Social Constructionism in Community Development in the Spring Branch,

Memorial Community of

Houston, Texas

by,

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Abstract

This study addresses the issues of developing community involvement, action and trust in a diverse community from a social constructionist paradigm using narrative action research and grounded theory strategies. Additionally, the study identifies and focuses on archetypal symbols and myths as they relate to these diverse groups and how they resonate with group members.

A community organization, The Metropolitan Organization (TMO) in Houston, Texas, comprised of churches and schools, is used as the vehicle for conducting meetings and developing relationships. The study also addressed the question of why persons become involved in such a group as TMO and what motivated them to stay involved.

The central theoretical focus of the project is the proposition that meaning is constructed through intersubjective referential realities (Rijsman, 1997) and also through interobjective projected meanings onto archetypal symbols. The intersubjective meanings to observers of archetypal symbols often lacks consensus of meaning between individuals and groups. This

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diversity of perception by persons can cause problems of co-ordination and can impede understanding and trust among observers and practitioners. It also can result in those embracing certain objectified perceptions and those persons embracing other objectified perceptions, avoiding discussion of personal understandings of the symbol. From a positive view, archetypal symbols, because of some perceived shared social constructed belief, can be the means by which persons suspend differences about the other and the associated symbol and coalesce around the symbol.

The findings identified several primary archetypes including isolation/cooperation, children, safety and security, transcendence and other first order issues. Stories around these issues resonated with most participants in small group meetings and had the effect of bonding and creating trust. This narrative approach also resulted in deconstructing old myths and creating new realities. As a part of the organizing process participants identified community issues, learned about the use of power, and acted together to make changes.

Through the grounded theory strategies original beliefs and hypotheses of the researcher evolved as the study progressed. Co-researchers, including members of an inter faith community organizations and citizens of the Spring Branch/Memorial neighborhood in Houston, Texas were consulted and interviewed to gain their perspective of what was transpiring. This study can be useful to practitioners working with diverse community groups in helping to identify motivating motifs and ways of bridging differences between divergent groups.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This has been a wonderful journey. From my first whirlwind meeting with John Rijsman in Tilburg to the day I stood with parents, teachers, fellow TMO volunteers and received the ruling that we had been victorious in getting a cantina closed on Pitner street, I have felt myself carried along like the feather in the movie, Forest Gump. With the help and encouragement of John Rijsman and Harlene Anderson, I was able to sort my experiences and flesh them out into something that hopefully the reader can make sense of and can see a bit of their own journey.

Thanks to my friends and co-researchers Al Zustovich, Roy Yeager, Molly McFarland, Virginia Goodson, Terry Anderson and to TMO and its organizers who helped create the space, the experiences and expertise for the journey. And there were the mothers and fathers, new to this country, who came here with hopes and fears, to build a new life for them and their children.

To my church, Memorial Drive United Methodist Church and our pastor Dr. Chuck Simmons, I congratulate for being willing to have the faith and courage to put into action what the Bible calls us to do, in a way that most affluent congregations would be unwilling to risk.

And to my family, Gail, Chris, Mark, Lori, Janet, Nick, Shannon, and Tyler this work is dedicated. If I leave any legacy to you and to the future, it is this work. I believe that we are called to be in the world and to make a difference, particularly when we are so blessed. I hope this will inspire you to reach out across the lines of prejudice and distrust and build bridges of understanding. Remember, evil flourishes when good people fail to work together for good.

Why do I feel responsible?

In 1969 after witnessing inner-city riots on television I was moved to write an article that was published in *Engage*, a Methodist magazine. In part I stated:

> "I see a black man on television and he's shouting and I say to myself, 'Man, I think I can feel a little of what you feel, and if you and I could only sit down and talk, maybe, just maybe, we could find some common ground, a place to begin, a way to be reconciled.' Then I think, 'What would we talk about?' The answer that keeps coming back to me is, 'I really don't know, I really don't know.'
>
> The church is the best qualified institution in our society to bring different racial and economic groups into meaningful confrontations. We have the facilities. Our inner-city personnel are most often from a middle-class background, which gives them somewhat of an understanding of both groups. And we have the purpose. If there was ever a time when we all need to talk and be reconciled it is now." (p.21)

Houston, Texas in 1969 was a time when segregation was still a fact. Efforts were being made to desegregate facilities, education, employment, housing, and access to political power. Even the Methodist Church was segregated, both from the standpoint of congregational access as well as organizationally.

It was a time when institutions guarded their power with secrecy and suspicion of those they were supposed to serve. Open meetings laws and freedom of information laws had not yet been enacted.

For me 1969 was the beginning of a spiritual and intellectual journey that has led me to the present. Along the way I embraced numerous forms and ideologies. Along the way many changes took place as a result of people confronting those institutions and by people who were willing to sacrifice and stand up for what they believed.

About the time that I wrote the *Engage* article I got a job with my father's company as a rent collector in a low income neighborhood. I went out on Saturday morning and collected the payments, door to door. When people owe you money they are very willing to tell you their sad stories particularly when they want to get you to let them delay paying. I noticed how different the people were. They were Anglos, Hispanic and African American. Some were very responsible and went to extremes to pay their payment to buy their little homes. They kept them neat and from appearances were good parents. At the other extreme were people who moved around a lot, left the house trashed out when they moved and left owing two months payments. It completely destroyed my stereotyping of people. It also challenged my religious convictions. As a young college student I felt that I had all the answers, particularly to religious questions. After all I was blessed, so my family and I must have done something right. But that view and other ideas no longer held validity and for a number of years I questioned what it was that I believed in.

But I hungered for more than reading ideas in books. I wanted to really converse with people and get to know them and more particularly, to have them know me; to know that even though I was Anglo and affluent I

was not a bad person and that I could be trusted. Thus my article to *Engage*.
Years passed and I have never forgotten that article and my desire to connect
to people in a more meaningful way.

During those years (about 1970) when the civil rights movement was
at its height, I helped organize several youth group exchanges between the
youth of our church and the youth at African American Methodist churches.
There were two separate governing bodies in the church--one for white
churches and one for African American churches. This made it difficult to
develop these exchanges since there was little communications between the
two groups. When we had made the initial contacts and procedural
agreements for the visits with the pastors of the African American churches,
we went ahead with our plans to do the exchanges without any fanfare. No
press releases, no church board meetings--we just did it.

I do not know whether it made any difference to the young people that
attended. Several white college sponsors of the African American youth,
said that some of the things that we did were not appropriate and that we had
made some mistakes, such as getting the young people to talk about color.
I'm sure they were right. I suggested that none of us were really black or
white and that using those monikers only made us more polarized and did
not express our full nature as human beings.

To demonstrate my point, we lined the young people up, darkest to
lightest. Some of the "white" kids were closer in color to the African
American kids and some of the "black" kids were closer in color to the
"whites". Little did I know that African Americans had a hierarchy of color
and that those that were lighter were higher on the social scale. I was told
that this was embarrassing to the African American youth since no one

talked about this. I suppose I was stupid and insensitive or about twenty years ahead of my time.

Today the governance of the Methodist church is desegregated. Our Texas conference has an African American bishop and several African American District Superintendents. Yet there are those who would say that Sunday mornings are the most segregated times of the week. But the difference today is that people can make the choice of where they worship and can collaborate on issues of common concern. They have a space to have conversations.

Between 1969 and 1986 I was involved in business as a real estate developer. Family responsibilities included being a husband and father to two growing and active boys. In my spare time I busied myself as a youth counselor at my church.

In 1986 I returned to graduate school to obtain a degree in psychology. I wanted to do family counseling and found the concept of systems to be fascinating. This opened a new world to me. I began to see the interconnectedness between people and how small changes could often change the whole system. During that time I discovered social constructionism and post-modernism. The idea that people could create relationships and meaning through conversation and the telling of stories and that the role of the counselor was to facilitate this process rather than imposing the counselors "expertise" to the process took me to the next level of thinking.

Then in 2000, I discovered The Metropolitan Organization (TMO), an inner-faith organization that brings congregations, schools, neighborhood groups, and business and political leaders into relational spaces to build bridges of understanding and appreciation, develop leadership, identify

common concerns and then develop strategies to bring about change. Thirty two years of waiting was over. The conversation that I had longed for could begin.

I believe that now is a special time in American history when there is a sense of openness and responsiveness that has not been present in the past. The situation certainly is not perfect but at least persons are open to building bridges, even though they may not know how and are afraid of one another.

Each time I work with TMO through House Meetings or Actions, I am afraid; afraid of failure, afraid that I will not know what to say or do, afraid that I don't know enough. I become frustrated that people do not understand the need to build relationships and trust. I become frustrated that people turn themselves inward and become self protective rather than embracing new ideas and their brothers and sisters. But mostly I become frustrated that some people see God as their God alone, and not everyone's God; that they exclude the other because they are different and don't believe as they do. I become frustrated when they refuse to be engaged in the conversation.

But in spite of all that, I go on because I have experienced and continue to experience my relationship with God that started so long ago and that continues until today; a relationship that has been fostered by my experience of others and that is affirmed through tradition, symbols, and myths. And each week I celebrate through the rituals of my faith with others, that unconditional love that was first shown to us through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. My personal theology has been greatly influenced by the writings of theologians such as Paul Tillich, Reinhold Niebuhr, Rudolph Bultmann, Martin Buber and Albert Camus. They each emphasize the importance of being engaged with the world. In the case of

Martin Buber (1922) in "I and Thou", the essence of the lived life is to experience the I in our relationships with the Thou and that when we shut off the other or treat the other as an "It", we too become "Its". I believe God wants us to be in relationship with one another, to love one another, and accept one another. Reinhold Neibhur (1957) in Love and Justice states

> "If the spirit of love is to qualify and mitigate the social struggle, the groups that profess to believe in the efficacy of love and who, at the same time, have favored positions in society are clearly under obligation to introduce this Christian element in society." (p.39).

To do that we have to learn to accept the differences of the other and through conversations and the shared stories, come to appreciate one another. That appreciation even extends to those who do not believe in God. In my world even that possibility must exist.

My personal vision of the Kingdom is where persons of all faiths and traditions are honored; that all children will be loved and will have the opportunities of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness and that our world will use its resources to ensure that this happens and that persons will see their vision of the world as a constructed reality that can breathe and be life giving. I believe that there is a universal TRUTH but that we humans fall short of being capable of knowing what that truth is that it is; that it is like the scripture in 1Corinthians 13 says, "now I know in part, but then, face to face the truth shall be revealed". Even that is a construction but it is one that I hold dear and it drives me on to bring people into deeper relationship with others, with God, and with themselves.

Problem Statement

As I began writing this portion of the study presentation I realized that my understanding of the problem had taken numerous twists and turns. My writing of the problem statement was from the viewpoint of looking back. But the story of this study was about change--change in me, change in my co-researchers and co-participants and those persons within the community that had been impacted by what we had done.   I would attempt to show the reader what changes took place in perceptions of the problem, as it evolved.

Several thoughts emerged several months into the study.   I became frustrated with my inability to make the kind of headway I wanted into the organizational process. As I reflected on those old notes, it was as if I was looking for answers in the challenges. Who would listen to us? Why didn't people in the community see what I saw and just come to the table with open arms? There were so many voices and it seemed that none of them were talking to one another. Maybe, by writing down my thoughts and reflections, some answers would bubble up. Or maybe, I wrote this to inspire myself.

But frustration was not discouragement. I believed that we could make a difference. TMO (The Metropolitan Organization), an interfaith group of churches and schools that worked collaboratively in Houston, on social justice issues became the vehicle that we used to provide a framework for the study. Using forms of social constructionist methodology, TMO had been successful in other parts of Texas and Houston in organizing people across religious, ethnic, and economic lines.

In spite of setbacks and disappointments, I was unafraid. Some of my friends asked me how I could just walk up to a Hispanic church, where I didn't speak the language or go to a Mosque when I didn't know anyone, introduce myself and begin a conversation. To me, it was not a big deal. I believed that what I was doing was much more than a study for my dissertation. I believed in my own myth...this was what I was called to do. I had a responsibility to make something good happen.

The Spring Branch/Memorial community of Houston, Texas was a diverse community separated by geographical, religious, cultural, economic, and historical factors. This resulted in a community that was often alienated and isolated between groups, with few shared visions, expectations and purposes. Myths about different groups within the community abounded and impeded trust and communications. That mistrust extended to religious congregations within the community, even though some of them were of the same denomination. The community was further separated geographically by the I-10 interstate freeway that runs east and west. There were few, if any, community icons or symbols that bound the community together (Smith, 2001). What started some forty or so years ago as a neighborhood rivalry between North and South of I-10 in the defined area of Spring Branch/Memorial, had now grown to an even more segmented, isolated community within communities where diversity was often seen as a threat to a lifestyle and where a mythical worldview of the past held fast. There were still many, particularly in Spring Branch that believed that the community would somehow turn itself around economically and ethnically and would return to bygone days. And many of those living in the more affluent Memorial area found little reason to ever travel into Spring Branch. And for some of those persons there was a fear attached to that journey which they

sought to avoid at all costs. As one woman from Memorial said, "I just don't go to Spring Branch."

When I began, I believed that this was a north, south problem. The rich against the not so rich. In my eyes the working poor didn't even fit into the equation. They were anonymous and invisible. I believed that the breakdown in relationships had occurred primarily because of benign neglect on the part of the community. I also believed that the geographical division created by I-10 played a big part in this division. Since TMO was an interfaith organization, I naively believed that if I visited with other Anglo churches on the north side of I-10 and explained what we were doing, we could band together and solve the ills of the community. Why wouldn't fellow Christians not just be excited to do this. But what I found was that the antipathy towards south side churches was deeply rooted and that there was little or no desire to build a relationship. As a south side resident who had lived in my own sheltered environment, I had little knowledge of the real situation and the history that existed in this conflict.   I did not understand the extent of my own isolation. Having worked in a south side church for years and having lived in the Memorial side of I-10, I thought I had a good grasp of the community. It was only as I began to work in the community, trying to bring people to the table that I came to realize how little I knew and how little we all knew.

Additionally, the schools and the community organizations within Spring Branch had been thwarted in their efforts to engage the undocumented immigrants into the system. Many of the Anglos who had been successful in getting undocumented workers rounded up by the INS in previous years were now unable to get the INS or the police to take action against the undocumented workers.

Again, I was naive to the extent of this problem. The community's attitude towards undocumented immigrants was at best ambiguous, at worst hostile. Many old time Spring Branch residents embraced an attitude of denial. 'If we don't admit they're there and don't do anything to encourage them to stay here, maybe they'll go away', seemed to be the attitude of many. In the schools there were the beginnings of change for the better. The school district was making progress in getting Hispanic administrators and bilingual teachers. PTA (Parent Teacher Association) and CAT (Campus Advisory Team) meetings were now bilingual. But in making this headway many of the last Anglo families withdrew their children from the now predominately Hispanic schools. It was not just that there were Hispanic children. It was that the Anglo parents were frustrated with having to go to meetings and wait for translations to be made. Many of them believed that people living in this country should make every effort to learn and speak English and this accommodation was not necessary and only reinforced Hispanics desire to remain out of the mainstream. As the project progressed it also became more and more apparent that there were few spaces available within the community that persons felt safe to be in conversation with others who were different than they were. All of these factors contributed to the sense of frustration, anger, and ambivalence that existed particularly within the Anglo community of Spring Branch and that impacted the work of the TMO in the implementation of relationships and ultimately the successful completion of this project.

Emerging Questions

The initial question that seemed most relevant in the beginning of the study was, how can a community made up of diverse groups of people, including differences in geographic, educational, economic, religious, and ethnic backgrounds work together with respect and trust of the other, in order to create a more civil community? I realized that my perception of what might be construed as a civil community might not be what others would see as a civil community. But I assumed that as we began to explore the issue, through social construction and appreciative inquiry techniques the question might be better illuminated.

As the study progressed a number of questions emerged and evolved that informed the scope, methodology, and assumptions of the work. Some of these emerging questions and that evolutionary process is described as follows:

1.   Do in-group, out-group biases exist between the south side of I-10 and the north side of I-10?

This was an early small study that indicated that the problem was much too complex to simple be studied and analyzed by statistical analysis.

2.   Can TMO (The Metropolitan Organization) help provide space for conversations that will result in more trust, acceptance, empowerment and a better quality of life for all? This was a question that emerged as the study progressed. I had anticipated that most of the meetings would be at churches in the Spring Branch neighborhood but since we got little positive response from them we had to find alternate facilities.

3.   What role can social construction methodology and appreciative inquiry have in this process?   I had anticipated and decided from the beginning that this was going to be a major focus of the study.

4.   What are some of the archetypal symbols that impact this community? Even though I knew that archetypal symbols existed in the community, I did not know how they emerged and what role they played in the relational aspect of the community. I believed that I would have to introduce these archetypes and do education on what symbols and myths were. This was not necessary and would have inhibited the study to do so.

5.   What emerging myths exist in the community and can they be deconstructed through social construction and appreciative inquiry to be more positive? I believed that many myths existed and I believed that they could be deconstructed through social construction and appreciative inquiry. Recognizing the extent and complexity of the existing myths made me realize that narrative research would be important and hopefully effective. It also helped me turn my focus from more traditional positivist methods of research methodology.

