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Self-Sufficiency, Personal Empowerment, and Community Revitalization: The Impact of a Leadership Program on American Indians in the Southwest

JEANETTE HASSIN AND ROBERT S. YOUNG

INTRODUCTION

Native Americans have been subjected to colonial domination by European nations for five centuries, resulting in a radical destabilization of their socio-cultural and economic systems, a general deterioration of health, and rapid depopulation.^{1,2,3,4} The resulting effects of cultural differences and conflicts, learned dependency, poverty, and feelings of powerlessness and low self-regard have impacted dramatically the health and quality of Native life. American Indians in the United States today are facing major health and social problems such as diabetes, substance abuse, poor nutrition, obesity, vehicular accidents, and suicides. Alcohol abuse, for example, is implicated in four of the ten leading causes of death among Native Americans.⁵ Entire communities are crippled by health problems, which ultimately feed into a cycle of despair, cultural dislocation, and lack of self-sufficiency.

This article explores how participants in a self-empowerment program have understood and translated the training into self-sufficiency both at the personal and community levels. In analyzing this process we will listen to the participants' voices, the words and the meanings they give to what they have learned from the program, and what enabled them to do something for themselves and others.

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THE PROGRAM'S AIM

The self-empowerment leadership focus (S.E.L.F.) and community revitalization program discussed in this article is designed to respond directly to core issues in Indian communities by empowering Native Americans to identify, develop, and implement solutions to community problems.

This model program, offered in two one-week workshops given over a three-week period, consists of three interactive components: (1) a self-empowerment leadership training program; (2) interrelated and interactive collateral programs addressing Native American community health and social problems; and (3) intensive instruction in developing community projects. The cornerstone of this leadership-training project is a self-empowerment program emphasizing cognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes directed toward an enhanced quality of life.⁶ During the process, the individual becomes aware that there are two minds, or ways of perceiving, which are described as the *conditional mind* and the *unconditional mind*.⁶ *Conditional mind* is externally dependent; that is, the individual with *conditional mind* projects blame, anger, and guilt onto others in interactions, relationships, life situations, sickness, and so forth. In choosing the *unconditional mind*, the individual learns to accept one's self as both observer and decision-maker, accepting responsibility for how one perceives and interacts with others. Exercising this process also enables the individual to exercise leadership skills and to interact with others in a more constructive manner, empowering others to strive to accomplish their goals.

The program also incorporates a number of interrelated collateral programs, including community project development in the areas of health and social issues. All participants in the program are required to develop a community-based project as part of their involvement. Participants define the scope of the project, the goals and the objectives, the resources they have available, the resources they need, and the obstacles that must be overcome in order to accomplish the program. A four-part structure similar to that found in most grant applications—*Abstract*, *Specific Aims*, *Needs Statement*, and *Methodology*—is used so that the participants can transfer what they have written into a grant proposal.

All workshop activities include hands-on experiences. A meta-cognitive approach is used in which participants are taught how writing can be used as a tool to help them clarify their ideas as they develop practical solutions to the problems their respective projects seek to address.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The empowerment program in this study is designed to provide the individual with a process for dealing with life's challenges, both personally (in terms of health and relationships) and communally (attempting to accomplish a community project). From this perspective, self-empowerment is a continuous process whose operationalized outcome is self-sufficiency in the personal and social spheres.

Empowerment traditionally is defined in an individual context and/or as part of a group dynamic.^{7,9} Some include in their definition the importance of motivation in expressing feelings, ideas, and self-worth.⁹ Self-empowerment, as defined by the theoretical perspective offered in our program, differs from the traditional focus on external success and power. It provides a new way of understanding self and bringing a person towards a greater awareness of her or his own internal strength. Here, too, the role of motivation is significant. Participants who are most successful in all aspects of the program also are those who come strongly motivated and committed to change. The program provides an empowerment process and related skills to help participants sublimate their motivation into achieving self-sufficiency.

Self-sufficiency, a term often connoting economic independence at the individual and community level and/or resilience of character, rarely has been examined as a measure of personal empowerment and how that empowerment is extended to others for their personal and communal health and well-being. In examining the full impact of a person experiencing ownership of her or his life events, it is possible to see self-sufficiency evident in behavioral change at the individual and communal level. At the personal level, self-sufficiency can be seen in the reduction of causal factors that lead to destructive behaviors in relationships and in how individuals take claim of their own experiences of events. In terms of the individual, self-sufficiency is the consequence or action of the empowerment process measured in terms of personal health, attitudes, changes in personal relationships, and empowerment of others. On the communal level, it can be seen in the development and execution of community-centered programs designed for the community's health and survival. As such it also is evident in their perceived sense of self-efficacy in successfully motivating others to participate in the project and, in some situations, obtaining formal tribal support to accomplish their goals.

The definition of self-sufficiency still is constrained because it does not allow for the changes in thought processes that precede the behavioral changes and outcomes. Therefore, to analyze how participants see themselves and the impact of their efforts on others, we must expand our view of self-sufficiency to encompass behavioral outcomes and the perseverance necessary to maintain and cultivate viable options for self-improvement and non-dependence.

To examine how individuals used the instruction they received in the self-empowerment and project development training, we are taking a two-tiered approach to our analysis, examining: (1) how the participants expressed their changed perception of their health, activities, obstacles, futures, and skills; and (2) how effective they were in using the training for the benefit of others and their community.¹¹

Program Participants

From 1995 to 1997, three generations of participants completed the self-empowerment program. All participants: (1) were American Indians from the Southwest; (2) were twenty-one years or older; (3) were able to articulate a community problem they would like to address; (4) had basic reading and

writing skills; (5) possessed a strong desire to participate in the program; and (6) if employed, had employer permission to attend the entire workshop. Forty-four participants, or 79 percent of the original number, completed the two-week workshop. Twelve individuals did not return for the second week because of job and personal obligations.

