

## Faculty and Staff Grassroots Leaders' Beliefs About Power: Do Their Beliefs Affect Their Strategies and Effectiveness?

Aдриanna Kezar

*University of Southern California*

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This study examines how grassroots leaders define and act on beliefs about and perceptions of power. In this article, we focus on the following research questions: RQ1. How do grassroots leaders understand and socially construct power?; and RQ2. How does their understanding of power impact their approach to grassroots leadership (e.g., strategies and ways they negotiate power)? The study is framed by reviewing literature from social movement theory related to power, including Marxist, Postmodern, and Tempered Radical frameworks. Three approaches emerged in the study: a) Confrontational narrative (resist and rebel against the oppressor); b) Tempered radical narrative (power conditions exist, but there is room to navigate); and c) Power as context narrative (issues of power are not relevant and tend to blend into the context). The discussion describes limitations identified with the confrontational and power as context approaches that limit their effectiveness. The study also provides empirical evidence for how people construct power and for the impacts of context and individual background on constructions of power.

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**R**esearch over the last fifteen years demonstrates that grassroots leadership efforts within institutional settings are not well-understood and yet extremely important to organizational processes such as change (Kanter, 1989; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Meyerson, 2003; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Studies identify how leaders at all levels of the organization facilitate change processes (Kanter, 1989; Kezar & Eckel, 2002; Meyerson, 2003; Pearce & Conger, 2003). Kanter's (1989) work, in particular, highlighted how leaders in positions of authority are not the only key agents of change, and that leadership at multiple levels is necessary for the type of shared leadership that leads to innovation and long-term change and sustainability. While this distributed form of leadership has been recognized, bottom-up leadership is still typically studied from the perspective of supporting top down efforts (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Though the role of bottom up leaders in top-down efforts is important to explore, these studies do not explain or explore bottom-up changes independent of top-down sanctioning or change efforts that run counter to the interests of those in authority.

In more recent years, researchers such as Meyerson (2003) have suggested that organizational members without formal authority also create change day-to-day, but often this work goes undocumented. This everyday leadership is often termed "grassroots leadership"; it

emerges from the bottom up, among those without formal authority (Wittig, 1996). Meyerson noted that grassroots leadership and activism is typically documented within social movements outside organizational settings, but she challenged the idea that grassroots activities are not happening “within” organizations as well. She studied organizational grassroots efforts in corporations that were not connected to formal authority and typically challenged the status quo. She called these grassroots leaders “tempered radicals”—leaders with no formal authority who are located in institutional settings and temper their approach in order to maintain their jobs. They are committed both to their change ideas and the organization, but these two are often in direct conflict because their change challenges institutional norms/practices. Change from the bottom up is fundamentally different: it takes longer, requires unique skills and strategies, encounters new challenges, and involves more personal resiliency and commitment because it often involves questioning institutional norms and power structures (Kanter, 1989; Meyerson, 2003; Safrick, 2003). Given these unique qualities, grassroots leadership efforts need greater study. We need to document the process, obstacles, strategies, challenges, and potential of this form of leadership (Astin & Leland, 1991).

While we know very little about the phenomenon of grassroots leadership in organizational settings in general, we know virtually nothing about this phenomenon in education, as the few studies that exist are from corporations and community agencies. Educational organizations have been slower than businesses to recognize or harness grassroots leadership (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). Apart from the few exceptions involving studies of faculty and student activism in the 1960s and of women activists in the 1970s and 1980s (Astin, 1975; Astin & Leland, 1991), studies of leadership within postsecondary settings have focused on college and university presidents, provosts, and deans, ignoring any other group as possible leaders. Only in very recent years has there been recognition that leadership in higher education takes place at multiple levels—administrators, staff, faculty, and students—all of which play a role in creating direction and organizational change (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006). For example, Safrick (2003) and Hart (2006) demonstrated how women's studies, centers for women, and women's councils hold leadership roles from their “marginal” status outside the circles of power on campus by transforming the curriculum, diversifying faculty and staff, and changing the climate of college campuses. These studies hinted at the potential of faculty and staff grassroots and examined a few areas such as resiliency or outcomes, but we still understand little about grassroots leaders in educational settings.

Research is needed because we know very little about the leadership of faculty and staff, and as a result there is little understanding, acknowledgement, support, development, or resources for individuals or groups who want to play a role in “nonpositional” or grassroots leadership. In addition, we know little about challenges they face such as negotiating obstacles and power. This study is framed by Meyerson's (2001, 2003) tempered radical framework. Because faculty and staff are members of institutions and not outside radicals, Meyerson's (2003) framework is appropriate for understanding faculty and staff leadership rather than social movement theory, which is typically used to understand grassroots leadership in society outside organizational settings. Meyerson identified several areas important for understanding tempered radicals: strategies, obstacles, power negotiation, and resiliency.

In this article, we focus on ways grassroots leaders define and negotiate power. There are many different definitions of power; this paper examines the way faculty and staff define power in a unique way, emphasizing there is not one static definition. For the purposes of creating some

baseline understanding, we based the definition of power on Pfeffer's (1981) definition of power within organizations: a force sufficient to change the behavior of others and achieve a desired outcome. Power is context and relationship specific, and it is both hierarchical and horizontal in nature (Pfeffer). Power may influence people, but people can be swayed by other processes such as advice, recommendations, or rational arguments; thus, power is typically associated with getting people to do something that is not in their interests and against their will (Bess & Dee, 2008). Others have suggested that power is an exercise in control that diminishes the autonomy of other people (Weber, 1947).

Understanding the way grassroots leaders understand and negotiate power conditions as they work to create change is extremely important for three major reasons. First, grassroots leaders are more likely to encounter and need to be aware of power conditions because those who create change from the bottom up often challenge institutional norms and power structures. Second, as Meyerson and Scully (1995) observed, tempered radicals/grassroots leaders generally remain within their work environment and the way that they define and negotiate power is critical to ensure their place within the organization. An un-strategic choice can result in dire consequences that tempered radicals are not prepared for because their goal is to remain within the organization rather than be fired, a choice most activists are more open to. Third, the way grassroots leaders understand power may be related to how successful they are in their efforts to create change. Meyerson (2001) suggested, but did not study whether, views of power impact success. Her hypothesis was that more confrontational approaches could impede success in institutional settings. Fourth, as the literature on grassroots leadership and social movements indicates, "[w]e lack a conceptual framework to understand attempts to construct and reconstruct definitions of power. Movement scholars have generally neglected the process by which these meanings are developed, sustained, and transformed" (Benford & Hunt, 1992, pg. 36). The way grassroots leaders define power is an area that has generally been overlooked in the literature on grassroots leadership and social movements and remains an important gap in our understanding. For all these reasons, we focused particular attention to the way grassroots leaders define and act on perceptions of power through the following research questions:

RQ1. How do grassroots leaders understand and socially construct power relative to change processes and initiatives? How is their view of power shaped by organizational conditions, identity, and organizational knowledge (as defined in the literature review)?

RQ2. How does grassroots leaders' understanding of power impact their approach to grassroots leadership of change initiatives (e.g., strategies and ways they negotiate power)?

RQ3. How does grassroots leaders' understanding of power and their resulting approach utilized impact the effectiveness of change initiatives?

### **Definitions Of Power: Views From Marxist, Postmodernist, and Tempered Radical Frameworks**

Before framing the study, it is important to first define several terms that are important for understanding the paper: leadership, grassroots leadership, and change. Definitions of leadership have changed over the years and have been contested in the literature. Early

definitions of leadership often focused on a person in authority, leadership as a person rather than a process, and the role as overlapping with management (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2006; Stodgill, 1974). More recent definitions of leadership have focused on leadership as a process rather than as a person, as a collective, and have focused on change as a defining feature of leadership rather than management roles (Astin & Leland, 1991; Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin). Management and leadership have become disentangled, and much of the work previously known as management—such as budgeting, human resources management, and supervision—is now seen as the work of people in certain positions rather than the defining characteristics of leadership. As leadership has become disentangled from management and holding a positions of authority, this makes grassroots leaders more identifiable as leaders as they are not in positions of authority. Because grassroots leaders are individuals and groups with a vision who work to implement and make that vision real, they are doing the work of change, which is leadership according to these newer definitions. Because leadership is closely associated with change, this study focused on how grassroots leaders accomplish their work of creating change and how their beliefs of power may shape this process. Change is another important construct in the study and it is defined as the alteration of structures, processes, and/or behaviors in a system, or the introduction of something new to an organization (Bess & Dee, 2008).

