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COMMUNITY BUILDING WITH PEOPLE OF MEXICAN DESCENT LIVING IN
THE UNITED STATES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Alberto Martinez-Granillo
June 1997

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Approved by:



Dr. Lucy Cardona, Project Advisor, Social Work

6/3/97

Date



Dr. Teresa Morris, Chair of Research Sequence

ABSTRACT

This study explored community building as a method for addressing the problems faced by Mexican Immigrant and Mexican American communities. One of the assumptions that underpinned this study is that community building can be used to counteract racist attitudes toward ethnic minorities. Historically, people of Mexican descent have been the victims of such attitudes; such attitudes have found their way in oppressive social and economic policy.

Critical theory was used to explore phenomenon for this study. Qualitative methods were used to gather and analyze the data. A total of twenty one community activists from throughout the State of California, participated in the study. All of the participants were identified experts in community building.

Variables for this study were discovered through the open coding process. These include: policy redrafting, historical revisionism, leadership, community building, culture, personal power, education, coalitions, grassroots action, dismantling oppression, voting, and pro-activism. Each of these variables were prescribed for use in the Mexican American, Mexican immigrant community by the study participants.

The findings for this study suggest that community building requires a multi level approach. Community building also requires understanding of historical events in the context of the population and its subjective experiences of this community. The findings for this study also suggest

that social workers must use culturally sensitive methods in community building for the population group to benefit.

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Ultimately the dedication of this research is to Livier and other immigrants who make their dreams come true by inspiring others, such as myself.

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INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to discover possible means to counteract oppression toward people of Mexican descent through community building. The current climate of anti-immigrant sentiment describes Mexican undocumented and documented immigrants as bringing about moral and economic decay (Acuña, 1996). For example, people of Mexican ancestry are portrayed as individuals who drain social services, are a tax burden, displace domestic workers, and burden public schools (Armbruster & Geron & Bonacich, 1995). Evidence of these perceptions have surfaced in current policy and have added to the historical oppression of Mexican immigrants (Smith & Tarallo, 1995 & Peña, 1985).

Currently, the Immigration Reform Bill and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) contains sanctions for both undocumented and documented immigrants (Idelson, 1996 & Congressional digest, 1995). Both bills eliminate Aid to Families to Dependent Children (AFDC), health care and general relief for immigrants. The Immigration Reform Bill also mandates deportation of immigrants who receive 12 months of AFDC in their first seven years of residency. The bill also forbids undocumented immigrants from receiving Medicaid services for HIV or AIDS treatment (Simpson, 1995).

These provisions as written help feed the notion that immigrants are not only a burden to social services but help spread and transmit deadly diseases. Such bashing serves to

divert attention from data showing that immigrants are considerably less likely than American born persons to receive public assistance (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1995). This is especially true of undocumented immigrants who deliberately refuse to benefit from any such programs for fear of apprehension and deportation (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1995).

There are numerous and recent actions that perpetuate racist attitudes and bring about policies that are detrimental. In 1994, California citizens voted to pass Proposition 187. This law denies social services, schooling, and medical services to the undocumented (Martin, 1995). The rationale behind Proposition 187 was that undocumented immigrants are costly and make no economic contribution to the state of California (Hinojosa & Schey, 1995).

Several studies counter this rationale and instead show the rhetoric and political gaming that was used to pass Proposition 187. The Tomas Rivera Center (1996) found that the average immigrant individual will cost California approximately \$62,600 in educational expenditures. However, lifetime tax payments adjusted to reflect what is repaid to education will return an estimated \$89,437 to the State. Additional research suggests that only 5% of 23% of undocumented mothers eligible for welfare used AFDC service (Acuña, 1996). Another study found that immigrants are no more likely than the native-born population to use welfare programs in the U.S. (Tomas Rivera Center, 1996).

On April 1, 1996 two suspected undocumented immigrants were beaten by two Riverside County California Sheriff

Officers (People Condemn, 1996). To add insult to injury, rallies were held to support the right of the officer's actions against the immigrants (Gerber, 1996). The support for the officer's actions only further illustrates the anti-immigrant sentiment found dominant in the State.

There are still other examples of organized hostilities directed towards immigrants. These include the agricultural industry recruiting immigrants for cheap labor through informal work process and exposing them to pesticides (Day, 1989). This action served to reinforce the negative attitudes that immigrants are disposable people.

Oppressive actions perpetrated upon people of Mexican descent has had an effect on service delivery. As legislation and community negativism toward the undocumented and documented immigrant grows, programs and services created to help immigrants have declined (Hinojosa & Schey, 1995). Moreover, policy which state that illegal as well as legal immigrants are not eligible to receive public assistance contain implications as well as unintended outcomes. For example, programs receiving federal or state money will be unable to assist immigrants. This threatens the legitimacy of government and its safety net objectives for immigrants and erodes the country's values of humanity.

The acculturation and assimilation process for American ethnic groups can be filled with unanticipated difficulty. The process can have a deleterious impact on the Mexican immigrant's and Mexican American's world view. To become acculturated means an individual must change his or her

behavior and attitude to reflect those of the host society. By changing their cultural patterns such individuals become more like the dominant culture (Barren & Miller, 1994 & Buriels 1993). To assimilate means that members of a subgroup gradually become like the majority group as they overcome cultural and structural barriers, blocking their membership into mainstream America (Aguirre, Saenz & Hwang 1989; Buriels 1993).