Since myth and archetypal concepts are so important to this study it is important at this point to consider why symbolic and mythological language is used. This is normally not the language of social constructionism.   Our tendency, even in social constructionism is to fall back on rationality and empirical language even though we are talking about realities being co-created. A dichotomy exists between rational and non-rational thinking. For over three centuries western thought and science has been dominated by rationality (Gergen, 1999). Our modern minds have difficulty connecting with the non-rational.   Paul Feyerabend (Horgan, 1996) believed that 'scientists create and adhere to scientific theories for what are ultimately

subjective and even irrational reasons....Feyerabend attacked science because he recognized --and was horrified by--its power, its potential to stamp out the diversity of human thought and culture. He objected to scientific certainty for moral and political, rather than for epistemological reasons' (p.48).

Mythology does not depend on rationality. It embraces our fears, our prejudices, our erroneous thinking as being a part of our human experience. Campbell (1988) states that myth is "the experience of life." This is also a function and result of social construction. This loose relativistic approach to viewing reality has its pitfalls. As early as the first century a.d. there was concern by the early Church fathers about gnosticism. In the Gnostic Gospel of Truth (Robinson, 1977), 'if one has knowledge, he gets what belongs to him and draws it to himself'. This kind of knowledge was purely subjective and non-rational. It gave credence to persons having their own personal experience of God, which was imparted to special persons by God. Church fathers over the next three centuries fought this form of thought as being heresy. They believed that there had to be some form of orthodoxy that would both give the believer a sense of rootedness and certainty about belief. But in the process of creating orthodoxy where personal experience was suspect a new hierarchy of power emerged in the form of the Church. This same attitude exists today as more and more people both out of the scientific community and in the scientific community embrace post-modern thinking at the perceived expense of rationalism and empiricism. Myth does not need proof. It is neither true nor is it not true.

> "People say that we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I
> think that what we're seeking is an experience of being alive,
> so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will

have resonance's within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life."
(Campbell, 1988, p.5)

Myth is most often treated by believers as being true. It may be couched as scientific, political or philosophical truth. (Gergen 1999) states, 'Scientists seldom carry out research for no reason; typically they have investments in some vision of the good, some benefit that will derive from their work'. In other words research even when it is presented as totally rational and empirical is not value neutral. At its core it is mythical. Again a trait and result of social construction.

By tapping into archetypal symbols we may be able to tap into common beliefs that can act as catalysts for positive change and mutual trust and solidarity. But these symbols can also result in myths that are prejudicial and will result in polarization. Racial, religious and economic considerations can negatively influence persons in being open and accepting. These prejudices come from internal *core narratives* described by pastoral counselor Andrew Lester (1995) "as the central interpretive theme that provides an individual or system with an overarching structure (composed of numerous smaller stories) that organizes and makes sense out of a particular aspect of the human condition. Individuals have core narratives that structure their understandings and values around concepts such as marriage, money, sex, discipline, work, and so on. Within a person's religious faith there will be core narratives that explains such concepts as suffering, church, and prayer"(p.30). As a part of that core narrative also

goes the persons propensity to turn one's actions either outward to embrace reality or turning inward to embrace reality in that manner.

Rijsman (1997) views these core stories as being inbedded through the relationship and interaction with the Alter (any person that the Ego interacts with that results in the intersubjective construction of meaning) resulting in objectifying the Other.

But the most compelling argument for using mythological language is the mystery associated with relational changes. Whether it is in counseling or in industry or community development with TMO, there is what philosopher Rudolph Otto (1923) calls a nuministic quality about the experience; a sacred or mysterious change that leaves one in awe of the power of conversation to change people. Even when one rationally and empirically dissects the event, and others try and copy the process, there is an element that cannot be explained, dissected, or identified. It is more art than science. The mechanics of art can be taught, but to be an artist must come from somewhere else.

This nuministic quality sometimes comes by the facilitator/researcher taking a position of not-knowing (Anderson & Goolishian, 1990).

'In not-knowing the therapist adopts an interpretive stance that relies on the continuing analysis of experience as it is occurring in context. The therapist does not "know" a-priori the intent of any action, but rather must rely on the explanation made by the client. By learning, by curiosity, and by taking the client's story seriously, the therapist joins with the client in a mutual exploration of the client's understanding and experience. Thus the process of interpretation, the struggle to understand in therapy, becomes collaborative.'

Using the not-knowing approach in group building and watching symbols and myths emerge in stories and being open to this unfolding construct, creates a sense of curiosity in the group since there is no pre-ordained outcome anticipated. Taking the not-knowing approach to group building shows the participants respect; that their ideas and life stories are worthy. But it also is a result of the stories content. They most often are archetypal in nature that resonate with the participants in the group. Even when the researcher is versed in social construction and not-knowing techniques there is still a sense of surprise and mystery of asking one self, 'how did this happen'. I have had non- TMO people who are members of groups in Spring Branch that have tried to engage Hispanics in civic or school affairs and have had very little luck and who are mystified as to how TMO is able to do what it does.

It may be that the small band of Christians at Pentecost experienced some of this numinisity as they embarked on a journey that was both exciting and frightening, but definitely embraced the unknown. (See Pentecost chapter).

6.   What rituals exist or could be constructed that affirm community symbols and myths? This was also something that I considered from the beginning and that flowed through the course of the study.

7.   How can changes through organization and empowerment be facilitated? This too flowed through the course of the study but took a turn as we began to work more with Hispanic parents in the schools as opposed to focusing on Anglo congregations in Spring Branch. We recognized that only in empowering the Hispanic parents through organization and training

could we get the attention of the Anglo community and the city government and demand equity and respect.

There are several subset questions that will also be considered. They are:

8.   What makes a TMO leader? Various assumptions and myths exist on what makes a TMO leader. The organizers of TMO state that TMO leaders are angry and therefore they make good prospects as leaders. But in talking to more affluent volunteers, they state that they are not angry, but passionate and or compassionate. So, in some cases these myths resonate but in others, particularly as it applies to TMO volunteers from affluent congregations, these myths do not seem to hold true. The question of what makes a TMO leader flowed from the beginning the assumptions that followed that initial question became articulated as the study progressed. At the beginning of the study I had little notion to begin making judgments about what made a TMO leader.

9.   What changes take place in TMO leaders as they become more involved in the process of community development? Do these persons enter into volunteering and working on relation building with certain assumptions that over time because of experiences of working in a different environment deconstruct those early impressions? This question emerged from the beginning of the study.

10.   Do some volunteers then become disillusioned with the work and drop out or do they maintain or develop a resiliency that sustains them? This question emerged later in the study as persons either dropped out or took less interest in the work.

11.   Is there a motivational difference between affluent TMO leaders and low SES leaders? In the beginning I had a kernel of a question about this but I believe the major genesis of the question came later.

There is the assumption that lower SES TMO leaders become leaders because of first order issues such as providing food, clothing, and security for their families and themselves, while more affluent volunteer leaders are more motivated by altruistic and abstract reasons. This idea was not originally considered but emerged as the study unfolded.

12.   What role can archetypal symbols and myths have in recruiting more leaders and building bridges within the community? This is one of the primary considerations and areas of research for this project and was at the heart of early considerations. In Spring Branch/Memorial many civic and school organizations have attempted to get disenfranchised and isolated persons and groups involved in the community democratic participatory process. This has most often had poor results. Whether it is the persons with the power assuming what the others need, or distrust of one another, or the belief that the disenfranchised and isolated either have nothing to bring to the table or their belief that they have no power, little progress has been made in this community to bridge this gaps. It may be that myths concerning one another impedes the possibility of working together. It may be that there are no perceived common interests, that could be identified as archetypal symbols. This concern emerged later in the study. In the beginning I was not even sure of who would be a participant. I thought we would interest more middle class Anglos in the work.

13.   Does my perception of reality as being influenced and controlled by my ideas of Christian benevolence and social justice resonate and is it appropriated by others? As both a researcher and a participant in the process

of community development and organization I bring a certain mindset with certain expectations and agenda as to outcome and process. I recognize that my own agenda might impede the process since it involves my having a certain set of beliefs and expectations that may be in conflict with others. But I saw my role as also being an agitator, of forcing persons our of their comfort zone. I also recognized that within the hearts of many there was a desire to make the journey I was proposing but because of either fear or the feeling of powerlessness, they had not been able to act. So, I became aware of the tension that existed between my own values and beliefs with the commensurate desire to bring about change and the need to listen, encourage, and nurture those to let their voices be heard. These concerns definitely emerged as the study progressed. I did not understand the extent of resistance to being involved in work for trust and solidarity in the community.

As the project progressed I realized that the interactions between various groups in the community were much more involved and complex and did not conform to my prejudices. Groups isolated themselves within their own comfort zones and attributed certain myths to other groups. As an example some within certain ethnic and economic groups seemed quite conflicted about what the role of the new immigrant should be in the community. For many in the immigrant community there was a fear of authority as well as a fear of their own minority. Many of these new immigrants had never been to a large city much less a large United States city. For most, who were undereducated, they had never been confronted by a system that sought out their input. Democracy was a foreign concept. As for me, I had been burdened in crafting my problem for study, by my own mythology.

14.   What role does power play in community development? How is it developed and how can it be used?   Power was a word that scared me in the beginning. I was influenced, as many other middle class persons, that if you empower the disenfranchised you might lose some of your advantage. Taxes might go up if the poor get better health care. Control of the schoolboard might be wrested from the affluent. The system may no longer accommodate me as it has in the past. This was a problem that effected some who were recruited from the affluent Memorial area to be TMO members.

Memorial Drive United Methodist Church Becomes Involved in TMO

Memorial Drive United Methodist Church's involvement with TMO began in the summer of 2000. That was when several persons in the congregation and I began conversations with one of the organizers from TMO about our possible involvement. I was immediately excited about the possibilities since from what was said, it was apparent that TMO used techniques of conversational narrative similar to those I had learned in my readings and practice in social construction. My role as staff person at Memorial Drive United Methodist, a six thousand member congregation, put me in the position of advocating for our churches participation in TMO.

I was somewhat leery of TMO methodology, since there seemed to be an element of confrontation in the background of TMO. I knew that as conservative as our congregation was, that it would be difficult to maintain an involvement with TMO if it were perceived as a liberal confrontational organization that might be a threat to the interest or philosophy of some of our congregation. This hesitation was a feeling that persisted for me for many months and continues to be an issue that must be addressed with new volunteers.

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I felt that TMO's Iron Rule of *Never do for others what they can do for themselves* resonated with me and I felt that it would resonate with our congregation. The Iron Rule is what many conservatives profess as what they believe to be the answer to personal success in this world.

I soon realized that one of our hardest obstacles to overcome would be the need to build relationships instead of being intent on product. Our congregation, not unlike much of our culture, is product oriented. During the organizational period prospective middle class volunteers often said, "just tell us what you want us to do. We don't need all this relational building... it's too nebulous." This attitude is an expression of Cartesian anxiety where persons need a sense of pre-given features and ready made information (Weick, 1995) to feel secure. Not to have this security and grounding makes some people lapse into feelings of idealism, nihilism or subjectivism, all of which they feel are to be avoided.

Many Christians tend to like quick projects of mercy such as food banks and helping the poor at Christmas. But those are not lasting relationships and only offer short term immediate gratification to the giver. Over time, short term acts of mercy, if not combined with empowerment, can make the poor more dependent and perpetuate a power dominance by the giver over the receiver (Foucault, 1980). The "subject is objectified by a process of division either within himself or from others" (Foucault, 1984). The giver can feel good about the gift and yet not be connected to the recipient and the giver can go back home and feel that something good has been done. In doing so the power of dependence in the receiver is conditioned for the receiver to accept his/her role.

In addition to my feeling that relation building within the community was desirable, our pastor had given as one of his goals, that we build lasting

loving connections with the community. On several occasions, in conversation with him I felt that we resonated on this issue; that he wanted to deepen peoples relationships both with God, congregation members, and the community. This was all that I needed to press ahead.

During the summer and fall of 2000 our congregation began having House Meetings. We targeted people who were possibly interested in relation building. The project in our congregation involved about one hundred fifty people during a six month period. This was not a very large percentage of a congregation of six thousand but we realized that it would not ever be a large group because of its philosophy and also because of its requirements and commitments to leadership. In TMO organizing, **leadership** means having a constituency or following rather than just possessing a passion for an issue.

In addition to our church wide house meetings we had numerous meetings across the city with other congregations. These congregations were very different than our own, being mostly Hispanic or African American. These congregations were also from a different SES with a majority being Roman Catholic. Most of our members had never been in their area of town, much less their churches. This was a real revelation to most of our people. Even though many of them had spent their lives working for large international companies such as Exxon, they had never encountered people *that* different, nor had they shared their life stories. A Z, a Memorial Drive UMC, TMO volunteer was asked midway through the study, how TMO had changed him, stated, "I have seen how people have been empowered by TMO and how I have been able to build relationships with people I never would have met, if it were not for TMO."   M M, a Chapelwood UMC, TMO volunteer, after being asked the same question

responded, "I think I have a greater sense of political comfort. I feel more comfortable with our [political] visits now. Individuals can make a difference." These conversations seemed to impact our people in very positive ways. They began to see that people in the community that were different, had many of the same concerns that they did for their families and they had capabilities to be empowered to do something for themselves.

TMO was also politically active. In some ways this was much more of a hurdle to deal with in our conservative neighborhood than the possibility that TMO might be too liberal or too confrontational. There were many in the Church that believed that separation of church and state meant that the Church should not be involved in the political arena at all. M M expressed the sentiments of many upper middle class TMO volunteers who initially had difficulty with the political aspects of TMO. In much of the initial work that we did, little emphasis was placed on the political aspects until we felt that the person had made the needed transition to accepting this role. This transition usually involved the affluent volunteers seeing that one of the only ways real change was going to take place was in working collaboratively with the political institutions.

There are notable examples on both sides of the philosophical spectrum where the Church has become involved in a political issue and it has had negative repercussions both in the community and in the Church. Whether it be prohibition, censorship, abortion, slavery, war, or desegregation, the institution of the Church has often suffered at least in the short run when it has taken political positions on social issues (Book of Discipline, 2000). There are those who believe that the founding fathers wanted to keep the Church out of politics for fear that one church would dominate the religious landscape or be sanctioned by government as "the

state Church". Others contend that the Church should stay away from controversial issues because it will be divisive within the institution. As one Memorial Drive UMC member said about the church and relations to others, "people should do what is common sense." I responded by saying, "The Christian faith is not about common sense. It's about being faithful, and sometimes being faithful is neither popular or expedient." "Let the Christian remain in the world, wrote Bonhoffer, 'to engage in frontal assault on it, and let him live the life of his secular calling in order to show himself as a stranger in this world all the more.' The very life of the Christian community is testimony to the fact that the fashion of this world passes away. (Hessert, 1967)."

Both of these contentions are correct but for some of us it is difficult to separate our spiritual/religious self from our secular self. And we also believe that the Church is not meant to be protected from conflict, that Jesus Christ stirred conflict and spoke out against pharisaic law. And if the Church does not take stands on issues and work with others in the faith community to insure family values, then who *will* speak and be heard. Many of our faith traditions embrace social justice as a precept of our belief system (Book of Discipline, 2000), (Neibhur, 1957), (Gutierrez, 1973), (Cortez, 1993) and Segundo .   Some embrace what has come to be called "liberation theology" while others take a less confrontational posture.

All of these writers and practitioners consider the use of power to be paramount in bringing about change and empowering the disenfranchised and oppressed. Cortes (1993) states, "relational power .... involves a personal relationship, subject to subject, developing the relational self. It involves getting into other people's subject and allowing them to get into yours--in a word, empathy." (p.299).   Foucault (1980) discusses the

importance of power and the way it is appropriated and the interactions between persons in giving and taking power. Consideration of the role of power in community building must be considered in this study as it became quite evident that their was an imbalance in the power structure in Spring Branch/Memorial that effected perceptions and myths concerning different groups within the community. In the context of this study power will mean the ability to act. Community building refers to constructing positive relational interactions between persons resulting in a more trusting and collaborative community environment. Community building also refers to the process of interaction whereas community may also refer to a geographical area that may or may not be loosely defined. For this study the geographical community is the Spring Branch/ Memorial area in Houston, Texas.

Through conversations and actions people expressed their sense of isolation and feelings of powerlessness. We often heard persons who were angry with the system and could point out the culprit/s for their frustration, but felt they could not or would not take steps to change things. Much of their focus was on negative, resistive expressions rather than on how to bridge differences and embrace some new form of change.   This feeling of isolation and alienation was more openly expressed by upper middle class persons who tended to opt out of the system or in some cases to run to a perceived safer environment, commonly called "white flight".

Often it is the secular culture, represented by PAC's (Political Action Committees) and other organizations not representative of the faith community, that are heard. By contrast Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus (2001) refers to the term "civic activist" and that "choices are not made by closeting oneself. Rather, the civic activist makes her most important choices by

engaging with others." They go on to say that a fundamental act of citizenship is association with others to bring about change. They use MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) as an example of a group coming together not just for social action but also to express their shared pain in loss. And in telling their unique story they were able to cross-appropriate their experience to others so that it became the issue of others, not just those who had lost a loved one to drunk driving.

