

CLARE WEBER

We Don't Need Your Help, We Need Your Support

Mexican Immigrant Mothering and Community Organizing

This paper examines the efforts of activist mothering by a Mexican immigrant women's organization in central Port City, USA. Their demands for environmental justice include the need for community voice within a labyrinth of non-profit bureaucracies aimed at "helping" the community. The research explores how immigrant women community activists negotiate the differences of their women-centered approaches to community organizing in the context of a complex network of social service agencies and non-profit organizations. Secondly, it examines how motherhood, race, citizenship, class, and gender influence the struggles for community control of local governmental and NGO policies. The Community Residents Association insisted on having a place at the table and a voice in the planning process for the ten-year building community initiative in central Port City. The research finds that the structure of the planning process remained intact, exclusive of community members of central Port City and dominated by local social service agencies. The findings conclude that the planning process was not women-centered and perpetuated a conceptual framework for organizing that assumed a divide between the public and the private spheres and framed the activist mothers as in need of capacity building and leadership, ignoring their activist mothering and community leadership. As a result, the planning process remained under the control of these non-profit organizations and city social services, keeping middle-class professionals at the center of power with the lion's share of the funding.

This essay explores Mexican immigrant women's activist mothering, and their struggles for autonomy and voice on behalf of their families, as allies and partners with more powerful nonprofit organizations and city social service agencies in an effort to effect positive change in their neighborhood. The Commu-

nity Residents' Alliance¹ (CRA) is a majority Mexican immigrant women-led neighborhood organization working for social and environmental justice in a low-income area of Port City, California, near one of the world's largest port complexes. The State Foundation (TSF), a large private foundation, funded a ten-year, multimillion dollar initiative aimed at building healthy communities in central Port City. The initiative comprised several local social service agencies and partners. My examination of this initiative reveals that the CRA served as the voice of the Latino/a immigrant community in that area despite barriers of local and exclusionary political dynamics as well as complex hierarchies of race, gender, class, and language.²

In this article, I demonstrate how the CRA's participation in this process with TSF emerged out of their identity as mothers, leading to challenges of the assertions of social service agencies that the mothers of CRA needed external nongovernmental organization (NGO) help to organize their community. Their activist mothering struggles and their efforts for political voice revealed the importance of demanding local autonomy so that a space is created where immigrant mothers can engage in defining their own needs and analyzing the political causes of their situation. The CRA reflected the importance of asserting a politics of mothering that extended beyond the personal and private spheres of domestic life. The CRA mothers were experienced activists, yet the nonprofit agencies in Port City had a vested interest in constructing them as immigrant women in need of "help." The initiative's planning process was structured in such a way that CRA's community concerns were marginalized in favor of the nonprofits', with their paid professional staff, and of the social service agencies.

As a result, CRA was put in the position of being the "opposition" and the voice of criticism in this process, constantly calling for input and representation from the Latino/a immigrant community and residents alike. As CRA assumed the responsibility of being the voice of opposition and community conscience during the planning process, the social service agencies and TSF framed CRA as mothers in need of "help." In effect, the planning phase of the initiative laid the foundation for reproduction of middle-class, nonprofit-led control, which was ostensibly what the initiative was expressly *not* to do. This reinforced the invisibility of activist mothering, and the continuation of male-centered approaches to both community organizing and to a neoliberal framing of social change work by nonprofit organizations.

Mothering and Activism

Mary Pardo's seminal work on Mexican American women activists in Los Angeles demonstrates how Mexican women's community activism becomes

an extension of their self-defined roles as mothers. It also shows how their commitment to support their families challenges the Anglo-centric assumption of a division between the public and private spheres, with women's roles assigned to the social reproduction of the private sphere. Mexican American women's community organizing breaks down this divide and demonstrates how motherhood has a public and community role. Nancy Naples's study of activist mothering shows that mothering is expressed in complex ways that reflect diversity and particular standpoints shaped by race, class, and gender. For the CRA mothers, activist mothering also includes immigration rights. Living in the United States without documentation is a daily concern for them and their children. As Hortencia Jimenez has pointed out, Mexican immigrant women's activism is grounded in the struggle to make demands of the state as it relates to their rights as both immigrants and community members.