Tools of Analysis

Forty-two of the forty-four participants who successfully completed the project were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured format. Several months later, semi-structured telephone interviews were held with twenty-seven of the participants (including one of the two who originally were not interviewed). Of the remaining seventeen who were not interviewed a second time, seven did not attend any follow-up project workshops or were no longer involved in doing their projects. Eight participants moved and left no forwarding address or were not reachable. All but four interviews were tape-recorded.

A discourse analysis of the narratives was used in order to grasp the nuances of individuals' understanding of the program and how they expressed their respective self-sufficiency. Because people convey their ideas broadly through language, this paper will analyze how the program participants expressed their thoughts. The paper will look at issues ranging from embedded, conflicted ideas to metaphorical messages used by the person delivering his or her thoughts and ideas.

Expressing and Realizing Personal Self-Sufficiency

At the personal level self-sufficiency included several aspects by which participants could choose to make changes in key areas of their lives. They reexamined their body, mind, and spiritual health and how they were going to take action and move to implement the knowledge they obtained in the training. Self-sufficiency was evident in the person's realization and ability to make choices and how he or she subsequently transferred empowerment—ability and awareness—to others.

HEALTH: A MEASURE OF PERSONAL HARMONY AND EMPOWERMENT

Health is tied inextricably to self-sufficiency, regardless of whether the person looks at health as the measure of physical prowess or as the ability to work a full day. But health and self-sufficiency are tied at an even more basic level. To be healthy, for most American Indians, is to have a harmonious balance of body, mind, and spirit. It is a sense of feeling and being complete within themselves, their family, and their community:¹⁰

Healthy? Well before I would have said healthy is just physical; if you're not sick, if you don't have any illnesses I would have considered that healthy. Now to me health is mind, body, and spirit.... I felt good

about myself when I came, but I feel even better now. I mean I feel good because I tried to learn.

... I want my children to have better, or how would I say I want my kids to be healthy, to have better opportunities than, how would I say, go above me... [To achieve this] I have to take care of myself. That would enable me to reach my goals and take care of the other things.

The young man who expressed these comments sees improved health as a metaphor for personal renewal and growth, a marker of personal well-being (“I feel good because I tried to learn...”), and the vehicle for the transference of that well-being to others, his children. His multiple references to health, the need to take care of himself, and the beneficial feeling of having tried to learn provide him with the groundwork for developing a new, proactive notion of health.

The Body: A Change in Perspective, a Change in Importance

The body is probably the most frequently used framework by which health is discussed and often is used as a measure of the presence or absence of robustness and the potentiality to thrive. The following narrative excerpts reflect not only this physical perspective of the body, but also how individuals have reinterpreted their well-being through a changing perception of what health entails. All participants related a change of perception and a change of focus as they dealt with their new understanding of themselves and of the role of the body and mind in health.

One man contrasted his pre-program behaviors and thoughts with his present feelings and actions. His comments, rich in the description of his heightened interaction with his family, leads him first to reflect and then to realize the choices of which he is capable:

My family said it made a difference. They saw. I felt I had more energy. Some of the things that would get me down, I used to worry about and fret about. I would just apply these things to it; it's my choice.

... Some of the other little things, I used to get peeved, now I just let it slide.... I feel like I have more energy. Before I was a semi-couch potato. Now I go for walks.

[Now] my daughter looks at me funny when I say let's go toss a Frisbee or go for a walk. My son's pretty much, if I'm home watching television; he always wants to crawl all over me. I always say, “wait, a little later.” Now, I'm grabbing and throwing him around.... I felt I had more energy. I wanted to do things.

Another man, this one with a major disability needed no time to reflect on his health as he quickly characterizes it as very bad. Yet, when asked to define health, he almost ignores the question, continuing to focus instead on his own health, reducing the importance of its physical component and in so doing giving a more defining role to his thoughts and perceptions:

... I'm healthy in thoughts, my way of thinking, but not in body wise I guess. I still have a healthy mind, a strong mind; I can't say too much for my body, but it's still there.

... When I feel healthy, I'm in a good mood, I feel energized, and I bake and I make people happy.... There's times when, especially like during this time, when I get home I'll probably do a lot of baking.

A person who had suffered a seriously disabling accident several years ago focuses on the mind and its role in the process of healing. She sees her new awareness and knowledge of herself leading to a new perception of her own health:

I think that's something I'm learning is that as long as you can understand what you're dealing with, then you're able to heal yourself. That word keeps coming up, heal yourself, and that's very true because that's what it comes down to is that if you're mentally intact as far as what your needs are and what you can and what you can't do, then you're healthy. If you're mentally healthy then you're physically healthy too, even though if you have a disability.

None of the individuals in the three examples changed their actual physical abilities. What they did observe as changed is their ability to make choices, to let little things slide, "to understand what you're dealing with," and to change inaction ("semi-couch potato") to action ("Now I go for walks"). The participants report these behavioral changes as observable. When the second person decides to alter his focus from his physical disability to his mental strength, he, like the first person, reports being energized. The use of this metaphor to describe a state of well-being was the basis not only of their mood change, but also of their altered perception of themselves as people who could make choices.