Power is a major topic of study within grassroots leadership/social movement theory. Researchers examine various aspects: mobilization by movement actors as a form of interdependent power (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994); approaches to mapping power structures (Pfeffer, 1981; Tarrow, 1988); ways that power becomes part of institutional structures (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994; Pfeffer, 1981); uses of power among elites (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994; Pfeffer, 1981; Tarrow, 1988; Wilson, 1973; Wittig, 1996); resistance as a form of power and review various forms such as sabotage or whistle blowing (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994); and backlash as a form of power once some level of change has been achieved (Tarrow, 1988; Wilson, 1973). Power tends to be studied from a macro or sociological perspective. This is not surprising given the social movement theory emerged predominantly in sociology. Also, the literature more generally from other fields outside social movement theory discusses various concepts about how power operates as well as various ways to categorize and understand power. For example, scholars examine the organizational determinants of power—such as horizontal, vertical, and cross boundary power (Pfeffer, 1992)—alternative sources of power—such as reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert power (French & Raven, 1960)—and relationships, such as trust or reason to power (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). Lukes (2005) categorized different definitions of power into one-dimensional, two-dimensional, and three-dimensional views of power, but these categories are based on the ways researchers examine power. However, none of these theories and concepts examine how leaders themselves define or understand power. Much more limited conceptualization has been conducted in this arena, which we review next through three frameworks: Marxist, Postmodern, and Tempered Radical.

While power in grassroots leadership has been the subject of substantial investigation (as well as across organizational studies), there are also significant gaps in our understanding. As Benford and Hunt (1992) noted, there is virtually no empirical literature that examines the way grassroots leaders (or elites) understand or define power. Instead, social movement theory is based on Marxist assumptions of how power operates, which is largely conceptual rather than empirical work. This Marxist viewpoint on power is the predominant perspective in the social

movement/grassroots leadership literature (Bernal, 1998; Bettencourt, 1996; Bettencourt, Dillman, & Wollman, 1996; Kroeker, 1996; Wilson, 1973; Wittig, 1996). Within the Marxist narrative, power is constructed as universal and unified because power is experienced similarly regardless of context or identity. There is a standard narrative in which grassroots leaders are disempowered by oppressive institutional elites (Alinsky, 1971; Gaventa, 1980). Hegemonic relationships define which group has control and power and which group does not. In the Marxist narrative, the only way to interact is through resistance and counter-hegemonic actions (Morgan, 1997). There is an understanding that elites and grassroots leaders have different interests and therefore see the world in very distinctive ways (Mondros & Wilson, 1994). Grassroots leaders perceive elites as oppressive, trying to maintain their power and privilege by denying or controlling information and social situations to their advantage (Morgan, 1997; Tarrow, 1998). Elites create a legitimizing myth that supports their unequal power and denies inequalities, or they provide rationale for the existence of inequalities. The Marxist perspective thus projects the following assumptions about power onto grassroots leaders: elites have power; they are unwilling to share and will maintain their privilege at all costs; thus, confrontation and direct action is necessary by grassroots leaders (Alinsky). Yet empirical evidence is not actually collected on grassroots leaders' views of power. Various scholars have suggested weaknesses with the standard Marxist narrative. For example, some see this Marxist dialectic (elites have power and others do not) as potentially limiting, allowing elites to actually maintain and control power because it is never examined or questioned (Benford and Hunt, 1992; Morgan, 1997). Another critique that we highlight is from Postmodernism (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994).

Recent postmodern views of power suggest limitations to the traditional Marxist views related to individual constructions of power and offer some other ways to conceptualize power (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994). Postmodernists portray the Marxist view of power as overly simple and missing opportunities for exploring agency, complicity vs. consent, and the localized nature of power (Clegg, 1979 & 1989; Jermier, Knights, & Nord). For example, a grassroots organizer may have personal power through their background and experience, or may know and share interests with members of the elite. The boundaries are not seen as clear and distinctive. In response to the simplified views of power in Marxism, Collinson (1994) proposed a new framework for understanding the way individuals construct power that might identify more complex views. The framework Collinson proposed and implemented in his study of manufacturing plants in England is based on an interdependency of subjectivity/knowledge, power, and organizational conditions. He asserted that individuals' sense of agency (subjectivity) and his/her own evolving understanding of "how organizations work" (knowledge) shape his/her view of power, which is mediated by organizational conditions that are also changing continuously. Knowledge of the organization refers to an understanding of how strategy formation, routine creation, agenda setting, power mapping, and other rules of the game. Therefore, the only way to understand constructions of power among grassroots leaders would be to understand their sense of agency, background, and organizational knowledge and to place this sense within an understanding of the larger organizational context and conditions (Tew, 2002).

While grassroots leaders' views of power have not been studied, some research has been conducted on people who resist within society or organizations (e.g., labor organizers or conscious objectors). Studies have identified how people within organizations that resist the direction of those in authority often have limited organizational knowledge, which inhibits their ability to formulate sophisticated constructions of power (Clegg, 1979, 1989). They also often have limited sense of agency, which makes them perceive greater agency and power among

those in positions of authority (Clegg, 1985, 1990; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994; Scott, 1985; Tew, 2002). Research has also suggested that gender, class, or race—as individual subjectivities—shape views of power (e.g., levels of agency) (Gottfried, 1994). Many of these postmodern writers borrow from Foucault, highlighting the systemic nature of power, demonstrating that power is both interpersonal/ individual as well as within structures, emphasizing individual agency, and focusing more on negotiation and mediation (Tew, 2002).

To date, limited empirical research has been conducted using a postmodern lens and much of the work remains conceptual in nature, similar to Marxist conceptions. Benford and Hunt (1992) noted that we need studies with the goal of understanding power from the perspective of movement actors—how they construct their images of power and struggle to alter extant power relations, moving beyond purely conceptual work. They hypothesized that while there may be more complex and differing ways that grassroots leaders define and understand power, for the most part this has not been a subject of study so the standard Marxist narrative continues to proliferate in the literature. Therefore, we examine the work of Meyerson (2001) on tempered radicals because it represents empirical work on this topic. Also, the postmodern work of Tew (2002) and Collinson (1994) focused on resisters rather than grassroots leaders, whereas Meyerson's work examines grassroots leaders within institutional settings, which is a stronger parallel for faculty and staff grassroots leaders and their constructions of power.

Meyerson's (2001) work provides several important insights into the way grassroots leaders may interpret power and how it impacts their strategies (even though it did not examine the relationship between power and strategies directly). We highlight this work as it is empirically based and helped us in thinking about ways movement leaders might be conceptualizing power. While she does not label her work as postmodern, the framework does incorporate insights from postmodern thinking (such as the importance of individual interpretation of power and the impact of context on perspective) that have advanced alternative views for the way grassroots leaders might construct power. Meyerson's work comes from a psychological lens so she examines leaders' inner worlds and their interpretation of their environment further than traditional social movement literature. Because tempered radicals remain part of the organization and are trying to create change, they often dilute or moderate how much they push the organization; she explains this as living on the line between conformity and rebellion (Meyerson).

Meyerson (2001) noted that many individuals within organizations become angry and feel victimized and debilitated. She described that these people typically do not create change or play a leadership role. In contrast, tempered radicals navigate the middle, using their anger in functional ways to fuel their action, and not allowing anger to overpower them or destroy their relationships and strategies. Tempered radicals focus on making modest and doable changes, carefully choosing whether to be visible or invisible, turning threats into opportunities for negotiation, and creating pockets of learning. These strategic choices suggest an interpretation about power within the organization and knowledge of how an organization works (tapping into the importance of knowledge of how organization work noted by Collinson, 1994). Meyerson implicitly connected people's interpretations of power within their contexts to the strategies that they use.

This article will review four approaches—modest changes, moderate visibility, communication and negotiation, and viewing threats as opportunities for learning—within Meyerson's (2001) framework, as well as provide an alternative way to think about power beyond the traditional Marxist narrative and an empirical framework that incorporates some of

the postmodern views. As will be shown below, movement leaders within the tempered radical framework appear to spend time understanding the power dynamics within the context before choosing strategies. Opposed to the Marxist perspective, the tempered radical framework does not assume that elites always have differing interests from employees and there is more room for negotiation. However, the framework does acknowledge that there is a status quo that is being supported by a power base and is threatened by major change.

Tempered radicals focus on creating small wins and moderate changes because if their change is too large, they recognize people will begin to resist and threaten their progress. More incremental changes are more easily absorbed into the organization and are not seen as threatening, even though they still can create long-term change. Tempered radicals are patient, working on change for the long-term and willing to wait to see change and success. Tempered radicals realize if they push too hard and their reputation is damaged, they may be unable to play the same role and may have to move behind the scenes. Thus, visibility is also dependent on how hard they have pushed and whether they perceive the need to go under the radar.

Meyerson (2001) also noted that tempered radicals use strategies that vary based on their comfort level; some use much more visible strategies that may encounter resistance, and some have more invisible strategies that encounter less resistance. Resistance and backlash typically arise when using more visible strategies (like collective action and direct activist strategies in the form of picketing or rallies). These findings have also been identified in other studies. For example, in a study by Hart (2005), women who were very visible in seeking to change the climate around gender in higher education in the 1980s experienced little success and were labeled as “campus troublemakers.” Those in power erected bureaucratic red tape and retaliated against those activists for their confrontational methods. Creating a collective network and foregrounding professionalization (e.g. using tactics that mirror professional work, such as working with the administration and forming formal committees) over activist strategies helps to eliminate some of the resistance from those in power, particularly the administration (Hart, 2005). More invisible or behind the scenes strategies like mentoring or helping others, channeling information, or naming an offense comment or action produces less resistance (Tarrow, 1988). The ability of leaders to reassess their strategy and change suggests that they may be interpreting cues about the power structure and determining what might work best to create change. The focus on comfort-level suggests that an individual’s background affects his or her choice of strategy.

