

ETHNOGRAPHIC EVALUATION OF THE BEHAVIORAL CAUSES OF UNDERCOUNT
IN THE COMMUNITY OF
SHERMAN HEIGHTS, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA
by

Alfredo Velasco

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970's, I sat in a meeting at the San Diego County Administration building with county officials and approximately seven other community activists. The subject was the county's planned mid-decennial census which was to take place in 1975. The salient concern for those of us present was the undercount of our respective constituent ethnic populations. This concern is still with us today. This study is part of a larger research effort sponsored by the U.S. Census Bureau to help understand the forces which play a role in the differential census undercount of ethnic and racial minorities (Brownrigg and Martin 1989). This paper is specifically concerned with the undercount of Latinos in an inner city barrio of San Diego, California.

The initial impetus for my concerns about the possible undercount and my subsequent participation in U.S. Census Bureau sponsored research, has to do with the long political involvement that the sponsoring institution, Chicano Federation, has had with the problem. Secondly I believe that the sample area selected for this study illustrates the types of social and environmental factors that contribute to the census undercount of Latinos.

SAMPLE AREA PROFILE

The sample area is located near the urban center of San Diego in an old neighborhood that dates back to 1868 (Chicano Federation 1986). By the 1890's prominent families had established themselves in this part of Sherman Heights (as the greater geographical area is known). Large numbers of Victorian homes were built, helping to shape this neighborhood as one of the more posh living areas in the city.

A major transformation began to take place in the early 1930's. The ethnic composition of the greater Sherman Heights area, including the sample area, began to expand and take precedence over the once white majority. A predominantly white population gradually changed over to one dominated by Blacks and Latinos. A factor that contributed to this change was the ability of more affluent households to purchase automobiles and homes away from the central city.

In the 1950's, the greater Sherman Heights area was considered "an undesirable place to live." By the following decade, a series of highways dissected the area, further damaging the structural integrity of what was once a single urban area.

The sample area is located in the Sherman Heights neighborhood and it consists of two census blocks. Both blocks have a large concentration of transient, Spanish-speaking

persons. We believe that most Latinos in the area are undocumented immigrants. Today the greater Sherman Heights area, and the sample area in particular, reflect the "pock-marked slum" image so familiar to inner city areas.

According to the 1990 census count the sample area has 155 housing units. Though predominantly zoned as a residential area, the sample area has a fast food restaurant, a social service agency, a mini-municipal park, a senior service center, a Catholic church, a Catholic school, a rectory, and a convent.

The vast majority of the buildings in the sample area are old historic structures. Scores of these buildings were at one time single family dwellings that have since been converted into buildings with multiple housing units. This pattern of conversion is characteristic of the area. Only two houses remain as originally built, single family dwellings, occupied by the owners.

In general, the housing units in the sample area are rented by poor families. This does not necessarily mean that housing is inexpensive. On the contrary, housing is relatively costly, especially when one considers all of the social turmoil in the community (e.g., prostitution, drug dealing and use, gang violence and other criminal activities). In general, housing in the sample area is poor. For the most part, the residents live in overcrowded housing units.

All of the usual social indicators of a run-down, dilapidated neighborhood are evident in the sample area. In spite of the aforementioned "slumish" characteristics, the neighborhood has a very low, almost non-existent vacancy rate. The magnetic pull of the area for Mexicans crossing the border, with and without documentation, into this barrio include a relatively higher standard of living and a large Latino community. The area is a haven for Spanish speaking immigrants.

The neighborhood draws large numbers of undocumented immigrants from "across the line." In the local vernacular "across the line" refers to the U.S./Mexico international border. They, in turn, move out and others from all over Mexico follow. The San Diego Trolley that passes through Sherman Heights is directly connected to Tijuana and Baja California. This direct connection further facilitates mobility from Tijuana into San Diego city.

In the sample area Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents are often seen cruising in their ever familiar light green vehicles. Without exaggeration, if by coincidence the reader were to be standing on the street curb at the precise moment that an INS vehicle makes its appearance, he/she would see a great numbers of individuals rush into buildings on both sides of the street. I have witnessed this knee-jerk, hide-and-seek game played out in this neighborhood for the past six years. On one occasion sample area residents were seen rushing from sight all along three city blocks.