Also as PAC's "act for the sake of sheer expediency to make a political change" they give up cross-appropriation for the sake of influencing the system. They become estranged and isolated from others that might have shared in that core experience.

No faith should dominate the political or social landscape, but the faith community should be brought to the public arena for the conversation. Even though the church denominations and representations may differ on dogma, in TMO the effort is made to cross-appropriate those archetypal concerns that bind us together.
The issue of how involved the Church should be in the political arena will not go away and is an issue that as we work with TMO will have to be revisited over and over again.

As we continued to meet, we began to identify leaders that saw the vision of TMO and relational possibility in community building. From our conversations, issues emerged that seemed to resonate with the congregations in the Spring Branch/Memorial area that we were working with.

By January 2001 we were involved with four churches in Memorial (south side of I-10) as well as being involved with fifty other churches, schools, and organizations throughout the Houston metropolitan area. We

had also established a set of agenda that we felt was representative of the concerns of our congregations (TMO, 2001). At this point the Spring Branch/Memorial cluster was comprised of four affluent south side of I-10 churches with less than twenty active persons involved.

In January of 2001 our TMO metro leadership began to make a push for a large metro area meeting where our goal was to bring three thousand people together from all the churches that we represented to an action. At this action we would invite elected officials, including the mayor, council persons, school officials, county officials, congress persons. The purpose of this meeting was to show our solidarity to these officials as well as to ask them to work with us on our agenda of issues. As it turned out most areas of town had similar issues. We began a two pronged approach. First, we continued to have house meeting in member congregations to help them know the extent of our reach and to find additional leaders and to further define the agenda of issues. At the same time we began visiting officials to build better relationships and present our action agenda that wanted them to work with us for implementation. Many of these officials knew of TMO and had worked with them in the past. for others it was their first exposure to TMO. As we met with these officials we discussed our agenda and asked them what they saw as being needed in the community. We then invited them to our June meeting. At follow-up meetings we asked the officials about specific issues and to what extent they would support us. We told them that at the meeting we would specifically ask them whether they would support us and work with us on our agenda. We were sure that the question that we asked them was something that they could agree to. We did not want to embarrass them or us before three thousand people. Thousands of hours went into putting together this meeting and making it happen. Since

our congregation was new to this effort we were a little uncertain about how it would turn out.

We were able to get over sixty persons from our congregation and about one hundred fifty people from our Spring Branch/Memorial Cluster to attend. There were over three thousand persons from Harris and fort Bend County in attendance. (Houston Chronicle, May 2, 2001), (Houston Chronicle, May 7, 2001), (El Dia, May 7, 2001). The diversity was amazing both on the dais as well as in the audience. Each political leader was asked whether he/she would attend a House Meeting to further the relationship and secondly would they support the TMO agenda which included issues concerning affordable housing, access to health care, fair treatment of immigrants, safe drinking water and sanitary sewer services and education. And the meeting was so well choreographed that it only went over time five or ten minutes. And that was with over forty politicians having the opportunity to respond to our questions. That in itself was amazing.

In early June of 2001 after having attended the area TMO action and having met with various other congregations in the community and having developed an action agenda our Memorial Drive United Methodist Church steering committee made our final decision to be financially committed to TMO. We agreed that this commitment would be $5000. for the remainder of the year and $10,000. for the following year. We also began looking at our goals and objectives for our congregations involvement with TMO. (MDUMC, 2001). This is what I would call the beginning of my action

study. As a part of that planning meeting we used methods of "appreciative inquiry" to look at:

- Appreciating and valuing the best of "what is"
- Envisioning "what might be"
- Dialoguing "what should be"
- Innovating "what will be"

I had felt that TMO had a great program but that there was something missing. One of those elements was that they had not discovered "appreciative inquiry". The other problem stemmed from the perception, at least among our new Memorial area churches, that there were no actual "projects" going on; that TMO just had a lot of meetings. And that when we had a project it was not clear why we were doing it and where it might finally lead. Part of that anxiety was culturally imbedded but part of it had to do with a real sense of not knowing where we were going and having a sense of what was going to bind us together. Possible participants could not see the connection and need to build this myriad of relationships. They did not see the need to go and visit the school board superintendent or the county commissioner or the city council person before doing a program in a school. There was a sense that all you had to do was just get volunteers and go do tutoring or give the teachers at an under performing school an appreciation tea and that would be adequate.

This attitude was quite puzzling to me since I am quite relational. As I worked on House meetings and relation building I realized that it was only when people connected on some symbolic or concrete issue or concern that they began to bond and be interested in our efforts. They wanted concrete projects. These projects might include giving food to the poor or building a Habitat for Humanity house or tutoring a child in school.

Concrete projects have several interests for people. First, they are most often archetypal. They resonate with a persons core. They relate to those primary issues of birth, death, safety and security, and first order issues of survival. Second, there is a sense of linearity about projects. They have a beginning, a middle and an end. You can measure success and see the fruits of your labor. And third, with projects you can feel connected to the other without in fact being connected. With projects, persons can feel close to the other without actually sharing much of themselves. Most often persons or organizations begin with an issue, say drunk driving, and then appropriate and cross-appropriate persons to that cause. Financial support may be garnered by direct mail advertising. Other than the blurbs on the advertising piece, articles in the paper, and television programs, little actual relational work is done with supporters. Most single issue appeals are made in this way, where persons are solicited for financial support who may have never been directly touched by the issue. Finding a common archetypal symbol gives persons a sense of communal empowerment that may not exist alone. Because of the disconnectedness of our communities finding these symbols and feeling connected and a part of community life is difficult.

Many persons would say that they have no power and that there was little community trust or working together nor do they see the possibilities for the future. (Cortez, 1993) stated "because our political system has failed to address urban decay seriously and effectively, much of our adult population is convinced that politics is largely irrelevant to their lives. And this alienation has impoverished public discourse itself." (p.295). This is not just something that exists in the lower SES areas of town. It also exists in the sometimes cynical and helpless attitude of persons living in more

affluent neighborhoods and may be one reason why many conservatives say, "less government is better government."

The need for relation building does not stem from the need to complete a specific project. It stems from a need to transform the whole community and bring as many participants to the table as possible (McNanee & Gergen, 1999). From my conversations with people in our congregation and throughout the community, I had the intuitive feeling that there was a general lack of trust and helplessness within the community. I also felt that one of the ways to deal with this was through relation building and through finding resonate concerns and needs. It also involved helping people see the need to move between the existing political and economic strata and across neighborhood and cultural barriers. I envisioned it like a multi-layered network matrix. At one level you have the shakers and movers from various constituencies such as political officials, institutional appointees, and business and religious leaders. At the next level you have the loosely organized rank and file middle class representing neighborhoods, religious organization and school teachers and parents, and then the unempowered persons of color and low SES. Being able to bring those groups together in Spring Branch/ Memorial across those real and imaginary lines was a challenge that those at the top of this matrix had not been able to bridge. This was particularly true concerning persons from low SES groups and with people of color who for whatever reason did not participate in the process. In several meetings with different groups this frustration became apparent. At a Spring Branch Super-neighborhood meeting, a city sponsored community organization, a young man who was president of a homeowners association said, "We've tried to get some of the Hispanics in our neighborhood involved in our civic association, but the only time they come

out is when we have a garage sale or a cookout." I replied, "well, maybe you ought to have your meetings when you serve food or when you have a garage sale." (SBSNE, 2002). Over the years I have heard the same concern expressed by school administrators who had not been successful in engaging parents in their children's education. Over and over whether it be Spring Branch Superneighborhood meetings or the schools, there was a perception that Hispanics wouldn't participate in community activities. And in Spring Branch, Hispanics represented approximately sixty percent of the population.

<div align="center">The Challenge</div>

There are numerous interconnecting challenges to developing a community that is trusting of its residents. Even though these challenges may be presented separately by constituent groups they cannot be considered separately. In addressing these challenges it soon becomes apparent that often there are those concerns that are verbalized and those that may be more basic and primal that are not being openly addressed. Those must also be ferreted out and addressed.

Why Be Relational?

We live in a world that is product focused. We tend to measure success in terms of concrete results. Many churches see success as being whether they have a building program going on. Communities see success as what it looks like rather than what goes on there. Businesses may have high sounding mission statements, but when things are said and done, it's usually the bottom line that counts.

In the arena of public policy, public housing is a good example of emphasis on product orientation being a failure (Fitzgerald, 2002), (Wit, 1993) and (Holmes, 2002). Architecturally most of these buildings built in the 50's and 60's had modernist appeal. They often featured amenities such as green space and community areas. Looking at the architectural renderings the projects looked inviting and appealing. But this modernist venture was doomed to failure because it did not address the human spiritual needs of those who would live there. On paper these projects should have worked. Architects and planners could not create that intangible feature called "community" that binds people together and makes them feel like they belong. As a result many of these ventures ended up being incubators for crime and misery. Some even suffered at the wreckers ball long before their physical life should have been over.

Viable neighborhoods that were vibrant and alive were considered by some of these city planners as being blighted and unfit for persons to live. An example of this is in Houston where for over twenty years there had been a battle waging between city officials and residents of an inner city neighborhood called Fourth Ward, over whether to tear down and revitalize the community that had been a home to African American families since after the civil war. The homes were small and dilapidated and were considered to be an eye sore to a modernist downtown that literally cast a shadow on Fourth ward. But to the residents of Fourth ward it was a community, where people had businesses, where they went to school, buried their dead, worshipped on Sunday and sat on their porches on hot summer evenings and talked to their neighbors. Whether it was fantasy by the residents that a true community existed or whether it was greed by both the residents and developers that prompted the ensuing fight over condemnation

and revitalization, there have been numerous lawsuits with claims and counter claims over the desirability of leveling the Fourth Ward community and starting with sparkling new development that would displace most of the residents of Fourth Ward (Bryant, 1998).

Spring Branch/Memorial does not have this legacy but the issue of modernist thinking taking hold might be in their future. This tops down approach to community building that was so popular in the 50's and 60's still holds appeal to many in high places. The attitude of "we know best" still holds sway. A local developer successfully convinced the local authorities to implement a TIRZ taxing authority in Spring Branch, Memorial with little input or opposition to the plan.

At the core of these confrontations is the question of communities being relational. At a conference in Spring Branch called Long Point 20/20 Visioning Event put on by the City of Houston and the Spring Branch Super-neighborhoods, over a hundred participants from the community addressed issues concerning the enhancement of the major thoroughfare through Spring Branch, Long Point Street.   Top Assets of the community were ranked as were the Shared Community Values. They included categories such as nature, pleasant look and feel, mobility, culture, and activities. Strong institutional and civic support were also sited. These categories were primarily concrete in nature rather than relational or human. Even when persons spoke of strong institutions the reference was not about relationships. This could be because, as a preface to this exercise, persons watched a slide presentation and were asked to rank their feelings about the slides. The slides included very blighted street scenes with sign pollution, broken curbs and grass growing in the esplanades. These were very much like Long Point. But in contrast there were other pictures with much green

area, benches, people on bicycles, trees and uniform and unobtrusive signage.   On the surface, this would seem quite commendable. But compare the responses on the Long Point 20/20 survey and the responses on the MDUMC TMO Core Group meeting in May of 2001. In this meeting, using appreciative inquiry techniques, answers concerning Valuing the Best of "What is", answers included community networks, lots of volunteerism, diversity in neighborhoods, parents care about children. Answers to questions about Envisioning "What Might Be" included, the community is a trusting community, the community works together, persons accept those of other races in the community--accept one another as valuable human beings. When asked to come up with a TMO Mission statement for the Spring Branch, Memorial community, the group said:

To constantly improve our human condition by encouraging/mastering

- Community involvement
- Community trust
- Community interaction
- Individual commitment and binding relationships

The Long Point 20/20 responses were much more concrete and less person centered whereas the responses of the TMO group went beyond the concrete and embraced person centered principles. Holzman & Morss (2000) discuss the challenge of creating an environment where conversations can be created that are different and invite other voices to the table thereby presenting beliefs, stories, doubts and hopes in a different space and context.

Another questions that must be considered is whether a community is really a community if it does not have common symbols that bind persons together. What happens to a community and its future when the parts of the community become fragmented and uncommitted? What happens to a

community when trust and positive interaction does not exist? What happens when a communities leaders become frustrated with the apathy and mistrust and decide to move elsewhere? Is gentrification the answer? Or can a community through social constructionist methodology and appreciative inquiry develop a sense of trust and solidarity within the community? Can diversity be seen as a rich asset with persons appreciated for what they bring to the table? Can good people come together to fight crime and blight without labeling people in different groups?

It might seem that the latter would be the answer but for many in our communities building relationships does not seem to produce a product. Building relationships is difficult to assess as to efficacy.   For many it seems to be a waste of time. This is a challenge that must be addressed.

I Remember When Attitude

Another community view that must be challenged is the "I remember when" attitude. It wants to hold on to the way things used to be. In SB/M there was the time when the community was primarily anglo. It was a time when the SBISD was considered to be the best school district in the region. It was a time when there were parades down Long Point and football stadiums were full of cheering fans from both sides of I-10. It was a time when crime was nonexistent. In the minds of those living there they were ideal times.

But changes have occurred that make it nearly impossible to return to those days. Over the past twenty five years tremendous demographic changes have taken place in Spring Branch. Anglos make up less than 40% of the population of SB. Memorial has become more affluent and more

isolated during these years. The gap between the rich and poor in the community widens yearly. People from Memorial spout myths about poor schools, crime, and changing ethnicity. There is fear and distrust of the other. Neighborhoods in Spring Branch struggle to establish an identity and to keep home values up. Many hope that because of the proximity to downtown that SB will soon be gentrified. Others fear that with gentrification that they will be unwelcome.

US immigration policy is both ineffectual and schizophrenic. Laws prohibit illegal immigrants from being here or working here, but there is very little enforcement. Children of undocumented immigrants were allowed to attend school and there was such a demand for labor to do low paying jobs, politicians either encouraged non-compliance or looked the other way. This issue remains in the forefront of community controversy and division and will have to be addressed.

No Binding Community Symbol

Houston is the fourth largest city in the United States. And it has no zoning. It has just grown up. In many ways this is why it has grown as much as it has. Fewer controls make for a conducive environment for development. But it has made it more incumbent on residential subdivisions to be pro-active in the defense of their neighborhood deed restrictions. This fracturing of development and community agendas has left SB/M with no binding community symbol. This was not always the case. Throughout the sixties, seventies and into the eighties this sense of community was established by the strong allegiance to SBISD. It was considered by people in the district to be the finest school district in the region, if not the state. Bond issues were passed with ease and taxes were high in comparison to other surrounding districts. It is hard to know why this perception existed

other than Real Estate brokers and the school district did a good job selling the public on this. In a sense this attitude was socially constructed since there was not always good empirical evidence to prove the case. It was a time when there were no objective measures of school performance such as TAAS testing. There was a general perception that there was a high percentage of young high school graduates that went onto college, but again there were no hard statistics to prove this. There may have been a much more sinister reason though for this perception. SBISD was practically all Anglo and middle to upper middle class. In fact, during the sixties there were several community scares that the federal government might demand SBISD to have forced busing of African American schools and vice versa to schools in SBISD and Houston's inner city. For a number of years, that fear was a binding symbol that brought people in SBISD together but they were not aware of the impending explosion in the Hispanic population in SB. This came probably as a result of several periods of over building of apartment units in Houston during the 70's and 80's (Smith, 2000). Apartment builders could get easy money and tax laws encouraged overbuilding rather than considering economic viability. Developers built apartments that often made little sense. Nice apartment projects often had as high as 60% vacancies during some of these periods.   Thus the stage was set for these units to be rented to this new inflow of illegal immigrants. There were even those who tried to stop the building of new units in SB and several older properties that became untenable were torn down. But this did not stop the influx and thus began a period of white flight that has persisted until a few years ago. Whether a binding community symbol could have made this transition more palatable is not clear. But the perception concerning SBISD today is that it is a great school district if your child goes

to a South side school. But the fact is that SBISD was a Recognized school district in 2001 and that a significant number of schools on the North side of I-10 were Recognized schools, in spite of being over 80% Hispanic.

The resident survey did not indicate an overriding binding symbol existing in Spring Branch. As stated earlier the closest symbol was SBISD and interfaith church relationships. Finding binding community symbols will need to be addressed in order for their to be effective long term change to take place. At the Long Point 20/20 meeting a handout was included from an excerpt from a study by the Spring Branch Super Neighborhoods, conducted by Barton Smith (2001), Professor of Economics at the University of Houston which says:

"Finally, Spring Branch needs a community signature, something that unites the community and helps establish its identity within the enormity of the Houston area. this could take many forms. One example might be a redevelopment zone for commercial and public functions, perhaps a comprehensive town square within the confines of the community. Spring Branch doesn't have the 'Lakes of..' as found in many master-planned communities today. ...What it lacks is something to catch our attention and imagination--a go-to place that sets in apart in this world of competing communities. The development of such a signature amenity will require the coordinated efforts of the entire community: the school district, the business community, and neighborhood organizations. Out of such an effort could emerge the secret of tipping this well positioned community into one of the prime areas of Houston's core." (p.57).

