
A Community Cultural Wealth Model to Train Promotoras as Data Collectors

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The literature has documented the use of community health workers as an effective strategy to work with underserved communities. However, there is scant research on the strategies community health workers use when working in research studies. This qualitative study examines how promotoras (community health workers) implement their community cultural wealth to participate as data collectors in the control site of the Niños Sanos, Familia Sana (Healthy Children, Healthy Family) study. Our findings indicate that promotoras implement their cultural values, knowledge, and practices to recruit study participants and facilitate the data collection process. This study has implications for the recruitment and development of culturally and relevant linguistic training targeting promotoras in Mexican-origin communities.

Keywords: *community health workers; health promotion; cultural competence; qualitative methods; focus groups*

Health promotion programs capitalize on the engagement of community health workers (CHWs), or *promotores de salud*, as they act as cultural and linguistic brokers for program providers or researchers working with diverse populations (Catalani, Findley, Matos, & Rodriguez, 2009; WestRasmus, Pineda-Reyes, Tamez, & Westfall, 2012). This article further develops the literature by demonstrating how

promotores de salud use community cultural wealth (CCW) when participating in research studies to enhance engagement and retention of the target research population. In most cases, CHWs are well-respected members of the community and undergo systematic training to learn about community outreach and health promotion. Currently, there are no national standards for training of CHWs (Matos, Willaert, & Rosenthal, 2007). Nonetheless, some states do provide CHW certifications, which vary according to the focus of the agency (Kash, May, & Tai-Seale, 2007). Agencies may provide CHWs with the health-related information and skills for delivering the information (Jackson & Parks, 1997) and rely on them to integrate their linguistic and sociocultural knowledge in local health programs and materials (Kreuter, Lukwago, Bucholtz, Clark, & Sanders-Thompson, 2003). Despite the vast literature documenting the use of CHWs, there is a dearth of research regarding how CHWs implement their cultural knowledge and assets in health promotion research (Koskan, Hilfinger Messias, Friedman, Brandt, & Walsemann, 2013).

The literature on the involvement of *promotores* in outreach and health promotion is well established (Viswanathan et al., 2010). For example, two studies

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found that when *promotoras* engaged in various activities of the project, including data collection, they were able to build on their leadership and professional skills (Farquhar et al., 2008; Marsh, Derose, Rios, & Cohen, 2015). However, within the literature on the involvement of *promotores* as data collectors, few studies have documented their firsthand experiences in how they use their social capital to enhance recruitment and retention efforts. In addition, few studies have examined the role of *promotores* as research partners (Johnson, Sharkey, Dean, St John, & Castillo, 2013; St John, Johnson, Sharkey, Dean, & Arandia, 2013). The majority of the studies focus on *promotores* from the community who have had extensive training as health educators working in community-based studies. Thus, there is scant documentation on how *promotores* implement their firsthand knowledge of the community to recruit research participants and facilitate data collection in these studies.

This qualitative case study documents the experience of the *promotoras* in the comparison site of the *Niños Sanos, Familia Sana* (NSFS) study (see description in de la Torre et al. [2013]). We decided to focus only on those involved in the control site as a way to capture their unique experiences of working with a community that was not receiving the intervention activities. The control site is a rural, Mexican-origin, low-income school district where the majority of the residents work in agriculture. In this article, we document the experiences of the *promotoras* of the NSFS study by focusing on what motivates community members to engage in community-based activities and how they implement their cultural assets to become data collectors who are active in the recruitment, retention, and data collection phases. We address the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What motivates *promotoras* to engage in community-based activities?

Research Question 2: How do the *promotoras* implement their cultural assets to become active data collectors and facilitate the research process in a control site?

► THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is framed by CCW (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) challenges the traditional model of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu's theory is used to reinforce the idea that cultural capital possessed by the middle-class and predominately White communities is of higher value than the cultural capital of other groups. However, Bourdieu's concept of cultural

capital is narrowly defined to include a particular set of skills and abilities. On the other hand, Yosso (2005) asserts that all communities have valuable cultural capital. Yosso's CCW framework encompasses a greater array of skills and knowledge. By using CCW as a lens to analyze the qualitative data, we were able to examine how the rural Mexican-origin *promotoras* use cultural practices to engage in the research stages of the NSFS study. The CCW model includes the following forms of capital:

1. *Aspirational capital:* The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers
2. *Linguistic capital:* Intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style
3. *Navigational capital:* Skills in maneuvering through social institutions
4. *Social capital:* Networks of people and community resources
5. *Familial capital:* Cultural knowledge nurtured among family that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition
6. *Resistance capital:* Knowledge and skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequality

Using Yosso's (2005) work allows us to examine the different forms of cultural assets and knowledge that the community members implement to engage in community-based activities and to facilitate the research and data collection of the NSFS study. Yosso's CCW framework has been used to challenge the mainstream rhetoric of the academic achievement of communities of color. For example, supporters of cultural capital argue that students of color are failing in school because they lack the requisite cultural capital to be successful in school. However, Yosso proposes that this is a limited explanation because their particular types of cultural capital are not recognized and validated by the school system. Furthermore, research by Lareau and Horvat (1999) support the argument that the value of cultural capital depends on the social setting.

Yosso's (2005) CCW framework is well established in the field of education and can easily be applied to further understand effective community engagement strategies. For example, studies such as Huber (2009) and Manzo (2016) in the field of education highlight how educators by identifying the CCW of Latino families can more effectively support the educational achievement of their students. Thus, CCW skills identified by Yosso (2005) such as familial capital can be used to evaluate and understand the cultural assets and knowledge

possessed by community members to engage them more effectively in research projects. These types of CCW skills facilitate the overall engagement of CHWs in community activities, which further support the recruitment of study participants and the data collection process.

► METHOD

Study Design and Sample

We selected focus groups for this study. Focus groups promote a free-flowing discussion, which allows participants to express their attitudes and opinions (Bers, 1989). The interactive nature of focus groups allows for participants to bounce ideas off one another and elaborate on each other's comments (Saumure, 2001). Individuals involved in the research stages of the NSFS study control site were selected as participants. The two focus groups met for between 1.5 and 2 hours and consisted of nine participants total (see the appendix for focus group guide). Two bilingual, bicultural researchers and a project coordinator conducted the focus groups in Spanish. The two researchers have expertise in qualitative methods. The project coordinator was trained to conduct focus groups by members of the research team and has a great deal of experience facilitating focus groups. The focus groups were recorded using a digital voice recorder to ensure the discussions were captured in their entirety. A bilingual, trained researcher transcribed the discussions of the two focus groups verbatim. A second researcher reviewed the transcriptions. The institutional review board at the university of NSFS approved the study.

Data Analysis

The focus group transcripts were analyzed in Spanish to maintain the integrity of the discussion (Cáceres, 2008). For the coding of these data a deductive approach based on Strauss's (1987) methodology was used. The first coding, or the open coding stage, generated ample categories based on critical words and associated forms of statements in which the participants identified their motivation to become active in community activities, their community engagement, and their challenges and success stories. After the initial coding, the research team met to discuss the emerging themes and agreed on any discrepancies. A second stage in the data analysis consisted of creating codes based on the original emerging themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the second phase of the analysis, the research team sorted the data based on the emerging

TABLE 1
Characteristics of Participating *Promotoras*

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Value</i>
Female, %	100%
Born in Mexico, %	78%
Primary language(s) spoken at home (Spanish), %	56%
Age (years), range	19-52
Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Hispanic, %	100%
Average years of education completed	13 years
Last year of education completed in United States, %	67%
Average years as <i>promotora</i>	6.5 years
Average years in project	3 years

themes and codes. The research questions and the theoretical framework employed in this study guided the analysis.

► RESULTS

Participants

Nine *promotoras* participated in the two focus groups. All the *promotoras* were females of Mexican origin. Seven were born in Mexico in the same state as the majority of the NSFS participating mothers. The other two were born in the United States to Mexican immigrant parents. The *promotoras'* age ranged between 19 and 52 years. For all the *promotoras*, this was the first research project in which they participated as recruiters and data collectors, although a few of them had some prior experience in community engagement. Table 1 provides a summary of the characteristics of the *promotoras* who participated in the study.