Acculturation and assimilation are processes immigrants as well as new citizens experience. Community building can be used to ease the problems associated with acculturation and assimilation. The assumption is that individuals who come from different groups can incorporate new beliefs without the need to abandon their own original culture, norms, and history. Building a positive link is essential for understanding biculturalism and the processes of assimilation and acculturation. Community building can provide continuity in the community for newly arrived as well as multi generation Mexicans as they experience their own culture and that of the host culture.

Problem Focus

This study uses Critical Theory to explore methods for addressing the community building needs of people of Mexican decent in the U.S. Critical Theory is useful because it provides a comprehensive integration and interpretation of a dilemma posed by the human condition. It allows for the revision of history and the exposure of oppression and

policies that negatively impact the immigrant population.

The purpose of this study is to learn the effects community level interventions can have in eliminating oppression of an ethnic minority group. Historically oppressive actions have resulted in reduced service provisions to groups in need of social services (Watkins & Gonzales, 1982). Currently, anti-immigrant sentiments combined with ill advised policies threaten to reduce existing community services, such as AFDC, and Social Security (Hinojosa & Schey, 1995). Community building can be used to activate the community's strengths against negative rhetoric and advocate for the betterment of the community.

Significance for Social Work Practice

Traditionally social work at the community level advocates for the provision of social justice and equality. The purpose behind advocacy is to improve the well being of oppressed groups. The social work code of ethics states that social workers should prevent practices of inhumane or discriminatory nature (Hepworth & Larson, 1993). Oppression and racism is inhumane and the social worker must advocate to improve social conditions and promote social justice (Hepworth & Larson, 1993).

Immigrants are among the most exploited groups in the U.S. and undocumented immigrants are at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1993). Social workers need to fight negative stereotypes and to promote the common good. Social workers need to ensure equal provision

of services to all groups.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the literature includes a historical account of oppression. Such is necessary to provide understanding of the impact oppression can have people of Mexican decent living in the U.S.

History of Oppression

The United States has a history that is replete with examples of oppression that includes negative attitudes and aggressive acts toward immigrants. Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans are some of the people who have been victims of this history. From the beginning Mexicans experienced direct intrusion of their homeland by American insurgency (McLemore, 1994). Rights granted by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848 to Mexicans were blatantly disregarded. Acts of violence were common, such as, the lynching of Mexicans by the Texas Rangers in the 1850's (Takaki, 1993 & Day, 1989).

In 1921 & 1924 several immigration laws were passed to favor the admission of immigrants from Western Europe, while denying admission of immigrants from bordering countries such as Mexico (Braggs, 1991). Half a million deportations of Mexican people without consideration for immigration documentation occurred in the 1930's (Donato & Massey, 1992). In the 1940's, Mexican citizens had to find ways to defend themselves against the Los Angeles Police force who used

brutality and other violent means to harass and control the Zoot-suiters (Mexican Americans who wore a certain dress form) (McLemore, 1994). Operation Wetback in the 1950's marked a period of mass deportations of Mexican people regardless of their documentation status (Donato & Massey, 1992). In this case, individual's color of skin was used as a sufficient reason for deportation (Flinch, 1990).

The decades of the 60's through the 80's witnessed another wave of negativism against Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. The Immigration Act of 1965 lead to new restrictions on the number of immigrants from the western hemisphere (Idelson, 1992). During the 70's, Mexican American children were over-represented in classes for the retarded; class assignments were based on IQ tests administered in English. By the 80's negative perceptions about immigrants included falsities like, migrants dependent on social services, displace native workers and driving down wages (Donato, 1994).

These historical events share two similarities. First, the dominant group made no distinction between the Mexican American citizen and Mexican Nationalist. Second, that all people of Mexican ancestry were regarded as inferior and should be treated the same (McLemore, 1994). The results of these historic events and policies that targeted immigrants has had a negative impact. The legislation has been used to deport citizens and has ignored the multi generational roots of Mexican people in this country. People of Mexican decent have been robbed of their land and citizenship rights.

People of Mexican decent have been made to feel as though they have no history in the U.S. and consequently don't belong in the U.S.

History of Community Building

People of Mexican decent have been involved in social activism form the beginning of the United States. The aim of this struggle has been against oppression and for the establishment of social equality. Briefly, the history of social action is traceable to the early 1800's. For example, La Alianza Hispanoamericana was founded in 1894. It sought to maintain political representation by Latino/as as well as continued development of the South West (Acuña, 1981). In 1903, Mexican workers in California protested unfair labor practices, such as withholding of wages until a contract was completed and signed (Acuña, 1981).

In 1918, the Orders Sons of America (OSA), a nonpartisan organization, focused on voter registration, citizenship drives, and jury selection (Marquez, 1989). The OSA later merged with the League of Latin American Citizens and became known as LULAC, the League of United Latin American Citizens (Marquez, 1989). LULAC was established in 1929 to fight widespread discrimination against those returning from World War II. Defending the rights of war veterans became the social and political cause of COS (Community Services Organization). From this organization came the G.I. Forum which sought to represent Mexican Americans on social, economic and political fronts (McLemore, 1994).

