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Collaboration and the Construction of Puerto Rican Community

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> A community is a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision making, and who share certain practices (which see) that both define the community and are nurtured by it
>
> —Bellah, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985, p. 333)

An ethnography of communication perspective (Carbaugh, 1994; Hymes, 1972, 1974; Philipsen, 1989) focuses on how particular people in particular places "do things." This theoretical framework is grounded in certain basic assumptions about communication. Communication is constitutive. As a constitutive process, communication creates culture and community. This is achieved through a system of symbols, symbolic forms, and meanings (Carbaugh, 1989).

In this chapter, I discuss the symbolic forms present in the discourse of members of a Puerto Rican cultural center. The chapter focuses on collaborative decision making as one such prominent symbolic form.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

As a way of discovering specific cultural patterns, ethnography of communication researchers frequently apply a neo-Hymesian framework to study cultural communication systematically. Hymes' (1972, 1974) theoretical framework for engaging in ethnography of communication is premised on the study of language as used in specific contexts. By examining situated language use, patterns can be discovered that otherwise would not be readily identified within some other framework.

Hymes proposed six basic units that can be used to analyze speech in a variety of different cultures. These units are speech community, speech situation, speech event, communicative act, communicative style, and ways of speaking. This chapter focuses on two of Hymes' components, a particular speech community and a prominent way of speaking. The speech community is comprised of people who share "rules for the conduct and interpretation of speech" (Hymes, 1974, p. 54). For a person to be counted as a member of a speech community, he or she must share at least one "way of speaking" with others. Hymes is vague in his definition of "ways of speaking." Although he suggested that ways of speaking can be used as a generic category, I use it to characterize patterned speech that has distinct features and meanings to a speech community. Hymes' framework for analyzing a particular speech community facilitates understanding of situated speech and helps the ethnographer interpret the speech forms, sequences, and norms in these scenes.

THE PUERTO RICAN CULTURAL CENTER

The Puerto Rican Cultural Center, Inc. is located in Springfield, Massachusetts. The city has a population of 607,600[1] and hosts the fourth largest population of Puerto Ricans in the United States. Located 90 miles from Boston, Massachusetts and Albany, New York and 140 miles from New York City, Springfield, as well as the nearby cities of Hartford and Bridgeport, Connecticut, has emerged as a major center of "Puerto Rican concentration in the 1980s" (Rivera-Batiz & Santiago, 1994, p. 20).

The Puerto Rican Cultural Center is located in the north end of the city, which is predominantly Puerto Rican. The center provides

[1]Sales and Marketing Management Survey of Buying Power (1992) as reported by *Springfield Newspapers*.

community services, such as GED and English as a second language (ESL) courses for adults at the local YMCA as well as after-school programs, such as folklore dance, bridge building, and drumming, for school children at a nearby middle school. The center has defined as its mission to "to enhance pride and self esteem within the Puerto Rican and other Spanish speaking communities" (from the Puerto Rican Cultural Center's vision statement).

A 13-member Board of Directors defines the direction, goals, and tone of the organization. The staff consists of an executive director who runs the daily operations of the Center. The executive director has an assistant. Each component of the center has a coordinator; for example, there is an education coordinator, a cultural activities coordinator and a youth leadership development coordinator.

DATA COLLECTION

Data was collected during daily activities at the center, where I participated as a volunteer. Subsequent to being elected to the Board of Directors, data was also gathered during the monthly board meetings. Initially, I worked closely with the cultural activities coordinator. Over time, I had the opportunity to have conversations with all those employed by the center. The data included fieldnotes, a videotape of the center's annual dinner and audiorecordings of the monthly board meetings. Segments of the audio- and videorecorded material have been transcribed using a version of the system proposed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974).

METHODOLOGY

Ways of speaking at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center were noted by observing how action was regulated and determined. Throughout this chapter, I describe a prominent way of speaking that was distinguished in the process of decision making that took place in the monthly board meetings.

Much of the literature on decision making suggests that there are "good" or "better" ways to make decisions (Janis, 1972; Rawlins, 1984; Scheerhorn 1991-1992; Wood, 1984). Rather than focusing on the benefits of a particular style of decision making over another, I became interested in exploring how a group of board members

actually made decisions. I did not presume that decisions would be made based on particular, researcher-specified goals; nor did I proceed by assuming that "direct" and "clear" messages would lead to any particular outcome. Instead, I used these decision-making constructs heuristically, to examine the ways in which decisions were enacted, the goals toward which these enactments were directed, and the types of messages that were used.