Motivation to Engage in Community-Based Research

The *promotoras* identified two major themes as their motivation to participate in community-based activities. First was their desire to recreate their culture in their community. Many of the *promotoras* aspired to recreate traditions and artistic forms of cultural representation as a way to build community. The second major theme was their sense of responsibility for action. The *promotoras* indicated that they were aware of the needs and disparities in their community, and they felt responsible for taking action.

Recreating Culture. During the focus group discussions, the *promotoras* shared their stories as immigrants or daughters of immigrants. Their migration stories highlighted their identity as immigrants who longed for a sense of community in their new country. Through their efforts to create culture, the *promotoras* exemplified their aspiration capital. Yosso (2005) explains aspiration capital as the hopes and desire an individual has for the future. In the case of the *promotoras*, they were aware that they had left their culture and community behind when they migrated, but in their new country they hoped and desired to continue their homeland traditions:

We already bring our roots from Mexico with many of its traditions. Here [in the United States] we want to do them again, so we put in our two cents so we can feel what we experienced over there and so that we do not forget about our roots and can experience it once gain.

The *promotoras* were also aware that many of them cannot return to their homeland, so they keep their aspirations to recreate their cultural traditions alive. The following exemplifies the reasoning behind their aspirations to continue to recreate their cultural traditions:

Many people cannot return to their country. They, and many others here in San Joaquin, are forced into this community, they have to see this community as their home. And one of the things that occurs is that we want to replicate what we have in our home country or in Mexico here in the U.S. For example, like the Day of the Dead that we organize every year.

Another *promotora* indicates, “There are a lot of people who cannot return to their country, so here they recreate their culture to experience what they wish they could live in their homeland.” The longing for their hometown and the desire to belong to their new community motivated the *promotoras* to help their community celebrate cultural traditions, such as Day of the Dead. The *promotoras* recreated traditions from their homeland to find a sense of belongingness. Although they may feel nostalgic because they know they cannot return to their homeland easily, they find comfort in knowing there are individuals from their home country in their new community, and they can bring a piece of their old life into their new community

by recreating some of the cultural traditions.

Responsibility for Action. The *promotoras* also indicated a sense of responsibility to take action to address the needs and disparities in their community. Yosso (2005) describes resistance capital to be the efforts of individuals to ensure equal rights. She further explains that resistance capital comes from parents, community members, and a legacy of engaging in social justice. The majority of the *promotoras* in our study were born in Mexico and indicated that they migrated to the United States in search of better opportunities. In the United States, they continue to seek better opportunities for themselves, their children, and their community: “You start to know more people, you begin to learn about the problems and solutions. You feel responsible, and feel the responsibility that you want to do something for your community.” The *promotoras* exemplified their resistance capital by providing examples of how they engaged in community-level activities to resist systematic decisions that prevent additional resources from being introduced into the community:

[The] Economic Opportunities Commission [EOC] has for more than two years been trying to open up a Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) office here in San Joaquin, and due to their politics and policies there is a lot of debate. They have been fighting with the state for two years. During the meeting with the [EOC] director, he said we needed for the community to have a voice in the process and support the efforts. So, they gave us some surveys, and we brought them to the open market and people filled them out. We collected them and presented them [to EOC]. The debate continues, but it’s an example to show that there are resources out there.

In this case, the *promotoras* indicate that they are aware that resources exist outside of the community and are aware of the politics involved that, at times, exclude them. The *promotoras* resist this exclusion by continuing to be involved and taking an active role in documenting the needs of their community.

► IMPLEMENTING CULTURAL ASSETS TO ENGAGE STUDY PARTICIPANTS DURING THE DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE NSFS STUDY

The *promotoras* also shared their experiences with the NSFS study. The section below describes the challenges the *promotoras* faced during the recruitment phase of the NSFS project and how they implemented

their cultural capital to recruit study participants. This section also exemplifies how the *promotoras* obtained certification to become involved in the data collection process.