The Mind: Changes in Perception and a Movement from Conflict to Peace

Whereas some people addressed (or metaphorically expressed) their change in thinking through altered physical activity, others focused on this cognitive change as it was manifested in an observable reduction of such behaviors, emotions, and thinking as blame, anger, and guilt. They talked about how they were able to use the method given to think about their lives differently. In using the learning process provided by the self-empowerment training, participants saw a change in focus from blaming others and expressing anger for personal misfortune to an inward focus on healing and peace. They were able to see their own actions through a new perspective. From that perspective, they were able to take responsibility for their experiences. For one man, new perceptual awareness caused him to reflect on his past actions, his guilt over those actions, and finally how his current healing had to come from within:

That self-healing is just something that I never knew before, and when [the instructor] talked about who makes you angry and all that, it's true what he said cause only you, yourself, can make yourself angry.

This person goes on to describe how he used to blame events and people for his own behaviors. He talks about how, in the course of a day's work, he would have to stop at multiple villages. Sometimes things would come up and he would be late for his first stop and subsequently was late for all the others. The people expecting him at a particular time would get angry because he was late, and because they were elders he felt he could not answer back and explain the situation. Instead, he kept the problem to himself. Finally, after a day full of this kind of frustration, he would react: "When I get to the third reservation, all it takes is for someone to call me an ugly dog or something and I'll pounce that guy ... [which] gave me the opportunity to take my anger out." In recounting this story, he shows his awareness of his actions in the past and how his thinking, rather than the behaviors of others, caused him to lose his peace. Several months later, he articulates the core elements of what he feels he must do to be empowered and become self-sufficient:

I found myself coming back home thinking about it, and I realized what it was all about. It finally dawned on me. Heal yourself. This self-empowerment stuff is working. Instead of getting upset about others not doing things, I feel like I can do it myself, now.

This expression of a personal, internalized change in thinking was expressed as a calming experience and a rejection of his normal response, which was to become upset. One young man discussed how the process of releasing some old perceptions and defensive attitudes resulted in both a feeling of "lightness" and order:

I was always on the defensive side of things.... I never gave anybody a chance to know who I am, to see who I was. When I got home, I felt a lot lighter. I enjoyed my family more, went back to work, everybody kind of looked at me and said "you look relaxed."... I guess like the body metabolizes food nutrients that supply different areas of the body.... It's kind of like how you pull out old files. I was doing that in my head. All these things that happened in my life that I think are negative are so positive. I never looked at those. I kind of shoved them back there where nobody else will see them except me. I think that's what hurt my relationship before, that I never shared any of this stuff. I know better. To let a person know where I come from and be up front. I can put my defense down but not all the way. Be in control of my own feelings. I find out now that I'm the only one who can control it. Nobody else can, no matter how hard they try. I know I have the upper hand on my own attitudes, anger.

Later in the interview he continues to explore this new process, contrasting his old way of handling pain with his new way:

I was going to project the pain elsewhere. That was always my weakness was my anger. No matter if I'm happy one second with you laughing, then snap I'll be mad because you said one word I didn't like that

was used a long time ago. But you don't know, because you can't read my mind. All these mental games that we play with ourselves has become a wide-open book to me inside.... Putting them in their categories. Re-shelving the books that were put away or the files, putting them in order where they should be and being at peace about it.

He details the steps he took in confronting his pain and releasing it as he systematically goes through the "old files" (grudges). By releasing the past, the memories at the core of his anger, he becomes less weighted down by them, "a lot lighter." In revisiting this theme at a later point in the interview, he realized that his pain made his interactions with others a guessing game, one that no one wins. Finally, in this second examination of those past hurts, still using the metaphors of categorization and ordering, he no longer discussed these difficult times in terms of their control over him but instead in terms of his control over them. And in the process of doing this, he re-shelved and released them from the present and achieved a state of "being at peace about it."

Spirituality: Expressions of Healing and Oneness

It was not uncommon for participants to compare what they were learning about empowerment and its impact on their health to what they traditionally had been taught by their elders and healers. Since the teacher and developer of the self-empowerment program was non-Indian, some participants greeted him initially with skepticism. Yet it became clear through comments made during the workshop and in subsequent interviews that the self-empowerment instruction appeared to resonate with the traditional teachings of many of the individuals. For example, "I've heard it before at home"; "it's part of our tradition, our religion, our upbringing," and was seen as a "reminder" or as being in agreement with the person's spirituality and faith:

... You have to step out there and believe. You really have to go on your faith and your belief. And the non-Indian world they really don't get into it. I think "P" is the only one I've ever heard, non-Indian, speak about stepping out there just on faith and belief alone. And yet, that's what it's all about.

One person describes the self-empowerment process as another way, a third way (after his biblical and Alcoholics Anonymous teachings) to see and practice healing.

A couple of individuals took what they received in the training to the level of healing, balance, and spiritual oneness. They talk about how the process helped them reaffirm the validity and strength of their culture's traditional teachings and beliefs, while providing a practical day-to-day tool for implementing those beliefs. While one person frames his discussion around the interrelated nature of health, the other relates how the training reinforces her beliefs and provides the necessary focus to rebalance her life:

Well, when I really think about it, this is something that the Indians have been practicing all their lives.... For instance, this medicine man

he only works with snakebites. He walked off, he got bitten by a snake so he was mad and said, "go ahead bite the other foot," and the snake just wandered off. And he turned around and walked back and by the time he got home he was healed because he was singing songs and healing songs. That's something like what these guys are presenting, but it's an old thing. I think, but I'm glad that they do realize that it works.

It just reinforced my beliefs.... I know that it works but I never knew the other side. When I say the other side I mean white people would understand it and teach it back to us. I mean I believe it and everything. It's just that nobody sat down and presented it in this fashion, so yeah, it really reinforced my beliefs.