Collaborative Utterances

One decision-making style that became prominent in my research was a process that seemed similar to the construct that Sacks (1992) called "collaboratively built sentences." Sacks maintained that the way collaborative sentences are usually built is by two persons, either one of whom is searching for a word and the other fills in, or by one person who is making a request and the other adds a word that properly completes it (e.g., "please"). Sacks suggested that collaborative utterances built by more than two persons is a rare occurrence. However, I found many such sentences within the board meeting data.

In order to examine this type of sentence more systematically, I used Sacks' rules about "multiparty conversations" as abstract guidelines. Sacks (1992) described the sequence of multiparty conversations as not necessarily following an A-B-A-B sequence (characteristic of dyads). He proposed an A-B-C-D formula for n-party conversations. Sacks also differentiates multiparty conversations from dyads because others are present and attend to the talk. These others attend to the talk by noticing the ways in which individual utterances are tied together. That is, each utterance is only understood in relation to another. Each utterance implicates another. Utterance A "does something" not only to Utterance B, but to C and D as well.

In order to figure out what utterances are doing according to all the parties present in a multiparty conversation, Sacks (1992) proposed a rule sequence system which he asserted that all parties will follow:

> The first thing they'll do is see who [an utterance] is directed to and what it's doing to him [*sic*], and then use what they think it could be doing to anybody else, by virtue of doing, say, a "challenge" to B, to find out what it's doing to them, or anybody else. That would then suggest that the sequence of interpretation could be orderable, and that a sequence of possible things the utterance could be doing, could be orderable. So that to find that it's a "threat" to you, you have to have seen that it was a "challenge" to him. (p. 534)

Initially, I tried to attend to what the individuals in the board meetings, and their individual utterances were doing in each conversation. I believed that this would get me out of the bind into which speech act theory may have put me. Instead of describing each move in a conversation as a certain "kind of speech" (speech act such as question-response), I would be able to describe the type of pattern that was produced by the sequence (such as collaboration).

In order to add further details to the sequence I was describing, I also examined the sequence for evidence of a "spiral" (Carbaugh, 1989). Whereas Sacks' collaborative utterances refer to a turn-taking sequence, Carbaugh's description of a spiral sequence refers more to the topic of a conversation. He stated:

> Spiraling speech moves continuously from a point of discussion, around and about the point, sometimes even changing the central axis of discussion but with each utterance related through an assumption of "more of the same." . . . it . . . provides for a type of relationship management . . . where . . . the relations among persons are highlighted over the accuracy of information exchanged. From this vantage point, solving the problems of discussion is less important than acknowledging "we are in this together." (p. 173)

Both Sacks and Carbaugh seem to be advocating for research that attends to the meaning of what utterances in groups are doing. Additionally, both seem to advance the position that a potential outcome or related effect of producing such sequences may be the demonstration of a certain closeness between the collaborators.

I relied on Sacks' and Carbaugh's assumptions that sequences may be "doing something." Additionally, I attended to the implications that when utterances were strung together they formed some outcome. While keeping the question open as to what type of outcome certain conversational sequences might be leading toward, I carefully documented the ways in which participants strung together bits of utterances in conversations to form a kind of characteristic sequence. This type of documentation provides the details for enactments that may form a culturally based "way of speaking," such as decision making, collaboration, or a spiral.

DECISION-MAKING ANALYSIS

Although the significant symbols of "board" and "staff" guide a cultural interpretation of talk within the board meetings, there are

significant ways of acting within the board meetings that I argue are more characteristic of a Puerto Rican way of speaking (being) than some other ways of speaking. This talk takes place primarily between "board" members (inclusive of the executive director).

Collaborative Utterances

The following instance is characterized by a collaboratively built statement.

339 JG: I remember 7 years ago when I came on the job, I took
340 over here, I accepted the position, one of the things that was
341 emphasized was that no staff person, only upon the request,
342 either of myself, or of the board of directors could be
343 present at the board meeting. Because they were going through
344 a whole transition with the executive director that had left,
345 they had about a year with no directorship there, the board
346 felt that there was a lot of business going on that they didn't
347 want the staff. And I remember that (??) was going to be
348 revision the, um
349 LG: the by-laws
356 JG: the by-laws, um, we're supposed to have done that.
357 These by-laws, I tell you right now, are half revised and half
358 unrevised, and so we need to some point seriously look at
359 that. But, the secretary of the corporation has always been
360 a board member.