By the end of the 1950's, many Mexican Americans felt that the established organizations were not promoting and pursuing equal rights (McLemore, 1994). For this reason other organizations were established to include MAPA (Mexican American Political Association), MAYO (Mexicans American Youth Organization), PASO (Political Association of Spanish Speaking Organizations) and NFWA (National Farm Workers Association). The intent of these groups was to put direct pressure on political parties (McLemore, 1994).

By the 1960's cultural nationalism emerged as a central feature to the Mexican American movement (McLemore, 1994). This era witnessed the formation of activism through both non violence and violent tactics. By 1966, MAYO organized the Raza Unida Party whose central effort was to gain control of counties where Mexican Americans were the majority (Green, 1992). The Brown Berets aroused fear because they countered U.S. oppression through militant demonstrations (Acuña, 1981). In 1969, the Brown Berets formed the Chicano Moratorium Committee, one of its efforts was to protest the Vietnam war (Acuña, 1981).

Mexican agriculture workers were continually denied economic advancement and were excluded from participation in the labor unions. Mexican agriculture leader Cesar Chavez organized the National Farm Workers Association. Chavez kept the movement concentrated on protecting the rights of farm workers through peaceful negotiation (Day, 1995). In 1966, Chavez joined with the Workers Organizing committee to eventually form the United Farm Workers of America (UFW).

Because of the actions by the UFW, 17 million Americans boycotted table grapes in support of the agricultural worker's demand for fair labor practices. UFW was also instrumental in developing the best labor law in America, known as the Agriculture Labor Relations Act (Mills, 1993).

More recent organization continued to push forth agendas for social equality. Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) was founded in 1967 for legal action and legal education for the Mexican American community (Vigil, 1990). The Community Organization for Public Service (COPS) was created in 1973 which emphasized utilitarian goals. The Southwest Voter Registration Project, 1973, promoted voter registration and voting among Mexican Americans (Green, 1992).

November 1994 marked the largest student uprising in Los Angeles since the 1960: this uprising was to combat Proposition 187. The protest drew over 100,000 people to march against Prop 187, establishing the largest demonstration in modern California history. The participants were composed of people from various Latin American heritages and not exclusively from Mexican ancestry. For the first time a march illustrated cohesion in Latino/a communities advocating for social justice (Martines, 1995).

On October 12, 1996 the first ever Latino/a march in Washington D.C. took place. Both men and women together marched for civil rights and demonstrated against anti-Latino sentiment. The march drew attention to the Latinos' plight and their recognition as Americans. The message sent was

that Latinas/os are part of American history and they will not be persecuted but embraced by America (Specht, 1996).

Chicana or Mexicana immigrant women have been active not only in countering oppression but also fighting against sexist attitudes. Chicanas and Mexicans have a long history of frequently resorting to collective social action. In many cases, their actions were to resist unjust working conditions or gender stereotypes. Cruz Azul Mexicana (CAM) in the 1920's aided flood victims and needy families in Los Angeles, and helped 1,500 unemployed persons (Orozco, 1995). From the 1930's through the 1970's women fought for the rights of striking cannery operators, wives of Mexican miners formed auxiliaries during copper strikes, militant garment workers and maquiladoras fought for improvement working conditions (Rose, 1990). Mothers Of East LA (MELA), founded in 1984, illustrates how Mexican American women transformed traditional networks and resources into political drives to defend the equality of their urban lives (Pardo, 1990). In 1993 and 1995, hunger strikes to win department status for Chicana/o Studies programs was advocated by Chicanas seeking social justice (Martinez, 1995).

In summary, efforts in community building and social action both by males and females in this population has resulted in a constant push for equality. These examples can be traced from all facets of community and have encompassed advocacy for political representation, voting rights, women's rights, and fair labor practices. The struggles by people of Mexican decent represents the constant battle

against oppression and inequality. The hope is to continue community building until a level of equality and egalitarianism can be achieved for people of Mexican decent living in America.

Community Building

Community building is one of the most frequently used methods for combating oppression. Community building is defined as activities, practice, and policies that support and foster positive connections among groups, individuals, organizations, and geographic and functional communities (Weil, 1996). Community building is a process for creating favorable economic and social conditions for the benefit of the whole community (Weil, 1996).

The goal of community building is to make fundamental changes in the community to include the redistribution of resources and to gain power in decision making (Rothmen, Erlich & Tropman, 1995). Community building is designed to create social environments that support social justice through influencing policy and developing programs (Gutierrez, Alvarez, Nemon & Lewis, 1996). The process of community building should be sought for a multitude of problems and their effects on the entire community (Rothmen, & Erlich, & Tropman, 1995).

Community building also includes community organizing. Rivera and Erlich (1992) suggest that coalition building is important when groups feel disenfranchised. They also recommend groups become organized and show a united front to

combat external political forces. They also expect groups to push for legislative reform to improve the economic conditions and to reduce poverty. In community organizing, the degree to which an ethnic group can maintain a sense of common destiny has clear implications for mobilization (Marquez, 1989). Further, racism that comes from external communities is addressed through community building.

Community building also relies on local leaders who need to be enterprising about resource acquisition and the securing of funds for projects involving social action (Rubin & Rubin, 1992). Leaders need to possess the ability to write appropriately and communicate effectively. Community leaders should have a strong understanding of the community and inter-group organizational relations. They should also possess skills in organizing, planning and implementing campaigns and projects (Weil, 1996). Community leaders must be able to mobilize activities like civic education, voter registration, and get out the vote drives and forums to work through issues (Weil, 1996).