I was trying to explain it to my son and he goes, oh yeah, I know what you're talking about, and he started explaining to me about it.... they're already teaching him about blaming people. If you do something and try to blame people, you know it's you projecting your own thoughts.

This person addresses her healing through three levels of interaction: (1) traditional healing; (2) her son's awareness of healing; and (3) her own awareness of her actions and subsequent healing. The segment illustrates how she brings her awareness to several levels, first as it pertains to herself, then as it pertains to her conceptions about others, and finally how she needs to face issues and long-held views before she can heal completely. With each example—the medicine man and snake story; her son's ability to explain what she was talking about; and her own reiteration and awareness of areas she needs to heal in herself—she explores and explains how her awareness of the similarity of messages between her traditional way and this new approach to thinking is bringing her to an acceptance of what her own behavior was doing to her and her need to rid herself of that behavior and thinking in order to heal.

The second person is, as noted earlier, focused less on healing and more on the interconnected, harmonious aspect of health:

To me to be healthy is healthy physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually, they all connect.... So for me to be healthy all these has to be like in harmony with one another.... It's like ... to be in harmony, to have a balance of all these, to be healthy.

Yet when asked how he sees his own health, there is hesitation, reflection, and reassessment of himself and his situation:

(pause) Not so good, everything's not in balance, and I have stepped away from my spirituality and now I've always been aware of it but have never done anything about it, I guess how to deal with it. Now going through this program has given me some ideas, some direction. I guess that's why I say it's exciting because the tools that I have now I can go out and experience some of the tools that has been given to me, so to get healthy.

In analyzing his present situation he reflects on what is ideal—balance and harmony—and what he actually sees: “everything not in balance” because of the absence of spirituality. Unlike before, he now feels motivated to change his situation. He examines what he received from the program—cognitive “tools,” “ideas,” and “direction”—and the impact these perceptions can have on his health.

All of the above individuals reflect on different aspects of their health, and they all see these changes emanating from their own thinking. And they frequently present this perceived change in health in the context of personal action and new direction.

ACTION AND DIRECTION

Perseverance is a key component to the implementation of knowledge and the use of cognitive processes such as self-empowerment training. It can be seen in the interest, motivation, and commitment of the person or of the community. Perseverance provides the impetus and the sustaining force for successful change to occur.

Realization of Choices

Choice is one of the key teachings of the self-empowerment process. Choice is defined as the ability to understand that reactive thinking, such as anger, blame, and guilt, comes not from external causes but from a way of thinking and that decisions made through that thinking result in a loss of personal power. To retake that power, or more precisely, to release oneself from external dependency, a person must make the conscious decision to think creatively about problems and situations and to approach these events with peace instead of conflict. For many participants in this program, the tools provided a new way of thinking about old hurts, present difficulties, and future plans. The recognition was voiced through self-examination of options for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Choice, viewed at the personal level, is the realization that everyone causes his or her own feelings: “[It] is how we go within ourselves and learn why we behave the way we behave. And that we choose our feelings; we even choose our own thoughts. Nobody causes them.” Reflecting on this notion of choice, one young man concretizes this view by describing a potentially contentious situation that occurred during the workshop:

A lot of people brought up a lot of things about the white man. Everybody expressed hatred. I thought, “my gosh, this is a part of our whole upbringing. No wonder we can’t function in this type of world and expect to survive.” A lot of these people forget what they really are; they forget what they really have in their minds and in their hearts. I was upset with “P” when he said, “don’t think you’re a unique person just because you’re Indian.” I wanted to grab that pitcher of water and dump it on him personal. I said, “wait a minute, he would-

n't have done that just to piss us off. There was something in there. What does he mean?"

... I thought this guy has a lot of guts to say that to me. Right off the bat. But then thinking like that, and then thinking about what he said: "Wake up, you're Indian, you'll always be Indian no matter what. You just got to learn how to survive and be at peace with yourself, have oneness in yourself and go on. You have to go on...." People haven't thought about it. They want to carry that monkey on their back instead of taking the monkey and looking at the monkey and finding what's different about the monkey among all the other ones that they have on their back.

In the above excerpt, the person walks through his reactions and levels of understanding as he moves through the choice-making process about (1) the message being given; (2) how to incorporate it personally; and (3) how the awareness he has discovered would be helpful to others. The narrative illustrates the compelling force of the person's thinking as he uncovers his levels of realization about himself and his choices. He discovers that these choices, even the choice to listen in peace, can be liberating from the addiction to certain concepts and behaviors. He expresses this change as he moves from his own feelings of anger to an understanding and awareness of self to a realization of the need for others to face and rid themselves of their own weighty "monkeys."

Self-sufficiency as choice also was expressed in how a person decides to interact with others. A young woman uses her new perception of personal power in an exchange with the manager of a hotel parking garage. Prior to her encounter with the manager, a parking attendant told her she could park on the ground level of the garage for the duration of her hotel stay because she had a pick-up truck. Upon returning the following day, she proceeded to park her truck on that level. Before she could leave her vehicle, the manager approached her and informed her she could not park there. After explaining to him what she had been told the previous day, he reiterated that this action was unacceptable: "... I am the manager, I want you to take the car to the third or fourth level." Rather than get upset she started to laugh as she drove up the ramp to park:

... The guy was so adamant at the fact that I couldn't park there and he didn't care who told me I could park there. So I said, "do I want peace or do I want conflict?" And I'm like driving away, and I thought, this was easy!... But yeah, there were other instances that I just think of the peace or conflict and how it comes in all forms, and how do I want to deal with it? I've also recognized that because of what I choose to say, I choose not to have conflict. I just say, okay, what's done is done, whatever you think you need to do, that's the outside portion, the other people.