But again the focus is on the icon. Many cities have tried to build such icons and have met with limited success. Their has to be not just a pleasant and inviting feel to it but there has to be a unique human element to

it. There has to be some emotional connection to the icon that is often difficult to identify. One of the most interesting enigmas in Houston shopping areas is The Village. It is over fifty years old and is adjacent to Rice University. It has terrible parking and until a few years ago consisted mainly of small mom and pop stores. People enjoyed the ambiance associated with the sometimes funky stores, their owners and the people who frequented them. It became quite impressive to shop in the Village. But as time went by more and more of the shop owners were pushed out of the Village due to increased rents. They were replaced with regional and national chain stores that you could see in hundreds of shopping centers throughout the country. The center continued to be a success but for those who remembered it before, it had lost a certain human element that was unique to the Village. In developing a community icon, this human element, represented by common community symbols, myths, and the attendant rituals that reflect positive relational aspects of community must be appreciated and incorporated into such an icon for it to be embraced by the community.

What might be more effectively appropriated for the community is the providing of space for conversation. When I went to the Boston area several years ago I was impressed with the Meeting Houses (churches) in that part of the country. It was where the great issues of independence, slavery, and women's rights were debated. It was a part of the fabric of religion. Of course, as one of my Congregationalist friends told me, you had to be a Congregationalist to attend. But those kinds of spaces do not exist today. We do have the Internet and talk radio but they generally do not provide the same forum for people of diverse backgrounds to meet. Providing opportunities for diverse groups of people to meet, get to know one another

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and then find common ground for working together could be more effective than having a community icon that has little symbolic meaning.

I Remember TMO When....

TMO has been in Houston since 1980. It has traditionally been a Houston east side interfaith organization that has primarily focused on the issues and concerns of lower SES persons and minorities. In the few times it had tried to penetrate the affluent west side of Houston it had met with resistance because it has been perceived as a liberal organization that was confrontational and militant. Twenty years ago, one Roman Catholic church in Spring Branch was almost split apart because of TMO's presence. In fact the confrontation between parishioners was so heated, a fight broke out at a church council meeting. There were even acquisitions that the organization was Communist. As a result, the current priest and older parishioners who still remember the incident still do not want anything to do with TMO even though TMO has changed a great deal over the past twenty years and the churches in the Memorial/Spring Branch area quite conservative. But as I have learned there is often more to the animosity towards TMO. It is also an animosity towards south side Memorial churches by north side Spring Branch church members. In numerous interviews with old time Spring Branch residents, there is the feeling that south side churches go to Spring Branch to do missionary work and then go back home to their safety and security. There is the implication that south side churches intrusion into the community over the years has encouraged undocumented immigrants by providing food, clothing and financial assistance. They contend that if these services were not available that the immigrants wouldn't have come to the community in the first place. At a meeting at the Spring Branch Family

Development Center in the far Northeast corner of Spring Branch I encountered a group of older Anglos that felt that the center, which had been underwritten by several large congregations on the south side at a cost of six million dollars, was perpetuating the inflow of undocumented immigrants and that a suggestion of finding a facility to get day laborers off the street and provide job training and workers rights education, would only exacerbate the problem of these men and bring hundreds more to the community.

In addition to TMO tactics, twenty years ago Spring Branch was in the middle of a great transition from being all anglo, to emergence of white flight and the inflow of Hispanics. This particular Catholic church was in the middle of this transition also. So it could be that TMO was a scapegoat for other things that were happening in the community.

Better the Devil I Know, Than the Devil I Don't Know

People are reluctant to change. They are often more willing to stay in oppressive or destructive situations rather than risk change. As an example, in Spring Branch large groups of Hispanic undocumented workers stand on corners waiting for contractors to pick them up to do day labor. The anglo residents in the area have complained numerous times in the past about the security problem involved, not to mention it being a blight on the area. But when TMO attempted to get the men indoors and off the street in churches close to these gathering points, the residents protested vehemently that if you provide a place for them, hundreds, maybe thousands more would come.

You Don't Look, Act, Think Like I Do

Prejudice is as old as humanity. And Spring Branch/ Memorial is no different. Myths and preconceptions abound between groups. Part of it is just that people don't trust people who are different from their kind. They

tend to focus on those bad examples of the groups they are prejudiced against and summarily characterize the whole group based on the worst cases of that group. Breaking down those myths and getting people to see the other as an individual will be important to our work.

In Spring Branch/Memorial prejudice exists but most often is subtle and hard to identify. It may be as simple as a parent on the South Side of I-10 making a statement to a friend that the SBISD is a good school system as long as your child goes to a south side school. Granted north side schools TAAS (a standardized academic achievement test that all Texas students take in various years of their school career) scores are 10-15% points lower than most south side schools. But students from the north side can get an excellent education there too. But what parents seem to really mean is that they don't want their children going to school with minority children that are poor. The perception among many south side parents is that the schools on the north side are not as safe and that even schools on the south side that have minority children as students, have discipline problems.

But this prejudice operates in both directions. Some people on the north side have much anger and resentment towards south side persons. In one response to my questionnaire a person stated that people on the south side and the north side had nothing in common and had never had anything in common. Additionally, in meetings that I have attended with north side residents on the hiring hall issue, some of the residents stated that if we were so concerned about the Hispanic men standing on the corner, that we (south side residents) should move them to our neighborhood. They stated that we came to the north side to "do good" and then at night went back to the safety of our Memorial area. Also, there is the perception among some that the SBISD has been controlled by the south side for many years. Among many

long time Spring Branch residents this resentment runs deep and they will generalize the actions of a few to the whole.

The same generalizations extends to other groups views of the other. At a recent meeting Pitner, Hollister area this was quite apparent. In addition to the prejudice and generalization of south side residents by old time north side residents, there was a generalization of Hispanics by old time north side Anglos, and a generalization of the police by Hispanics. Getting people to see persons as individuals will be a challenge and providing a space for community conversations and the telling of personal stories that incorporate archetypal symbols may be helpful in this effort.

Nature of Narrative Action Research

After doing the field work for my action research project with TMO in the Memorial/Spring Branch area of Houston, Texas, and then attempting to present my findings in a coherent and meaningful way, I realized that I had a major problem. The traditional APA format (APA, 1992) for dissertations seemed limiting and inappropriate for action research. In considering this problem social psychologists Bauer and Gaskell (2000) state

"What is needed is a more holistic view of the process of social research, to include defining and revising the problem, conceptualizing it, collecting data, analyzing data and writing up the results." (p.9).

They go on to say, "the problem with qualitative research is that it is a 'didactic nightmare'...those who want to become qualitative researchers, find very little procedural clarity and guidance in the literature."

I found this little consolation as I proceeded with my writing. It at least made me feel that I had not discovered something new or that I just did not know where to look for the answer.

From the very beginning page of describing the problem, I had difficulties. Because action research evolves over time, what I started off with as the problem and the associated assumptions surrounding the problem, changed. As I referred to my original outline I realized that my questions concerning the study had been global and unfocused. I believed that archetypal symbols and myths had something to do with what was going on in the community and that some form of social constructionist methodologies could be used to bridge some of those differences and identify symbols and myths that existed in the community. At the beginning of the study I made the assumption that archetypal symbols would have to be introduced into the conversations by the researcher. To my surprise this was not necessary. I found that archetypes, by their nature, emerge naturally in narrative conversations. If I had maintained my original position I possibly would have had to force the issue (Glaser, 1994). I would have had to assume which archetypal symbols were operative within the group and would have been forced to manipulate the process.

To take an objectivist approach to the research would have also put me in the role of the expert. Not only would I help provide the space for conversations and research but I would be obligated to provide the agenda and possibly to suggest the solutions. In Memorial/Spring Branch other administrators, pastors, and community leaders have assumed these types of positions and roles, with little positive effect with those potential participants that we in TMO wanted to engage.

On the commencement of the study, I had been a resident in the Memorial/Spring Branch area for forty years and I felt that I had an intuitive knowledge of the community. I concluded that one of the points of study would be in-group, out-group (see Appendix H) biases between residents living in two areas that were divided by and interstate highway, a natural geographical barrier to the community. This barrier was not just geographical. The economic differential between the two groups was immense, with those living on the south side of interstate I-10 having a much higher median income than those persons living on the north side of interstate I-10.

I hoped that these differences between groups could be readily identified and measured. I devised a questionnaire that I thought would measure some in-group, out-group biases (see Appendix D) . To measure this in-group, out-group bias I devised questions that generally fell into the following categories:

- School success and comparisons between North and South of I-10.
- The role and attitudes towards ethnicity between North and South.
- Perceptions of "goodness", safety, and education between North and South.
- Perceived community icons and symbols that created community trust and solidarity.

At the point where I had collected and analyzed twenty one responses from South of I-10 and sixteen responses from North of I-10, I realized that the questionnaire that I had developed about attitude would be limited in its use. The questionnaire and it's results were minimally successful in making the case for in-group, out-group bias, but I quickly became aware that this way of doing research would, in this case, have marginal, if not inaccurate

results. What was apparent as the project progressed, was that my assumptions about the community were limited and that the community was much more fragmented than I had assumed. Not only were there vast differences in economics, but there were differences among racial groups, religious groups and age groups. Even within groups such as Hispanics, vast differences in beliefs and prejudices were noted.

Some of the reasons for this limited use are enumerated as follows:

1. There are numerous grades and nuances to attitudes that are difficult to measure in quantitative instruments. (Some people are more prejudiced than others).

2. There are in-groups within out groups and out-groups within in-groups.

3. Quantitative instruments have limitations such as questions either being too specific or not being specific enough (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000).

4. Not having enough information about the group or subject to be studied to develop an adequate instrument.

5. Inability to keep up with individual participants in a quantitative study where action research interventions are introduced, to see what changes take place.

6. Written questionnaires often do not really tell people's stories (Wadsworth, 2002).

7. Survey questionnaires are typically not acted upon (Wadsworth, 2002).

8. "Quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

9. Difficulty in eliminating faking (Anastasi, 1982).

It is probable that some of these concerns could have been minimized with more initial research. It is also possible that I could have used a standardized published instrument that had been normed with insured

validity and reliability (Anastasi, 1982). One problem with this approach was that many of the desired participants in this study were Spanish speaking with limited education and limited proficiency in test taking.

The process of doing the small in-group, out-group questionnaire study was still valuable. It helped me realize the complexities of the problem as well as determining, even in this small way, that there were in-group, out-group biases in the community.

Since I was focusing on narrative action research using grounded theory strategies, my decision was to spend my time in developing individual and group relationships within the community through listening to their stories, through interviews, and group meetings.

"In action research, community or organizational stakeholders collaborate with professional researchers in defining the objectives, constructing the research questions, learning research skills, pooling knowledge and efforts...to produce positive social change" (Greenwood and Levin, 2000). Narrative action research uses narratives or stories as a means of creating relationships, sharing of self, identifying common archetypal symbols and myths, and in the case of TMO finding leaders who are angry and impassioned enough to develop power and act.

Grounded theorists develop criteria for analyzing and interpreting data collected and or observed, to further focus data collection and to make further interpretations of that data (Charmaz, 2000). There is a constant comparison of people, their views, situations and actions. Persons are compared in terms of time and change in attitude and circumstance. Hypothesis may change concerning the problems and possible solutions as data is observed and interpreted.

The study was not void of quantitative evidence. Demographic material published by the City of Houston Department of Planning and Development (Super Neighborhood #10, #85, #86, 1999) (Super neighborhood #16, 2000) & (Houston Chronicle, 2000) were used.

As I began to write my initial drafts I found myself writing the problem from my proximal view of the present, rather than where I had begun a year and a half before. For a time that gave me grief until I realized that this was an interesting effect of the research. I saw my own change and development. But I felt frustrated as to how to present that change.

As an example, early on, the decision of who would be participants in the study became an issue. I knew that I wanted to have TMO participants from Spring Branch, Memorial churches as co-researchers and see how they developed and what their impressions were. I also wanted to see what type of person was attracted to TMO work. What was their background and what motivated them to be involved? Beyond those persons, I was unsure about who would be participants in these community conversations. This was one of many paths that I traveled during the study. Part of the project involved engaging other churches, schools, and organizations in relationships. I had originally thought that traditional Anglo congregations in Spring Branch and Memorial would be my target participants. After visiting with numerous pastors over a number of months it became apparent that there was little interest, and in fact antagonism by some of these pastors toward our project. This will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. As it turned out we were able to engage a number of north side Spring Branch Independent School District principals and parents, apartment managers, and Hispanic Pentecostal churches. The emergence of the Hispanic Pentecostal churches

in the leadership was quite serendipitous and would not have been in an original plan of action.

This diffuse and diverse quality of the community and my own isolation within that community initially made the project more difficult but after I freed myself from the need to follow positivist methodologies, and moved towards grounded theory strategies (Charmaz, 2000), I found that the community was much more diverse than I had initially thought, which reinforced my belief that if trust and solidarity were to be achieved, there had to be some common bridge that could bring people together. Even though I was aware of emerging archetypes and even identified them in the early write-ups, I avoided doing coding until after most of the interviews and meetings were done in order to avoid "forcing" or preconceptions (Glaser, 1995).

Similarly, I noted as the project progressed that I didn't have enough information to develop an adequate problem statement and hypothesis. I had assumed that, if given a chance, persons living in Spring Branch would embrace my ideas and the ideas of TMO. I was surprised when I found that people had deep seated prejudices and that those would not be easily changed. I also realized that people would need other motivations to change than just my own sense of Christian benevolence.

The methodologies used were also inconsistent with positivist methodologies. Narratives in the form of focus groups, interviews, and written inquiries were used. The use of multiple mostly open ended meetings, interviews, and focus groups emphasizing narratives assisted in following persons or groups thought processes, rather than boxing them into a certain pattern of presentation. Charmaz (2000) states. Theory remains embedded in the narrative, in its many stories. The theory becomes more

accessible but less identifiable as theory." (p.527) With grounded theory the task of the researcher is to understand what is happening and how the participants manage their roles (Dick, 2002). Themes and motifs emerge into categories and properties through coding of the interviews (Glaser, 1994), (Dick, 2002).

Another important issue of presentation, was the rendering of the Results section and the Discussion section. Since my Narrative Action Research evolved and since I, as researcher, am in the role of reflexive practitioner, my growth and change is a part of the results. It is important to see how that change evolves. That is most difficult to present in traditional APA format. I decided to place the narrative results in regular print and the reflection and discussion of portions of the narrative in bold print. That way the reader can follow the evolution of both the study in terms of its linearity but also from my viewpoint and the viewpoints of other practitioners that were interviewed.

By engaging others in their stories, meaning is constructed with those stories viewed as sacred.

"This sacred epistemology is political, presuming a feminist, communitarian moral ethic stressing the values of empowerment, shared governance, care, solidarity, love, community, covenant, morally involved observers, and civic transformation" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). (p.1052).

That sacredness, that connectedness to the other became an overriding benefit to the research I attribute to narrative action research. I doubt that I would have benefited as I did, if I had not approached the research as a reflexive practitioner. Schon (1973) contends that society and all of its

institutions are always in the process of transformation. We must learn to guide and influence these transformations. We approach this process with preconceived strategies that have been practiced in the past. If they succeed we take that success as affirmation of what we did. If they do not succeed we may use our internal mental maps to develop another strategy "that will address and work within the governing variables." Or we may scrutinize the governing variables themselves. Pastoral counselor Andrew Lester (1995) quotes Stephen Crites by saying,

> " 'the formal quality of experience through time is inherently narrative.' As we humans encounter the world, we organize and make sense out of our experience by means of narration. Each new sensation, stimulus, and interpersonal transaction is shaped by our mental processes into a story." (p.28).

The reflective nature of narrative action research make the presentation of the material difficult from traditional methods. The researcher may go down numerous paths during the study. Many of those paths will be fruitful in gaining an understanding of what is taking place and what is being learned. The process of being involved in doing and relating that story is part of the study. Not just learning about methodology but what those of us as participants learned about leadership, one another, politics, our faith, and community. Philosopher Donald Schon (1973) also states that learning is not just individual. It is also social.

> "A social system learns whenever it acquires new capacity for behavior, and learning may take the form of undirected interaction between systems...government as a learning system carries with it the idea of *public* learning, a special way of acquiring new capacity for behavior in which government learns for the society as a whole."

Social activist Ernesto Cortez (1994) reflects on political action by groups such as TMO as learning and doing and being both intentional and reflective. He further concludes that there is a dissolution within communities due to a feeling of impotence and the failure of the system to deal with the issue of the marginalized in our midst. He states,

> "To reverse the current dissolution of community, we need to rebuild social capital, to reinvest in the institutions that enable people to learn, to develop leadership, and to build relationships to become, in Jeffersons's phrase, 'participators in the affairs of government.' What IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation) has found is that when people learn through politics to work with each other, supporting one another's projects, a trust emerges that goes beyond the barriers of race, ethnicity, income, and geography: we have found that we can rebuild community by reconstructing democracy." (p.305).

As a result of this effort, government learns that persons can exert power responsibly and that government has to be accountable to the public. The system then learns that it must accommodate those who they serve.