Central to community building is that individuals share tasks and become invested in their community. Investment in the community creates a stronger bond between group members (Weil, 1996). It is crucial that when groups work together, group members move from a general plan to concrete actions. There must also be a link with other groups and other organizations inside and outside of the community (Weil, 1996).

Social justice is central to the practice of community

building and organizing. Organizers may work toward short term goals but the overarching goal is social justice and social equality (Gutierrez, Alvarez, Nemon & Lewis, 1996). This approach presupposes that community change should be pursued through broad participation of people in determining civic action. Through organizing, people rediscover themselves: They find out who they are, where they came from, their background, and their culture. They rediscover their families, gender, class, ethnicity and language group, and their racial strengths. They rediscover their own history of struggle and resistance (Kahn, 1991).

A part of community building is electoral participation. This is a powerful strategy for influencing politicians and highlighting problems in the community (Lum, 1996). Communities should conduct political activism and organization at the grass roots level advocating for programs. People of color must register to vote for candidates who are willing to champion their cause (Lum, 1996). For example, when Mexican American advocate for voter registration and turnout they narrow the gap with Euro-American precincts (Longoria, & Wrinkle, & Polinard, 1990). Not only do more Mexican American seek city council seats in Mexican American precincts, but win (Polinard, & Wrinkle, & Longoria, 1991).

In community building, Latino organizations have pioneered the struggle for equality (Vigil, 1990). These organizations have provided two general functions, first, the advancement of group consciousness for cohesion and political

power. This is performed through emphasizing core values which encourages group identification and commonalties. Second, these organization have provided goods and services which address community needs. These organization also generate forums which enables the community to identify their problems. Through discovering issues, organizations can assist in planning strategies to solve the problems in the community (Vigil, 1990).

Important to community building is the establishment of a community identity. Community identity often begins with residents organizing to maintain the integrity from outside interest. Such efforts may be established by residents maintaining their heritage through historic societies, monuments, museums, and celebrations. These establishments become part of a community's collective identity and the sense of distinction (Rothmen, & Erlich, & Tropman, 1995).

Locality development is an intervention used that gives priority to building community solidarity and competence (Rothmen, & Erlich, & Tropman, 1995). The most common interventions are to increase communication, education, formation of groups, seeking consensus, encouraging group discussion, and focusing on common concerns and problems (Rothmen, & Erlich, & Tropman, 1995). Another assumption of locality development is to raise consciousness with a desire to resolve problems (Rothmen, & Erlich, & Tropman, 1995). For example, community builders should never lean in the direction of the elite or influential members. Instead they should objectively view the situation from the community

level. The idea being to start where the community is and move toward where the community wants to proceed.

Multiethnic and cross cultural perspectives are highlighted in community building. In community building, failure to take into account the cultural characteristics of minorities becomes a significant deterrant to effective direct service delivery (Rothman & Gant & Hnat, 1985). By ignoring how issues of culture and oppression affect community, community builders can perpetuate the objectification and exploitation of people of color (Gutierrez, Alvarez, Nemon & Lewis, 1996). Variables such as social class, racism, and discrimination must be accounted for in community building (Rothman & Gant & Hnat, 1985).

Community building includes the capacity for successfully coping with powerful authorities and institutions. Such capacity can empower community members to act on their own behalf. Community building assumes that planned interventions in the community is better than a flawed status quo to that can dominate a community (Rothmen, & Erlich, & Tropman, 1995).

In community building, community economic development refers to the synthesis of individual and collective change as empowerment (Wilson, 1996). Individual empowerment in a collective action format is crucial for economic development for the entire community. Wilson (1996) proposes that empowering individuals lead to productive membership. Wilson (1996) suggests when members become productive such will benefit the community as a whole. Empowerment in community

development starts from the inside out. Through empowerment, a collective change is accomplished and arising economic opportunities for the community (Wilson, 1996).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The following are the questions that guide this research:

1. What community level social actions need to be taken to promote equality and help people of Mexican decent escape the effects of oppression?
2. What type of community level activism needs to be performed to bring about change?

Hypotheses

The questions proposed were guided by the Critical Theory paradigm. The questions asked are what actions can communities take to address oppression against the people of Mexican decent? More specifically, what actions can lead communities to eliminate oppressive climates?

The following are the hypotheses proposed for the research. Central to this study is the hypotheses that negativism toward people of Mexican decent has lead to history of oppression and toward an alienating environment. Further, that community building has the potential to counter such oppression and thereby empower the community to prevail.

What this research expects to discover is the components which are necessary in social action for addressing oppression. These may include community building, improving

education, providing outreach, organizing social demonstration and implementing collective movement?

This research also expects that through improved understanding about people of Mexican decent in the U.S., more positive attitudes toward this group will occur.

METHOD

Design of Study

The purpose of the study is to describe community building with people of Mexican ancestry in the U.S. The theory that underpins this study is Critical Theory and the methods are based in the grounded qualitative research. Critical Theory proposes to reduce false consciousness and to increase true consciousness for understanding a particular reality (Guba, 1990). For example, the more the oppressed are aware of the world around them the more they are able to transform that world. Transformation is viewed as a political act because it changes the way people view their situation and because it empowers them to act on that consciousness (Guba, 1990). By building on a new consciousness false ideation and negative stereotypes become eliminated.