In addition, tempered radicals choose negotiation and communication as favored techniques rather than confrontational techniques as a response to threats (typical in Marxist perspectives). The tempered radical framework acknowledges that people who hold different views will be open to threats and attacks from those who take a dominant position or are in authority positions. Tempered radicals see these moments as opportunities for educating others or for negotiating new understandings rather than focusing on the personal threats. In other words, they do not see an impenetrable hegemony, but opportunities for shaping and amending existing power conditions. Furthermore, Meyerson (2001) noted the importance of depersonalizing threats so that it is possible to confront people and inquire about their comments and actions in order for learning to take place as a result of the incident. Meyerson (2001) found that tempered radicals are more successful in achieving their goals if they are able to strategically confront people who threaten or attack them.

Tempered radicals attempt to use conflict and different interests as a point of interaction for learning. The framework assumes that individuals in organizations have different interests,

but that these interests can be negotiated –particularly if people interact and have an opportunity to rethink their position. Some of the goals of movement leaders is to create opportunities for interaction, to humanize the change process by bringing people together, and to encourage listening on both sides so that honest sharing, feedback, and learning may be possible.

Again, these allusions to visibility, comfort, and threats all suggest that there is some source out there that is resisting tempered radicals attempts at change, but whether the forms of resistance are norms, institutional routines or habits, power, etc. is never explained by Meyerson (2001). In sum, Meyerson does not directly address power in her text and never discusses the way people define or construct power, but her text does suggest that some source is shaping tempered radicals' work and it is important to understand how people navigate this condition (however they label it). Her work does suggest an alternative way that grassroots leaders might interpret and understand power that could impact the way grassroots leaders respond. This study sought to more explicitly articulate what is only implicit in the tempered radical framework by asking movement leaders explicitly about their views of power, which Meyerson did not do.

In addition to building on Meyerson's (2001) framework (the only empirical work in this area), we are informed by Marxist and Postmodern views of the way individuals construct power and thus brought these frameworks to the interpretation of the data. In particular, we found Collinson's (1994) framework of how subjectivity/knowledge and organizational conditions shape constructions of power to be a comprehensive framework. Our analysis of the data specifically examined organizational knowledge, identity, and organizational conditions, all aspects of Collinson's framework.

### Methodology

We chose an instrumental case study research design (Stake, 2005) to foreground the phenomenon of grassroots leadership (including processes, activities, and strategies) and background the particular case setting. In contrast to intrinsic case studies, which are guided by a particular interest in the specific case examined (e.g., a particular college or university), this instrumental case study design places the phenomenon of grassroots leadership in the foreground of the research rather than the particular case settings. We are ultimately interested in examining and understanding the grassroots leadership efforts of faculty and staff working within "typical" institutions of higher education. Typical was defined as institutions not characterized by an institutional commitment to innovation, activism, and change. They had some grassroots leadership among faculty and staff, but no unusual history or culture that fostered such activism. Thus, the term typical was related to the level of activism and support for activism. While it is difficult to define a typical higher education institution, we attempted to pick institutions that had no unusual structure, history, or culture. For example, we did not choose institutions with very unique histories or backgrounds such as Alverno College (unique curriculum) or California State University Monterey Bay (new campus with alternative teaching philosophy and mission).

While we were striving for typical institutions, we wanted varying institutional types. Numerous studies have identified how institutional type impacts organizational processes (e.g., Birnbaum, 1988). Our criteria for selecting cases were as follows: a) typical institution (for grassroots leadership and as it relates to institutional history, mission and structure); b) presence of more than one grassroots leadership effort; c) grassroots efforts among faculty and staff; d) different institutional types; e) presence of a series of nested cases (e.g. environmentalism) with multiple

individuals we could interview per case; and f) located close enough to one of the researchers so that repeated visits could be conducted

Because case selection is one of the most important criteria for informing trustworthiness in a case study, in order to select institutions for the study extensive document analysis and interviews were conducted to determine if the site was appropriate for study. Interviews were initially conducted with each campus's informants to understand if the site had a concentration of individuals who would be considered grassroots leaders, but no unusual history or culture which leads to the leadership activity. In addition, documents (e.g., campus papers, faculty governance minutes, and agendas) were compiled in a report to understand the campus culture related to change, potential nested cases, and the names of potential participants.

Through the criteria and careful case selection process, we identified five typical institutions (those institutions not characterized by an institutional commitment to innovation, activism, and change) of higher education representing different sectors (community college, liberal arts college, private research university, comprehensive public regional, and technical college), assuming that grassroots leadership might differ by institutional type. Please see appendix A for an overview of the sites.

### **Identification and Recruitment of Participants**

As an initial means of identifying these grassroots leaders, we had an inside informant on each campus to ask for assistance identifying staff and faculty actively involved in grassroots (local, bottom-up) change efforts. Individuals identified as grassroots leaders were then contacted by a member of the research team and invited to participate in this study. After this initial round of participant recruitment, we used a snowball sampling technique to recruit additional participants involved in various movements on campus. In addition to recruiting participants who were considered grassroots leaders, we also focused on identifying change initiatives to serve as nested cases (e.g., diversity, environmentalism, and multiculturalism). We continued to seek additional research participants until we had exhausted our recommendations and saturated the sample. The findings presented in this paper draw upon interviews conducted with 84 staff and 81 faculty members (total 165) at five different institutions engaged in grassroots leadership. The participants represented tenure and non-tenure track faculty at all ranks. Staff ranged from custodial, clerical, entry and mid-level staff in academic and student affairs, and other areas like operation or business. In terms of demographics, there was a gender balance; but there were more people of color given the proportion in the institutions.

In addition to recruiting individual participants who were considered grassroots leaders, we also focused on identifying change initiatives to serve as nested cases (e.g. diversity, environmentalism) and asked to speak with other individuals who were specifically involved with those initiatives. For each nested case, we had between 4-15 individuals who commented. The following represents some of the nested cases we followed to understand the spectrum: diversity (including race, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and income), service leaning and other innovative pedagogies, environmentalism, staff equity, childcare centers, wellness, student success, campus and community partnerships, anti-capitalist movements, immigration status, and participation in governance. We focused our study on changes that occur on campus, but we also identified some off-campus issues that faculty/staff and students were involved in, such as immigration rights.

## Data Collection & Analysis

One-on-one semi-structured interviews provided the primary data for this study. Each participant was interviewed at least once in-person, with the interview lasting approximately one hour. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The interview questions and prompts focused on several key themes to focus on our research questions: a) the focus of the participants' change efforts, b) strategies for creating change; c) issues that enable and constrain leadership; d) ways they define and negotiate power; and e) strategies for maintaining resilience and internal conflicts.

In addition to document analysis and one-to-one interviews, case sites were visited multiple times (often up to ten times) and observations conducted of key events, meetings, or celebrations noted by grassroots leaders. Also, once on campus we asked grassroots leaders to identify three individuals with historical and broad contextual knowledge of campus. To better understand the case sites, we focused our interviews on their perspectives about the organizational culture and environment, as well as their perspective on the grassroots initiatives. Through the documents, interviews, and observations we created a thorough description of the campuses in order to illuminate how campus context may impact grassroots leadership.

Consistent with methodological norms of qualitative inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994), the systematic coding of texts (i.e., interview transcripts, institutional documents) served as the primary means of data analysis. Formal data analysis began during the initial stages of data collection and concluded with the write-up of the final research report. Team members used journals to capture initial interpretations and issues for follow up. The research team members met regularly to address data analysis questions, compare interpretations, and develop consensus on research findings. For this paper, data analysis focused on identifying definitions of power, the ways participants described negotiating power, and ways that either they explained or it appeared that their view of power shaped their approach to leadership. We developed portraits of each faculty and staff member. The frameworks we chose to understand power (Marxist, Postmodern, and Tempered Radicals) informed our analysis of the data, but we remained open to other interpretations. Related to research question one, we examined the overall organizational conditions of each campus and determined if these conditions related to different interpretations of power. We also examined whether the grassroots leaders constructed power differently based on the nature of the change they were pursuing (e.g., environmentalism versus service learning). We explored their organizational knowledge by identifying their strategies for negotiating power as Collison (1998) and Meyerson's (2001) works suggested. We also explored relationships between aspects of their identity, mostly through their sense of agency, and their background related to race, gender, and class to views of power. In sum, we explored the relationships between the campus context/change initiative, organizational knowledge, and subjectivity to personal definitions of power. Three perspectives emerged and we use archetypes of individuals to explain these varying perspectives.