This also creates a dichotomy concerning geographic boundaries. In the beginning of the study I envisioned the project to encompass the area bounded by the Spring Branch school district. This was done because demographic material was readily available for that geographic area. But as the project progressed I realized that the boundaries originally set were both too large and too small. They were too large because the area was entirely too large to effectively study the diversity of ideas and people within the community and it was too small because of the interdependency of so many

factors including relationships with governmental officials both local and statewide, relationships with various businesses and religious organizations within the larger community, and TMO's relationship with the state organization Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). The issues identified in the Pitner, Hollister St. community, that were finally chosen as the laboratory for the study, could not have been adequately addressed with the resources available within their own confined geography. The net had to be cast far beyond those narrowly defined boundaries.

We next look in more detail at the role that narrative played in the study and how that effects the form material is presented. Epston & White (2002), state that "narrative implies listening to and telling or retelling stories about people and the problems in their lives." Narrative inquiry according to action researchers (Connelly & Clandinin) 1988,

"allows us to explore our personal histories in an effort to understand how who we are impacts on what we value and what we do. The 'evidence' consists of narrative accounts of significant moments in our past which helps us understand our values and provides insight into current decision-making. There may be elements of documentary evidence, but on the whole the evidence consists of the narrative reconstruction of incidents which we believe to be important for understanding who we are." (p.2).

As has previously been noted narrative was used in "house meetings", a relation building method used by TMO. But in addition I used narrative from the prospective of the researcher and co-researchers to chronicle and analyze changes within the leadership core. In this realm, the emphasis was on personal reflection and narrative. What did we come to the study with, what did we experience, what did we learn? These stories create a sense of

reality with complexities of life, disenchantment, fragmentation and alienation expressed while at the same time, trying to make sense of these factors (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Another form of narrative that emerged was a community narrative of persons of different backgrounds, coming together, bridging differences and learning to work together. These narratives will be addressed more fully in subsequent chapters and are a major function of the social constructionist paradigm.

At the most abstract level is the meta-narrative. As this form of narrative emerged the implications of the archetypal came into focus. The relevance to the human community became evident and even though might not be replicated in the exact form, pointed to the possibility of persons of diverse backgrounds working together for common concerns and goals. It showed that we have common concerns, that we all feel, and that we all have something to bring to the table. It might even be said that this narrative implies the way that human interaction should be.

Narrative action research is not without its shortcomings or its critics. As a branch of qualitative research it must bear some of the same criticism. Among these criticism is that qualitative research does not "emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Quantitative researchers contend that their work is done in a value-free framework. Quantitative research is traditional empirical research and therefore has a huge academic following. Positivist's and postpositivist's often see postmodernism as an attack on reason and truth. The political ramifications within academia of this difference is formidable. Bauer & Gaskell (2000) contend that quantitative research has set the standard for study and methodological training in many

universities, so that the term 'methodology' has come to mean 'statistics' in many fields of social science. Also, in the field of both business and psychology quantitative social research has been widely used. And even though psychotherapy has branched into numerous theories and methodologies, quantitative testing of subjects continue to be a powerful form of assessment, diagnosis and use in treatment (Anastasi, 1982).

Thus we can see why the APA format for research has not been supplanted. It is both a political as well as a functional issue. The APA format is good for what it was constructed and many fine qualitative research reports follow that form. But by the nature of qualitative action research, other forms must be embraced since the research is so varied and researchers find themselves seeking alternative methods of presenting and evaluating their work (Bava, 2002).

The Nature of My Research

Having concluded that traditional methods of presentation of findings to be inadequate and deciding to present those findings in what I considered a more congruent format for social constructionist methodologies and epistemology, we now move to a discussion of the nature of my research and some of the theoretical decisions that went into research design and methodology.

Narrative Action research for this study was the Spring Branch/Memorial area in west Houston, Texas. The perimeter boundaries follow the boundaries of the Spring Branch Independent School District (SBISD). It is an area of the city that is very diverse with the richest zip code in Harris County, as well as being the location that houses some of Houston's poorer residents (Super Neighborhood # 10,16,80,85).

Boundaries and Scope of the Study: Geographical, Relational, and Interconnectedness of Praxis and Theory

One of the initial considerations for the project was to determine the geographical boundaries to be considered. The boundaries of the Spring Branch ISD in Houston, Texas were generally used since this was a relatively easy area to identify demographically. Later as the project progressed the area around the Panda Path Early Childhood Development Center, located on Pitner street and roughly identified in the study as the Hollister, Pitner area was isolated as a more heterogeneous community for the study. This was an area that was represented by a large Hispanic undocumented immigrant population that lived in apartments, a lower middle income single family neighborhood to the south of the apartments that consisted of a large number of Hispanics as well as Anglos, and an area to the west that consisted mainly of middle income Anglo families living in single family residences. This area represented a diverse mixture of community stakeholders.

Even though the geographical and demographic components of determining the boundaries and scope of the study were important, the relational boundaries of the study were possibly more important. One of the primary objectives of the study was to see if and how individuals and groups of persons could bridge differences and work together for community solidarity based upon trust and respect. It became important to find those constituent groups within the community, and see which ones needed to be in the conversation and which groups could be engaged in the conversation. As McNamee and Gergen (1999) reflect on the interconnectedness of systems, "Systems are fields within fields, and any identification of a system is but a temporary index to be abandoned as one grasps the higher

order of which it is a part" (p.16). This was the case with this study. As the study progressed the interconnectedness in and between groups, even outside of the perimeters of the study, became apparent even though there might not be direct contact between these different groups.

TMO members from south of I-10 were key in developing organization and leadership in this project. However, much of the concrete work was focused on Spring Branch, rather than the Memorial area. And without the leadership and involvement of principals, church people, political officials, and residents of Spring Branch, no changes and very little relation building would have occurred.

Demographic Information

Much demographic data for this study area was readily available through Spring Branch ISD, the City of Houston, and through a study by Barton Smith, Professor of Economics and the University of Houston. Additionally, since I had been a resident of the area for over thirty-eight years, I was knowledgeable about the area.

The study area is split almost down the middle by Interstate Highway 10 (I-10). This natural boundary has long been more than a physical boundary but also represented a social and philosophical boundary. The neighborhoods to the north of I-10 are comprised of less than 50% Anglos with the vast majority of non-whites being Hispanic, whereas over 70% of the persons on the south side of I-10 are Anglo. The primary inflow of people into Spring Branch has been a net increase in residents of 68,190 since 1960 with 56,974 of those being Hispanics, many of them being undocumented immigrants. This was not a straight line increase in population growth but involved a turnover due to white flight starting in the 1980's. (Super Neighborhood #10,16,80,85) These new immigrants have

normally been less educated and poorer with over 50% to 60% of Spring Branch residents have a high school diploma or less and 15% to 20% of households making $15,000. or less (Super neighborhood #10,#80,#85,2000). Smith (2001) states, "It would be a serious mistake to treat the Spring Branch area as homogenous aggregate that everywhere faces the same challenges and same potentialities. There are areas of Spring Branch where the average age of the housing stock is more than 50 years old and other areas where it is less than 10 years old. There are areas dominated by low income households, large percentages of which are below the poverty level, and other areas where households would be classified as upper-middle income." (Smith 2001, p.2)

Spring Branch (North of I-10) --A Short History of its Transition

From the late 1950's to the 1980's Spring Branch was a largely homogeneous bedroom community in west Houston. Along with single family dwellings there were large numbers of apartment projects built to satiate the ever burgeoning population of young people. In addition to smaller one and two bedroom units there were also large three and four bedroom units to attract families with children, who would go to the highly desirable Spring Branch Independent School District. There were several boom and bust periods in the Houston apartment market, the last and most devastating being in the 1980's. During these periods lenders foreclosed on thousands of units and were forced to manage projects until they could be resold. As time went on, the projects deteriorated, vacancies were high and tenancy began to deteriorate. Cheap housing, with large units close to downtown, attracted the new influx of Hispanics that migrated to Houston. At the same time Anglos began to either buy homes or move elsewhere to get away from the deteriorating neighborhoods.

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Since the 1990's, due to the new tax laws that did not reward owners for losing money on projects, there is a new equilibrium in the apartment market. Occupancies are high and projects are being kept in better condition. New single family housing in the over $200,000. range is making Spring Branch appear to be an emerging gentrified neighborhood. (Smith, 2001)

Memorial (South of I-10)--Unending Prosperity

For over forty years the Memorial area of Houston had been one of the most prosperous areas of the city. In 1997 46% of the Memorial households had income of over $75,000. per year whereas the rest of the city had only 15% of households with annual incomes of over $75,000. Spring Branch more closely tracked the rest of the city in household income with only about 15% having over $75,000. in annual income. With the exception of the far west end of Memorial, there were few apartments, which some persons claim was a probable cause of the deterioration and the introduction of lower income families into the housing stock in Spring Branch (Super Neighborhood #16, 2000). The large inflow of Hispanics into Spring Branch caused great consternation in the community particularly with old Spring Branch residents

Table 1- Spring Branch, Memorial Statistical Information

Statistics are summarized from Superneighborhood reports #10,16,80,85

$25,000-$35,000	15%	14%	14%	9%
$35,000-$50,000	17%	18%	19%	13%

An early step in the project was the development of a questionnaire to administer to area residents to see if there was an overriding icon or institution that tended to bring people together as community. In this questionnaire, the Spring Branch ISD was the institution identified as showing the greatest potential for creating community solidarity. With scores on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 being most important, indicated respondents SBISD had an average score 7.6 for the South Side and 7.1 for the North side came in a close second and seemed to be the most widely accepted as creating community trust and solidarity. The survey was only administered to Anglos and was a small sample. Also mentioned with a high degree of importance were interfaith groups. Interfaith groups in the community have impacted the community in very positive ways. Some of these are the Memorial Area Ministries which runs a resale shop and gives direct assistance to the needy, the Spring Branch Homeless initiative, which works with homeless families to help get them on their feet and viable and the Spring Branch Family Development Center which was a joint effort of several churches in the Memorial area and continued to be an important force in ministering to the needs of persons in the community. (see Results and Discussion for more complete explanation of questionnaire) (Appendix D)

Most churches were also segregated.   Most Anglo churches did not make attempts to include Hispanics in their congregations. With one

exception, in the few churches that have large Hispanic and Anglo congregations there is very little interaction (Pipes, 2000). It's as if two separate congregations co-existed under the same roof. Only one church surveyed had been able to somewhat integrate the two congregations. There were numerous small Hispanic churches, most of which were either Evangelical or Pentecostal, that have sprung up over the past ten years. They were becoming more of a force in the community as they grew and their congregations become more stable and affluent.

I-10 acts as a barrier to community development and for at least forty years there had been a degree of animosity between the two sides of the freeway. The reasons were varied. Because of the economic diversity, particularly the diversity that had occurred with the incursion of Asians and Hispanics, many old time Spring Branch residents felt more alienated from their community than ever before those rank economic changes occurred. There was a sense that the south side controls the political institutions, particularly the schools. Responses to the questionnaire and subsequent interviews with north of I-10 Anglo residents reflected this bias.

Approximately 5-6% of the community was Asian, primarily Korean. But again there was not much interaction between the Asian and non-Asian community. Many Koreans felt rebuffed by prejudice and perceived heavy handedness in community affairs by Anglo residents. Even though there was a Mosque located in the western end of Spring Branch the Muslim community was yet to be a factor in the political and economic life of the community. However, since September 11, 2001 there had been an effort on the part of both the Christian community and Muslim community to develop relationships and dialogue. The Mosque has had numerous open houses for the community and the MDUMC congregation has had meetings and

discussions with members of their congregation. The Muslim community was making a real effort to be a part of the community while still maintaining their traditions and beliefs intact.

This fracturing within the community and its great diversity presented many challenges in deciding what type of research to do, and how to do it. Some form of the social constructionist paradigm seemed logical, but with few spaces available for conversations and with limited shared activity and less cohesive social relations, barriers existed that made relational activity difficult (Shaw, 2002).

Spring Branch, Memorial--Current Economic, Social and Relational Trends

According to Smith (2001), Spring Branch is poised to "tip" towards gentrification as other parts of Houston have done in the past. Smith also clarified this by saying that community vigilance and involvement would greatly influence this change. He pointed to Spring Branch's proximity to downtown and movement of the center of Houston to the area just east of Spring Branch. Another factor that Smith considered important to this revitalization was the Beltway 8 tollway on the western boundary of Spring Branch that was having a construction boom in light industrial and distribution facilities.

The complexities of the community and the goals of the study influenced the type of research that was used. Three types of research are considered here. They are qualitative research, action research, and narrative research. These three types of research are both conceptual in nature and point towards methodologies.

Qualitative research focuses on qualities of entities rather than experimentally examined or measured means of study. These qualities are often much more subjective and difficult to measure experimentally. Even when attitudinal surveys are taken that supposedly measure a feeling, it is difficult to objectively determine whether the respondents share the same understanding of a norm. As a set of interpretive activities qualitative research does not acknowledge one methodology over another (Denizin & Lincoln, 2000). Constant tensions and contradictions existed as the study was conceived and throughout the project. My early attempts at producing a meaningful questionnaire that might shed light on empirical trends were interesting in that they gave me a place of beginning but only pointed up the need for more intensive one on one and focus group meetings. Grading these responses for nuance and content would have been difficult with a traditional empirical study. Allowing persons to respond with the breadth of their concern enabled the researcher to gain a better understanding of the extent of the problems.

Following is a reaction to the question in the survey questionnaire concerning what people south and north of I-10 are like. The question allows the respondent the latitude to go beyond prescribed boundaries with the answer. This answer is from a person living on the north side but is much less strident and cynical than others.

A north side resident describes north side residents.

"People on the north side of Katy Freeway include many groups of   people. From an ethnicity point of view the population includes a large   Anglo and Hispanic population with smaller groups of Asian residents including Korean, Indians, Vietnamese and several smaller groups. The schools are 50-70% economically disadvantaged

children, however SBISD still does an excellent job of offering educational assistance to all people. Several of the schools on the north continue to reach Exemplary ratings even with their challenges.

The north side is primarily middle income with several pockets of low income and a few high income areas. Because most of the SBISD area north of I-10 is in the city of Houston the residents have   natural opportunities to work with each other. Since Houston has no zoning, these similar opportunities have evolved into a number of strong neighborhood associations. Recently the direction has come from the three organized City of Houston Super Neighborhoods and the Spring Branch Revitalization Association (SBRA).

Politically, even though the area votes heavily Republican (usually though of as pro-business and pro-pollution), the residents care about their community and want a clean neighborhood, nice trees, in other words, pro-environmental. Annual street cleanups and street median improvement projects have occurred regularly throughout Spring Branch by the residents with their own funds. A lot of the residents Republican/Democrat, Anglo/Korean have been trying to work together with or without governmental funds to improve their neighborhood. The recently organized Spring Shadows Neighbor Assistance Program was set up to help residents of Spring Branch having trouble keeping up their homes is an example of neighbors working to make things happen.

One large failure of the northern SBISD residents is the ability to include their Hispanic neighbors in community clean-up projects or nearly any type of organization. The large group of day laborers is a concern to many residents. However not everyone wants

to help these residents as some would like to just see them go away (even though the laborers live in the community too).

As the center of Houston shifts further to the west, the north side   of the Katy Freeway is evolving into Houston's melting pot. A wonderful place to live with a lot of opportunities for the future."

However, another north side resident had these comments to make about the issues between north and south of I-10.

"Homogeneous and inclusive of their own. Elitist. Controlling of local policies. SBISD is bought and paid for by the south side. Thus two districts exist in reality. Decisions on configuration of I-10 expansion are based on south side concerns. Gessner expansion will have far different look on north vs. south side of I-10. Overriding attitude of south side is one of superiority to north side, even where good works are undertaken, it is with a sense of foreign missions - helping the unclean. There is no sense of community between north and south, over the years the gulf has grown steadily wider.

Ethnicity is blamed. I don't agree. There are ethnic individuals on the south side, however because of their economic condition they are "homogenized". Economics is the difference. If you cannot keep up -   you do not belong. No apartments, no industry. Send us your maids - now go back home. You speak of the I-10 corridor as a community. It is not, nor has it ever been. I grew up here, I remember a one campus school district. It is human nature to compare and divide groups. Spring Branch/Memorial is a case study in cultural dynamics. I have seen the steady progression of economic

boundary making develop over the last 50 years, to the point where we have totally separate communities with nothing in common. There are significant differences in any area you may choose to look at. Any and all, take your pick. The sad thing is that we have learned nothing. As we see high end development moving into the north side, slowly creeping westward. This should be, and is, a good thing. It brings with it, not an incorporation of diversity, but the same brick fence elitism that is prevalent on the south side. My middle class family will not belong here. Wealth does not tolerate others in their midst, they simply move them, and then bless the bread they supply them with....somewhere else."

It quickly became apparent that persons living on either side of I-10 or within individual churches, ethnic groups, or neighborhoods could not be easily categorized. But the purpose of the study was not to categorize persons. Themes of isolation and inability to engage different groups occurred over and over again in interviews and conversations. There were signs of hope and ambivalence that indicated an openness, at least with the respondents, to continue to work for community solidarity. This type of response led me to believe that action research methodology and epistemology could help engage persons and bridge the gap through conversation and acceptance of the other.

Another north side resident responded to the question 'Describe south side people.