Another indicator of the volume of undocumented immigrants, if not living in the immediate neighborhood at least residing in the surrounding greater Sherman Heights, comes from

one of the local street agencies providing services to the predominantly Spanish speaking. The Chicano Federation, a community based organization located near the sample area, provides services to over two thousand persons per year. The staff estimates that fully half of their clients are undocumented immigrants.

Spanish is the common language in the sample area and in the surrounding neighborhood. The 1980 Census for the city of San Diego notes that 115,964 persons of Hispanic origin spoke a language other than English at home.¹ This number more than doubled by 1990 according to the 1990 Census.²

The sample area does not have establishments specializing in reading materials. However, the immediate neighborhood has a small grocery store that sells both English and Spanish reading material, including but not limited to newspapers, photo novelas, pornographic magazines (e.g., Playboy and Hustler). This store is the only market in the vicinity and it is located one block west of the sample area, along the principal thoroughfare. The store carries, among other publications, El Mexicano, La Opinion, El Sol de Tijuana, and TZETA. One can also find Spanish print magazines such as Selecciones, Lucha Libre, Super Musical, and TV y Novelas. It is also possible to find the three common sensational English print weeklies -- The Examiner, The Star, and The Enquirer.

A number of local newspapers are delivered into the sample area. The larger regional powerhouses -- The San Diego Union, The Evening Tribune, and The Los Angeles Times are available for home delivery. All of these dailies, however, are in English and are not of much interest to sample area residents.

Although the dominant spoken language of the area is Spanish, the written language is mostly English. The few signs that are visible throughout the sample area are invariably in English, with a few written in both English and Spanish. The market and liquor store in the immediate neighborhood have all of their signs in English.

Adjacent to the sample area is a public elementary school while a parochial elementary and secondary school is located in the sample area. The majority of school-age children attend the public elementary school. The parochial school is expensive and children from the sample area do not attend it. The children who do attend the parochial school are driven or walked to the school every morning. Both schools are bilingual, with the predominant number of children at both institutions being Spanish speakers.

An indicator of mobility in the sample area is the turn-over rate of students at the public

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, PHC80-2-320, Census Tracts, San Diego, California: Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Issued July 1983.

² U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, 1990 CPH-1-6, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: California. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Issued August 1991.

elementary school. According to staff persons, fully thirty percent of the student body changes during the regular school year. The school has approximately 1,200 students. Last year about four hundred students left the school and were replaced by newcomers. This turnover of students illustrates the transitional nature of the area.

The educational level of neighborhood residents, as a whole, averages below a twelfth grade education. The 1980 Census, for example, states that the non-high school completion rate for individuals 25 years old and over is 69.5 percent for the census tract in which the sample area is located.³ It is reasonable to assume that since a great number of Mexican immigrants have moved into the area during the decade of the 1980's, the non-high school completion rate of area residents has remained constant, or more likely, has increased.

According to the 1980 Census, 40 percent of all Latinos throughout the city do not graduate from high school.⁴ A study of Latino intravenous drug users, including individuals from within the sample area, found that 59 percent of the study's population (N = 1,288) had not completed high school.⁵ Moreover, continuous immigration depresses the aggregate level of educational achievement since many recent immigrants are less educated than long time residents.

Sample area residents earn their livelihood in a variety of ways. A good number are employed in the service industry, e.g., hotels, hospitals, domestic service and restaurants. Others are employed in construction, agriculture, ship buildings and other manual labor trades. Some of these jobs pay a decent wage, although work tends to be seasonal and often sporadic. Construction jobs, for example, can command anywhere from fifteen to thirty-five dollars per hour. However, the vast majority of the working class is underpaid.⁶

³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, PHC80-2-320, Census Tracts, San Diego, California: Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Issued July 1983.

⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, PHC80-2-320, Census Tracts, San Diego, California: Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Issued July 1983.