It is important to note that a few other beliefs about power emerged, but that these beliefs were not very prevalent in the data and thus did not represent themes or patterns. For example, we found a few individuals that held what might be called a feminist perspective on power (although this overlaps with the tempered radical framework in some ways). Feminists tend to view power as a shared and collective resource, see power processes as more win-win, and value relationships over direction and persuasion. The differences were subtle, but it did not appear significant enough to make a separate category of people who shared this view. A few people

had more Eastern or metaphysical views on power as a Zen force that is part of nature and that is to be experienced more with body and emotions than pure reason and without fear. These individuals viewed power in much less contentious ways than almost all other individuals. But, the numbers of individuals holding these views were so small that they are not highlighted here; but they are mentioned to demonstrate our openness to seeing other views about power even though other belief systems did not emerge in the data. Previous conceptualization from Marxism and Tempered Radicals largely captured many views. We also had a third category that emerged and was not described in the literature: power as context.

### **Trustworthiness**

We used several methods to ensure trustworthiness within the study. First, because case site selection is one of the primary ways to ensure trustworthiness within case study, we spent several months identifying the institutions where we would conduct the study. We ensured that these campuses had ample grassroots activity but were not extremely unique or distinctive campuses. Second, we spent considerable time on each campus. Researchers visited the campuses often over a year-long period conducting interviews, meeting with informants, gathering new documents, and observing campus life. Third, we interviewed both grassroots leaders and other members of the campus in order to get a fuller picture of the work of grassroots leaders as well as the nested cases we were following. Fourth, we had multiple researchers at most sites (two sites had primarily one researcher) who talked and journaled together regularly in order to provide richer interpretations of the data. Fifth, we had multiple individuals conduct data analysis and review the interpretation.

### **Results**

What emerged from the study is that individuals/groups tended to have three different ways that they understand power: a) The standard confrontational narrative (resist and rebel against the oppressor); b) Tempered radical narrative (power conditions exist, but there is room to navigate); and c) Power as context narrative (issues of power are not forefront to the grassroots leader). These various narratives will be described primarily using the portrait of grassroots leaders and supplemented by the quotes of several additional leaders who understand power in similar ways. Narrative portraits are helpful representations of qualitative data to demonstrate how ideas and beliefs are related to activities and behaviors. They also help to demonstrate how certain concepts are tied to identity and experience, which we found to be the case with views of power. Regardless of initiative or campus context, these three perspectives represent underlying ways that individuals conceive of power—basic and fundamental beliefs that certainly can be reinforced or changed by context, but seem more fundamental to personal background and beliefs. We found few relationships between campus context/initiative and beliefs of power. Multiple individuals on the same initiative or campus context held differing views based on their lifetime background or experience. One campus had more faculty members who maintained a confrontational approach, so we describe this campus and some unique aspects of the campus as this might be an important direction for future research.

## Confrontational Narrative

About one-fifth of the grassroots leaders that we talked with used a confrontational approach, which mirrors what Benford and Hunt (1992) described as the traditional grassroots or Marxist narrative. Many others faculty and staff we interviewed referenced the confrontational approach as a strategy used by grassroots leaders who had been forced off campus. Therefore, purely based on attrition, it was more difficult to find these individuals. Those who did have a confrontational approach, described here by a woman named Jennifer, viewed power as located with the organizational hierarchy and as oppressive and finite. She challenged power through confrontational strategies (e.g. criticizing the administration, organizing rallies, and student protests). As Jennifer's narrative illustrates, confrontational approaches often lead to retribution.

Jennifer, a white, tenured, female faculty member is very involved with unions on campus, and has been involved with faculty rights and gender issues. Through her involvement with the union she feels that she has improved the work conditions for her faculty colleagues, but it has been an on-going battle. She also believes that her work with the women's center and some of the student groups has helped to improve the environment around sexual harassment, childcare, and gender on campus.

**How do Jennifer and her confrontational colleagues understand power?** Jennifer has long understood that the power source at the institution is the administration and that they routinely abuse their power and need to be carefully monitored. For Jennifer power was in formalized structures, something that those in authority had and that others fought to obtain. She viewed a dialectic between those with power and those without as an on-going and constant battle. Her responses to questions of power demonstrate how she sees it as located within the hierarchy and bureaucracy: "Most of the power is in the bureaucracy. There are not very many sources of power outside of that, at least for faculty. And for staff, they are only as empowered as their immediate supervisors allow them to be." She and other grassroots leaders note that those in power have an oppressive stance, but she is always willing to challenge that stance: "you have to recognize there is a power structure here and there are a lot of people who don't want to stick their necks out. I've been around people who stick their necks out in life and so sometimes I'm shocked when people are afraid to, but then people get whacked so I understand." The description of power within the institution is one of active oppression, battles, retaliation, and opposing sides. She explains how she developed these beliefs through her "family upbringing, my parents were real activists. Also my involvement in the women's movement and political action in the community." As noted in the introduction to the results, background and life experience are influential to people's interpretations of power.

Jennifer and her confrontational colleagues tended to view power as a finite resource. Therefore, they often saw their interests in conflict with other social justice issues. For example, on one campus, those who are fighting for diversity felt they needed to compete with those supporting environmentalism because there are only so many resources and support that can be garnered. Asian, Latino, and African-American groups are often vying for power rather than working together as allies because they view power as finite. Jennifer's colleague noted concern with the confrontational approach: "the problem with the zero-sum view of power (held by Jennifer and others) is that people who you think would be on the same side on issues begin to take each other on. And I'm not sure they are even aware of it, but the way they view power and interest results in this approach."

**How do Jennifer and her confrontational colleagues approach grassroots leadership based on these views of power?** Jennifer noted that she has “always had a strong sense of justice and fairness that has overwhelmed my fear of consequences.” Therefore, she has felt compelled to actively confront members of the administration when they trample on staff or faculty rights. She believes that “you have to demand and assert your rights. There is no way that the administration will ever work with us to create the type of changes we want.” As a result of her views of power, she feels that it is her duty to actively criticize the administration. She noted that she does not “dislike the people I criticize, but it is expected that we butt heads sometimes.” Her strategies involve direct and visible approaches, such as writing articles or memos that criticize the administration, organizing rallies and events, participating in student protests, picketing, and other more visible change efforts. When she described her approach to change she stated, “I have problems with authority and I get in their faces, and then I get in trouble that way. I fight with my colleagues and I fight hard and so they push back hard and they know how to push back from that white male dominant place and then I get chewed up.” This quote also illustrates how her change strategies and approach make her a direct target for retribution. She noted that because the administration is actively against her ideas for change, the only way to create change is to force their hand. Also, her direct approach to change has been noticed by others within the institution:

We heard through the grapevine that the president was very offended, personally offended, by what I wrote, so some of the other board members also thought I was pushing the limits, over-the-top. So I wrote a thank-you note to say I didn't mean to hurt you personally, but the president never acknowledged my note.

Jennifer and other grassroots leaders believe that public humiliation is an important tool for creating change. Yet, this type of severe tactic can threaten the overall change because campus members perceive this behavior as inappropriate and uncivil, which impacts the grassroots movement's legitimacy.

Almost half of the individuals who take a confrontational approach had changed their approach slightly over time, often as they aged or to avoid backlash. Jennifer noted how she is “more diplomatic than I used to be. I'm more patient than I used to be. Raise a couple of kids and you'll learn a few things from that. I'm more tolerant of human failings and fears now.” This change translated into Jennifer tempering her confrontational approach slightly. This change also may be why she is still at the institution, whereas others with a critical approach left or were asked to leave. Another faculty member described his own transformation over time: “I try to stop myself when the discussion gets bigger and more personal. I try to allow them to disagree with what ever they feel that they disagree. If you allow it to get too personal, then it can hamper your efforts to change.” Many of the grassroots leaders with a confrontational approach have some awareness that their style is confrontational and a turnoff to those in the administration as well as some of their colleagues. However, based on their views of how the power structure operates, they feel it is their responsibility to maintain this approach—even if they slightly temper it over time. They do not have a desire to become tempered radicals, but rather feel a responsibility to be the ones who “stick their necks out” for the good of the order.

**How do Jennifer and her colleagues negotiate power conditions?** Negotiating power conditions is particularly critical when the confrontational approach is utilized. Jennifer and others noted that many confrontational colleagues were no longer at the institution or, if they

were, were no longer considered legitimate (were not listened to or did not have influence). As Justin, a tempered radical, noted, “it is easy for administrators to organize you right out of the organization.” Jennifer experienced this power reaction to her confrontational grassroots approach when her departmental nomination for chair was overturned by administration. Jennifer said although it is “illegal for administrators to retaliate against the criticism that I have lodged against the institution, I know that they often retaliate and act out against people who question their power.” Many other grassroots leaders who took this approach explained other forms of retribution such as formal lawsuits against them, having their courses scheduled at the worst times, not being selected for committees anymore, having their evaluations impacted, social isolation, and having colleagues or other administrators make biting comments at meetings.