Critical Theory is a value laden approach which seeks to empower the disenfranchised along with gathering information by people who are most affected by the problem. Critical Theory seeks to empower people by raising their consciousness about a social dilemma (Wagner, 1991). In this study, empowerment of valued for raising community's consciousness

against oppression through community building.

Critical Theory uses the history of oppressed populations and it relates this discrimination to current day dilemmas found within the group (Wagner, 1991). The history of a people's experience is taken into account to explain the conditions of disenfranchised people. Critical Theory also helps describe to disenfranchised people in the present conditions in society. For example, the Mexican immigrant community has historically been blamed for economic and societal disintegration. Mexican immigrants are blamed for the wasteful use of social services and for the problems brought by displaced workers (Peña, 1985).

Sampling

Sampling was performed through a snowball method of gathering subjects. The non-exploratory sample was comprised of people who devote time and effort in promoting and finding social justice for people of Mexican decent. The number of participants in the study totaled 22; the sample size was kept small for reasons of time constraints.

The opinion and comments made by the participants was documented and what they each had to say served as a blue print for activists and others involved in community building. The sample of subjects brought their expertise to the study and their experience in community building activities. Further, the techniques these individuals used to influence and effect policy and programs became illuminated.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

The data was collected through a face to face interview process. The objective was to promote an egalitarian relationship in the administration of the interview between the subject and the researcher. The objective was to insure that the researcher and the subject were equal parts, and to promote an equalization of the relationship (Davis, 1986). The effort was to encourage a contextual conversational interview that described how people in every day interactions construct definitions for their situation and shape their realities (Davis, 1986).

The qualitative aspect of the interviews took place in the participants environment. Topics for the interview included community building, revisionism, collective activism, and personal power (See Table 2). Open coding was performed to find relevant categories of variables related to the study. These categories were grouped and discussion was provided toward categories which were in support of the hypotheses.

Qualitative research has it's limitations. It utilizes open ended questioning and unstructured questioning, so that it seldom yields precise descriptive statements about the the larger population. Therefore, the findings are often regarded as suggestive rather than objective (Rubin & Babbie, 1995).

The benefits of the this type of interview process are that higher response rates are attained then when surveys are mailed. Further ,confusion and questioning is reduced when

the interviewer allows the subject some flexibility to expand on the topic. Interviews can be used to find qualitative data which is used to explain a phenomenon (Rubin & Babbie, 1995).

A weakness is the influence of the researcher on the interviewee. The researcher's awareness of their presence can compromise the integrity of the data. The egalitarian approach assists in decreasing influence by making all parties equally active during the interview.

Procedure

The data for this exploratory research was gathered through a snowball approach. This non probability sampling approach incorporated the interviewee to suggest additional people for referalls to other potential interviewees (Rubin & Babbie, 1995). The data was collected by use of face to face interviews and performed by the researcher exclusively. The time estimated for the study was ten weeks. Time duration of the interviews varied. The variation in time duration occurred because of the conversational style of the interviews.

Protection of Human Subjects

The interviewees were solicited on a volunteer basis and their identity was not reported in the study. Each participant reviewed a consent form and a copy can be found in appendix A. The interviews were conducted in either English or Spanish depending on the language preference of

the subject. A Debriefing statement (See Appendix B) was given to the participants after each interview.

Plan for Analysis

The plan for analysis involved the use of methods related to Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is described by Strauss and Corbin (1990), as the studies of phenomenon through systematic data collection. That is, the data being analyzed reveals the phenomenon to be studied. This approach does not begin with a theory to be tested, but rather begins with one area of study. Through analysis, theory which is relevant to that area starts to emerge from the data. As the information emerges, a working hypotheses forms into a concise theory around the research question.

Open Coding

The procedure of open coding was utilized to analyze the interviews. Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing conceptualizing, and categorizing the data provided. The objective of open coding is to discover categories that are applicable to the phenomenon being studied. For this research the data was grouped together in categories to reveal as many elements as possible related to the phenomenon. The information coded was relevant to the study and included; community building, collective social action, and historical revisionism.

The data was coded by extracting information from each word, sentence, and paragraph to find pertinent categories.

As categories emerge a focus was put on major themes, to include and similarities as well as differences, among the data. This comparison provided a spectrum of categories relevant to the phenomenon. Categories were then grouped together in an effort to make the information more concise.

RESULTS

The primary intent of this research was to discover elements that contribute to community building with people of Mexican decent in the United States. Also, to examine methods that can be used to counteract a history of oppression toward the Mexican American and Mexican immigrant populations. The descriptive statistics of the demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in table 1. Participants in this study came from the greater southern California area. A few of the participants came form northern California. Several of the participants have a history of political and social activism in their backgrounds and in their life experiences. According to the results, twenty two activists participated in the study. Participants came from Riverside, San Bernardino, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, and San Francisco California. Ten females and 12 males were represented in the study and their ages ranged from 23 to 72 years old. There were 20 bilingual participants and 2 monolingual participants. Twenty one participants were of Mexican heritage with one being of Salvadorian heritage. The educational level of the participants ranged from high school graduate to 20 years of education. The interviews

were conducted and data was collected from January 1997 through March 1997.