Nonprofit organizations frequently control women's activism to the extent that efforts at real structural change are thwarted and the work is channeled into reform-minded approaches and social service work (Burrowes et al.). The nonprofit sector in the United States has conservative roots and a history of supporting the middle class. David Wagner argues that nonprofits, on the whole, serve middle-class interests and needs despite the popular belief that they exist to "help" the poor and working class. My own work on organizing among immigrant women street vendors in Los Angeles showed that city hall interests took over efforts to legalize street vending, larger nonprofit organizations interfered with their efforts, and the business community and anti-immigrant sentiment thwarted them to such a degree that when the ordinance to legalize street vending was passed, it was useless to street vendors and served only to advance the careers of middle-class nonprofit workers and city politicians (see Weber). The Better Communities Initiative has the potential to follow the same trajectory, where middle-class, reform-minded professionals benefit at the exclusion of low-income residents of Port City.

Manuel Pastor Jr., Chris Benner, and Martha Matsuoka have recently studied organizing efforts in southern California and the potential politically progressive impact on regional policies, but a problem with their study is that it glosses over the very real class, gender, and race biases that exist in the regional organizing efforts. Indeed, the authors spend too little time examining the power dynamics at play among community members, men and women, citizens and undocumented residents, racial-ethnic groups, larger organizations, professionally staffed community-based organizations (CBOs), and foundations. This paper analyzes these power dynamics as they are key to understanding how immigrant women's community organizing develops into autonomous work or is subsumed by more powerful actors and organizations.

To ignore the strengths of mothers community organizing to effect change

at the community or regional level is to ignore the history of social movement organizing in the United States, for it is women's efforts to build community and strengthen community ties that is foundational to social movements (Abrahams). As Susan Stall and Randy Stoecker have argued, every successful social movement is built on either community organizing or a network of communities organizing together. Women-centered organizing is an approach to community that builds on and strengthens the relationships in the private sphere, and uses them to effect change. Women-centered organizing is part of a larger social movement, termed by Andrea O'Reilly as "matricentric feminism." Matricentric feminism is defined as a social movement based in the politics of feminism for mothers that resists essentialist notions of motherhood and assertions that empowerment of women should occur solely in the private sphere (O'Reilly). The study of activist mothering of CPC demonstrates how women's identity as mothers is context-specific and shaped by race, class, immigrant status and contemporary politics of neo-liberalism and globalization. One CPC mother stated,

At times we've had to confront certain challenges, like medical ones. They [the mothers] are afraid to go to a doctor, demand things from their landlords. But now, people don't have fear like they used to. We've done leadership training, workshops on health, workshops on self-esteem. All of this has helped. We have the challenge of men thinking that women don't have power. But, women know how to advocate. It's challenging at times because as a mother, it's difficult to work and do advocacy work. (Fieldnotes, September 24, 2009)

As Gilda Laura Ochoa has noted, Mexican American and Mexican immigrant women are marginalized from more traditional and formal political processes, which exclude women of color generally and immigrant women more specifically. To understand local efforts to assert autonomy and create spaces for developing a political voice, Ochoa argues that struggles for group survival must be counted in the body of local resistance to multiple oppressions. However, corporate models of organization that nonprofit organizations have adopted, overlook and devalue the efforts of activist mothering and women-centered organizing (Incite). Furthermore, corporate models of organization assert that the empowerment of women and mothers is a private and personal process. This assertion is based on racist views of immigrant, Latina mothers as clients needing help as individuals (Herrera). The activist mothers of CPC asserted a public identity as women, mothers, immigrants, many of whom were undocumented, and made public demands on behalf of their children.

“It’s All About the Kids”

Despite the wealth generated by the port, residents of central Port City are themselves economically and politically marginalized. Living in close proximity to one of the world’s largest port complexes, these communities in Port City face the brunt of environmental injustices caused by the ports. Pollution from ships, trucks, and trains have led to increased rates of asthma, particularly in children, and cancer among residents in neighborhoods surrounding the ports (SCAQMD). Yet those same communities seldom have input into policies affecting the very health and well-being of their families and other community members. In Port City, low-income Mexican and Central American immigrant women are engaged in grassroots community organizing through CRA to address the myriad health and social problems that plague their community and impact the well being of their children.

The residents who live the closest to the port are primarily low-income Latino/a immigrants. In the U.S. zip code where most CPC mothers live, U.S. census data reports that the average family income is \$27,163 per year, with family size averaging 4.3 people. Low-income residents, especially those whom politicians perceive as lacking the legal right to vote, are often ignored despite their civil rights and responsibilities as community members, workers, renters, students, and parents, among other roles. The CRA is challenging these dynamics by working on local policy issues that directly affect their community. Further, it strives to address issues such as community violence, lack of resources for youth, and the need for living-wage jobs, immigration reform, and affordable housing.