Jennifer believes that the union is a source of power that can protect her and allow her to speak her mind in ways that non-union faculty may not. So, the union is a mechanism for helping her to negotiate power conditions within her environment. Her approach is to build and/or become a part of an oppositional structure. However, she reiterated, “The power is really seated in the administration.”

Jennifer also described the importance of tenure as a protection for faculty, in particular, to speak their minds and navigate the power structure. She is a fierce advocate for tenure and believes that if tenure goes into demise, then the administration will gain a tremendous amount of power and faculty will be much less able to navigate institutional power: “Because of tenure I feel I can be an fierce advocate against sexual harassment and for the childcare center. Otherwise, I am not sure I would feel as comfortable.”

Because Jennifer uses very confrontational approaches to change, at times she and other grassroots activists need to change their strategies and go underground. When using such active strategies to fight the power structure, often a person can end up being labeled a troublemaker and have to work in different ways for a while. These individuals were more likely than others we spoke with to cycle in and out of different strategies of change (from active to more underground). Jennifer described the way she flies under the radar from time to time:

I do a lot of stuff in my office right now, I am still active but it is sure not as visible. I do not want to put my family at risk anymore. I remember that the last chancellor came up to me at one-point and said, ‘I haven’t heard from you for in a couple years.’ He sounded pretty relieved. And my dean said: ‘I heard you were this wild woman, and I have not experienced that.’ I said, ‘well people change.’ Well I haven't changed, but right now they don't know what I'm doing. That is how it has to be at times.

“Flying under the radar” was described by Jennifer’s confrontational colleagues as necessary once they had reached a certain level of open antagonism. Leaders gave many examples—mentoring and working with students, creating underground networks, anonymously forwarding information to key individuals, having other people speak your perspective—and a host of strategies can be used as ways to accomplish one’s goal without others knowing the work you are doing. Beyond building oppositional structures (unions), relying on tenure, and flying below the radar, these leaders tend to do little to negotiate power. Power is to just a force to be reckoned with.

### **Tempered Radicals Narrative**

Approximately half of the individuals that we interviewed understood power in ways that were similar to the approach described within Meyerson's (2001) tempered radical framework.

Justin, a staff member of color, represented the perspective of other tempered radicals we saw across the campuses we interviewed. Justin has been dedicated to several issues, including staff equity, increasing service learning, and diversity. He was acknowledged by his colleagues as successful in his efforts to create change.

**How do Justin and his tempered radical colleagues understand power?** Tempered radicals on campuses often perceived power in complex ways – noting different forms of power (expert, charisma, influence), different sources (informal and formal), and dynamics of power (changing over time and by situation). Because they see power as distributed, embedded differently within each culture, and something that needed to be identified uniquely, they spend time trying to determine or map power locations. Justin described this process:

Well one thing we do is analyze the existing power structure, which is changing all the time. It's hard to get power or make change if you don't understand where decisions are made and where influence resides. So when our group sat down to work on diversity, we started to map out a system of formal and informal power on campus.

Justin went on to say:

I think power has a lot to do with change. And there are lots of different kinds of power—expert, charisma, influence. Staff are not disempowered wholesale like some would have you believe. The faculty have lots of opportunities to create change -- both through informal processes and through formal processes like the faculty senate, unions, or shared governance process, which is big in our state.

Those who shared a tempered radical view of power described how this perspective has evolved over time; in Justin's words, "my views of power have evolved through different positions I have held, my experiences, and even my family background and experience."

Certainly tempered radicals believe that oppression and abuse of power happens, but they see more opportunity for changing existing power relationships. These individuals believe that they can negotiate with those in power, have some mutual or shared interests, and believe in their own empowerment within the situation/organization. As Justin described,

Administrators have to share power to a degree or another. None of us thinks we have to force the administration in many situations, we just have to appeal to shared interests, work informal power processes to overcome inertia. Sometimes we do have to work around them, and we have done that but working in a civil way. I think that's how we create change—we continue to empower ourselves through the process of change. We actually have acquired quite a bit of informal power. These things can't be made public because all of us would have our necks chopped off if people really understood how often we are impacting choices and the direction of the campus.

This quote illustrates the complexity of a tempered radical's view of power. These grassroots leaders believe they can change power relationships, and they provide examples of such change; but they also acknowledge that there is a power structure that would be retaliatory if it realized how much power they had actually garnered. The quote also demonstrates that tempered radicals feel that those in positions of authority do not hold all the power and therefore they can work with them in civil ways.

Tempered radicals understand power differently from confrontational grassroots leaders. Justin noted that power is infinite and that he and others:

Have really created an alliance between various groups on campus. Those in diversity really support environmentalism. Environmentalists and supporters of campus

community partnerships also support diversity. Asian-Americans are very supportive of African-Americans on campus. We believe that through working together, we can empower all groups and create social justice more broadly.

Power, according to tempered radicals, is not held solely by the administration or some other group to be confronted. Instead, Justin and his colleagues view power as located in various places among different groups, and they acknowledge that power can be garnered through informal and sometimes subversive approaches. Although power can be shared, they do believe those in the hierarchy hold formal power over grassroots leaders; those with formal authority could retaliate if they realized how much power grassroots leaders were able to yield.

**How do Justin and his tempered radical colleagues approach grassroots leadership based on these views of power?** As a result of their multifaceted and dynamic views of power, tempered radicals adopt strategies that are less visible, beyond the scenes, smaller in nature, and more informal. Furthermore, their strategies suggest an ability to negotiate and work with those who are in positions of authority and hold formal power. Justin says one of his most commonly used strategies is questioning traditional practices:

If I'm in a meeting and they are discussing an issue, it is entirely appropriate for me to say: 'how are students of color going to be affected by this change?' I bring it to the table but do not engage in direct conflict with a supervisor over resources or policies. That would be professional suicide and usually does not result in change. I've seen others do that, and they are no longer here.

The less visible strategies taken by Justin and his tempered radical colleagues are adopted due to the risk inherent in attempting to question practices and create change. Using the less visible and less confrontational strategies decreases risk while still achieving the goals of questioning practices that may lead to change.

Another one of the tempered strategies is planting ideas with administrators and allowing them to take credit, a practice Justin regularly uses. Justin also provided another way he can be influential in decision-making processes in ways that are effective, but tempered:

What is important for long-term change is to be the voice of underrepresented students at meetings, and to change the culture by the questions that we ask. Asking for a quick change overnight only creates obstacles. There was a real concern over the way that fellowships were being allocated and that students of color were not getting any. Rather than try to impose a policy, which I could've argued for but would have been an uphill battle, I contacted a faculty member of color on the committee and made it his responsibility, informally of course, to impact the decision-making process. It would have been a real struggle to change our policy, but it was easy to get someone on the committee who has sensitivity to push and get students of color fellowships. I constantly look for these opportunities.

The strategies used by Justin and his colleagues reflect their understanding of power. He acknowledged that power structures exist but that they are open to influence through decision-making processes, engineering himself onto influential committees where he can bring a new perspective, building relationships with those in power, building bridges and relationships with others in general, developing coalitions and networking, or leveraging external support. Justin also recognizes that as a part of an institution, his approach to change needs to be different: "The kind of confrontational politics that I used when I was a student just don't work later when you're part of the institution."

Learning to adopt these less confrontational strategies requires that the tempered radicals learn to scan the environment or context. Justin narrated about ways that faculty and staff can pick up on signals from others within the institution and avoid direct confrontation. However, many people are not adept on picking up on these signals—they have to be aware of how power is operating to pick up on these issues, and they have to realize opportunities for negotiation are constantly there:

Some professors were trying to help students maintain a project {changed to protect anonymity} they have created. They were trying to do this research project out there to help, and then the administration sent them a letter saying that this was in violation of university policy. But if the faculty decided they wanted to teach classes out there, there was nothing specifically against that issue. So the faculty picked up on this signal from the administration and were able to find a creative way to keep the (project) open. So there are ways of doing that, and you usually do not have to have direct confrontation. The faculty member could have called screaming on the phone: 'I can do what I want with my research funding.' But then the whole (project) would have been lost. So if you pick up on the signals, then there's room for creating changes.

However, Justin acknowledged that there were times that some of his tempered radical colleagues did participate in more confrontational approaches; but they did so sparingly and often under the radar:

My colleague Jean is an untenured assistant professor and she was mentoring students who were protesting. She wasn't doing anything illegal, but she certainly didn't want anyone to know exactly what she was doing and the administration would not be happy about it. So these things happen from time to time, but people tend to be really careful and measured in taking these approaches or they lose their legitimacy.

Being careful about the visibility of one's actions is different than treating administration like the enemy, which Justin sees as a problematic approach:

You can set up a strong arm of resistance when you see the other people as enemies. As soon as you start reacting to people in that way, they react back with force -- they feel like they're being pushed and push back. So part of being an effective change agent is trusting others and trying to understand where people are coming from not assuming they are the enemy.