The procedure used to explore the phenomenon of community building is based on grounded theory. This approach is used to identify, develop, and relate concepts in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The relating of concepts was accomplished by means of conditions, context, strategies, and overall consequences. Since the paradigm indicates a lack of structure and assumption about the subject matter, categorizing the concept evolved with coding data.

Interviews were conducted with willing participants from the state of California. Open coding was completed after the interviews. This allowed for the development of categories to begin. The goal was to obtain between 20 to 25 interviews in a three month period. As mentioned earlier snowball sampling was instrumental in finding this population as one participant would recommend other participants and so on.

The interviews were conducted in a nonstructured conversation style allowing for exploratory discovery. The interviews were conducted at the participants convenience and in their environment. For example, in participants living environments, agency's, universities, and communities from which they practice. This allowed the participant to feel comfortable in providing their perspective of community building. The only motivation the subjects had for participating in the interviews was their own incentives for providing information on a relevant topic.

To operationalize the process, information was indexed

into categories and subcategories. The basic task was to bring together provisional categories of information that apparently relate to the same content. The content can be used to develop the evolving categories, through building on obtained information and by bridging disconnected units of information for the hypothesis to be formulated (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Some of the major categories that originated for the primary analysis were community building, historical revisionism, and dismantling oppression. Subcategories were also explored such as policy redrafting, outreach, and cultural education. The purpose of these subcategories was to give the major categories precision. The context of each category was explored in detail.

According to the results the data gleaned from this process, several salient categories of information was obtained (Tabel 2):

Community Empowerment

Participants viewed the need for community empowerment within a multi-level perspective. The participants suggested the multi-level perspective should encompass community economics, politics, people, class, ethnicity, citizenship, documented and undocumented immigrants. They also suggested that what is crucial to community building is the willingness for members to accept the good and bad of the community and take responsibility for both. Participants also felt that the community needs to have accurate information and follow up to issues which are relevant and provide positive

influences. Representation must reflect the population of the community by taking into account demographics. Through this representation a practical agenda can be planned which respects all people's opinions.

The participants also suggested that the community should emphasize commonality and minimize the differences among groups to achieve community cohesion. The satisfaction of building and empowering community through peoples' personal and collective insights can also be instrumental in community building. Also suggested was identification of resources and the creation of new resources where gaps in services are found.

Historical Revisionism

Participants viewed historical revisionism as important in providing accurate historical data to the community. Historical revisionism was also viewed as a way to abolish negative stereotypes built on false history. Participants suggested that developing a historical knowledge of the peoples of Mexican descent. Such can put emphasis on social progress provides the community with a sense of reality. Historical revisionism can be used to counteract the constant negative bombardment of damaging images found through history.

Participants also suggested that historical revisionism could assist in keeping people's heritage in tact while providing a multicultural perspective. Historical revisionism was seen as important because it can provide an awareness and widen the perception and understanding of

people. The participants suggested that by portraying history as it occurred, such can lead to understanding the culture of a group.

Education

Participants suggested that both informal and formal education can be used to raise consciousness. They suggested that education should be a goal of community building and a vehicle for empowering the community. Education can be the result of life experienced gained through formal as well as informal settings. The assumption is that both settings are of value and can be used for community building.

Personal Power

The Participants suggested that personal power can come from a person's self identity and the appreciation of their heritage. Providing personal power can be achieved through outreach to get people personally involved in their communities. Personal power can also be inspired through factual information which is relevant to the community such as issues which face an individual. Personal power can be gained through self interest which can translate into collective effort and investment in the community. Participants suggested that by providing people with the motivation to get involved, such will result in self investment and personal power in the community. Then, there can be potential for people to move away from self defeating beliefs and toward building self esteem.

Grassroots Action

The participants suggested that grassroots action is

fundamental in drawing attention to issues in the community. Participants suggested that grassroots action is the focal point of change and such can hold people accountable for their behavior. Furthermore, people of Mexican decent have a history of grassroots action for seeking social equality. People of Mexican decent viewed grassroots action that starts moving people and communities forward to counteract issues which are counter productive.

Policy Redrafting

Policy redrafting was described by participants as the act of writing and proposing legislation at all levels of government. Participants suggested that policy redrafting must take a creative approach and must concern issues facing the Mexican American community. Policy redrafting must always be used to influence and change legislation. Participants suggested that as a community we must be willing to change policy and become vigorously involved in drafting and renewing policy. In essence, policy redrafting provides the community with influence and power to assert their needs into policy which will ultimately effect their culture.

Dismantling Oppression and Discrimination

Participants suggested that the first step in eliminating oppression and discrimination must be the belief that we are equal in our community and the larger society. One way to affirm equality, is to recognize and counteract political scapegoating and negative attitudes toward our community. These concepts must be recognized through a cross generational perspective within and throughout our

population. Also suggested by participants was that we must recognize oppression and racist attitudes within our own; some of which is maintained in our own communities and families. These attitudes can also spread toward the larger society. The participants suggested that oppression has the power to alter culture. Oppression requires that someone claim power over people. To assume equality, members of a community must recognize all people in order to maintain an egalitarian component in society.