The Community Residents’ Alliance has its origins in a 1995 project supported by the local YMCA and funded by the state to prevent juvenile crime in central Port City. The project included funding for parents and social service agencies. It quickly expanded to address issues of concern that the mothers identified, not as private issues, but public one. In particular, mothers in the community came began to address the environmental causes of asthma in children, which is rampant due to the pollution from the port and goods movement. Today, the CRA is funded primarily by small grants and community fund-raising events and is also supported by a local community health clinic, which serves as its fiscal sponsor and provides part-time support staff. At its monthly meetings, some forty to sixty mothers attend to discuss issues of concern to them and to collectively strategize on how to solve them. Many of the members of CRA are undocumented immigrants, whose work on behalf of their children reflects a personal courage and resistance to the silencing effect of living in the United States without legal documentation. As one CRA member said, “It’s all about the kids.”

The need to better the community for their children and the efforts to collectively educate themselves about the realities of being undocumented combined to encourage many women to work collectively for the betterment of their community despite the fear and risks. The CRA mothers make demands of the state and local social service agencies out of urgency to help their children and each other. For example, CRA members successfully worked with policymakers to have construction of a section of freeway moved by fifty feet, allowing for a much-needed elementary school to be built. Then they worked with the school district to set up medical clinics in the schools. They worked on projects ranging from halting expansion of the highly polluting rail yards to initiating community projects to lessen violence against women. They have taken the Port City police department to task for not responding promptly in emergencies and for racial profiling of their sons and daughters. A representative of the police department now comes to their monthly meetings to take note of residents' concerns and to be held accountable by the community. The CRA mothers developed strategies for educating and organizing the community on members' health and well-being. It has successfully trained community members to speak at public hearings on port pollution and to serve as representatives on policy boards and nonprofit organizations, including TSF (one of the largest foundations in the state of California). In sum, CRA is a go-to organization for city officials, social service organizations, and politicians looking for community support.

The Web of Agencies

Neoliberalism has contributed to the formation of a particular form of corporate style philanthropy on a local, national, and global scale. Rodriguez names this the "nonprofit industrial complex" and argues that it supports social service agencies and organizations of the political Left in ways that create a dependency on corporate style philanthropy and educated middle-class professionals (Rodriguez). As neoliberal economic restructuring has reduced state funding for the poor, and has limited the rights of women, men of color, the working class, and immigrants, corporate style foundations rose to fill the void of these state programs through philanthropic support of policies and programs. Their efforts seek moderate reforms and programs that support the political and economic status quo and maintain the power of the wealthy. Middle-class professional "NGO staff" determine policies and programs for the poor. In effect, corporations use their political might to lower taxes and defund social services and tax structures that redistribute wealth and income. In their place, they support policies that serve to concentrate wealth, income, and political power in their own hands. Then they use tax deduction laws, which they themselves

created, to establish foundations to “help” the poor, all the while controlling the agendas of these nonprofits (Rodriguez; Incite). Matricentric feminism in this context is challenging, as social service agencies and established organizations on the Left are structured to perpetuate their organizations rather than serve a movement for activist and immigrant mothering.

Port City, sometimes referred to by residents as a port with a city, is home to many social service agencies that are part of the area’s “nonprofit industrial complex.” Such agencies aim to address the needs of low-income Latino/a, black, and Cambodian communities, as well as poor whites. While central, west, and parts of north Port City are populated by low-income communities of color, East Port City, parts of the downtown area, and neighborhoods along the Pacific Coast are affluent, predominately white, and politically conservative, with the exception of a primarily white gay community, which tends to be politically liberal. My research suggests that City Hall policies have favored the conservative and pro-business base at the expense of working class, low-income communities of color in Port City. In this context, a myriad of social service and community agencies exist, each with a particular mission or service area. They include housing advocates; legal support for immigrants and immigrant rights; youth programs such as the YMCA, the Boys and Girls Club, and a Cambodian youth organization; Cambodian community groups; community health clinics; cultural groups; community gardeners; parent groups of local schools; social services provided by churches; advocates for educational justice; and the service sectors of city government of Port City and the county government. These community groups, NGOs, and government social service agencies have, historically, not worked together and have had to compete for funding from foundations. Recently entering this set of agencies and nonprofit organizations is a regional organization with a leftist agenda of supporting living-wage jobs and policies that force cities to include labor rights and unions as part of the process of economic development and city planning.