Here, LG supplies "the by-laws" when JG says, "um." This effort to collaborate was successful. JG confirms LG's utterance by repeating it. Filling in a missing portion of a statement that someone is fishing for is a recognized way of making a collaborative effort (Sacks, 1992).

The next instance demonstrates how a collaboratively built statement is orchestrated by three persons.

466 HT: so, is there a motion on the table?
467 CR: is there a motion
468 RM: I motion that uh, I make the same motion, that agendas
469 and necessary documents relevant to the next PRCC board
470 meeting be mailed in advance.
471 TM,FR: second

Within this instance, the beginning question by HT (line 466) is met with a continuation of the question by CR (line 467), and completed with "a motion" by RM (line 468). In this way, the three (HT, CR, RM) work together to build a motion that can be "seconded" and voted on (approved) by the others in the group (line 471). This segment illustrates the use of "repeated phrases" that occur in several instances within collaboratively built sentences. In half of all collaboratively built sentences,[2] phrases, such as "is there a motion" (line 466), are repeated by the next speaker who helps to complete the sentence.

There are several ways in which board members build collaborative utterances within the monthly board meetings. These include:

1. Repeating the phrase of the prior utterance.
2. The use of "and" to add on a statement, or an addition to a sentence made without the use of "and."
3. Supplying a word that the speaker was searching for.
4. Turn overlap with any of the above (1, 2, 3).
5. Sentence completion.

These parts may be used in any combination. For instance (in lines 62-64), the use of 3 "um" and 1 repetition of "go into executive session" are combined.[3] For example, the following instance illustrates a collaborative utterances built by filling-in the missing piece:

60 JG: Mr. President, we're missing one person enough to have
61 quorum, but we do have the four members of the executive
62 committee here. I would, I would suggest that um,
63 HT: go into executive session
64 JG: go into executive session, and if we get someone, an
65 additional board member, then we can always revert back
66 to...(May board meeting)

The following is an example of a collaborative utterance built through "and":

[2]From a recorded corpus of 28.
[3]The ways of building collaborative utterances that I have described above do not include question/response because they are too numerous to cite.

134 LG: if he could get it out on time, its a very detailed
135 report
136 JG: and it, and it's widely accepted, I mean, and the city
137 does not even blink when the name C comes out because they
do
138 all of the non-profits. So. (May board meeting)

The next instance takes the "adding on" a bit further. Three board members fill in a word:

166 JG: the soft drinks (louder), when you talk about coca cola,
167 it comes from, you know, a server, versus, a piña colada,
168 which is, which you need a, a, um
169 (blender)
170 JG: a blender, you need to blend the juices, you need to buy
171 ice,
172 CR: coco lopez
173 LG: a refrigerator
174 CR: its much more complicated. It's a special drink. (April
board meeting)

This instance suggests that adding on may become more pronounced when the topic of discussion is culturally relevant to Puerto Ricans. In this example, many people participated in the construction of the recipe for piña colada. Participants were able to draw on their cultural experiences to add the necessary ingredients and demonstrate that the process of establishing a cultural definition of a traditional drink is a process in which the entire group did, and should, participate.

Consider an instance of turn overlap and repetition:

568 JG: I think, I think that the board should be on the spot
569 because you all have the spotlight [RM: I think I know we're
570 on the spot J—continued talk]
571 LG: for myself, I will commit to try to go out and raise
572 money, I'm not going to commit to an amount [HT: that's fine],
573 because I am in the middle of an agenda, and I'm talking to
574 some of these players, the same players .... (April board
meeting)

Within this instance, RM talks during JG's turn (lines 569-570) and HT talks during LG's turn (lines 572-573). Morris (1981), an ethnographer who has studied Puerto Rican culture, corroborates this finding. He stated that, "the 'etiquette' of discourse allows for

more than one person to speak at the same moment, and for conversations to divide into smaller conversations and to rejoin into one" (p. 17).

Finally, sentence completion is another way to build a collaborative utterance:

677 RM: tell us what the Treasurer does
678 JG: the Executive Committee are also in power to sign
checks
679 [RM: okay] you know in case I'm not here, and we need to sign
680 payroll, either one of the four on the executive committee can
681 sign, can sign, so that's one of the responsibilities. The
682 treasurer, basically, on some of the legal papers, for grants,
683 may want the signature of the treasurer, so that goes, but
684 there is no legal binding within the agency
685 LG: because of our status, the attorney general puts out a
686 pamphlet that tells you all your legal responsibilities as a
687 treasurer to any corporation, there are liabilities, but
688 you're covered by the insurance policy, et cetera, but there
689 are personal liabilities, you are completely liable for the
690 finance of the corporation, (inaud) by the attorney general
691 anyway, so uh, you have any... (April board meeting)

In this instance, LG continues the sentence that JG began.