Justin and his tempered radical colleagues focus on a style that they believe is much more successful, typically labeled as professional, civil, and taking a higher moral ground. Justin commented on this issue:

I always make sure that I come from extremely civil and professional place, I do not attack people, even when I'm attacked. I always take a calm tone and a keep my comments related to the issue at hand. You have to distance yourself from taking things personally and getting your ego involved. When people lash out you want to lash back but it's only a waste of energy and then you've lost the higher moral ground. That's one of the most important tools you can have. If people can say, 'there goes so-and-so on their tirade again, then people stop listening to you and you've lost your ability to have impact.

**How do Justin and his colleagues negotiate power conditions?** While Justin acknowledged that power conditions always exist, he finds the best way to negotiate power is to very carefully map the landscape (described in the last section). After mapping the landscape, he and his colleagues attempt to building bridges with those in power. A variety of techniques are

used for building bridges, such as appealing to personal relationships, attempting to influence by understanding concerns, and identifying key people who might be open to negotiation. Justin described how he uses bridge-building techniques to negotiate power in comparison to other colleagues who take more confrontational approach:

We started figuring out building bridges was a lot easier than punching holes. We asked everyone in the group, who do you know who might be interested in supporting service learning? What might entice them to support our efforts?

Building bridges also was used by a group of women faculty on one campus when they were trying to move a diversity agenda forward. They began to reach out to other faculty who had openly expressed concern with their efforts to raise visibility about issues of race. Grassroots leaders asked to hear resisters' concerns and just listened—they did not try to convince resisters that their perspective was wrong. Just the act of listening lessened the overt criticism by these other faculty who were concerned with diversity initiatives.

Another approach that Justin has used is attempting to influence those who might be resistant to his ideas. Once he builds bridges, it is important to understand those who may block the initiative. Again, Justin usually attempts to appeal to personal relationships, even with resisters. He described this example:

You may know a person in the administration who is resistant to your ideas, but that you have rapport with. It can be a dangerous game to play but in a social situation you can mention "on my gosh, we are really having a hard time with this (not letting them know you realize they are resistant)." And you try to get them to empathize based on your personal relationships.

Another form of negotiation is to slightly modify the idea to include notions of those in positions of power. Often small concessions or additions by those in positions of authority could increase buy-in. For example, interdisciplinary teaching may be the focus of faculty efforts, but expanding discussion to research (an interest of the administration) may help create support. But Justin and his colleagues would not attempt these types of negotiation unless they believe that those in power were open to influence and that they were empowered enough to make a difference and to influence others, overcome resistance, or negotiate.

Justin noted how understanding the language of those in power and acting as a translator is also an effective strategy that could enhance their effort to build bridges and to understand resisters. He explained how they have used this technique over time:

We realized that we were not always communicating effectively. We seemed to be talking past people. One woman in our group stood up and said, 'you need to reframe this, they think we are asking for monetary support. They also do not understand why this is necessary. They worry about legal issues. We need to address their concerns and we need to take our message to them in a way they will understand it.' This woman's father had been a superintendent and she knew the way people in power think. You need people like that to help you understand resistance.

The strategy was also referred to as reframing. Justin and his colleagues might also engage in techniques to have those in power believe that they came up with an idea. Justin explained:

Many people want to believe that they have created a new and visionary idea. People also have pretty poor memories. I've realize I can often leave a meeting or make a comment in the elevator, 'Great idea so and so, I really likes that concept.' The next meeting I go to they are presenting the idea as their own. So you just need to plant seeds sometimes.

Several of the tempered radicals acknowledged that addressing their own rage, anger, and despair is one way that they negotiate power. One of Justin's colleagues eloquently explained:

I really think what gets me down the most is my rage. Those moments of total rage. I find white people so annoying (this woman is white) and my own rage around this really gets in my way of being an effective change agent. To be skillful, to be generous, to be open hearted, to be compassionate, to be patient, to acknowledge where everybody is at in their own development, to celebrate people's good intentions, all that is just rough inside me. And so there are these moments where I have to address my own internal crap, my rage, or I cannot be effective.

So negotiation involves carefully mapping the landscape of power, building bridges and relationships where possible, appealing to resisters, understanding the language of those in power in order to act as a translator, and addressing tempered radicals own rage that can get in the way of being effective tempered radicals veering toward confrontation, which they believe can destroy their efforts.

### **Power as Context Narrative**

Nearly a quarter of the individuals interviewed spoke little about power and saw it as a part of the context, not as something separate or to be actively engaged. Power is something that must be existed with, like a fish in water who does not notice the water unless something changes in the water composition. Those who take a confrontation perspective see power as something to be had, as finite. Tempered radicals see power as something that can be shared, fostered and something people should be attuned to since power conditions do actively shape existence. People who see power as context may be perceived as finding power largely invisible or irrelevant. They do not speak about or communicate an active awareness of power conditions. As a result, in their grassroots efforts they did not attempt to negotiate power, nor did they recognize resistance if they experienced it. If they encountered obstacles, they developed other interpretations for resistance to their idea, such as funding, history on the campus, or their own lack of persuasion. Since power is not forefront in their view of the world, they simply see it operating very infrequently. One of the limitations of this perspective is that when these faculty and staff face resistance, they did not develop any strategies for attempting to negotiate, confront, or address this resistance. The result was that resistance from those in power was much more effective for stalling their change efforts and maintaining the status quo. Identity overlapped with this construction of power; specifically, Caucasians and some Asian groups tended to hold this interpretation more than other groups.

When we asked them to describe their understanding of power or how power impacted the change process they exhibited one or more of the following: were unable to answer this question, did not see how this was relevant to grassroots leadership, and/or typically do not attribute resistance to power conditions. We describe the story of two individuals that reflected the power as context narrative: Ned and Shannon. Because they do not describe power in much detail, this section does not follow the layout of the other two sections describing how they understand power or how their understanding of power affects negotiation of power dynamics. They simply did not answer these questions to provide that type of data. We do review how they approach grassroots leadership and the very implicit notions of power we were able to discern from their silences and lack of direct discussion of power.

Ned is a white faculty member in psychology at a community college working to advance diversity and faculty participation in governance. When asked about obstacles, resistance, or power on campus, he focused on ways that these could be overcome and had trouble describing power or attributing power conditions for resistance or obstacles: “It seems like through relationships, the campus network, strategic hiring, we are able to achieve our goals of creating a new teaching and learning environment and multiculturalism. There is always some resistance, there are always people who will not support change.” He focuses much more on power as a natural element of any context. His comments throughout the interview focused on the importance of choosing the right strategies and tactics of the naturalness of change unfolding, but in a context of “general” obstacles and resistance. When pressed further about obstacles and resistance, Ned could only identify funding as problematic: “Well, funding is always an ongoing problem and issue. Sometimes we want to host an awards dinner or do some faculty development and there isn't funding.” In describing the story about getting a multicultural requirement in place on campus, Ned described a group of faculty who, under the guise of academic freedom, attacked the provision in the Senate. When we asked him about whether this was a pocket of resistance or some power conditions on campus, he did not acknowledge that there was resistance. Instead, he considered it just a different perspective that he needed to write a compelling letter to the Senate with an opposing ideology to support multiculturalism. We asked him to describe the group of resisters: “All older, white men.” He made no connection between the multicultural requirement being supported primarily by people of color on campus and women and the opposition being older, white men as perhaps related to any power dynamics. No matter how often we prodded, Ned’s interpretation of obstacles and resistance always went back to funding or simply a different set of beliefs. Ned did not describe any particular ways that he tried to negotiate resistance or obstacles. Instead, he always focused back on strategies for moving forward, not directing any attention to the obstacle or resistance. As a result of his lack of awareness of power, Ned sometimes had success—such as developing a leadership institute for students and eventual development of ethnic studies. However, more often than not, Ned was unsuccessful with the initial development of ethnic studies, certain hiring committees, and efforts to initiate campus and community partnerships.

Shannon, an Asian staff member of the technical college, is trying to help undocumented students be more successful and support them on campus. When we asked about her approach to grassroots leadership and the strategies she used, Shannon described her involvement with student groups, particularly marches, and rallies. She also noted that she is very vocal in meetings and has become extremely visible on campus as the go-to person around undocumented students, which is considered a controversial issue. When we asked whether she is concerned about the visibility of participating in marches and rallies, she noted:

I cannot turn away people when they come for services. My director is pretty scared. And his fear, it puts me in a difficult situation. But I just have a plan, and I work to encourage students to seek services in a variety of offices. And also plan to create a network on campus to support students.

Shannon focuses on her plan and realizes other individuals are scared, but this fear and awareness of power conditions is not an issue that she is willing to focus on or a large part of her consciousness. While she noted that not only her director but also the other staff members are unhappy about her support of undocumented students, she continues unabated. They worry that her efforts might draw too much attention and perhaps resistance to the work that her office is doing. In fact, the issue has gotten to the level of the president—she encouraged students to bring

it up during a dinner with him. As a result, the president is considering her for a new position as advisor. For others we interviewed on campus, this new position would likely be fraught with problems as people could target their criticisms of the effort to support undocumented students on her. She would become a lightning rod.