Coalitions

Coalitions were described by participants as a group of people, organized, who come from different backgrounds and who together take action against a particular issues. Coalitions focus on common ground instead of group differences. Coalitions send messages or communicate their needs through united fronts and these are comprised around specific agendas. Participants suggested a group effort may achieve greater results than when individual's act separately. Coalitions were seen as broadening opinion by involving more groups into the political arena. Participants suggested that members of coalition must have well defined goals and objectives. Also, coalition members must know which goals are compatible with their intentions in community building.

Leaders

Participants described leaders as not one person but a collection of people from the community. Leadership was seen as present in community but not recognized by major society.

Participants suggested that in community building leadership needs to become more cohesive. Participants also suggested that there seemed to be a perceived lack of leadership in national arena because of the lack of recognition.

Participants suggested that due to little media profile, outside communities seem to perceive a lack of leadership in the communities of the people of Mexican decent. Community builders can be used to fortify leadership in the community.

Voting and Electoral Power

Voting was seen as crucial for community building. Participants suggested that voting has resulted in people getting others to vote and to vote continuously. Participants also pointed out the need to continue to monitor and increase the number of people involved in the electoral process. Also, participants suggested that documented immigrants should be encouraged to become citizens and use their right to vote for issues of concern. Documented immigrants also should be encourage to vote for individuals who represent their personal interest.

Pro-Activism and the Radical Extreme Approach

The need to take radical extreme was categorized as "Pro-Activism". Participants suggested that coordinating strategies to take social action is sometimes necessary. If advocacy through verbal and written means was not successful, participants suggested that a last resort can be political or public visual protest. However, they suggested that a planned action with creativity be implemented. Reactionary approaches were not recommended. Participants suggested that issues be

brought to the forefront and that activism be pro-active. Participants suggested that pro-activism can produce results because legislators and other political figures want to avoid public action and negative publicity.

Cultural Identity

People of Mexican decent in the U.S. were described as one people who become separated because of propaganda and negative images which are projected onto the groups. Participants suggested that propaganda has negative effects on the community's perception of itself and it's characteristics, including the use of language. Differences in language can contribute to the problem of separatism found within the culture itself. Participants suggested that bilingualism can be destructive because not everyone in the community may speak a similar language with fluency. People of the same culture seem like strangers to each other due to the inability to communicate with one other. Also, the undocumented immigrant and those who have language barriers have difficulty finding commonalties; thus separatism takes hold. The community's desire to maintain culturally bound behavior can be hurtful because of the negative images associated with ethnocentrism. When the history of a group is not completely understood, the culture of that group can not be celebrated. The Latino/a culture is still trying to find ways to build bridges between traditional barriers and modern ideologies.

The results and their applicability to community building will be discussed in the next section.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore elements in community building for eradicating oppression toward people of Mexican decent in the U.S. As the findings in this study show, community building is a form of social action involving several elements (Weil, 1996 & Gutierrez & Alvarez & Nemon & Lewis, 1996 & Gradner, 1994 & Rivera & Erlich, 1992). The elements of community building include policy redrafting, leadership, community building, culture, personal power, education, coalitions, grassroots action, voting, and pro-activism (Gutierrez & Alvarez & Nemon & Lewis, 1996 & Wilson 1996 & Weil, 1996, & Rothmen & Erlich & Tropman 1995, Gradner, 1994 & Rivera Erlich 1992, Rubin & Rubin, 1992). Community building uses a multi-level approach that requires the energies for each element to work together in synergy. When the energies of these elements are combined, people feel a sense of empowerment and are influenced to take control of their communities.

Other factors in community building include the influence of historical revisionism. Kahn (1991) suggested that through organizing, people can rediscover themselves, their backgrounds and ultimately their culture. Historical revisionism helps to eliminate false information and enables communities to flourish. This is because the community becomes capable of comprehending their present situation in the context of the past. People of color have always been interested in improving their community (Gutierrez & Alvarez & Nemon & Lewis, 1996).

The participants in this study share a history and knowledge of community building. Throughout history Mexican people have been actively involved in community building (McLemore, 1994 & Green 1992 & Acuña, 1981). Rothmen & Erlich & Tropman (1995) define community as a geographic location and a community of interest. These interests can range from political ideologies and social class position to cultural commonalties. The findings in this research support the idea that community building within this population is not limited to geographic location but also a struggle for social justice. The findings also suggest that community builders must also take into account people's personal perceptions of their culture and who they believe make up their community. For example, there is a perception among the participants that undocumented as well as documented immigrants are included as one population.

There are numerous implications for the findings of this research. Community diversity and opinion should be used in community building to accentuate the beauty of the people and the richness of the community. Community building should provide a conduit between building within and outside the community with emphasis of achieving social equality. Community building provides an aggressive use of social action. The overall effort is to counter the effects of historical oppression. Community builders need to assist in mobilizing the community against not only oppressive and racist attitudes but also policy.

Another implication of this research is that community

building can counteract present policy. The research suggests that through community advocacy and action, community building can have an effect on the electoral process. This action can be achieved through electoral participation, voter registration, turnout and running for political offices (Lum 1996, Polinard & Wrinkle & Longoria 1991, Longoria & Wrinkle & Polinard 1990). Through political power individual communities can counter oppressive policies. Political power can be used to advocate for policies which reflect the needs of the community.