There may be some social significance found in the participants' relationships of those who most frequently engage in this communicative behavior. JG and LG collaborate the most.[4] Although one may account for the high level of collaboration by assuming that they have a good rapport, another way to account for this is that they are thoroughly familiar with the norms of speaking in this way. Generally, within talk during board meetings, collaboration occurs between two persons on 13 occasions, and between three persons on 6 occasions. Because this way of speaking is done so frequently, it is not an unusual or rare occurrence (as Sacks' research suggests). This way of speaking, then, can be considered normative for this speech community.

The conditions under which collaboration occurs vary by speaking situation. I recorded all these instances within the speech event of monthly board meetings. In these instances, collaboration occurs when one board member talks at length and others join the discussion. The most effective way of allowing others to join is to use

[4]Nine times with each other, JG = 19 times, LG = 15 times.

the "um" technique (which JG does frequently). The use of hedges, such as "um," are commonly understood (in some "American" scenes) as pointing to a speaker's uncertainty about what he or she is saying or is about to say. Yet, in the Puerto Rican Cultural Center board meetings, as in the next segment, an "um" (line 174) can serve as a bridge for the participation of others in the process of decision making by linking their next phrase onto the previous utterance. Although, an "um" may also indicate uncertainty, here its function is to welcome confirmation, further elaboration and definition by other participants before any one utterance is accepted meaningful (social significance). (See line 174 and lines 60-65.)

Sequence of Consensus

Next, I illustrate how a spiral sequence unfolds in board meetings. This particular exchange followed a financial report:

174	JG:	um,
175		if I may,
176		Mr. President
	....	
214		I would encourage as many board members
215		as can be present
216		to be there
217	PR:	when is that going to be?
218		next Wednesday
219	HT:	Wednesday
220	PR:	what time?
221	HT:	at nine o'clock
222		in the morning?
223	PR:	where, here?
224	JG:	its, basically its always done at one of our classroom
225		sites
226		which will be the YMCA
227		they'll probably meet here
228		and shoot down to the Y
229	PL:	where should we go?
230	?:	we should be here at nine
	....	
238	PL:	there's no room here, for them to meet? 239 there's no conference room?
240	JG:	no.
	....	
251	?:	so this is next Wednesday

252	LG:	next Wednesday at 9 o'clock
253	AB:	where is it gonna be?
254	JG:	it'll most likely be at the Y
255		as you walk in,
256		downstairs
257	?:	so we're gonna meet here, at nine?
258	PL:	no, we're gonna meet at the Y
259	JG:	no, let's say that we're gonna meet at the Y
260		and if there are any changes,
261		then, I will notify you.
262	HT:	they're supposed to meet us there at nine
263		should we schedule it for a quarter of nine?
264	PR:	we'll all be there by the time they make it there
265	PL:	make it 8:30 and
266		we'll all be there on time
267	AB:	the morning before
268	AB:	it's about an hour right?
269	JG:	yea, its a little longer than an hour
270		but those that can be there for an hour
271		or any part of the interview
272		would be great
273	?	now, a motion to accept
274	?	I second
275	TM:	you mean the...
276	?	you mean the financial report
277	PR:	second
278	HT:	all in favor
279		aye (January 1995 board meeting)

This sequence illustrates a topical "spiral" by participants talking around and around an issue by asking and repeating questions[5] and answers. For example, questions and responses about place and day are repeated. While the place and day of the meeting may have been predetermined, they become negotiable issues as the following analysis illustrates.

Location is the first issue that is addressed. PR asks, "where, here?" (line 223). In lines 224 to 225, JG states that "its always done at one of our classroom sites." The issue of where the interview will take place and where board members should meet is again addressed in line 229, "where would we go?" In line 238, the response about meeting in the classroom is questioned, "there's not room here, for

[5]Questions were asked 20% of the time during this episode (or 11 questions in 54 lines).

them to meet?" This contribution changes the certainty in which JG gives another response. In line 254 he says, "it'll most likely be at the Y." This change is reiterated in lines 257 to 259. Although a plan of action may have been previously made by JG, it does not prevent participants from questioning the decision and possibly suggesting an alternate location, such as the center.