The State Foundation invited this dense network to implement a ten-year initiative aimed at improving health outcomes for the communities of central Port City. The process has brought to light the challenges of bringing together community members, social service agencies, and nonprofit organizations, all while offering the possibility of funding for the groups that participate. In this context, the CRA has been the one consistent voice of Latino/a community residents. Cambodian and African American community members have often been present, but in small numbers, and they were excluded initially from the process. Their absence is indicative of the problems present with the initiative. Furthermore, several community-based organizations decided not to participate out of concern that the process laid out by the endowment would

consume the limited time and human resources of their organizations and, at best, lead to limited gains.

To closely examine the exclusion of a feminist politics for mothers that occurred in the first phase of TSF's initiative, it is necessary to briefly describe how the Building Communities Initiative was laid out. TSF worked through a local community health clinic to organize a series of meetings, with the goal of achieving ten outcomes for a healthy community³ and developing related "logic models" that would then provide the basis for carrying out a ten-year plan. TSF hired a consulting firm to facilitate the meetings and to lead community members, social service organizations, and community-based organizations through the process. Early on in the project, TSF worked with local groups to reach out to the community, with the result that approximately four hundred people attended a meeting to discuss the ten goals of the initiative. From there, working groups formed around each outcome and meetings were held regularly to develop a "logic model" that served as a plan to achieve each outcome. In addition, there were general meetings for all involved and a steering committee made up of lead organizations. The president of CRA was the sole low-income volunteer community member on that steering committee. She tirelessly insisted on including the voices of mothers and community members and regularly reported back to CRA members and sought their input.

People from the community and those serving it, defined by TSF as the stakeholders, were invited to meet regularly over the course of eight months to develop logic models and prioritize which outcomes would be addressed first. However, the majority of participants were paid staff members of local nonprofit and social service organizations. The logic models mapped out what actions and resources would be needed, as well as what existing resources would help achieve the specified outcomes in the ten-year building community initiative. Although TSF provided funding for food, translation services, and childcare, no organizations received grant money during the process. TSF did provide funds for support staff, child caretakers, and the consulting firms doing the facilitating. TSF required community members and stakeholders to attend numerous meetings. These were designed to be inclusive and allow for community input, but the frequency of the meetings was challenging for some. Community-based and social service organizations that had paid staff were in the best position to attend the meetings regularly, as part of their full-time work. Despite the time demands and lack of financial support, CRA members, in particular the president, continued to attend the meetings. Throughout the process, CRA served as the principal voice for the Latino/a immigrant community in central Port City. Furthermore, it was the sole organization engaging in activist mothering.

Defining Stakeholder

In documents outlining the ten-year building communities initiative, TSF referred to nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and social service agencies as “stakeholders” and community residents as “community residents.” Even before TSF established itself in Port City, the labeling of “stakeholder” to include individuals and organizations other than community residents signaled that residents were to be acted on by the stakeholders, and it implied that residents were not engaged in organizing. In many ways, this delineation mimics the masculine approach to community organizing best represented in the work of Saul Alinsky. The Alinsky approach to community organizing (Stall and Stoecker) sends professional organizers into a community to lead residents in the public sphere to make changes to public issues that residents have a stake in changing; existing organizations and groups are incorporated into this endeavor. Furthermore, this particular framing of the community, as being in need of help and of capacity-building rather than solidarity, justifies the existence and maintains the power of middle-class, professionally led NGOs.

What this approach overlooks is the activist mothering work of women residents on behalf of their families, which breaks down the notion of a public–private divide in community organizing. It further assumes that there is a lack of leadership or organizational capacity in Port City. What is left unexamined when operating under this set of assumptions is, specifically, the ways that social service agencies as “stakeholders” emphasize services over political organizing and thereby effectively block work in that direction (Ndbuizu).

