transformation.

Finally, it is important to point out that there is as much literature on transformation written by grassroots leaders, organizers, and activists, as there is in academic literature. This journey of understanding and articulating transformation began with constructing an academic model. This study was step two in co-constructing a theory of transformation with organizers and activists, using my academic model as one source of knowledge. An important next step in triangulating these findings will be a deep engagement with the grassroots literature. This includes practice-oriented books on how to do transformation such as Eric Mann’s the 7 Components of Transformative Organizing Theory, and Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox of Revolution co-created by a team of organizers, artists and revolutionaries. Additionally, this includes social movement literature, such as Upping the Anti, discussed above. These resources and so many more will make up my program of research focused on learning about and with organizers to see how our current theory of transformation can contribute to a grounded and critically informed transformative practice.
Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study remind us that there is no silver bullet of transformation. It is hard, messy, and contextually based. What we have done in this study is provide sites of possibility in rethinking the small in order to reclaim agency in transformative research and practice. This study constructed an actionable theoretical framework of transformative change - built for community-engaged researchers, community organizers, and activists. As outlined above, the implications of this research are many, and the questions this study surfaced require a continued dedication to this line of research. The need for strategic and theoretically-informed transformative research and action is crucial in the current state of our communities – both to provide a map on how to get there and as a process of accountability for documenting and evaluating transformative efforts. As community-engaged researchers, we need to better understand how to think about, support, reflect on, and do transformative research and action – to more systematically and strategically build power for transformative movements and change.
References


Appendix A: Interview Guide

This will be an interview about stories of transformative change. How you understand transformative change, how you know it when you see it, and how you have tried (successfully or not) to achieve it.

1. What does the word transformative mean to you?

2. Tell me a story about something that you think was transformative.
   a. What about the story made it transformative?
   b. Additional question prompts
      i. Framing: Why/From What/To What
      ii. Action: When/Who/Where/How

3. Tell me about a time that you sought transformative change in your own work (that may or may not have been successful). What happened? How did you try to get there?
   a. If it was successful how did you know that?
   b. If it wasn’t, what would it have looked like if it was?
   c. Additional question prompts
      i. Framing: Why/From What/To What
      ii. Action: When/Who/Where/How