Using challenges to her "peace" as a means of expressing her own awareness, sense of power, and autonomy, she separates herself and her thinking from the other person's agitation. She also takes note of her choices and that each situation must be consciously handled separately each time.

Both persons translate the knowledge they obtained into practice, noting what the usual alternatives to peace would be for them.

Transfer of Empowerment to Others

The process of transferring one's own sense of empowerment to others by sharing the information directly or by letting them take responsibility for their own experiences was evident from many of the narratives. Participants used and extended the self-empowerment process to others through sharing, modeling, and enabling others to realize the consequences of their own experiences. They approached this transfer process with varying degrees of commitment: some out of a desire to share it, and some out of a need to release themselves from a codependent relationship. Still, there were some who were ambivalent about their own understanding of the process, yet maintained a belief in the worthiness of the program. They approached sharing with trepidation about their ability to convey it to others.

In addition, because of its direct and immediate applicability, it was seen as a practical tool, accessible at any point in time for self-awareness and for interacting with others. How people voiced their awareness is reflected in the experiences they discussed and how they thought this understanding impacted those onto whom they were transferring. Awareness is shown in each person's self-sufficiency as she or he empowered others. The following narrative segments illustrate how three different people understood, manifested, and transferred empowerment onto others. In so doing, they illustrate their own self-sufficiency as they release themselves from their reliance on external dependencies—anger and hostility for unsatisfied wants, reactive responses, or codependent relationships—and enable others to experience self-sufficiency.

In the following situation a man recounts his confrontation with a life-long hostility he had for another person and how he resolves it. He starts by discussing how most people he knows may see or experience a bad situation yet never stop to think about what really occurred. He then relates his own process of rethinking events:

This woman she said, "Hey, how you doing?" And this is one lady I never did like because she took me out of my home and put me in a foster home. I said, "I'm doing fine, how are you doing?" And she was shot to hell. It was the first time you said something, in her mind I knew she was thinking that. I said, "I forgive you, you were doing your job." She just started crying. I've learnt to open a lot of doors. Instead of putting Band-Aids over them, let the wound open and dry itself out. Let the tears take over. Or let it bleed till it stops bleeding. It's an exhilarating experience, top of the cake with a cherry.

His act of forgiveness not only healed his wounds but also healed those of the other person. By letting the hurt out, he is able to let it "dry itself out." It was a process that was sweet, perfect, and rewarding: "top of the cake with a cherry."

Discovering patience became the focal point for a participant who talked about his reaction to learning that his oldest daughter had dented his new truck.

His analysis of the situation emphasizes the importance of his own conscious awareness as he charts his reaction to receiving the news, his handling of the situation, and his observation of his daughter's response to his new reaction:

So I guess she made a sharp turn ... and she dented the side of the truck. ... They came in and my youngest daughter was saying, "L's in trouble, L's in trouble." ... Then my oldest daughter came down and she just laid down on the bed on her stomach, and she just laid down there. Because I guess before, I would get mad at every little thing. And then I asked them what happened, and she told me, then I didn't say anything, I just like smiled I just accepted it right there, even though it was a new truck.

... I didn't say anything, I just accepted it, then I just told them that it was an accident. And I noticed right away that she changed her ... the way she was feeling before, like she was scared or she was like, how I would react. Then she right away, she just got happy.

... And then we just kind of like compared [it with another dented truck] and it was really nothing, because it was just a small dent. Compared to what she would have went through if I didn't accept her, I had done something else. It was good.

In this situation, the man chose to look at the event and not just react—a departure from his normal response to similar situations. By not reacting in his typical manner ("I guess before, I would get mad at every little thing"), he chose to look at the accident as though he had the ability to make a choice and his choice was peaceful acceptance. Removing that element of anger and reciprocal fear from his relationship with his daughter liberates him. In the end, they both are able to look at the dent on the truck without condemnation, anger, guilt, or fear—a totally different perspective than before.

Sometimes people were able to see how becoming self-empowered actually encouraged others to be responsible for themselves. One participant recounted how he often found himself dominating a staff meeting. When he realized he was doing this, he decided to "shut up and let the staff take over." He "was amazed at what they came up with." In a different kind of situation, a woman whose son was going to trial for a DUI charge used the self-empowerment process to help her realize that not letting her son experience the repercussions of his own actions was preventing both of them from self-sufficiency. Through her discourse, she reveals a thinking process in which she is trying to come to terms with her conflict, fear, and guilt about her family, herself, and her son. Ultimately, she faced the situation and came to a resolution:

And it's real interesting [the self-empowerment process], I'm real interested in it. It's of interest to me. I know it will help in my ... for myself, with my family, that I'm really looking at it, with my family first. I'm skeptical of my family, though [laughter].... How come I feel that way? I don't know, maybe I'm just afraid that they would turn against me or something, or I don't know.

I will have to work myself with more self-empowerment in really coming out and giving it to them. I know I have it, but I think it's just doing it, and not feeling that guilt and that. I think I've already started with my son.

He's gotten in trouble with the law and drinking. I know he used to go to court, and he expected me to pay his fines and stuff, but I told him I wasn't going to pay for them. I said, you're old enough to go out and do what you have to do, and I'm not going to help you.