Doing Community

The Kickoff

“Doing community” refers both to the role that CRA assumed in the process and the way that agencies and TSF need community members to legitimate their work. A politics of inclusion occurs with community organizing, and, in this context, CRA claimed voice as the representation of community. TSF gave small grants to community-based organizations (CBOs) to do outreach to residents in an effort to ensure their participation. CRA was one of the groups that the CBOs successfully recruited in the Latino/a immigrant community. Youth were initially well represented from the community, owing to outreach by the NGO’s working with youth, although their participation quickly faded. Residents in the Cambodian community were also present, but the presence of just one Khmer translator limited the participation of Cambodian-speaking

residents to one breakout group. Spanish-speaking residents also had a single translator and only one breakout group. English-speaking residents had the choice of four breakout groups. Participation by members of the Cambodian community also declined over time. An African American community presence was limited, and there were later attempts to redress that by including an African American minister on the initiative's steering committee.

A community organizer who supports CRA stated on several occasions that it is the one community group whose members were consistently present at many of the meetings. My observations confirmed this. At TSF meetings, the majority were representatives from social service agencies working in the community and city employees, but not residents themselves. Despite this, the process began in a way that excluded community members and ignored gendered dynamics. CRA was the one surviving resident-led community-based organization at the end of the planning phase.

CRA was the one consistent community presence at the planning meetings. The CRA mothers participated as both residents and volunteers in numerous meetings and events aimed at addressing community issues. They are committed to serving their community and see collective efforts as the one way to help one another and improve their families' situations. Their children's safety, education, and health are huge concerns, given the levels of community violence, problems in local schools, and the pollution caused by the ports. When the CRA members attended the meetings of TSF, they consistently raised the issue of increasing community participation. For example, Rosana spoke to me about the first kickoff meeting held in September 2009. She participated in a group discussion on community and stated,

The community group met and we were talking about the community; it was a long and complicated talk about the necessities of the community. They [the community] should come and talk about their needs and necessities. Most people were agency representatives. The next time, we need more input from the community. Those who offered opinions were agencies and they don't know what the community needs, so for the next meeting we need to work on this. There should be one community member/community representative from each organization. (Fieldnotes, September 30, 2009)

The initiative had no process for differently weighing the ideas and opinions of social service agency representatives, be they nongovernmental or governmental, and of people living in the community. The community members have a need to access services, alter them to better fit their needs, and affect policy. The service agencies and the municipal government sought TSF funds to continue providing the services that they offered (and hoped to offer) as

part of the initiative. Community members were present to participate on behalf of the health of the community, while agencies were there in the hopes of receiving funding for their work to the degree that they could relate it to community health.

The Planning Phase

As the planning for the ten-year funding initiative advanced, community members' participation and attendance at the meetings was low. In a comment to the program officer of TSF, Rosana of CRA stated, "I believe a lot has been lost. The majority of the meetings have been agencies." African American, Latino/a, and Cambodian youth, all of whom showed up in large numbers at the initial kickoff meeting, stopped attending the subsequent planning meetings. A leader of a community-based organization working with youth said,

There were some challenges with the process and we spent time educating [the youths] on what was going on. The process was boring for the youth. We need to figure out how to form the process with youth. We can't use Robert's Rules [of Order]. The youth felt the process was "high level."
(Fieldnotes, September 30, 2009)

The technical aspects of the planning process were, at times, daunting for adult community members as well as for youth. One community member present at the beginning of the process stated, "The logic model was not user friendly and was difficult. It will turn community members off. There are not enough community residents and no representation from the African American community. The only Cambodian was the translator, who gave input" (fieldnotes, September 30, 2009). Despite repeated and publically stated concerns about minimal community participation, TSF did very little to alter the planning process and ensure increased community input. The one exception was adding a leader of the African American community to the steering committee for the planning process, but this failed to translate into increased participation by African American community members.

Activist Mothering As An Oppositional Voice

The work of CRA to claim voice as community was present at the initial meetings and continued to the end of the planning process. CRA then began to directly criticize the process. In a January 2010 collaborative meeting to report on the plans of the working groups, Rosana stated, "We're going too fast. The facilitators are going fast. There's quick questions and then they

move on. Some folks are here for the first time and it's going so fast I don't feel we're being heard" (Fieldnotes, January 15, 2010). Rosana was speaking to a process that led to the exclusion of a grounded discussion that should have moved from the realities of the community to solutions that the community members were vested in and thought would work. Community members felt marginalized. Rosana said,

I have some comments about the discussion and these themes. I know it's going to seem old. We're talking about a lot of themes, but not about what's going to happen to the community. We're all talking about the money, but to receive that money we need to reach the base, to include the community. So the question is, what is our vision for the community? We need to take a few steps back and say what is our vision for the community. (Fieldnotes, March 18, 2010)