The other issue in this segment is "time." For example, in the statements about time, "should we schedule it for a quarter of nine?" (line 263), participants freely change or moderate the predetermined decisions about when they should arrive as they discuss the subject. As board members talk about the topic, the details about the topic become flexible enough to accommodate alternate options, such as arriving at "8:30" to be there "on time."

From lines 251 to 267, there are 11 different turns. Many more people have joined in the conversation. By participating through questions, comments, and suggestions each person adds his or her voice to the table and participates in a well-orchestrated description and understanding of a particular problem or issue. Each voice is added through repetitious phrases (lines 218-219, 251-252). The definition or constitution of the topic at hand changes, shifts, and becomes altered slightly by participants who engage in this collaborative, spiral process. Through this process meaning is jointly constructed and then celebrated through one or two single voices, whose voices function to state, or reiterate, the agreed resolution of the group.

This sequence ends with the speech act, "taking a vote." The president states the requisite, "all in favor" and everyone agrees with "aye." Even though the "motion" and "vote" were taken for the "financial report," presented prior to this sequence, the placement of this speech act at the end of the "decision-making" sequence about the location and date of the meeting suggests that it is this sequence, rather than the financial report, that concludes with a unanimous vote.

Although the character of the questions was not my main concern, it is interesting to note that prior to making a suggestion or proposal, participants ask for permission, or approval, from the chair or the director. One will notice that individuals in this segment are not brazenly contributing or offering their opinions as autonomous persons, as might be found in some "American" scenes (Carbaugh, 1995). Here, politeness norms are operating. Group consensus is achieved through the proper, respectful deference to authority. For example, "may I make a suggestion?" can be heard during similar collaborative decision-making processes (i.e., lines 175- 176, "if I may Mr. President").

To determine the cultural relevance or use of such forms of speech, in the instances just presented, researchers should ask why hedges, questions, and qualifiers are used, who uses them, and on what occasions. The occasion, in this case, is the monthly board meetings. When board members use hedges, questions, and qualifiers during board meetings what is being culturally accomplished is a sense of community where values, such as politeness and respect, are affirmed. Evident in this enactment is the value of the group over the individual. By focusing on how these ways of speaking (hedges, questions, qualifiers, repetition, etc.) function, for particular people in particular situations, we come to understand the functions of, and meaning for, their uses in speech.

Conversations during board meetings, like the one just presented, are characterized by a fluidity.[6] The sequence of one person speaking at a time does not hold true for this scene. As indicated in the aforementioned sequence, after one person begins speaking, others can, and do, respond and join the conversation. Additional voices are added until finally, everyone is using his or her statements to come to a group resolution (consensus). Other properties of this decision-making sequence include the use of rising intonation.

This "way of speaking" has implications for responsibility and blame. For example, by layering statements one on the other, no one person becomes responsible or accountable for an idea or decision, but the group gets credit or blame jointly.

The spiral form is the sequence used by board members of the center when making decisions. Morris' (1981) also found a spiral form sequence in his research. He noted that, "especially in explaining, there is a 'round about' way of talking: a constant rephrasing which turns out 'not to be the same thing, so they have to keep on explaining,' which makes for a kind of 'gush,' going back and forth and round and round . . ." (p. 17). Although the speech act described here is "decision making," this sequence also functions to maintaining cohesive relationships. A norm for decision making can be stated as follows:

> To discuss ideas in a group, do not take credit for those ideas (e.g., "it is my opinion that,"), the group, as a whole, makes decisions.

[6]This fluidity is a fluid sense of "time." Time has been described as a device for rhetorical organization (Hoffman, 1992). Hoffman described the use of verb tense to signal a sense of past, present, or future within a rhetorical test.

"CONSENSUS" AS AN END OF DECISION MAKING

The following illustrates the steps of the decision making that is accomplished in this episode:

1. Collaborative utterances are present.
2. A spiraling sequence is followed.
3. Questions, hedges, and qualifiers are used.

The ends-as-outcomes (Hymes, 1972) for which this form is enacted include the following:

1. To highlight the importance of group relationships.
2. To achieve consensus in decision making.

This way of speaking, with these ends-as-outcomes, are not the ends-in-view of the decision-making act. Rather, the ends-in-view (or, what participants believe they are doing) may be to clarify issues, gain additional information, and make a decision. Carbaugh (1990) described how at the same time that there may be "dissensus" on a topic, the talk may serve the function of creating consensus. This function is governed by "consensus rules that enable the performance" (p. 134). In his research, Carbaugh found that this is a way that consensus can be achieved in the enactment, although it may not be achieved on a topical level. However, as I have demonstrated in many cases within board meetings, consensus occurs at both levels: on the topical level as well as through a coordinated performance. Although I have described the way that consensus can be, and has been, achieved in board meetings, consensus has also been articulated as a goal. During the May board meeting, PL was heard to say,

528 if we can reach consensus on that, though, that that will be number one, that we will
529 make every effort to do that

Although there is evidence for consensus when one analyzes speech and decision making, there is also evidence that the goal of consensus is a value that can be explicitly stated by those engaged in such a process.

CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON

To illustrate different ways that consensus is built and the values associated with this way of speaking, I offer two similar cross-cultural examples. The first is an example from Liberman (1990) who described a type of speech that occurs in the talk of Aboriginal persons from Australia who maintain consensus in public discussions. He stated, "when [Aboriginal persons] have secured any substantial conclusion it is already a conclusion that is unanimous" (p. 177). This way of reaching a unanimous conclusion is achieved in an enactment in which, "all speak with one voice" (p. 177). The second example, is the speech act of the Antiguans, called "making noise." Their speaking style, which also builds consensus, is characterized by many voices overlapping, rather than having one person speak per turn with silence in between. The Aboriginal and Antiguan "way of speaking" and "style" are similar to the decision-making way of speaking within the center's board meetings

In contrast, the criticism that "Anglos" make of the Aboriginal Australians is similar to the tension found in the talk at the Puerto Rican Cultural Center between "American" norms and Puerto Rican practices. "Anglos" criticize Aboriginal Australian discourse as "excessively repetitive" and as occupying "more time than is necessary for making adequate decisions" (Liberman, 1990, p. 178). This criticism stems from valuing talk that is "not repetitive" and that privileges decisions that are made quickly and efficiently in a logical, linear sequence.[7]

In addition, Liberman stated that the school system in Australia serves to "individualize" the Aboriginal children, helping them to "live as individuals, and as persons" (p. 182). This "Anglo" value of individualism, and concomitant way of speaking that constructs this value, is predicated on an "American" norm that privileges understanding people as "separate and autonomous." What is valued is an individual's "opinions." These opinions are offered regardless of how they may differ from the group's opinions. This "American" way of speaking highlights, "the individual voice." As Carbaugh (1990) pointed out, "what is hidden is the collective sayings. So conceived, proper communication enables everyone to speak individually, while disallowing one person's, or 'the majority's,' opinion to dominate others" (p. 131).

[7]By recognizing the values that are embedded in one's criticism, we can hypothesize that perhaps what "Anglos" take time for might be considered too much time, or not valued by Puerto Ricans.

CONCLUSION

In order to understand how this decision-making way of speaking is meaningful for the participants it is important to understand the role of community for the Center. By noting the way that the term "community" was used within conversations and printed material, I came to understand that "our community" is a binding symbol that helps to create and foster a sense of group cohesiveness (Carbaugh, Gibson, & Milburn, 1997). Given that participants frequently and prominently use the term "our community," indicates the significance not only of the term itself, but the value of enacting this symbol for this Puerto Rican community.

Through cultural communication, such as is described here, people construct communities. Carbaugh (1994) described this as the process of "linking individuals into communities of shared identity" (p. 24). Various communicative forms enact and enable this function. One such form is collaborative decision making, which not only creates consensus among participants, but also works to link members to one another in a communal way, by forging a cooperative sense of what it means to be a member of the Puerto Rican Cultural Center.

Ethnography of communication relies on participant observation. By working with the people in which one is interested, ethnographers are able to privilege participants' meanings as they come to understand how, through everyday practices, key symbols, and ways of speaking (being, acting) are made sensible. By privileging and participating in the constitutive process of communication and community, we are able to demonstrate and affirm the value of constructing community.

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The Divisive Discourse of the Beartooth Alliance: A Community of Strangers

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To the extent the communities we construct evolve within a larger natural environment, and insofar as the very concept of the *environment* prompts all manner of political posturing, those interested in the link between communication and community should welcome an invigorated discussion of the bases of modern environmental discourse. However, although the span of research concerning the role of communication in reference to the environment has grown steadily in recent years (e.g., Bennett & Choupalka, 1993; Cantrill & Oravec, 1996; Herndle & Brown, 1996; Killingsworth & Palmer, 1995; Lange, 1990; Peterson, 1988; Short, 1991), such analyses have generally not focused on how environmentalists, particularly those in grassroots organizations, define themselves in relation to one another, the communities in which they live, or their vision for the future. And such discourse may hold important clues as to the manner in which dominant cultural values may influence community viability.