... He has to spend a day in jail, and he owes \$395. So I think he felt that I was going to pay, help him pay for it, and I told him I wasn't. It hurt me to say that to him, but I knew that was the only way that he would see his mistakes and like that.... I take him to the court and I'll sit in there and listen, but I won't help for any of the conditions he has to do.... I made that decision, made that choice to go ahead and do it.

She begins by examining herself and her fears: "I'm just afraid that they would turn against me or something...." Then she proceeds to accept her fear, "I will have to work myself with more self-empowerment." She then begins to outline what her son had done and what she felt she had to do in order to empower him to experience events differently than he was used to (not to expect his mother always to bail him out of trouble, for example). As she examined the worthiness of having her son become more self-sufficient, she also helps herself step away from guilt and fear of rejection. She becomes her own decision maker ("So I think I have a step.... I made that decision, made that choice to go ahead and do it") and begins to see herself released from the codependent relationship she was in. When she was re-interviewed two years later, she noted that the tools she acquired from the program gave her courage and a greater understanding of herself. While not everyone experienced such long-term principle retention, 62 percent of those re-interviewed stated they still were using what they had learned.

The preceding narratives indicate that many of the participants attributed their behavioral changes to the program's success. Each person noted a change in at least one behavior: anger, impatience, or guilt. As a result of their decisions and choices, they saw themselves capable of de-coupling another person from his or her dependency and removing themselves from guilt or past troubles. The end results were described as contentment, calm, satisfaction, and increased productivity.

While these examples support the notion that an individual's self-sufficiency can enable another to become self-sufficient, it is still unclear whether that empowerment can be translated into self-sufficiency at the community level. Such an achievement would require a greater effort and commitment from the individual.

TRANFERRING A PERSONAL VISION TO THE COMMUNITY

The goal of transferring personal strengths to a larger community forum can be a daunting task—one that not everyone in the program felt ready to pursue. Although the ideal goal was to produce self-sustaining community programs, the real, meta-goal was to see progress in the transfer of the self-empowerment process into this next level of self-sufficiency. Of the forty-four participants who completed the self-empowerment leadership program, more than half of the participants (twenty-five) have formulated a clear project

plan; of that number, fifteen have completed at least preliminary work on developing their projects either by assessing support or through preliminary meetings of interested community members. Seven of the fifteen also have performed necessary needs assessments and are holding regular community meetings in their project areas. These individuals are also in the process of procuring funding or obtaining final tribal approval to move their projects forward. Six additional participants have successfully instituted (or completed) their projects. Although not all have realized their final goals, all have moved themselves and their communities towards greater self-sufficiency within their chosen areas. The following discussion will look at how participants pursued their goal as measured by their ability to transfer their increased personal self-sufficiency to initiate, develop, and accomplish their community project.

Creativity

A key aspect of the self-empowerment leadership program is to teach participants the skills necessary to reduce reactive conditioned thinking that can inhibit their ability to overcome personal and community obstacles. Creativity is expressed in their use of knowledge, awareness of community needs, development of strategies, and application abilities. It is this effort, in combination with the skills obtained in the project development and grants-writing workshops, that show how far the participants were able to take their skills and knowledge towards community level self-sufficiency.

TRANSFORMING INDIVIDUAL SELF-SUFFICIENCY INTO COMMUNITY CHANGE

Developing skills to design projects and to write grants were integral components of the leadership program. Although most participants sought these skills and were motivated to obtain this knowledge, not everyone shared that interest. For some, the level of realization remained at the personal level. For a variety of reasons, they did not bring it beyond that stage to the community. These individuals are not included in the following analysis.

Levels of Realization

The following discussion will focus on the efforts of twenty-one program participants who represent seventeen different programs. These participants have taken their goals and objectives for their programs and either have realized them or made significant steps towards attaining them. All were able to express clearly the issues they wanted to address and the strategies they would pursue. Yet not all were able to realize their goals equally. For many, time was indicated as an impediment to their completion or persistence. Others felt that the staff's follow-up was not as frequent or involved as they would have liked, and for this reason they did not complete their project work. Two individuals admitted to having "lost track" of their project. The questions never-

theless remain: Why was time an issue for some and not for others? Why did some people call and work with staff and others did not? Why did some people lose track of their projects?

In analyzing how participants viewed their projects, their roles in them, and their responses to possible and realistic setbacks, we looked at how much progress people made based on: (1) preparatory steps for the project (for instance, organizational meetings); (2) level and frequency of contact with others concerning the project, including lobbying efforts; and (3) implementation of the project. The projects reflected several community level concerns:

- a) Youth related programs: three language and culture programs (two specifically for young children), a Girls and Boys Clubs program, a youth resource center, and a community theater group.
- b) Community-related programs: community needs assessment, beautification of a commemorative park, and an alternative housing project.
- c) Family-related programs: two parenting skills programs (one specifically for parents with children with special needs) and a domestic violence center.
- d) Disability-related programs: a vocational rehabilitation program and an intertribal disabilities council.
- e) Health-related programs: diabetes health education program, intertribal FAS/FAE network, community wellness center, and a self-empowerment program.

The manner in which people progressed with their programs reflected how well they were able to see a bridge between their own self-sufficiency and that of their community. There were three observable levels of progress among those developing and implementing the above programs: (1) unclear support and uncertain course of action; (2) clear support and defined course of action; and (3) clear support and implemented action.