The concerns voiced by some of the CRA women shifted the discussion, at least momentarily. For example, Ed, who is a member of a faith coalition of Port City, said, "I see agencies that stop coming because they aren't getting money. I've also seen community residents stop coming because they don't see anything getting done." Andrea, a community organizer who works with CRA, then proposed a way for community members to participate in the planning process. She stated,

Through the process a lot of the community felt things were lost in translation or not included in the documents. I think it's great to have minigrants. A lot of these meetings we have are with directors for agencies in attendance. We don't have the workers, the staff that does outreach and organizing. What about stipends for community leaders, i.e., Rosana? (Fieldnotes, March 18, 2010).

The State Foundation neither acknowledged nor adopted Andrea's suggestion. Criticism also included concerns over the technical language and the writing-intensive process. Although some documents were translated into Spanish, and although Spanish and Khmer translators were present at all the meetings, concerns were expressed that not every written document was translated or, if it was, it was lengthy and in a highly technical language (or, as one CRA member said, "it was at the level for college graduates" (Fieldnotes, March 18, 2010).

More than six months after the initial kickoff meeting to plan for the TSF initiative, CRA's leaders were still insisting on community representation and input into the process. Rosana, at a meeting to evaluate the planning process

in January 2010, stated, “We had previously talked about cleaning up a youth [police] record and I don’t see it here. That’s why I feel we’re not heard.” The facilitator responded to Rosana, “It’s in Outcome 6,” which is titled “Neighborhood and School Environments Support Improved Health and Healthy Behaviors.” Rosana was not satisfied and said,

I want to return to this issue. I lived this history. I knew a youth who did a crime when he was 15, 16 years old. He wanted to clean his record up at about 20 years old and he couldn't. He couldn't find work and he killed himself.

She then complained about how the process of note taking and facilitating was leaving important facts out, arguing, “If the community can’t see all we decided, how can people understand?” (Fieldnotes, January 15, 2010).

For the CRA mothers, it was important to understand and state the realities of their daily lives and what was going on in the neighborhoods and community. Rosana, at the same meeting to evaluate the process in January 2010, said, “This time we’ve had the opportunity for the agencies to understand how we work. So for me, my message to all agencies is that the community belongs to us and we need to make Port City better for us and we’ll work together.”

However, the issues were reduced to a few words written on butcher paper, watering down the critical nature of issues and the sociopolitical context and paving the way for agencies to interpret the problems to fit their existing programs that they wanted funded.

An example of a lost opportunity for a grounded discussion is that of community violence. The CRA women were quick to express their views of how violence against women, violence in the homes, and violence in the streets were all related. CRA mothers do not consider teen-dating violence and gang violence separate issues. But as a TSF program officer put it, “Domestic violence programs tend to be a reaction to the crises. TSF is interested in prevention and is looking at the child.” Local advocates involved in the shelter movement, however, took issue with this perception. In a discussion of this approach, Rosana responded to TSF’s comment by saying, “Prevention is something that worries me the most. There’s violence in the street. They see it in the home, and they go to the streets and take it out on other youth. I have a 12-year-old son, but there are some things I can’t protect him from. Inter-family violence work is a way to prevent youth and street violence” (Fieldnotes, March 8, 2010). The CRA mothers advocated for an approach to youth violence that did not distinguish between violence in the home and in the streets. CRA’s women-centered approach, in other words, did not create a false divide between the public and private spheres.

Centering Activist Mothering

In addition to the presence of class bias, which favors professionally staffed nonprofits, power differences on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and age excluded sectors of the community and activist mothering approaches to organizing and planning. Although CRA claimed voice as organized residents of central Port City, African American and Cambodian residents did not have the same voice. Community violence was limited in its definition to largely exclude intimate-partner violence. The planning process designed services for youth but did not effectively include them in the process. The planning process was not women-centered and perpetuated a conceptual framework for organizing that assumed a divide between public and private spheres, framing residents as being in need of capacity building and leadership.

