

Research Statement

My research over the last seven years has focused on community involvement processes in public health. I view community involvement as the work individuals and groups do on behalf of a collective good (e.g., women's health, HIV/AIDS prevention) in the context of formal or semiformal organizations and social networks. This concept is informed by literature on social movements, citizen participation, volunteerism, and empowerment. Within this broad topic, I address three questions: a) How do individuals become involved in public health issues? That is, what are the motives, facilitators, and barriers to community involvement at the individual and collective levels? b) How does participation take place? Here I examine what individuals and groups do either amongst themselves or with community-based organizations to address their health concerns. c) What are the consequences of community involvement? I study individual-level outcomes (e.g., self-esteem, safe sex) and societal-level consequences of community involvement. I investigate these questions using qualitative and quantitative methods guided by participatory and feminist approaches. I have applied these research interests in Mexico among women and gay men and in the United States among Latino and African-American groups and gay men. I share these research interests and experiences with students, particularly with those in my seminar on community organizing for health, which I developed and have taught for four years.

My research has significant implications for public health. First, through community involvement in health issues (e.g., reproductive health, HIV/AIDS), individuals may develop and maintain a positive sense of themselves and adopt healthy behaviors. Second, via this involvement individuals may affect change in their communities. Third, health education interventions that are based on the direct participation of communities are likely to be culturally appropriate and sustainable. Moreover, most of the current knowledge on community involvement is based on anecdotal data and flawed methodologies. My research aims at systematically studying community involvement, developing its theoretical basis, and developing and testing measures using both qualitative and quantitative methods. Further, my research fills a significant gap in the literature by focusing on Latinos' community involvement.

I have published research on several aspects of community involvement. For instance, in a 1998 article in *Social Science & Medicine*, I explore the societal consequences of women's community work from a feminist perspective using qualitative methods. I argue that some public health efforts to promote community involvement unintentionally reproduce normative concepts of femininity. In an article in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* (1998), I develop and test a model of the influence of community involvement on sexual behavior among African American and white youth using structural equations modeling. I also have been invited to several expert panels and colloquia. For example, in 2002 I participated in the prestigious Annual Claremont Symposium on Applied Social Psychology, titled Processes of Community Change and Social Action. Among a multidisciplinary group of eight international scholars, I spoke about the public health implications of race in the AIDS movement.

I also secured considerable external funding to support my research. I obtained a grant (University of California-National Institutes of Mental Health) during my first year at UIC to conduct several pilot studies leading to a five-year grant from the NIMH. In this project (currently in the second year) I explore: a) Whether community involvement buffers the effects of stigma (e.g., racism and homophobia) and poverty on Latino gay men's sexual risk behavior. b) The consequences of community involvement for sexual risk behavior (e.g., peer norms, self-

efficacy, positive self-identity, and social support). c) The barriers to and facilitators of community involvement in HIV/AIDS and gay related organizations. The project includes the collection of 80 life histories and a quantitative survey of 600 Latino gay men in Chicago and San Francisco. I already have published two articles from this study, one in *AIDS Education and Prevention* (in collaboration with a doctoral student; in press), and another in *Health Education Research* (2002). In the latter, I outline the theoretical framework for understanding community involvement in the context of HIV/AIDS risk behaviors.

This line of research has led to several collaborations with colleagues at UIC and elsewhere in the country. I am a faculty member on the AIDS International Training and Research Program at UIC. I work with a doctoral student from Chile in this program. We presented our study comparing white and Latino gay men's community involvement at the 2002 International AIDS Conference. This effort also involved colleagues from University of California at San Francisco. In another study, I am currently working with a colleague at George Washington University on the mental health outcomes of community involvement among HIV positive Latino gay men.

My future research plans include completing my current NIMH study and disseminating the findings. This study has already raised several research questions. One is about the causal effects of community involvement on health. Another related question is whether those effects are connected to individuals' psychosocial developmental stages (e.g., adolescence). Thus, I will explore these questions using an intervention, or a longitudinal cohort study, and involving Latino youth.