Unclear support and uncertain course of action. Of the five participants who made preparatory steps towards proceeding with their project, three saw a lack of time and support as the major obstacle in completing what they set out to do. Their work, while seen often as feasible during the workshop, became less focused over the intervening months. Their efforts stopped at early stages (a person might reach a preliminary stage in the program's organization, hold an initial meeting or see if others like the idea, but not go beyond that point). While some of the comments reflect a person's dissatisfaction with him- or herself for losing track of the project, others, who were less empowered, directed the cause for this lack of action outside of themselves. A couple of individuals acknowledged that they had the support of the overseeing agency and the community, but claimed that because their new jobs were consuming their available time, they were unable to continue work on their projects. For most of these individuals, their setbacks or lack of progress were attributed to forces outside of themselves (others' inaction, new job, lack of time) that were beyond their control.

Clear support and defined course of action. Nine participants fell into this category. Members of this group were intent on keeping themselves focused. They also were clear about expressing their needs: "...[I] need more grants writing training," "[help] with dealing with people who say they will help and then back out." And sometimes they simply wanted feedback on their work. One person was doing her project even while looking for areas in which to expand and fund her project. Another person, interested and motivated in creating an intertribal information network on FAS/FAE, found out during the preliminary stages of organization that before the network could accomplish anything constructive the group had to find out what human and material resources were available.

Each individual was intent on pursuing his or her goals. All had (and appreciated) the support of their communities ("everybody is committed to a prevention type program," "we had a lot of directors from different programs supporting us"). Possibly because of this support, these participants were willing, if necessary, to pursue funding for their projects outside of the tribe. They also saw their own personal commitment to the project as critical ("If I quit and say forget it, 'you guys can handle it' and go home and stay there, it may never take place"). Each focused on the problem and pursued the tasks necessary to keep the plan alive and viable and to write the proposal that could provide the funding.

Clear support and implemented action. These individuals have been able to put their projects into action within the contexts they defined. The six participants who did this pursued projects bearing no great similarity to each other. In fact, these people's work mirrored the diversity of the other projects. This diversity also was seen in what people brought to the workshop. Some participants had strong ties to their spiritual beliefs, while others had drifted somewhat away from their traditional ways, for example, in such areas as coping with and relieving personal conflict and anger. What distinguishes this group is the interconnection between their jobs and their projects. These participants had the support of their supervisors to pursue their respective project, and the few times that they needed to procure funding through grants, they were able to develop the proposals as part of their jobs.

Similarly, each of these individuals enjoyed community support. Among the program's participants, more than one person took action within the context of their priorities. A person who originally wanted to develop a language and culture class for children to attend while on their school breaks soon turned her attention toward the larger issue of what the community believed to be its primary needs. This was a question she had to answer for the tribe in order to determine if her project was in agreement with the community's perceived concerns. To this end, she successfully developed, executed, and analyzed the results of a community needs assessment and has worked toward getting these concerns addressed. Not only does this show transference of action from a specific to a broad scope, but it also shows a commitment to transfer the decision-making process to those most personally affected by it.

This was also observed in the efforts of another participant. In this case, the person, in her role as a service coordinator, focused her attention on the

housing situation in her district. For a variety of reasons, previously built HUD housing was unsuccessful in the district. The results of this misguided government effort stood abandoned and vandalized while many families remained in need of better housing. With the help of a mentor from the project staff, she brought together a cadre of volunteer experts and personnel from inside and outside the community to work on this project. The tribe currently is discussing the possibility of setting aside a large area of land on which to locate the new housing.

This person, along with the planners, architects, her supervisor, and the tribal council, is bringing creativity and a non-dependent approach to this project. The act of the tribe in both working with the designers and planners and in finding an appropriate response for both the need and the desire for home ownership responds to the essence of self-sufficiency: non-dependence and creativity.

In two smaller programs, we see a successful transfer of personal self-sufficiency to others in the development of a self-empowerment course and the creation of a youth resource center. In each case, the expressed interest in and motivation for the development of these programs were evident during these participants' first workshop. During those times, each of these individuals defined and contextualized their individual efforts. These separate goals were outlined clearly by the young woman who developed the resource center:

Grant writing ... It was helpful, because that's what I've always wanted to learn also.... I always like putting things on paper and trying to put it in words to where I can explain it or maybe come up with my ideas on paper, be able to write it down. I've always like tried to seek for like a challenge or something.

That's why I tried to really get involved in it, like writing down my goals and my objectives. And then this project that I'm putting in, I'm trying to really figure it out, you know, put it down....

[I would] especially like to be able to work with the youth or have something for them. I guess it's just something that I've never had or I've always wanted when I was growing up, to have somebody or a place that I can get this information from, or to get help from, just one place. That's why I really feel like strongly about it, about what I'm trying to do.

She took her own desires, interests, and concerns and used them to attain something for her community. Drawing on the self-empowerment process (as well as her own spirituality), she saw a similarity between focus and goal: "Even in our own language, that's what's always been said, that it's really up to me, that it's up to me to decide whatever I want." Harnessing this intent, she developed her project and wrote a grant proposal that was funded. The center is not only a resource hub for the community's young people, but also is a core of activity that, through the efforts of its coordinator, has generated several smaller programs, including a dance group, traditional games, and community service activities.

The other participant became closely involved in learning and using the self-empowerment process, examining each aspect of his life and reevaluating

past and present personal decisions and how he could change long-held beliefs:

Each day as we covered a specific topic, I sat in my room and thought about the whole thing and try to weave my own little world out of it. ... It helped me learn the things that I already knew but never practiced.

After attending a teaching of teachers workshop on self-empowerment, he took his new learning process and introduced it to his community. Since there was little to no cost outlay in instituting the program outside of the teacher's time (and in this case, because it was performed as part of the person's job), no outside funding was required. What it did require was support for its continuation, which it received from the participant's employer. To date, two workshops have been held, and the participants have received both very favorably. Future workshops will continue to be held on a requested basis.