Recruitment

The *promotoras* indicated that the recruitment stage of the study was difficult as their task was challenging: They needed to recruit 400 children. Many of the *promotoras* shared that they implemented their social and familial capitals to recruit study participants. Yosso (2005) describes familial capital to be the social and personal resources an individual has, which stems from their familial and community networks. Social capital refers to an individual's peers and social contacts (Yosso, 2005). For example, the *promotoras* indicated, "We are part of the community and because of that we were able to recruit more children from our friends." The *promotoras* continue to elaborate on their strategies to recruit participants by indicating that knowing people in the community, their social capital, allowed potential participants to have more confidence in providing their contact information for the research study. For example, one *promotora* shared, "The community knows us; they were comfortable sharing their information with us." Having extended networks acquired through other community work such as food distribution, participation in the open market, their personal business, or their involvement in the schools also proved to be successful for the *promotoras*: "The majority of the people know me because I help at the food distribution, so that helped me."

In addition to their social and familial capitals, the *promotoras* also expressed instances when they implemented their navigational and linguistic capitals. Yosso (2005) explains navigational capital to be the skills and abilities to navigate unsupportive and hostile environments. The *promotoras* shared that during the recruitment process they faced difficulties such as obtaining correct contact information from individuals or convincing them to take part in the study. In response to these difficulties, the *promotoras* navigated the challenges: "We would advise each other, and we would do things a little different." This quote exemplifies how the *promotoras* would ask each other for feedback on their strategies, and if strategies did not work well the first time around, they would change their approach based on what the rest of the *promotoras* suggested. Furthermore, the *promotoras* also implemented their linguistic capital, which Yosso (2005) refers to as communication skills and abilities. The *promotoras* shared that as time went on they became more "confident to

speak because the more we recruited, the more we would know how to communicate with potential participants." As a result of their efforts, 265 families and 356 children were successfully enrolled in the comparison community during the first year. In the last year of the project, 190 families and 248 children remained enrolled.

Data Collection

For the *promotoras* to engage in data collection, they needed to obtain certification from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. A major challenge for the *promotoras* was that the course was only in English. The majority of them are not fluent in English. Although this was a challenge, they implemented their linguistic capital to obtain certification. For example, those who did not speak English shared, "I started translating everything, but after that, I would read and try to understand it, and the words I did not understand I would translate them [using a dictionary or a translator online]." Seven of the nine *promotoras* who participated in the focus groups became certified. The other two who did not obtain certification were not directly involved in the data collection but participated in the development and oversight of the community engagement activities.

For the data collection, the *promotoras* implemented linguistic, navigational, and social capital. First, the *promotoras* indicated that knowing how to speak with participants is critical:

[She] trained me and I would go with her. She taught me how to speak to people, [to] be nice and be courteous when you go into their homes because usually you're going to enter their homes and you're going to ask them, "How much do you make?"

In this example, the *promotora* is making reference to another *promotora* who trained her in how to reach out to participants in a sensitive way during the data collection process.

Other *promotoras* expressed how they used their linguistic capital during the data collection process.¹ For example, one common statement was that the survey questions were cumbersome. As a result, the *promotoras* found ways to make sure participants understood the survey questions by first ensuring that they, themselves, "understood the question, and then asked the question to the participant and provided clarification if the participant was confused."

Furthermore, another common finding was the implementation of social and familial capital to facilitate data collection. For example, one of the *promotoras* indicated, “We got along well with some of the families, so in reality, it was not difficult to schedule the families that I administered the surveys to.” This *promotora* explained that knowing someone creates a sense of comfort for the participants because “participants will feel more comfortable sharing the information.”

Although being acquainted with potential participants facilitated the scheduling of appointments, the demanding work schedules of the participants given the nature of agricultural labor and the lack of an office space within the comparison community were significant challenges. Thus, they had to implement their navigation capital to ensure prompt data collection. Specifically, the *promotoras* found strategies to navigate the scheduling barrier by adjusting their schedule to the participants’ need. For example, one *promotora* shared,

There were months when I would need to start working at 9 a.m. or there were times when a participant was working, and I had to administer a survey at 6:45 a.m. because that was the only time that the mother could attend.

► DISCUSSION

This study documented the motivation of *promotoras* to engage in community-based work and the cultural assets they implemented to facilitate recruitment of study participants and the data collection process. Previous community work facilitated the *promotoras*’ involvement with the research study. The majority of them were active members of the community who had participated in other events, such as local food distribution or the open market, but had not received formal training as health educators or data collectors. Through their community involvement, they had established networks and relationships with other community members. Their networks and relationships facilitated the recruitment of study participants and the trust to collect sensitive data.