Volunteering and attending the meetings was demanding and pulled CRA into the world of TSF and the agendas of larger NGOs and city social services. The CRA spent more time defending the importance of the voice of mothers and the community than setting its own agenda. CRA community members' participation declined over time, out of frustration of not being heard and because of the demanding schedule of the meetings. Barriers with transportation, meeting times and language were also contributing factors in declining attendance. Rosana remained as the main spokesperson for the Latino/a community residing in central Port City. Her status and that of CRA have increased as a result of this process. Nevertheless, it was sufficiently exclusionary to community members, resulting in a missed opportunity for leadership from the activist mothers. At the end of the planning process, community participation had been skewed so that it placed a burden on the CRA mothers to continuously be the voice of opposition and overcome barriers to attending and participating in the meetings. Community participation also rewards the social service agencies and the professionals who run them. These forces maintain power by constructing the women of CRA as needing help and involving them only in ways that do not support activist mothering as practiced by the Community Residents' Alliance.

Implementing a Feminist Politics for Mothers

On the basis of the observations and analysis of the Building Communities Initiative, this final section proposes alternatives that may have achieved a more inclusionary, matricentric feminist and community-driven process. Defining "stakeholders" as community members rather than agencies is a necessary first step in placing residents, whose identities are gendered, raced and classed, at the center of the process for defining needs and determining actions. The

decision-making process should center community members as leaders in the planning process. Community activists are attempting to see that this happens in the next phase of the initiative. Whether they will succeed is yet unknown, as there is significant pushback from social service agencies and city government. Relying on and supporting activist mothers who are already leaders in the community, rather than bringing outside facilitators into the process, shifts the power of decision making away from the professional class of nonprofit organizations to poor and working-class residents. The issue of how decisions are made should be structured in ways that are transparent and give residents the majority of votes in relation to the nonprofit organizations represented by paid staff. These social service agencies would then be held accountable to the residents' community agenda. It is also important to allow an inclusionary, women-centered, community-resident-led process to drive the timeline rather than letting TSF's deadlines drive the process. If a diversity of community members is not present, the planning process should not move forward until the issue is addressed and until there is a critical number of residents with the power to make decisions.

Issues of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia should be explicitly addressed at the outset. An important first step is to acknowledge individual chauvinism, racism, or classism. However, the structural ways in which women, people of color, the GBLT community, undocumented immigrants, Spanish and Cambodian speaking residents, and poor and working-class people are excluded needs to be understood so that the planning process does not reproduce exclusionary tactics. Understanding the gendered nature of community organizing and the ways that women are at the center of family, community, and organizing against classism and racism is key to mobilizing effectively for change and positively supporting these efforts.

The planning process should include resources and time to self-evaluate and make collective changes. If the process is exclusionary and community members feel shut out and not heard, if there is a lack of transparency, and if nonprofit organizational staff exert undue control over the process, then the entire process must stop and corrective changes should be made. It is imperative to an inclusionary process to not underestimate the organizing abilities and leadership of residents. It is important to know the experiences of each participant and understand how leadership is done and how women in the community build on their roles as mothers and caretakers to extend to community issues. Funding social service agencies and putting them in leadership positions reproduces the very power dynamics that thwart political action and community activism. Social service agencies are not in the business of community organizing, and have a vested interest in the status quo. Community members have a vested interest in changing policies. Mexican immigrant activist

mothers have a vested interest in a feminist politic for mothers that empowers their children and their community.

¹The names of all organizations, as well as the city and the individuals in this study, have been changed.

²This research developed out of a feminist approach to activist and community-based research. Dorothy Smith's institutional ethnography, Michael Burawoy's organic public intellectual, Randy Stoecker's approach to community-based research, and Nancy Naples's work on community activism and feminist politics have influenced my work. I started this project in consultation with the Community Residents' Alliance, framing the questions and the focus of the research to support their efforts. Findings from this study are shared with CRA leaders in order to get feedback and critique. I continue to work with CRA in various capacities. As such, I see my relationship as reciprocal, dynamic, and activist.

³TSF established the following ten outcomes for the ten-year Building Communities Initiative:

1. All children have health coverage.
2. Families have improved access to a healthy home that supports healthy behaviors.
3. Health and family-focused human services shift resources toward prevention.
4. Residents live in communities with health-promoting land use, transportation, and community development.
5. Children and their families are safe from violence in their homes and neighborhoods.
6. Communities support healthy youth development.
7. Neighborhood and school environments support improved health and healthy behaviors.
8. Community health improvements are linked to economic development.
9. Health gaps for young men and boys of color are narrowed.
10. California has a shared vision of community health.

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