Shannon is perceived to be in the “hot seat,” but she does not see the same power conditions that others see. Yet, she is not completely without awareness; she noted when pressed, “Well at times it scares me a little bit—being on a conservative campus and having heard people voice their concerns against the services I provide, I am advocating for these students and my name is on the line.” But for the most part, power is not part of her consciousness and certainly does not impact her strategy for change. Even when we pointed out that she may be in a vulnerable position, she did not identify with that interpretation. Vulnerability suggests accepting that power dynamics exist and could affect the individual. She noted, “You just have to keep following what you believe in and events unfold—you can not control things. It can be a waste of time trying to.” Those who come from a view of power as confrontational or tempered radicals see power as something that can or should be controlled and altered. Shannon and Ned operate in a world where one does not try to control or alter power or even pay much attention to it. To acknowledge power could perhaps give it more salience or agency. Power is just part of the context, something that plays out and will always be there. To focus on it is a waste of time and energy that could be exerted toward creating change. These grassroots leaders focus more on the creation of effective tactics and approach than the resistance and power dynamics. Shannon is new to the campus, and so far has experienced some success. But we suspect that, like Ned, she may have her share of problems over time because she does not engage power in a direct or conscious way.

It is important to note that *some* grassroots leaders who saw power as context were so effective in their use of strategies that regardless of their inattention to negotiating power, they were able to create change. In addition, their understanding of power did not impact their choice of strategies; they simply developed a tool kit—networking, creating a vision, working with students, mentoring colleagues, hiring the right people, etc.—and through the right combination of strategies were able to create change without any engagement about notions of power. Their choice of strategies was unrelated to seeing an enemy or persuading a relatively uninterested group. What distinguished this group is that their chances of success were much less predictable and precarious; success was happenstance.

In sum, out of the three approaches to grassroots leadership, tempered radicals noted and described greater predictable experiences of success. Those who took a confrontational approach had much more predictable experiences of failure. Individuals/groups who adopted the power as context narrative also described less experiences of success, but might be lucky enough to succeed through force of charisma or chance. However, their chances are much less predictable than tempered radicals, who carefully negotiated power dynamics based on their definition and understanding of power. This data on success was based on their own attributions of success in interviews as well as interviews with others on campus about success, making views of success triangulated.

## Campus Context

It did appear that one campus, a technical college, had more individuals who held a confrontational perspective, so we chose to describe this campus context in more detail. As noted

throughout the results, beliefs about power seem more fundamental, or more directly tied to overall life experiences and background. It seems that a campus with a history of certain characteristics—such as authoritative leadership; divisions between faculty, staff, and administrators; and lack of shared governance—may foster a more confrontational perspective. Many of these characteristics (e.g. divisions between faculty, staff, and administrators) were found on other campuses, making it difficult to fully understand the direct connection between context, views of power, and grassroots strategies. Yet, since a confrontational perspective seems more limiting to faculty and staff leadership, it is important to investigate any relationships between characteristics of campus context that might elicit this view of power.

“Hierarchy,” “bureaucracy,” and “status quo” are the words most used to describe this former technical institute, which had a history of authoritative leadership. A very formal chain of command and powerful deans and chairs were noted by all participants. One person summed up these characteristics in this quote: “You do not email a vice president on this campus, that is counter culture.” Everyone spoke about the power lying with the administration, which controlled resources and decision-making and seemed closed off to other groups. Most people thought of change as happening only through chain of command and were mostly unaware of grassroots activities. Staff mentioned feeling “absolutely invisible” and faculty worried about their rights, maybe more than teaching and learning.

There are deep divides among groups on campus: the administration is largely distrusted by faculty and staff, the staff are invisible to faculty, and faculty are demonized by administrators. Employees spoke about the campus as “fractionalized.” One faculty member noted that the campus has many different constituencies, each with different goals and interests and this makes it hard to come together on issues. This fractionalized feeling can also be seen in the responses of some employees who believe the campus is collaborative or values learning. Union newsletters poke fun at the administration, sometimes in biting ways. Faculty lash out at the administration out of a general sense of disempowerment, as well as out of care and concern about the direction of the campus. Faculty and staff feel the campus often is not operating in productive ways that help students, for example. While people were not able to readily describe change on campus, when looking back historically to the 1970s it had a largely white, male student body and faculty, narrow curriculum, less open leadership, and a weak union. Today it is more diverse, has a broad curriculum, open leadership, and a strong union. Faculty and staff we spoke with realize that many changes have occurred, but many felt these just happened—that they were externally imposed and that the campus has been less active in actually charting its own course and responding. The campus is changing, albeit slowly. The notion of status quo emerges as a controlling feature on campus. New employees are constantly reminded that “we did not used to do it that way” as a response to any proposed change. This culture of status quo frustrates grassroots leaders who are tired of hearing how it used to be without any proof the old way worked. Perhaps, as a result of this frustration among new employees or the fractionalized campus environment, there are many, many interim positions—turnover is rampant.

Faculty and staff are unionized and this impacts the campus and how it operates; most faculty and staff feel the union has protected them and been an asset and allows them to speak out and be change agents. The grievance policies and the union as an oversight body have helped to legitimize faculty and staff activism on the campus. However, a pocket of faculty and staff feel the union leads to mediocrity and stifles innovation. These tend to be faculty and staff deeply committed to students and change; such faculty members view the union as an excuse for faculty and staff to disengage from activism work. Other faculty and staff see the union as the

advocacy body that leads to change. Overall, the union has served to protect the faculty and staff—especially as seen in the latest contract renegotiations, which led to higher salaries.

The campus context discussed in this section led many faculty and staff to take a more confrontational approach to change. The belief in a strong hierarchy with a powerful administration resulted in faculty and staff viewing power as top-down and unavailable to create change without direct activism and confrontation. As described in Jennifer's narrative, activism in the form of picketing and involvement in student protests were seen as methods to challenge the hierarchy and create change. In addition, the presence of factions at the technical college led to strategies championed by the union, seen as a protective body, that would prevent outward backlash to their confrontational approaches. Campus context appeared to play a role in the view of power and the overall strategies of the change agents. Viewing the campus as hierarchical, bureaucratic, and fractionalized, along with the presence of a union, all appeared to facilitate a more confrontational approach.

### Discussion and Implications

In this study, we attempted to fill an empirical gap related to understanding the ways that people construct power as they operate as grassroots leaders. We focused on faculty and staff on college campuses. Three patterns emerged in the data about how grassroots leaders understand power: a) confrontational pattern—power as invested in those in authority, static, and a dialectical struggle with those who were attempting to obtain power; b) tempered radical pattern—power as complex and generative, located throughout an organization, formal and informal, and ever-changing; and c) context narrative—little awareness or focus on power. The findings suggest that there is not a universal definition of the way grassroots leaders define or experience power, as Marxist frameworks suggest (Bernal, 1998; Bettencourt, 1996; Kroeker, 1996; Wilson, 1973; Wittig, 1996). An individual's identity and background may impact whether and how they are aware of and see power conditions. Jennifer and Justin's early life experiences and involvement in activism/leadership shaped their views of power. It is less clear how early life experiences affected Ned and Shannon because they were unable to articulate this connection. This is an area in need of future research—how to examine issues people are unable to clearly articulate consciously. The three views of power appear to be fundamental beliefs that would likely be seen in other types of organizations and with other employees. While context somewhat shaped beliefs, it was to a much lesser degree than we anticipated.

However, the study did not find a multiplicity of definitions of power and approaches to grassroots leadership as postmodernist frameworks suggest either. Postmodernist conceptualizations suggest that each individual has his/her own singular construction of power, organizational knowledge, and perspective of organizational conditions (Clegg, 1979, 1989; Collinson, 1994; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994). While context (local context) and identity were relevant, faculty and staff at various campuses with different backgrounds and different organizational conditions tended to express one of three perspectives. We also feel that these views would transcend organizational context and would be found in hospitals, law firms, community agencies, and corporations. Thus, the narratives appear more universal than nuanced as postmodernist conceptualize. That the views of power overlap with the conceptual literature on power suggest that people are informed by these notions. Perhaps academic settings are more likely to be informed by this conceptual literature, but we think these narratives would be found in other settings. In addition to identifying these patterns, the study demonstrated that there is a

relationship between views of power and the way that grassroots leaders approach their work of change. Therefore, views of power have important and real implications, which we describe next.