"SBISD residents south of the Katy Freeway are mostly middle and high income residents with good jobs or income. Their

neighborhoods appear clean and well maintained whether in the city of Houston or in the Villages. The Villages like nearly every other incorporated community in the US (except Houston, Texas and Pasadena, Texas) have zoning to protect their property values. Like residents north of   I-10 most of the people I have encountered are good hard working residents who want to live in a nice part of Harris County.

Politically the south side of the Katy Freeway votes Republican but unlike the Republicans north of I-10 these residents are not perceived as working together on such things as neighborhood cleanups. I have never heard of a street cleanup project as the Spring Branch Redevelopment Association has had on Long Point annually for several years. One complaint heard regularly from some residents south of I-10 is, we pay more in property taxes and we should have the right to spend this money on our   neighborhoods and not shift these funds to the north side of I-10 (or other areas of Houston)."

One area where it is perceived that the residents south of I-10 work together is the operation of SBISD. One common theme heard throughout the Spring Branch side of SBISD is that some individuals from the south side of SBISD have near total control of how SBISD operates (i.e., they own and operate the School Board). From school board elections held on the day when the villages hold their elections (May, not November) to not even considering School Board representatives from each district. The recent SBISD school board election included no candidates from north of I-10 primarily because they knew the location of their house would deny them votes from residents south of I-10. Most school boundaries for schools south of

I-10 appear to have been drawn so as to minimize attendance from students north of I-10.

In 1999, when the Memorial City TIRZ offered SBISD up to $200 million, the citizens south of I-10 (and especially the village of Hedwig mayor) individually and collectively threatened each SBISD Board member to turn down these funds from the TIRZ. This $200 million from TIRZ would have to be spent in city of Houston areas (which in the north needed this money badly)."

As I read these comments I wondered how much of this was factual and what was myth and how that perception was constructed. I found myself feeling that some of the myths that I heard were almost urban legend stories that had some factual basis but that had taken on a life of their own. Could old myths be deconstructed and new myths be con-constructed that would be more inclusive of this multi-voiced community?

If I had been successful in producing an effective questionnaire, distributed it to a large diverse constituency, and made proper interpretations, would it have been anything other than an academic exercise? I was not looking for an exercise nor to simply categorize persons into demographic groups and further reinforce differences. I wanted to see if spaces for conversations could be created, if people could be coaxed into conversations, and if positive relationships could be facilitated to build trust and solidarity. I also wanted to see if people could be mobilized to bring about change. I wanted to be both researcher and participant in that process. I knew that I had to be somewhat on the outside looking in, but I wanted to be in the middle of what was taking place as much as possible. I wanted to be changed by the experience.

These tensions and desire on my part to be both participant and researcher influenced my decision to move towards action research which seemed to go beyond the limiting factors of pure qualitative research. Greenwood and Levin (2000) contend that qualitative research does not go far enough in its scope. Qualitative research is still tied to positivist methodology which allows those in power (the researcher) to maintain their distance from the subjects and still make assumptions and conclusions based on the researchers subjective interpretations of the data. In qualitative research the researcher can have their cake and eat it too.

> "....most qualitative work becomes mired in intraprofessional rivalries and ends up chasing the latest trends in the literature, trends that rarely coincide with the felt needs of any particular social group for analysis and support. Although antipositivist in attitude, qualitative research has not as yet succeeded in reconstructing the relationship between the social sciences and society in any fundamental way." (p.93)

Looking to action research as the next step, we now consider the possibility of using this form of research for the study. Action research brings stakeholders within the community and associated organizations together to collaborate for positive social change. Gustavsen (2002) concludes that a large part of the change that takes place in the context of action research happens because of the social relationships that are created in the research. These stakeholders assist in developing research questions and concerns, learn skills for identifying these skills and then work on implementing for results. Borda (2002) goes further by stating that "participatory action research can reveal well the imageries and representations underlying the logic of conflictual, violent, and repressive

acts...and that we can provide keys to preventing or diluting such acts"
[through action research].

But our initial contacts indicated that most often persons from
the south side made comments that were more neutral in nature. It was
difficult to know if this was because they did not know persons or the
situation that existed on the north side or whether they did not want to seem
to be prejudiced toward that side. Or, was it politeness bias, a form of bias
where persons do not want to admit or appear that they are better than other
people. The written responses also tended to imply politeness bias. The
following are a few responses from residents living on the south side of I-10.

> Describe N. Side "An ethnically diverse population of lower to upper
> middle income. The education level varying from little formal
> education to post graduate."
>
> Describe S. Side "A diverse ethnic mix with all education levels, but
> with concentrations of high income, homogeneous WASP types."

Even responses of persons involved in TMO regardless of which side
of I-10 they lived and whose answers were generally more complete and
more involved, tended to imply politeness bias.

> Describe N. Side "Much like people on the south side except those
> with an ethnic background often have a fear or timidity of the
> structure that surrounds them in that it is peopled by those who are
> usually of a different race, socio-economic level, speak English better
> and/or are viewed as being more highly 'educated.' All this translates
> into sticking 'closer to home,' closer to those who are like themselves,
> where they feel comfortable. Is this true; Do poorer people on the
> north side have more dreams because they don't have the resources or

opportunities to make <u>plans</u> while south side people don't dream as much because they can make plans?"

Describe S. Side "Hurried, more active in schools - have some concerns about sex, drugs and grades as north side parents but without, for many parents south side parents, the concerns about gangs and having to work for the essentials. More willing to be vocal about their discontents and aren't as 'cowed' by those in high positions.

Other comments: Comparing schools "based on what criteria; a) physical structure: Inferior b) academic environment: Superior c) quality of teachers: about the same d) school morale, spirit, cohesiveness: pretty good but don't consider them "superior" just better."

These comments indicate that ambivalence, frustration and hope exists with these respondents. Comments also seem polite and non-conflictual. Could politeness bias be overcome? Could persons look at themselves more honestly? Their comments indicate that some of them would be willing to work for change and community solidarity, through the co-creation of new realities, if only given the opportunity, the space and effective methodology. These residents seem to be looking for ways to come together and make the community a better place to live.

Since I, as a researcher, had ideas that I wanted to test and act upon, action research seem a logical approach. Action research does not separate praxis and theory (Greenwood & Levin, 2000). The test of success for action research is whether it provides the space, the atmosphere for relation

building and support for the stakeholders in determining and carrying out self-determining social change. In terms of action, political and social results, participation by stakeholders and whether there is generative results both within the studied group and outside the studied group is what count? Also to be considered is what happens to the stakeholders studied, after the researcher leaves? And does any other group not directly associated with the research, become motivated to become mobilized by the action of others? Thus, because of the nature of the community, and resources available to TMO and member churches, action research was viewed as a viable method of research for this project.

Another factor influencing the research was the underlying myth that exists in the community is that Spring Branch is undergoing a gentrification transition. In several of the Villages in the Spring Branch area, older apartment units have been torn down and new expensive homes have been built. They are often walled communities with guard gates. This is interpreted in several ways by the community. Some see this as a way to force out poor Hispanics with the resulting upgrade of the community. Others see that in just the opposite way; that there will be no affordable housing for those persons with lower incomes. On the other hand, for some long time residents there was the fear that they will be shut out of their community by high prices and high taxes and high fences and that they would eventually forced out of the community. In September 2002, when a group of parents, TMO members, and teachers from Landrum Middle School did a Walk For Success in several apartment projects around the school, a teacher who had been at the school for a long time stated, "ten years ago you would have had to have a police escort to go to those

apartments." Whether it's Houston's economy or a better tenant moving into the neighborhood, there was an evident improvement in the community.

On the other hand, there was still a movement among Anglo residents to get apartment projects closed that did not meet city health and fitness standards and to keep 'affordable housing' from coming into the Spring Branch community. When it was first learned in September 2002, that there was a move for a variance on a new proposed 'affordable housing' project in Spring Branch, the Super Neighborhoods challenged the project. There were also rumors that TMO was supporting the project, which was not true.

As mentioned earlier, Spring Branch had a significant Korean population. Even though they are not involved in activities outside their own community they had been a positive force with businesses, home ownership, and religious observance. Other parts of Houston have enclaves of other Asian minorities including Vietnamese and Chinese. In several of these areas, those Asian contingencies have convinced the city of Houston to put additional Asian names on the street signs in the neighborhood. In Spring Branch the Korean community petitioned the city to allow them to do the same. It was all but approved when some Anglo activists protested and the city removed it support from the effort (Wolfe, 2001). "Now, many people in Spring Branch seem content to maintain the status quo. They are hesitant to criticize or applaud what some feel is a racially charged, inherently divisive issue." One Anglo businessman who stated that he didn't "have an ax to grind" went on to give his reason why the signs were rejected. "Prejudice - hell, this whole community's prejudiced." This perception was congruent with much of what we found.

And this was just Spring Branch. Add the south side of I-10 into the mix and you had one of the most diverse communities in America. What a perfect laboratory for testing social construction methodology.

Appraising the responses from the questionnaire, it was apparent that there was no monolithic myth that exists in the community. There were many myths. If there was an overriding theme in the responses, it was one of pessimism. Many people saw the challenges but no one had the wherewithal to make changes to bring people together. The Super Neighborhoods that were organized by the mayors office to span the gaps between individual subdivision civic clubs and the city for acquiring needed city services, had thus far been largely ineffective (Reeves, 2000). The city did not provide funding to these groups and so far had not acted on any new proposals coming out of the Super Neighborhoods system. Some would say that it was merely a political ploy to make people think that something was going to happen, if they just meet enough. These groups did however, provide a space for conversation and the development of action plans. It was too soon to see what impact these Super Neighborhoods will have.

They myths, stories, and opinions and complexities that were presented so far are among other things, a result of focusing on narratives of residents from both sides of I-10 in Spring Branch/Memorial. I realized that the questionnaire crafted was too incomplete and that the answers that were most meaningful were the written responses. Demographic data on the community was present but could not mine the rich stories and feelings of participants. Through narrative, persons could both relate the subjective as well as being able to distance themselves from the subject and offer reflective comments. Goolishian (1990) states that "all problems are unique to the narrative context from which they derive their meaning." And

referring to therapy he states, "change in therapy is a dialogical creation of new narrative, and therefore the opening of opportunity for new agency." Shotter (1991) contends that shared understandings are very infrequent and require a great deal of interpersonal work to achieve this understanding. Narrative is one way in which this conversation can facilitate this back and forth "on the way" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988). Narrative in the context of either the individual or the group has particular significance for either resistance to, or the embracing of change. This study is the micro view of the unfolding of this new created story and how it changed the community and the lives of those who participated.

Grounded theory strategies became increasingly important in developing and implementing narrative action research. These strategies enabled the researcher to develop criteria for analyzing and interpreting data collected and or observed, to further focus data collection and to make further interpretations of that data (Charmaz, 2000). In grounded theory there is a constant comparison of people, their views, situations and actions. Persons are compared in terms of time and change in attitude and circumstance. This fluidity while providing more flexibility in the process of collecting and interpreting data, also became an impediment that required diligence in maintaining manageable parameters, to keep the project from becoming overwhelming in its scope.

Not Knowing, Numinisity and Diversity

The Message of Pentecost for Action Research

It may seem out of place to have a section on Pentecost as a part of this study. The point of this piece is that the human situation has always sought to find meaning and much of this meaning is co-created through language. Even though persons may be of different backgrounds, those ideas that resonate with archetypal symbols are appropriated and old myths are deconstructed and new myths are written. These new myths often use the same symbols as the old myths. I believe this is the case with the Christian faith. The meanings that emerge from these reconstructed myths can be powerful and long lasting, since they touch something in our very core.

> Acts 2: 1-13
> When the day of Pentecost came they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.
> Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parathions, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pntus and Asia, Phrygis and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God

in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one
another, "What does this mean?"

       Some, however, made fun of them and said, "They have
had too much wine." (New International Version, 1985),

As in many cases concerning Bible scriptures, Christians are not
always in agreement on interpretations. Keeping this in mind I look at this
scripture from the perspective of social contructionism and the not-knowing
position (Anderson, Goolishian, 1992). During these days after the
resurrection of Jesus, the disciples did a lot of waiting and praying. They
believed that something was going to happen but they did not know what.
For most, there was the hope and belief that Jesus would return. But for
others there was a sense of confusion and anticipation. This sense of not-
knowing is expressed earlier in Acts,Chapter 1, when the disciples asked
"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?" Jesus'
reference to the coming of the Spirit had caused them to wonder if the new
age was about to dawn. 'What happened was that for the first time in their
lives this motley mob was hearing the work of God in a way that struck
straight home to their hearts and that they could understand. The power of
the Spirit was such that it had given these simple disciples a message that
could reach every heart' (NIV). Could it have been the confusion and fear
for the future as to what they should do and of the loss of their Master and
Teacher that made them open to the possibility of something nuministic to
happen? There seems to be a relationship between not-knowing and
numinisity. "The art of letting things happen, action through non-action,
letting go of oneself, as taught by Meister Eckhart, became for me the key to
opening the door to the way. We must be able to let things happen in the
psyche. For us, this actually is an art of which few people know anything.

Consciousness is forever interfering...." (Fox, 1980). This same posture exists when embracing not-knowing whether as a therapist or a community organizer. The organizer takes a position of curiosity and appreciates the reality and experience of the individuals being engaged. This sense of curiosity leaves the door open for the conversation to move in a multitude of directions. For many persons this seemingly lack of direction creates a great deal of anxiety. In heightening the anxiety level some persons become disenchanted with the process because they are product and goal oriented. But when the organizer is product and goal oriented from the beginning, it means that the organizer must promote and sell a specific agenda. It means that they must find a constituency that can resonate with their position. With a position of not-knowing a new reality emerges as individuals assess their own realities and narratives and mesh those narratives with others. They see that they have something in common other than a specific agenda.

As a result of this less directive approach, surprises occur. Surprises are the things that create an atmosphere for numinicity to flourish. Creation becomes relational. Something new and unexpected comes from the experience of sharing narratives and co-creating new narratives and myths. 'Being is radically relational.' Echarts says, "all things are connected" and "God is being". In the sharing of narratives from a not-knowing viewpoint one senses that connection taking place with the emergence of trust and caring. The recognition and experience results in a sense of the sacred and mystical.

Does this mean that there is no direction. On the contrary, the direction comes out of results of these new connections and relationships. It comes because people have a new confidence in being able to tell their own story and find that their story is shared by others and that by knowing that

their experience is not singular, they become empowered to act on that experience. Whether it be to become involved in ones children's education, to speak out against injustice or just to know that you are not a one dimensional creature that is uninteresting and flat; that your story counts.

After years of working with people in counseling and groups, to see people emerge from their singularity is almost mystical. Even though I have been taught methodologies for facilitating people making these kinds of changes, I am still in awe of change. I'm sure that my spiritual experience influences my perception of change and how it occurs. Life is so much richer when you approach it with curiosity and anticipation.

The other point in this scripture that relates to social construction and not-knowing is the references to speaking in tongues. There has been a lot written over the centuries about what these scriptures mean. For some scholars, they mean that the disciples spoke to the listeners in a language that they could understand. Not necessarily meaning it was Greek or Aramaic but that the message and stories that they told resonated with the people that were told about Jesus. It is the same with us. The stories and parables of Jesus are common to us all (archetypal symbols) and even if we are not a believer there are common themes that are ageless and that all people can relate. The gospels embrace ageless myths and shift their symbolism into a new paradigm of that age. The deification of Jesus shifted the worlds understanding of what a living God was like. God was now approachable and loving of *all* His children and the God that Jesus incarnates, sacrifices Himself for all humanity out of love, rather than demanding allegiance as all gods before him had required. For centuries the concept of the virgin birth and the resurrection of the dead had been a part of mythology. Egyptian pharaohs were believed to be living gods, conceived

by an earthly mother and a heavenly god. And when the pharaoh died he was embalmed and sent with his worldly possessions to the next world to be raised. Even in early Egyptian history it appears that the pharaoh at some point was sacrificed in order to ensure the pleasure of the gods. As time went on a surrogate was chosen in order to spare the real pharaoh (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988). Other cultures in the Mediterranean had similar beliefs and similar myths with associated rituals (Bultmann, 1956). At the time of Christ the emperor of Rome asserted that he too was a living god. So the story of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection was not a foreign an idea to people of that time.

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> "It has been pointed out that the "Christ-myth" has it origins in contemporary (first century) mythology. The figure of the Messiah-King, as well as the image of Son of Man (and connected with it, the doctrine of the two aeons), comes from the messianic mythology of Judaism. On the other hand, the ideas of a savior-god who dies and is once again brought to life, and of sacraments (baptismal bath and holy meal) through which the mystics acquire a share in the destiny of the deity--these ideas come from the mystery religions. Furthermore, it is from Gnosticism that we get the idea of the heavenly redeemer and his incarnation and exaltation, which prepare the way for the faithful to return to their heavenly home." (Bultmann, 1960). p.184.

What made the story of Jesus so impactful was the difference in the character and message he preached. Jesus was approachable, whereas the emperor and the pharaohs were not. Jesus died for all persons, not just for the elite. Jesus spoke of compassion and the worthiness of all humankind. The emperor and the pharaohs again only spoke of the elite and themselves. This paradigm shift could not have been lost on those that Jesus' disciples preached. The disciples used language that persons understood.