While having an employer's support in developing and completing a project is extremely helpful, this support neither guarantees the successful development and completion of a project nor qualifies it as the sole, overriding determinant for the lack of successful development and completion. Other factors reflect what the individual and the community bring to the effort. Whereas the community must see the idea as support worthy, the individuals developing the project should: (1) have the ability to use self-empowerment to enhance their self-sufficiency on a scale that is larger than personal interaction; (2) possess a strong internalized perception of support (motivation and commitment to the project); and (3) not perceive obstacles as barriers.

DISCUSSION

The multiple expression of self-sufficiency evident throughout this analysis emphasizes both the subtlety and complexity by which it was expressed and realized. The analysis shows that the notion of self-sufficiency is not only difficult to separate from self-empowerment, motivation, and commitment, but also is integrally connected to each of these by the participant involved. The people whose voices are represented in this paper saw and used self-empowerment as a means of working with daily life events. It helped them to understand their own reactions and their interactions with others. Yet, even though the explanations and theory were new, comments and analysis were couched in a familiarity that facilitated the use of the process. Familiarity and resonance with their own spirituality was helpful to the participants in understanding how the self-empowerment process could be incorporated into their lives without conflicting with their beliefs.

While commitment and motivation were easier to secure at the personal level, they were much more difficult to sustain when asked to develop and implement a community project. Here motivation and commitment had to

take on a more proactive role in achieving self-sufficiency. As much as personal self-sufficiency required a level of internalized support based on one's beliefs, so the development of community level self-sufficiency relied heavily on the external support of the social system. If there was resistance to the project, then the participant might drop or disregard the project. This could occur if a person had trouble obtaining funding or the like. Conversely, some participants took the same difficulties and interpreted them as challenges and pursued other avenues of support (sustained motivation and commitment). Consensus may play an important role in determining whether or not a person chooses to pursue completion of his or her project. This kind of support from the community appears to be important for the translation of personal motivation and commitment into a community-level project.

There were multiple levels at which the participant could apply the self-empowerment process towards self-sufficiency. On the personal level, individuals did this through their view of their health, their ability to make choices, and their aptitude in transferring self-sufficiency onto others. If the understanding of the tools of self-empowerment were incorporated and used in their personal lives, then the individuals were more likely to use the process to bring self-sufficiency to their communities. And yet this did not occur for all participants capable of using the self-empowerment process at the personal level. Everyone did not start or make significant progress with his or her project. Therefore, it is necessary to examine some other underpinning cultural, social, and economic factors that influenced this aspect of the program as well as the program itself to understand why some participants were able to transfer the knowledge and others did not want to or were unable to do it.

The majority of the comments reflect perceptions people have about their ability to approach projects from conception to execution. Some, while secure in using the self-empowerment learning process at the personal level, were unable to translate it into self-sufficiency at the community level when they needed to know more about some specific skill (such as grant writing or turning community support into community action). While a few participants requested and received direct assistance from the empowerment program staff (outside of the workshops) to implement their goals, others simply made no contact and made no progress in developing their project when they felt they lacked the necessary knowledge to proceed. Finally, while time was the most frequently cited reason for inaction or stalled action, a few simply noted that they did not know how to move beyond their present point of inaction. There was a desire to work on the project but an inability to take a direction or to mobilize the necessary people needed to proceed with the plan. For these individuals at this point in time, self-sufficiency at the community level was not operating.

The question remains: What has prevented some persons from using their tools of empowerment while others have used them at all levels of interaction? While we cannot disregard other factors in the participants' lives that may have impacted their progress, these other circumstances and events may not have been the whole explanation. Part of the answer may lie in how much

they were able to initiate and actualize projects within their current employment (Did they work for the tribe? What was their position?), and part may be the need to achieve consensus before proceeding with a plan. Yet those who translated their plans into action did so by a number of active means: conducting community meetings, surveys, and needs assessments and handling funding problems by seeking support from outside sources. Many of those who did not get a grant did not yield their interest in obtaining one or in improving their grant-writing skills. This dichotomy between action and inaction suggests that there is a need for a self-empowerment program to address the problem of transferring self-sufficiency from the personal to the community level.

Furthermore, it might be helpful to reexamine the selection criteria used for participation in the program. Additional criteria would include community involvement, the ability to articulate problems at the community level, and recruitment of more than one person to work on the same project. These criteria would facilitate mutual support for project planning and implementation. People should not just be interested in doing *something* for the community, but should have a clear idea of what it is they want to accomplish. For successful completion of a project and the projection of self-sufficiency, participants should bring a level of motivation to their community work that enables them to use the self-empowerment and project development skills necessary to enhance their ability to stay focused.

There is yet another level of self-sufficiency for American Indians that has remained unmentioned thus far: self-determination and sovereignty. Because we were able to see expressions of non-dependence at the personal level and its translation to the community level, we were not surprised to find that these expressions also are part of a larger socioeconomic and political picture. This is best exemplified by the comments of one participant in the youth program. This young person talked about her frustration with her tribe and tribal council because they were planning to build another casino on tribal land: "Why," she wanted to know, "were they building another casino for the entertainment of white people?" Why weren't they directing more of their attention towards the needs of the tribal people themselves? She was not, as one might assume, unaware of the monetary gains the casinos bring. She was instead protesting the role of the tribe as a source of entertainment for non-Indians. This protest should not be discounted as a motivating influence. Needless to say, further study about self-sufficiency as seen through self-determination is an important and worthy area for future work.

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