In terms of practical advice for grassroots leaders, we offer several suggestions that we summarize in the next few paragraphs, including the problematic view of holding an unconscious confrontational role, the negative impact that a confrontational and power as context view of power can have on making change, the importance of weighing when to use confrontational approaches because of their negative impact of creating changes, and the significance of being aware of power conditions in order to be able to navigate power (and thus the problem of not being aware of or focusing on power conditions consciously). One main finding appears to be the problematic role of holding the confrontational view of power often associated with Marxism and trying to enact change within an organizational setting like a college campus. In this view, power structures are considered more static—the elite are always trying to oppress the non-elite. The only way to overcome this dialectical relationship is through active resistance, group mobilization, and direction action (picketing, rallies). Hegemony is almost completely impenetrable in the confrontational view. Certainly, in the history of higher education there are examples where the confrontational approach was successful (e.g., in the 1960s civil rights movement on campuses). Perhaps there will be other opportunities where a confrontational approach will be successful and should be considered. Even tempered radicals do not discard the importance of confrontation and direct actions in certain circumstances. Resistance has an important and valued tradition; but its most direct and confrontational incarnations seem to have more limited success in organizational settings (as predicted by Meyerson's framework). Those who use a more tempered approach in our study experienced more predictable examples of success, perhaps because they do not see that a hegemony as impenetrable and are thus more likely to use a variety of strategies. Those who see power as confrontational saw less opportunity for creating than tempered radicals.

More important, the study suggests that confrontational grassroots leadership may not just result in retribution against the individual leader but may also jeopardize the change effort. The confrontational approach might be successful for a very limited effort, but the stories told by faculty and staff grassroots leaders suggest that the confrontational perspective typically results in not creating the desired change—in fact, it created resistance to the change effort. In addition, the stories of individuals who moved from a confrontational to a tempered perspective demonstrated awareness of grassroots leaders regarding the effectiveness of a tempered approach. Among the hundreds of grassroots leaders we spoke with, no one had gone from a tempered approach to the confrontational approach. Several of the leaders who took the confrontational approach had questioned this approach over time. We do not mean to suggest that the tempered approach is the correct or right approach. Our aim is to show that there are implications or consequences that result from our views of power and can affect grassroots leaders' ability to meet their goals. In some cases, principle or challenging the system may be more important than achieving the goal.

Another finding from the study that has implications for faculty and staff grassroots leaders is the potential problem wherein leaders do not focus on power. While we found that it was problematic for grassroots leaders to hold a confrontational perspective (at least an unexamined confrontational perspective), grassroots leaders in higher education described being less effective if they were not attuned to power. By defining it as uncontrollable or a background facet of the context, they did little to navigate power or connect their strategies to a belief about

how power was operating. Another consequence is that these individuals were typically less intimidated and more likely to feel a sense of agency; but they often naïvely approached situations and were unable to navigate resistance they encountered. As a result, this resistance often became a barrier that prevented them from moving forward on certain initiatives. Those in positions of authority that have formal power were much better able to control individuals who did not focus on power and saw it as a background feature. Yet, seeing power as a background feature also allowed these individuals to possess greater agency, and there may be several advantages to this approach as it relates to motivation and participation in grassroots leadership. This is an important area for future research as well.

Postmodernists' focus on subjectivity, agency, and awareness of organizational knowledge is precisely aimed at explaining this issue of awareness (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994). If individuals remain ignorant of power conditions affecting them, cultures of power in their organizations, potential allies, etc., they remain poorly positioned to be resisters or play a role as grassroots leaders. Therefore, another lesson from this analysis of individual views and understandings of power is that there is a subset of individuals whose leadership is potentially compromised because they have not spent the time to think through and understand how power is operating within their campus context, or they lack a strategic approach to deal with power conditions. We hope that this paper helps grassroots leaders in recognizing the importance of identifying how power operates in their setting and developing strategies how to navigate power on their particular campus. Ignoring power or seeing it too much as a background feature can jeopardize efforts.

The overlap between the power as context narrative and identity (race and gender) can be interpreted through previous research. Research studies on individuals who come from more privileged positions suggest that they often have less awareness of power conditions because they are less likely to be actively encountering them (Collins, 1993). For example, many do not become aware of discrimination until they finally confront overt acts; for people in more elite positions, discrimination may come late or perhaps never. After these overt instances, they become much more aware of subtle discrimination. Likewise, those who are in less elite positions in society experience more active and on-going discrimination and often become more aware of power.

Campus context emerged (although less clearly) as important to how individuals constructed their views of power as well as their specific change strategies. As seen with the technical college, the belief that the campus is hierarchical, bureaucratic, fractionalized, unionized, and maintains the status quo led to a belief that power was held by a few administrators who need to be challenged directly. This view of the campus illustrates the power of hegemonic beliefs leading to a specific change style. Simply, when the faculty and staff viewed the campus as having more hegemonic conditions, they adopted a more confrontational style. Therefore, campus context appears to interact with personal, philosophical beliefs about power and affects change strategies. Personal beliefs may trump context in shaping views and vice versa, depending on how pronounced the context is.

From a theoretical perspective, the tempered radical narrative on power maintains assumptions of postmodernists and some aspects of Marxism. As noted in the literature review, postmodernists emphasize how power is more fluid and that groups who have traditionally been noted as disempowered also have agency and power (Collinson, 1994). Power structures are more dynamic and changing within a postmodern perspective (Clegg, 1979). Power is dynamic and changing based on historical and social circumstances (Clegg, 1989). Certain forms of power

are not inherently embedded into structures and systems; we construct and perceive power in our daily lives. People's actions can create changes in power and the context. When people believe they can make a difference and have agency, they are more likely to affect and potentially alter power structures. Yet, the tempered radical approach also acknowledges that formal power exists and that formal power can be used to retaliate against those change agents and their efforts. Tempered radicals choose a less visible (and non-confrontational) style based on an awareness of power and how opposition to it could risk one's job or personal standing in the institution, as well as the overall efficacy of the change effort. This aspect of the tempered radical framework reflects some of the assumptions of a Marxist perspective.

### **Conclusion and Future Research**

The stories of grassroots faculty and staff leaders in our study suggest the importance of individuals examining their own views of power. Those who hold a confrontational perspective may want to question whether this is the best approach or use confrontational strategies more selectively. Certainly there are circumstances where individuals may want to make a stand and are willing to be fired and lose their legitimacy. However, in our study, people who took a confrontational perspective did not appear to have an awareness that there were other strategies they might want to adopt. We recognize that their strategies are based on their fundamental beliefs about power and may not be readily changed. It may not be possible for those holding a confrontational perspective to adopt new strategies unless they fundamentally rethink their views of power. The stories presented are meant to assist people in this type of reflection about their underlying values and beliefs.

Additionally, some individuals in the study noted how their views of power were informed by feminism. They believed that feminism instructed them to humanize their interactions with others, seek out commonalities, focus on empowerment, and build relationships with those in power. We found significant overlap and ultimately decided that these were not distinctive enough belief systems on power to create another classification or category. Future research may want to examine distinctions between tempered radical and feminist approaches.

Further research is needed to understand how campus context shapes individual views of power. Are there certain organizational characteristics that foster a tempered, invisible or confrontational approach? Perhaps organizations that have unclear bureaucracy foster a sense that power is invisible. Do unions create a more confrontational environment? From the findings presented in this study, beliefs about power appear to be fairly fundamental and develop based on one's life experience. However, it appears that certain contexts can foster a more confrontational approaches to leadership—administrators who take an extremely hierarchical approach to leadership; lack of a shared governance structure a fractionalized organization where faculty, staff, students, and administrators have little relationship; a culture that stifles new ideas and strongly supports the status quo; or a unionized environment. Other characteristics and conditions which shape views of power and how grassroots leaders might approach change are also important to understand and should be examined in future studies.

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**About the Author:**

Adrianna Kezar is Associate Professor at the University of Southern California. Her research focuses on organizational theory, change, leadership and equity issues in higher education. She has published 12 books, over 75 articles, and over 100 book chapters and reports. Her latest books include: *Organizing for Collaboration* with Jossey Bass books and *Rethinking Leadership Practices in a Complex, Multicultural and Global World* through Stylus Press.

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APPENDIX A – OVERVIEW OF SITES

**Table 1: Characteristics of the five campuses**

<b>Char.</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Research Univ.</b>	<b>Public Regional</b>	<b>Technical</b>	<b>Liberal Arts</b>
pseudonym	Community activist college	Tempered radical university	Innovative regional public	Almost untempered Polytechnical Institute	Hidden tempered radicals college
size	25,000	25,000	17,000	30,000	3,000
control	public	private	public	public	private
selectivity	open access	highly	moderately selective	moderately selective	highly
resources	constrained	moderately strong	moderate, constrained more recently	constrained	strong resources
location	outside urban	urban	rural	suburban	suburban
student body	diverse by race, gender, social class	diverse by race & gender	diverse by gender	diverse by race, gender, social class	diverse by gender, increasingly by race
administration	weak	strong & controlling	weak	strong & controlling	strong
faculty and staff demographics and political orientation	very diverse and progressive	increasingly diverse, moderately conservative;	not diverse and fairly conservative	very diverse; mixed, progressive but more conservative	increasingly diverse, progressive
culture	student oriented, developmental, proud of mission & colleagues, unionized	entrepreneurial, top down and hierarchical, image conscious, striving	student oriented; known for innovative teaching ideas; collaborative work relationships recent budget problems	very contentious relationship between faculty & administration, unionized, adjusting to more diverse student body	collegial, close knit, currently some political tension between the administration & faculty, classic liberal arts experience