⁵ . This study of Latino intravenous drug users was sponsored by funds from the National Institute on Drug Abuse. The Project in San Diego was called "*Horizontes*" and its sister sites were in Laredo, Texas, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Alfredo Velasco was the Director of the Project in San Diego. All of the members of the ethnographic team worked as outreach workers on the Horizontes study.

⁶ . For an in depth analysis of the Undocumented Immigrant population in San Diego County, see Velasco, Alfredo, Joseph Nalven, and Craig Frederickson. Undocumented Immigrants: Their Impact on the County of San Diego. Community Research Associates, May 1980.

According to the 1980 Census the median household income for the larger neighborhood, including the sample area, was \$9,104 compared to \$16,408 for the city of San Diego as a whole.⁷

At the other end of the spectrum are households receiving government assistance. A number of homes receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Some receive general relief or unemployment compensation and many have members that are simply unemployed or underemployed.

Data from the San Diego Police Department, Crime Analysis Division are displayed in Table 1. These data are from the last full year for which information is available (1989), as well as for the first five months of 1990. In Table 1 these figures are compared with the full year (1989) for the whole City of San Diego.

Table 1 shows that the rate of murder, rape, armed robbery, aggravated assault, residential burglary and non-residential burglary is higher in the sample area than in the city of San Diego as a whole. Table 1 also shows that, in general, the rate of violent crimes are higher in the sample area than in the city of San Diego.

Three other illegal activities that do not appear in Table 1 are prostitution, drug dealing and gang violence. The sample area, and surrounding census tract, are well known for prostitution and the sale of drugs. Prostitutes, for example, ply the main avenue between both blocks. Every day, all day long, women, transsexuals, and transvestites can be seen waiting along this main avenue for the "Johns" to pick them up.

The prostitutes are a mixture of Anglo, Black and Chicanas, while the transsexuals and transvestites are all undocumented Mexicans. This information about the prostitutes and transvestites is based on the observation of the research team and a recently completed research project AIDS prevention among intravenous drug users. A high percentage of the women, transsexuals, and transvestites working in the sex trade in this neighborhood participated in the research project.

Youth gangs are another criminal element in the immediate neighborhood. The sample area's surrounding neighborhood is the home of the 27th Street Locos and the 22nd Street Locos (both are pseudonyms). The 27th Street Locos are predominantly Chicanos while the 22nd Street Locos are mainly Mexicanos (recent immigrants from Mexico). These gangs do not mix even though they are based within blocks of each other.

Graffiti is omnipresent in both languages. Most of the statements written on building walls are signatures of both individuals and gangs. The "placaso" is always highly stylized and

⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing, PHC80-2-320, Census Tracts, San Diego, California: Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Issued July 1983.

to the uninitiated it is almost illegible.⁸ Private homes are the least victimized, while abandoned structures of all types are the most susceptible to graffiti. Barrio residents, especially younger residents, can identify individual names that are spray painted on the walls. Anonymity is not one of the concerns of the culprits.

In the sample area males can be seen drinking beer at all hours of the day, most significantly in the late afternoons. This trait is not necessarily viewed negatively by community residents, so long as public order is preserved. The question of public drinking, then, may have conflicting meanings for different groups, especially between outsiders and insiders.

There are two types of homeless individuals -- the down-and-out residents who do not have shelter and recent undocumented immigrants who have crossed the international border and wind up sleeping anywhere they can in the barrios of San Diego. The sample area has its share of the latter type, with the local barrios being a "way-stop" for undocumented immigrants working their way north to Los Angeles.

What is a census? What does it do? Who does it? Why is it done? These were common perplexing questions asked by community residents. A number of individuals within the sample area did not understand what the census was all about or were not aware that the census had actually taken place. As for evidence of outreach or community involvement, only the two local social service agencies had any material about the census. The two local elementary schools may have participated in trying to inform the parents through their children. Whatever the case may have been, the public was not sufficiently informed about the census.

In describing the sample area, I focused on environmental and social issues that stand out. My intention was to give the reader some indication of the look and feel of the sample area. It is important to realize that the sample area is a thriving, dynamic, living environment where life measures out its success and failure, perhaps differently but no less succinctly than in any other part of the City of San Diego.