But much of this meaning may have been lost on us. The Church over the centuries has tended to make these supernatural events historically unique, as if they had never happened before. Possibly this was because, to make a connection to past references to these myths might put Jesus' life and experiences in the same category as superstitious myths that would cast doubts on whether the events of Jesus' conception, life, death, and resurrection really happened as it is related in the Bible. But to me, gaining a different understanding of God's nature through the reinterpretation of existing myths, whether it happened in exactly the way related or not, gives me a greater appreciation of Jesus, his teachings, and his incarnation as God. In this new mythology there is a new understanding of God's wondrous, loving, and forgiving nature that did not exist before Jesus and the story of his life.

> 'Our liturgy of the future....must celebrate a connectedness that the discovery of DNA and the human genome has revealed to be very close....That celebration must enable us to see the mutuality of life and to be cognizant that one can neither be human, nor a living being of any kind, alone.' (Spong, 2001, p.207)

This is how I want to approach relation building with our work with TMO. Can we approach organizations from a more or less attitude of not-knowing and engage persons in the process, without pre-conceived ideas of outcome and then draw out and lift up stories that are archetypal? Then can we deconstruct old stories and myths and with the collaboration of persons involved in the process, see what paradigm shift might take place in persons thinking, that will embrace and appreciate the other? Could this be our mission as a faith community, that God is the same God that we all worship, and that all persons are loved and lovable and that they have value and can contribute to the betterment of that community?

Theoretical Framework: Review of Literature

Basic tenets and applications derived from social construction, appreciative inquiry, evolutionary psychology, Jungian psychology dealing with archetypal symbols and myths, numinosity, and game theory provided the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study of community relation building. Bringing these different disciplines together was challenging but social construction theory acknowledges that meaning making crosses disciplines, thereby creating an integrated praxis that is less limiting (Gould, 1982). In this study various disciplines and language uses are employed in describing and reflecting on the observations and outcomes of the research. Using various language uses and disciplines presented more lenses to view the problem and the results.

Gergen (1999) refers to how different professionals in diverse disciplines use language to describe similar phenomenon. This can result in persons not versed in that language being excluded from the conversation thus creating an exclusionary culture. It also may create a myopic view of the reality, because of a narrow vision of the problem. This same phenomenon exists between groups in a community in terms of their accent, national language spoken, vernacular used or belief system expressed through language and symbol. As the research unfolded for this project, my original assumptions about the community and the problem often were challenged and the introduction of different lenses of theoretical thought enabled the process to continue and be dynamic. This dynamic nature and the consideration of different disciplines and theoretical concepts made it

imperative to integrate our thinking with these new ideas that might normally be expressed by the various theory.

Social Construction

Social construction is the primary underlying epistemology justifying this narrative action research. Social constructionism concludes that most all human meaning is created out of social interaction (Gergen, 1999). Knowledge comes from this interaction and is, among other things, embedded in narrative and conversation. Social construction has revolutionized the way we look at relationships in all venues of life. It suggests the need to level the playing field between those engaged in conversation by accepting all persons as having something to contribute and recognizing the negative implications of setting up hierarchical domains of communication (Baldwin, 2002).

Social construction also takes a post-modern relativistic view of knowledge. Truth, if the word can even be used, lies in the constructions that persons place on objects and ideas. Philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, (1980) did ground breaking study of language and its use in creating meaning. Truth, for him, was seen as being constructed rather than objectively determined.   His work has impacted much of the postmodern and social constructionist movement and its theoretical basis that our interaction through language is the primary basis of creating meaning.

Persons collaborate in the effort of constructing meaning. Discord occurs when systems become rigid and inflexible. But this would not imply that the social construction paradigm is without conflict. On the contrary, conflict is a part of the process of creating meaning, even if parties agree to disagree. And meaning can also be created when persons avoid collaborative languaging. Lack of verbal communications can result in persons making

assumptions about the other that may or may not be accurate. This may create an impediment to future mutual understanding and collaboration.

Projects influenced by social construction and appreciative inquiry, even though not necessarily empirically based, show the efficacy of these methods in organizations and communities. Cooperrider (1999) reviews the work of Bliss Browne in the Imagine Chicago project, an ongoing community development program that engages all segments of the community through the use of social construction and appreciative inquiry. In this project representatives from neighborhoods, schools, museums, business, and government engaged in conversations about what was important to them and what they saw as possibilities for Chicago. Since it was started, this bottoms up approach to community organizing has grown into a world wide movement, with dozens of cities using the innovative techniques in creating vitality within communities and visioning what possibilities might exist if people work together. This project is important to this current study in that it presents a working model for communities to use in organizing for collaborative projects and understanding.

(McNamee and Gergen, 1999) reflect on the interconnectedness of systems. "Systems are fields within fields, and any identification of a system is but a temporary index to be abandoned as one grasps the higher order of which it is a part." An understanding of this concept of interconnectedness was beneficial in that it helped the researcher to recognize the many facets of the problem and those who were a part of the unfolding story of the Spring Branch, Memorial community. The intricacies and complexity of communication channels between those interconnected systems became an important factor in finding spaces for conversations to take place with these multiple voices. However, it became apparent as the

study progressed that even though there was a recognized interconnectedness of systems, there had to be parameters placed on the study to make it manageable. Without these parameters, it would be impossible to address the multitude of systems and the voices within each of those systems.

In the field of family therapy Anderson & Goolishian (1988, 1990, 1992) explored and enriched the field of family systems theory from a social constructionist viewpoint. Their understanding of the use of questions coming from the "not knowing" position was particularly helpful. That position took the researcher out of the role of the expert who had all the answers, and thrust the participants into the role of co-creator or meaning. It also facilitated the possibility of numunisity to exist by introducing the uncertainty of outcome.

This position of "not knowing" also provided an atmosphere conducive for the researcher to risk changing and allowing the relationships to continue to evolve.

Extended Phenotypes, Memes, and the Selfish Gene

Even though evidence would indicate that most human sense making comes from social construction, there is still a large body of evidence that advocates the idea that certain innate drives inform the human condition and impact our construction of meaning. Social construction would generally discount these innate drives as not having much to do with the creating of meaning.

Philosopher Daniel Dennett (1995) discusses Darwin's ideas concerning natural selection and nature's way of weeding out the unfit and organisms that do not accommodate the environment. Dennett goes further

and views humans as an organism whose cells and organs work together for the purpose of perpetuating DNA. He draws the conclusion that we also interact between humans for the purpose of surviving and perserving our DNA strains. He cites Thomas Hobbes theory that humans, in their primitive stages of development, hit upon the idea of cooperation for mutual benefit and formed a "social contract". This was the birth of society and civilization and in order to stabilize this contract, language was used as the medium of exchange and negotiation.

Biologist Richard Dawkins (1982) carries Darwin's theories further by introducing the ideas of the extended phenotype, the selfish gene, and memes. He theorizes that DNA clumps together to form more efficient organisms that serve to enhance the DNA's chance of replication. Extended phenotypes include "all effects of a gene upon the world.... where the effects influence the survival chances of the gene, positively and negatively." This manipulation of the environment, he concludes extends to the world of ideas. Meme's he states, reside in the mind and are analogs to genes in that they are ideas that seek to be replicated, as genes do. There is little empirical evidence, he himself admits, to sustain his arguments for these concepts. But they are intriguing and antidotal evidence would imply that he is on the trail of something important as pertains to social biology.

If we can accept that there *are* primitive innate drives such as the desire to procreate and the need to self protect, this would inform and influence sense making in the social constructionist context. Even if one did not accept the idea of memes, we would have to accept that biological drives influence our actions and our thinking. From that point on, sense making is constructed through social interaction.

I would suggest that the socially constructed realities associated with these primitive drives inform much of what brings us together and what drives us apart as humans.   The meanings of the value of children to a community, the need to self protect, and the drive to provide first order needs are archetypal representations and are expressed as both internal and externally fixed symbols. They are universal in nature. Even the social construction paradigm could be considered archetypal, since language and communication fill our need to form the "social contract", be relational for communally providing first order needs, protection and procreational reasons.

Archetypal Symbols and Myths

The interpretation used in this study is different from Jungs concept of archetypes in that he conceived that archetypes were intrapsychic, primitive, and inherited motifs and came from the collective unconscious (Campbell, 1971).   Jung also saw in these universal motifs, a spiritual component that connected all humanity.   I do not deny that archetypes have spiritual implications and that the spiritual is not important to most humans but in this study we will consider that the source of archetypes and how they are developed is grounded in biology and that the symbolic motifs called archetypes are socially constructed. Typically these archetypes would be limited to biological mandated desires for procreation and self protection. Such expressions would include children, safety and security, and issues of transcendence and mortality.

Myths then flow from these archetypal symbolic constructions. Philosopher Ernst Cassirer (1946) makes a distinction between language and myth.

"Myth never breaks out of the magic circle of it figurative ideas. It reaches religious and poetic heights; but the gulf between its conceptions and those of science never narrows the least bit. But language, born in that same magic circle, has the power to break its bounds; language takes us from the mythmaking phase of human mentality to the phase of logical thought and conception of facts." (p.9)

Joseph Campbell (1988) would concur with Cassirer that myth is the "experience of life." Therefore, it can be non-rational and non-verbal and can be communicated between persons.

Of particular interest in this project is the identification and tracking of archetypal symbols and myths by individuals and groups and how through deconstruction of meanings associated from these symbols and myths new meanings and collaborations are established. Campbell (1971) describes Jung's concept of archetypal symbols and myths and how cultures share these same symbols in their religions, their mores and customs, and their mythologies. Understanding these archetypes is important in understanding the directions and functions of conversations within groups. It is also important in understanding the evolution of deconstructed symbols and myths and how they can be both agents for positive change or agents for impeding and entrenching myths concerning the other. In this study **positive change** is defined as the creation of newly constructed archetypal myths between persons that result in those persons experiencing an affinity for the others that were involved in the construction of those new myths and that resulted in more trust between those persons and a willingness to work

collaboratively in the community to establish new or amended behaviors, actions, or attitudes reflecting their common interests. This study assumes that common interest exist in the form of archetypes, but that because of the objectification of the other, positive interactions have been minimal.

Jung & Campbell, (Feinstein and Krippner, 1988) affirm the importance of archetypal symbols and associated myths within a culture. But they spend an inordinate amount of time describing ways that an individual may internalize, better understand and personalize these symbols and myths but do not give much guidance about the process by which common symbolic and mythological themes are constructed and are deconstructed over time and new myths constructed. Campbell also asserts that myths have shifted over time from collective myths to individual heroic myths. This elevates the individual at the expense of the collective community. From a social constructionist viewpoint we would consider the collective construction of symbol meaning and myth meaning as paramount to community development. We would also add the icon and the abstract archetypal symbol as a focal point in relation building in that they have the effect of creating communal myths that can bind persons together in collaborative efforts.

The cultural effect of symbols is crucial in cultures and groups working together with trust and cooperation. In order for persons to work together, form alliances, and trust one another, they may hold back pertinent information concerning their beliefs and prejudices concerning these symbols. Existing myths may be deconstructed and new myths constructed but important information may be omitted in order to have positive outcomes. People often do not engage in conversations for fear that they will be ridiculed or that someone will not agree with them.

This project uses social constructionist methodology in addressing the issues of meaning making, through a window of archetypal symbols. When we look at the area of social construction it is apparent that not much is said about icons or symbols except in the language meaning sense. It's as if the study of archetypes and social construction theory do not acknowledge the existence of the other or at least do not make a connection.

Campbell (1988) affirms the importance of symbols and myths in shaping and coercing cultural norms and beliefs. But Campbell and Jung also emphasize that symbols and myths are internally mandated and that persons and cultures only resonate with these internal motifs through the "collective unconscious".

The central theoretical focus of this study is the proposition that meaning is not only constructed through intersubjective referential realities (Rijsman, 1997) but also through interobjective projected meanings onto archetypal symbols. This is accomplished by persons in one group ascribing certain meanings to themselves and certain meanings to other objects or persons. These meanings may contradict meanings that other groups of persons ascribe to the same object or group. The intersubjective meanings to observers of archetypal symbols often lacks consensus of meaning between individuals and groups. This diversity of belief by persons can cause problems of co-ordination and can impede understanding and trust among observers and practitioners but also can result in believers and non-believers avoiding discussion of personal understandings of the symbol. This may be done to preserve the symbol as a unifying object between factional groups to enhance the perception of unity and solidarity. From a positive view, archetypal symbols, because of some internal shared social constructed

belief, can be the means by which persons suspend differences of the other and the associated symbol and coalesce around the symbol.

Noble & Davidson (1996) state that meaning only "becomes an issue once the symbolic use of signs has emerged as a practice." It becomes important for groups to protect the meanings associated with the symbol and the myth so that a sense of continuity and grounding can be maintained.

One example of archetypal intersubjective meaning may be expressed through a spiritual connectedness called (Otto, 1923) numinosity. Even though nuministic responses are purely subjective, this subjective state can create a sense of accomplishment, acceptance, perceived connectedness, and spirituality as opposed to a researcher attempting to view the event in purely objective terms through control and outcome manipulation. This form embraces both the rational and the non-rational. This mystical relationship with ones environment can be separate from others or it can be in concert with others.

Part of this spiritual numinosity may come from the sense of "not knowing" (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988, 1990, 1992). Those persons involved in the meaning making process, whether researcher, participant, or other, approach the process with anticipation and without expectations of outcomes. This allows persons to go beyond the boundaries of their own preconceptions and prejudices. It allows for deconstruction of old myths and the co-construction of new myths. At its most inspired level a sense of bonding and closeness can occur that has spiritual overtones that something mystical has happened.

This seeming lack of objectivity is unsettling and controversial to many quantitative researchers (Gergen, 1999). We will weave the concept of numinisity and spirituality into the fabric of the study.

Theologian Martin Buber (1970) discusses the idea of numinosity in I-Thou (You) terms, where an almost spiritual connectedness between the participants occurs. It involves a sense of respect and engagement that does not exist in an I-It relationship where the parties are looked upon as objects.

In the field of Appreciative Inquiry Schiller, Holland & Riley, (2001) use words such as passionate, inspiring, and spiritual to describe appreciative leaders. The accounts of such leaders would indicate that there is something beyond intellect and knowledge that sets charismatic leaders apart from others who may be less successful. This would not imply that only appreciative leaders are successful, but that they have struck upon something that engages and respects others and allows those others to feel a part of the process.

It will be valuable to see whether changes in community perceptions and cooperation will be characterized by creation of new myths and numinosity.

Moscovici & Perez (1997) studied the criteria for prejudice as wells as focusing on the social and historical roots of prejudice. Values also were considered through a study of students on their attitudes toward Gypsies. It was shown in the study that social structures that were either totally homogeneous or totally diverse with no predominant ethnic group, was more desirable than a social system with two roughly equal ethnic groups that were interdependent.

Allport (1979) while not specifically alluding to the significance of language in meaning making in relationship to the nature of prejudice, concludes that various influences inform a persons tendency towards prejudice. These would include parental training, cultural input, and visible differences in persons. Additionally, he cites a persons tendency towards a

rigid worldview where there is a need for certainty rather than a relativistic view. Both Allports assertions concerning societal influences and a persons lack of a flexible worldview would point to a need for persons to engage in conversations that would center around common thematic motifs that could be areas of ultimate agreement and cooperation.

As a result of ideas presented by Rijsman, Moscovici & Perez, and Allport it was determined that a small study of In-Group, Out-Group biases would be made as a part of this study to establish individual and community biases.

Additionally, it was important as a preface to the project to determine that some form of in-group, out-group bias was present in the community. As has been previously presented, the Mann-Whitney U test was used on statistical material gathered through a survey and found that there was a significance in what persons from both side of I-10 believed concerning the dominance of the school board by persons on the South side of I-10 and their showing funding preferences to south side schools. In subsequent interviews and focus groups this in-group, out-group bias was confirmed. Since this was a very diverse community we concluded that it would be important to consider social representations and prejudice in the study.

Game Theory

Another thread of theoretical material to be assimilated into this study involved game theory. Even though game theory is not a primary thrust of this study it nevertheless has implications. It became apparent during the study that outcomes and responses by different groups could not be understood or ameliorated simply by using appreciative inquiry techniques or archetypal symbols. Motivations were operative in participants and needed to be understood from a different paradigm. Persons would not

respond simply on the basis of altruism and the researchers understanding of Christian benevolence. In addition to dealing with their prejudices they needed to see that they could receive benefits from engaging with the other and making changes, that without some pay off, would be difficult to achieve. Thus, game theory.

Some of the game theory studies considered are as follows: Axelrod (1987) used the Prisoner's Dilemma as a method of looking at effective strategies. A form called TIT FOR TAT, a strategy of cooperation based upon reciprocity was most successful. A variation of that study was by Bender, Roderick, & Stout (1991). It studied TFT in a noisy environment and found that more generous strategies were more effective. Boyd & Richerson (1988) studied cooperation in larger groups and concluded that there needed to be some mechanism which maintains cultural differences and variation or defectors would spread more quickly than those of cooperators. Bull & Rice (1991) studied "partner-fidelity" as it related to cooperation. Caporael et al (1989) studied in-group biasing not explained by "economic man" or "selfish gene" theory. Alternatively, they explained that sociality was a primary factor shaping the evolution of Homo sapiens. Other more complex forms of the PD game such as the Queuing Game and the Heave-Ho Game is considered in determining the way diverse groups might learn strategies for cooperation.