Another idea was articulated by a participant in the study who stated, "One people. Nothing more and nothing less". Community builders need to advocate for cohesion between citizens and immigrants. Participants suggested that cohesion strengthens the community economically, socially and politically by bringing members together inspiring collective power.

Another finding was that community builders must provide education within a cultural perspective. This effort would find creative solutions to erase existing cultural gaps in immigrant and citizen communities. By including culture as a way to unify people, community builders may move toward productive goals.

Women must be incorporated in community building to provide an egalitarian perspective. Historically, women's efforts have benefited the struggle, but women have lacked recognition from their counterparts in the political movements. Community builders can no longer make the mistake

of not recognizing women's efforts. Without the recognition of the contribution made by women, oppression and sexism will continue to grow and be counterproductive.

Finally, professional community builders must understand the people's perspective and their vision of community. Vision is what drives the community and should be the navigating point for confronting issues. People's informal education as well as life experiences should be used as a tool to fortify the community building processes. Connection between the community's perspective and the community builders may become convoluted if the people's plight is not at the forefront of the community building effort.

Based on the finding of this research there is a need for continued investment in community building within minority cultures. Traditional social work has not invested in the broader economic, political, and social problems of people of Mexican decent in the U.S. (Padilla, 1990). The challenge for social work is to respond to changing social conditions (Weil, 1996). Social work needs to become proactive in ways to empower the community through community building. The role of social work should be to continue the struggle for social equality in all communities through community building.

Social work must advocate for future research in understanding the perspectives of oppressed people and techniques to counter oppression. Community building is a method to counter oppression purposed by this research. Culturally sensitive community building techniques should be

used when advocating for programs and policies to serve all community effectively.

SUMMARY

This research examined the oppressive climate directed toward people of Mexican decent in the U.S. The oppressive environment targeted toward this population was proposed as a means to eliminating it, through community building. Elements of community building were explored as a means of strengthening the community against negative historical forces and the present negative conditions.

The method for examining this phenomenon was through Critical Theory. Critical Theory explores a phenomenon by taking historical accounts into perspective to understand present conditions. The data was examined through quantitative methods and open coding was performed on the data.

Twenty two participants took part in the study and provided information on community building. From the participant's information, relevant data was discovered through open coding and presented as elements in community building.

The results of this study suggested that several community building strategies need to be approached through a multilevel perspective. A secondary effect of community building is the eradication of historical oppression against this population. The challenge for social work to aggressively invest in community building to assist in the

empowerment of all people to reach equality.

The implications for this research challenges social work to invest in culturally directed community building. This should include the component of social and gender equality along with investment in building community cohesion and perspective. Community building and social work should be combined to counter policy which can be counterproductive to the life of the community. Research should focus on how social work could empower communities and advocate for their needs through community building.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Participants		
Variable	(N)=22	Percent (%)
<u>Age</u>		
20-40	6	27
41-60	10	45
61-80	6	27
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	12	54
Female	10	45
<u>Education</u>		
Grade 12	4	18
BA	9	40
MA	4	18
Phd	5	23
<u>Ethnicity</u>		
Mexican Decent	21	95
Salvadorian Decent	1	04
<u>Language</u>		
Bilingual	20	90
Monolingual	2	09
<u>California</u>		
Southern	20	90
Northern	2	09
<u>Citizens</u>		
Citizens	18	82
Noncitizens	4	18

Table 2: Elements of Community Building		
Variables	(N)=22	(%)
Community Empowering	14	64
Education	13	59
Historical Revisionism	19	86
Personal Power	13	59
Grassroots Action	13	59
Policy Redrafting	12	54
Dismantling Oppression & Discrimination	17	77
Pro-Activism/Radical Extreme	16	73
Coalitions	13	59
Voting, Electoral Power	18	82
Personal Power	13	59
Leaders	20	20
Culture Identity	11	50

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to examine oppression toward people of Mexican decent in the U.S. This study is being conducted by Alberto Martinez-Granillo a student in the Masters Of Social Work Program. The student is being supervised by Dr. Lucy Cardona, professor of social work.

In this study you will be interviewed on several topics which may include oppression toward the Mexican immigrant, activism, community building, and historical revisionism. The interview will be in a conversational style format, your thoughts, feelings and impression of the topics will be discussed. The interview will encompass about an hours time. There will be no right or wrong answers or trick questions during the interview.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence and at no time will your name be reported with you responses. All interviews data will be accumulated and reported in group from. At the conclusion of the study you may receive a report of the results from Alberto Martinez-Granillo, the primary researcher.

Please understand that your participation in this research is totally voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty. You may also have any data you provided removed at any time during this study

INFORMED CONSENT (continued)

I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and freely participate.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Debriefing Statement

To: Participant

From: Alberto Martinez-Granillo

I want to thank you for volunteering your participate in this research study on combating oppression through community building. Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher. At the conclusion of this study, you may receive a report of the results.

The reason for you participation in this research study is to assist in identifying community building elements used to combat oppression against people of Mexican decent. Theses findings will assist in provided insight to the phenomenon of community building.

If you would like to obtain general results of the study or, if you have any questions of concerns you can contact the perspective researcher at the address listed below.

Again thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study.

Alberto Martinez-Granillo

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(909) 473-1762.

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