The *promotoras*’ CCW offered useful skills and abilities to engage and retain study participants during the data collection process. This finding is consistent with the work of WestRasmus et al. (2012), which indicates that the *promotoras* acted as cultural brokers who connected with the participants. More specifically, because the *promotoras* were members of the community and were able to implement their CCW to fit the

needs of the participants, they were able to ensure that participants were engaged and participated in the data collection. For example, when *promotoras* implemented their social and their familial capitals they were able to recruit and engage participants in the data collection.

Additionally, the *promotoras* were able to implement their CCW to help them navigate challenges of the data collection process such as Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative certification or needing to accommodate the needs of the participants. Overall, the implementation of their CCW allowed them to be better connected to the participants and navigate the challenges they faced during the recruitment, retention, and data collection process. Furthermore, through their participation in data collection and their involvement in the community the *promotoras* were able to help address the needs of their community.

Limitations

Although this study offers new insights regarding *promotoras*, there are some limitations. The sample size and the lack of a comparison group of *promotoras* present limitations to this study. These limitations constrain our understanding of how *promotoras* may implement their CCW differently in intervention sites. The lack of quantitative measures to examine sociodemographic similarities between the *promotoras* and the study participants limits our generalizability. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that the majority of the *promotoras* were from the same community in Mexico as the study participants, which may have increased their success. Future research should examine the relationship between sociodemographic variables of *promotoras* and the communities they serve.

Implications

Our findings indicate that identifying the characteristics of *promotoras* and the successful strategies they implement can be useful for successful implementation of community-based projects and training development. For example, identifying the CCW assets of CHWs such as familial and social capital may enhance recruitment and retention of research participants. Also, by knowing some of the navigational strategies used by *promotoras*, program directors can better support these workers by providing them with adequate resources and support such as office space that is available during flexible hours and with professional development focused on computer skills and public speaking.

Helping the *promotoras* enhance their skills is aligned with the community-based participatory research approach of empowering community members, and it is also important for the sustainability of skills and activities in the community. More specifically, a key element of building community capacity is to tap into the existing resources and assets of a community (Goodman et al., 1998). Implementing a CCW framework to examine the existing assets can aid program directors in building community capacity and ensuring sustainability. For example, in our study, the *promotoras* continue to collaborate with city organizations and the university in the development of additional activities and other research projects after the conclusion of the NSFS study.

► CONCLUSION

Overall, this study examines how *promotoras* implement their CCW to participate as data collectors in the control site of the NSFS study. Our findings indicate that *promotoras* implement their cultural values, knowledge, and practices to recruit study participants and facilitate the data collection process. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how *promotores de salud* who are familiar with the community can enhance the engagement and retention strategies for the target research population. More specifically, a major contribution of this study is the use of the CCW framework to examine the specific skills and assets implemented by the *promotoras*. Thus, this study has implications for the development of culturally and relevant training targeting *promotoras* in Mexican-origin communities.

APPENDIX

Focus Group Guide

1. To get to know more about each of you, please introduce yourselves, tell us how long you have lived in this community, and how long you have been involved with the *promotora* group.
2. How are you involved in the community?
3. What motivates you to be involved in community activities?
4. Has your experience as an immigrant to the United States affected your community involvement? If so, in what ways?
5. How or where do you find support and/or resources for the community activities you lead?
6. What are some of the challenges you have faced?
7. What are some of the success stories you have from your involvement in community activities?

8. What has been your overall experience with the research project?
9. What are some of the benefits you have observed in the community as a result of the project?
10. How do you manage to ensure that participants continue to participate in the project?
11. What has been your experience with data collection?
12. How can other members of the research team better support you?
13. Do you have any other comments about your participation in community activities and the research project?

Note

1. The *promotoras* were responsible for administering six different surveys to each of the participating families (see de la Torre et al. [2013] for the list of surveys). During the first year of data collection, *promotoras* averaged an hour to administer the household survey. The average time was reduced to 18 minutes by the end of the fourth year.

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