All of these studies even though not completely applicable were still congruent with our study. Might old time Anglo residents of Spring Branch see benefits from a workers center for Hispanics, if it could be shown that the workers could be moved from the streets, thus making the community more acceptable and creating higher property values? Could Hispanic workers be convinced that they could make more money and be safer by

being in a workers center, than standing on the corner waiting for an employer to come by and hire them? Both of these examples are considered in the studies on game theory, cited.

Empowerment and Civic Action

The issues of power and empowerment are primary for such a study as this. It is particularly important since TMO is an interfaith organization that is concerned about social justice issues and the empowerment of and cooperation between persons from different faith traditions, different ethnic and economic backgrounds. In the words of Cortez (1994), "power precedes program". In order to be effective in the political arena, persons must come together, organize for power, and work the program.

Foucault (1980, 1984) suggests the relationship with constructed meanings in language and power. He also suggests that power is exerted by the way conversations are formed and that through myths, misrepresentations are made that misdirect or misinform to lesser sources of power. Culture suggests what "should be" through these myths and thereby oppress the other. The other becomes a part of that system of power/knowledge in accepting the dictates of the more powerful.

This expression of power and the meanings addressed to certain groups of people is even expressed in public housing architecture (Wit, 1993) which had as its results the isolation and oppression of those that it was intended to serve.

As a result of Foucault's work and the nature of this study, the aim of which is to work to empower persons, we will need to be aware of and address some of the issues that he addresses.

The Church as a whole has struggled with the issues of power and its use since the beginning of the Church. These questions are no less heated today than at other times in history. Our nation, being formed on the premise of separation of Church and stated attempted to address these issues but even now there continues to be questions of what that concept means and how power should be practiced. For many, particularly in mainstream Protestantism, the idea of the Church exerting political and economic power, is repugnant. This might be that there was no necessity for the Church to provide a united front to the community in regards to the political reality, since the Church has long enjoyed political and moral hegemony (Brueggemann, 1997). This issue arose throughout the study and therefore must be dealt with as a part of this book.

Ruoss (1968) lays down an argument for the Church to be involved in community development which involves the use of power and politics. This is a cornerstone for TMO and it's sister organization, the IAF. Vatican II (1965) posits that the Church must be concerned for the lives of all persons and cannot escape into monasticism. It must be involved not just with acts of mercy but also with acts of social justice. A state of cooperation and dialogue between diverse communities is necessary to bring justice to all humanity. In addition to Vatican II and Ruoss, the theological issue of social justice were explored through the writings of Neibuhr (1957), Bruggemann (1993), and the Social Creed of the United Methodist Church (2000).

Hyung (1999) discusses the influence of Juan Luis Segundo and his influence on liberation theology. Segundo (1976) envisioned the "hermeneutic circle" for deciding dogmatic relevance and concludes that "anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately

bound up with the existing social situation in at least an unconscious way". He sees theology as being involved in the social struggle and connected with historical reality. Praxis challenges theory according to Segundo and is informed and guided by faith. Gutierrez (1973), another Latin American theologian also echoes much of what Segundo says in professing that the Church must be attuned to the needs of the impoverished and the oppressed. They both stand on the pronouncements of Vatican II on the role of the church in the world towards the ends of social justice.

Neibuhr as previously discussed calls for those who are in the faith community to work for justice as part of their Christian calling. He also does not see justice coming alone from persuasion. Having lived through World War II, Neibuhr believed that power sometimes had to be wielded in order to obtain justice. There is always a tension with power and "tension involves covert conflict; and there will be moments in history when covert conflict becomes overt."

Old Testament theologian, Walter Bruggemann (1993) discusses the role of post-modernism in challenging the church to imaginatively redefine what the scriptures say and also calls for a more pro-active behavior in the process. He also believes that the organized Church no longer has the privilege of being a hegemony. He sees this loss of power as being an opportunity for the church to reaffirm its mission and recognize how it has become part of the popular culture.

The United Methodist Church as well as other main line Protestant churches take strong stands on social issues. However, even though they profess the right of the Church to advocate for social justice most congregations take a very conservative view of separation of Church and state.

Even though many, if not most, in the Christian faith community would not embrace the philosophy of social justice or liberation theology, it was important that those of us involved with TMO consider our faith and our faith traditions as we embarked on this project.

Research Design and Methodology

In the beginning two settings were targeted in the Spring Branch, Memorial community in West Houston, Texas. These included TMO leaders and residents living South of Interstate I-10 in the affluent Memorial neighborhood, and TMO leaders and residents living North of Interstate I-10 in the low to middle income Spring Branch community stakeholders in the Pitner, Hollister area of Spring Branch, North of I-10. Early in the study the focus was on the differences between residences from the south side and north side of I-10 in west Houston. The purpose of this was to determine whether an in-group, out-group bias existed between the north side and south side of I-10. A questionnaire was developed and distributed to TMO volunteers, church members not associated with TMO work and others living in the community. Analysis of the responses was made as data was collected. The study was discontinued after there were sixteen responses from persons north of I-10 and twenty-one responses from south of I-10. The Mann-Whitney U test was used to see if there was significance on any of the questions. Response on only one question was significant. That was concerning whether there was unequal funding of schools by the school board, favoring southside schools. Those persons living on the north side believed that there was less favorable funding to school on the north side.

It became apparent that the questionnaire was not specific enough and could not adequately isolate and evaluate attitudes of a large enough segment of the community to gain a significant understanding of those

attitudes. Because of an unclear understanding of the community, and the recognition of the fractured and diverse nature of the community, this method of collecting data was abandoned after about forty participants filled out the questionnaire. The community was far too complex in nature and a fair appraisal of the residents could not be effective with this method alone. The results of this study will be reported more fully in the results and discussion sections.

Other forms of methodology used were personal interviews, focus groups, and house meetings. House Meetings are a technique of narrative engagement that TMO uses to build relationships, discern issues, identify leaders, and develop an action agenda.Grounded theory which has some of the characteristics of positivist theory of collecting and generalizing data interpretations but collects that material through field or ethnographic methods where the researcher does not completely immerse themselves into the specific community, was assumed as a strategy for our social constructionist paradigm (Charmaz, 2000).

House meetings facilitated by TMO are like many other small group meetings where eight to ten persons sit in a circle and converse. There are some notable differences. People begin by introducing themselves and what organization they belong too. In the case of TMO where there is often not only racial but national diversity, language interpretation is quite important since many people may have minimal skills in the predominant language of the group. Next, participants are given directions to tell a story about a subject such as the following:

1. Tell a story about how you came to be in Houston.

2. Tell about someone who was a great influence on you, growing up.

3. Tell about a child that you have known or loved who overcame something and what was it that he/she overcame.

The facilitator models for the group and keeps the flow moving so someone does not monopolize the conversation. Then the facilitator asks a question such as:

What are some of the pressures that you and your family experience in this community?

Notes are taken on each question and the responses. After the groups have met and each person has told their story, the recorder reports to the larger group. The responses are put on newsprint for everyone to see. Interestingly, the responses are always quite similar. Even in middle class congregations such as Memorial Drive United Methodist Church the responses generally focused on issues of education, fair wages, health care, safety and security, community values, and immigrant issues.

From these meetings natural leaders emerge. A leader is not just someone who is verbal and vocal. A leader is someone that can marshal a constituency, no matter how small. They exert influence in other words. Even though groups that have met before throughout the community and have identified the same issues, it is important for each new group to go through the same process. There are several reasons for this. First, TMO is about being relational. In order to work together persons not only have to share the same interests, they have to trust one another. Additionally, it's important to build a constituency across social, ethnic and political lines. Second, specific issues are identified by one group that may be different form other groups.

As the study progressed I realized that I would have to sharpen the geographical area to be studied. Originally, I had thought that the entire Spring Branch ISD would be the area to be studied. However, I could not ignore the influence of other diverse groups within the original geographical system. This methodology is in keeping with grounded theory strategy which allows for an initial research question or questions to be altered or analyzed in deeper ways as the research unfolds (Dick,2002). The data is like an unfolding story that is both witnessed and interpreted by the researcher. The researcher recognizes that they are not objective in interpreting the events and data of study. Meaning is sought out in terms of both respondents meanings and researchers meanings. This strategy lies somewhere between traditional research methodology and postmodernist methodology (Charmaz, 2000). This process included data collection through interviews, focus groups, and House meetings. Tape recordings or notes were taken during or after the interviews and meetings. Coding of the data collected was made to determine core archetypal categories and connected categories and properties. As a result of this coding motifs and archetypes emerged from the interviews and meetings. Then the process of writing up the results with the accessing of relevant literature as it became relevant (Dick, 2002), (Glaser, 1994).

My own beliefs and attitudes were challenged by the project. Bringing about change was much harder than I originally had anticipated. And the resistance to the change and the associated antagonism did not come from where I had thought it would come.

In considering the constructionist paradigm and grounded theory strategy, seven basic, critical issues were considered (Denzin & Lincoln): They were axiology, accommodation and commensurability, action, control,

foundations of truth, validity, and voice, reflexivity, and postmodern representation. With the constructionist paradigm a relativistic "ontology, a transactional epistemology, and hermeneutic, dialectical methodology" (Denzin) is observed. However, with postmodern paradigms such as social constructionism there is a "blurring of genres". It becomes difficult to differentiate the methodologies used. (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Relativistic Ontology: There are multiple realities

The ontology of social constructionism is relativistic and with local and constructed realities. This was best exemplified in House Meetings where persons who did not know one another started their relation building with the telling of stories. Questions such as "tell about someone when you were growing up that influenced you" "What kind of pressures do you and your family experience?" "Tell a story about a child that you have known and loved who overcame something." The resulting narratives had the effect of humanizing each of the participants and even though each persons experience may be different, persons can usually relate to others stories. By telling the stories to one another, they are deconstructed in the telling and a new story of sharing is co-created between members of the group. This new story of sharing then becomes the beginning basis of trust and relationship. It is local and constructed because of the setting. It is relativistic because it does not judge what persons believe but honors and respects the experience of the other.

Epistemology: The source of meaning

Meaning is created in the transactional qualities of the story telling. Stories are subjective and mythological. As was noted in the meetings and interviews tended to coalesce around archetypal symbols such as children, safety and security and first order issues.

In working with TMO volunteers as co-researchers, the process was slightly different in that often the interviews were one on one. In those situations the stories helped my co-researcher and me to develop new meanings and deconstruct old myths.

Philosopher Richard Rorty (1979) stated, "we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature." This along with Wittgenstein (1963) who states "for a large class of cases--though not for all--in which we employ the word 'meaning' it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language" almost seems simplistic when first read. But on deeper study, the implications are enormous. It would indicate that meaning is constructed through language and interchange and that for Wittgenstein words may have different nuances between and even within groups.

For me as researcher, I came to the project with my own set of beliefs and myths. I had been influenced by the Christian existentialist movement and believed that knowledge was experienced and relative. However, I also had been influenced by Jung and his idea of archetypal symbols as relating to the collective unconscious and this study attempts to bridge the dichotomy between issues of innate inherited qualities and social constructed phenomenology.

Methodology

Methodology in the participatory and constructionists forms of interaction created situations where political participation and collaboration between groups emerged. Common themes around archetypes became evident as more and more persons developed relationships through house meetings and small group relation building situations. As the process progressed learning pieces were introduced to the participants in the area of

political activism and the role of the church and the faith community. This called into question some of the participants ideas and preconceptions of what the role of the faith community and the church should be in the areas of social justice and political action.

Numerous issues are raised by the social constructionist paradigm that influence research design and methodology. A brief description and explanation of these issues and how they related to the study are as follows:

Inquiry Aim of the Study

The inquiry aim of the study was to gain an understanding of the issues, participants, setting, etc. and the reconstruction of what has gone before in terms of history and mythology. A great deal of time was spent in interviews talking to residents of Spring Branch/Memorial finding out what they had experienced and what they thought. Therefore, the methodology of the interview was mostly indirect and unstructured even though there were several questions that I usually asked during the course of the interview. Co-researchers were asked to talk about what got them interested in social justice and what kinds of things they learned as the study progressed.

Nature of knowledge

What we wanted to do was to talk to as many stakeholders in the community and find out what their perceptions, narratives, myths and associated symbols were. Even though we were willing to tell our stories and to an extent give our perceptions, initially we were not interested in changing minds through facts, debate, or intimidation. As much as anything, we wanted to establish the genesis for stories and beliefs. We wanted to see if there were connections from past experiences that impacted current thinking. And we wanted to see if and when community engagement ceased.

These reconstruction's of past experiences and stories resulted in identifying emergent myths and symbols that tended to coalesce around consensus. Often person would talk about their hopes and dreams for children, themselves and others.

For both the participants and the researcher there is an impreciseness, vagueness, and fluid nature to rhetoric. Persons are never quite sure of what the other is thinking or saying. But language can work "to make it appear as if it is well ordered and structured, its form-giving or form-lending aspect, is rhetoric's most important characteristic" (Shotter, 1991). This fluidity, which can be unsettling for many persons, can also provide a rich caldron for change and understanding to take place.

Knowledge accumulation

Knowledge accumulation was somewhat vicarious. As has been stated before, this study took numerous twists and turns. Each new interview or relation building encounter opened new possibilities for further study and questioning. It became almost overwhelming because I realized that I had to limit the study both from the standpoint of geography as well as participants and time. I became quite aware of the interconnectedness of the parts of a system and defining the system that influences the whole can be quite problematic and challenging.

Where possible interviews were taped and transcribed or meeting notes were taken and then transcribed. Demographic material was obtained from the city of Houston, the Spring Branch ISD, and various other sources.

The initial questionnaire to Spring Branch/Memorial was a start towards determining attitudes towards others in the community and towards prevailing institutions.

Goodness or quality criteria

In constructivist and participatory paradigms it is important for information gathering methodology and acquisition to be trustworthy and authentic. Even though narratives are colored by symbols, meaning and myths, it none the less is usually authentic when viewed from the prospective of the teller. There are notable examples of story tellers fabricating stories for the benefit of the researcher, so great care needs to be given to minimize leading questions to participants. A goal of the gathering process is to get honest responses rather than having respondents giving responses that they think will either please the researcher or will alienate the researcher (Freeman, 1997).

Values

This study was not value neutral. Its aim, in addition to developing and implementing material for the writing and presentation of this study was to see if our interventions with TMO could bring about positive change through bringing people together, identifying issues, identifying leaders, establishing an action plan and then putting that plan into action. This was done from the traditions of those churches in the faith community and from the values of the principals and administrators of the educational institutions where alliances were made.

Voice

This narrative action research called on the researcher facilitators to illicit as many stories as feasible in the time allotted to develop a multi-voice universe of the community. Participants were not coached into over elaborating or under elaborating their stories or views.

Axiology and Basic Beliefs are also considered by (Denzin) for constructionist methodology:

Even though certain assumptions and beliefs were initially embraced by the researcher, it was evident that as the project progressed that these assumptions and beliefs evolved. This was consistent with what we thought would happen with the constructionist paradigm and made for a richer and more productive experience.

Within the context of the aforementioned methodology, Appreciative Inquiry techniques were used to engage persons who might normally not be involved in the process of community development. When Hispanics were involved in the conversations great care was taken to have interpretations from Spanish to English and English to Spanish. Encouragement and support was given to House Meeting participants. Parents of children in schools were encouraged to take leadership roles in areas where the parents had shown interest.

After a series of House Meetings some schools in the target area decided to have Walk for Success programs where parents, school administrators and teachers, and TMO volunteers walked in a neighborhood surrounding a school to encourage parents to come to a meeting to learn more about their child's education. In these visits, parents were encouraged to talk about concerns, hopes and dreams for their children. At the subsequent meetings, at several schools, parent academies were developed and carried out.

As part of the training of leaders, parents, teachers, administrators, and TMO volunteers were introduced to TMO methodology of engagement, where new participants are engaged and a bottoms up approach to organization and issue development. It was sometimes difficult to get school administrators to let go of the "expert" role and allow the process to work.

Other voices that were negative to the emerging TMO agenda were sought out and attempts were made to engage them in the process. In some cases this was effective while in other cases the challenge still exists to develop positive relationships.

Thoughts on Replication

Much of the methodology could be replicated for other projects focusing on community development. Of particular importance is the process of building collaborative relationships with stakeholders in the community. In the beginning of the project, probably 70% of the time was spent in the effort of relationship building. Because community relation building is quite foreign to many people, it was found that to start, small groups were the best vehicle for building these relations. It was also found that the interconnectedness between groups was so vast and complex that the researchers could continually be expanding the realm of relational contacts without ever addressing cross group interactions and interests.

It would also be important for stakeholders to recognize the benefits to them as a result of this relation building. As the project progressed the researchers focused on archetypal symbols such as community safety and security, education, economic well being rather than strictly relation building.

For the researcher it would be important to think in terms of what the archetypal symbols and what myths exist in the community and among different groups. For many of the disenfranchised who had never been involved in the political and community process, education and identifying leaders becomes a prime consideration. This was done by respecting the stories and beliefs of the participants and then giving them a forum to act of their common concerns.