In the following sections I discuss the study's methodology, state the study's major hypotheses and provide ethnographic information in support of the hypotheses.

METHODOLOGY

Data in this report were collected through: (a) ethnographic participant observation techniques, and (b) an Alternative Enumeration. These two modes of data collection were used concurrently.

⁸. *Placaso* is a *Calo* term referring to the graffiti one can see written on walls, fences, sidewalks, and so on. In the barrio experience, however, placaso does not connote graffiti. This stylized form of writing usually identifies an individual, a group, one's paramour, one's barrio, and so on.

I selected three ethnographic research assistants to help me with the research. Specifically, the three research assistants conducted ethnographic interviews, did participant observation research and helped compile the Alternative Enumeration (AE). I selected them because of their familiarity with both cultural and linguistic characteristics of sample area residents. All three were fluent in Spanish and English and had already been working with a number of individuals from the sample area who received services from the Chicano Federation of San Diego County.

I provided the three ethnographic research assistants with intensive training. The training included a review of the guidelines provided by the Census Bureau as well as instruction in conducting ethnographic interviews and participant observation research. Also included in the training was a walk through the sample area on two separate occasions. This provided the research team an opportunity to meet sample area residents and also provided the research team the chance to become familiar with the sample area. In all, there were approximately 40 hours of training before the actual field work began. By the time the actual field work began the research team felt confident that they could enumerate each and every housing unit and individual in the sample area.

In order to become familiar with each and every building we began the field work by canvassing the two census blocks that comprised the sample area. This exercise was in preparation for the development of maps identifying each and every housing unit in the sample area. Because some of the housing units were difficult to locate the map development procedure took a good five tries before each housing unit was accounted for and correctly configured.

The actual AE took six weeks, it began on July 2, 1990 and it ended on August 12, 1990. The AE entailed a complete count of every housing unit and individual residing in the sample area. In addition to a head count we also collected the names, addresses and basic demographic information from everyone included in the AE. This information was provided to the Census Bureau for matching with data from the same two census blocks collected by the 1990 Decennial Census. The Census Bureau used clerically assisted computer matching to match the AE with the 1990 Census data. The result of this matching operation was a match report that we used in our follow up fieldwork (see below).

Each housing unit was visited enough times to ensure that every person living in the housing unit was enumerated. Each research assistant was assigned an equal number of contiguous housing units, approximately forty-four each.

The team used personal acquaintances residing in the sample area to assist with introductions to neighbors whenever possible. When direct contact with sample area residents was not possible we asked neighbors for the information.

Precise attention was given to the number of different family groups living in each housing unit. Systematic observations concerning living conditions were also made. For example, with respect to households, we determined, through observation, the dominant home language. Similarly, literacy level was determined by observing the presence or absence

of reading materials in the household. Likewise, the level of financial resources was determined by the presence or absence of material goods such as color televisions, stereos and other household items. Ethnographic interviews were conducted with sample area residents in order to find out individual level characteristics such as occupation, knowledge of English and educational level.

After the Census Bureau matched the AE data with 1990 Census data and provided us with a match report -- a list of individuals and housing units on the AE and the census -- we conducted our follow-up fieldwork. This additional fieldwork began on February 6, 1991 and ended on February 28, 1991. In the match report each housing unit and individual enumerated by the AE were coded as either matched or not matched to the census. In the follow-up field work we confirmed housing units and individuals that appeared on both the AE and the census (matches) and explained why some housing units and individuals that appeared on the AE did not appear the census (non-matches). Through this method we were able to identify housing units and individuals that should have been enumerated by the 1990 Census but were not.

THE HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses relating to census undercount were tested: (a) it is expected that a census undercount will occur because of the presence of irregular housing units which are difficult to locate, (b) it is expected that a census undercount will result because of irregular household arrangements, and (c) it is anticipated that a census undercount will occur due to the lack of trust that community residents have toward non-community residents, especially government officials. These three hypotheses carry their own measure of validity, although not one alone nor all three combined account for all of the missing residents from the census count.

The first hypothesis states that many residents of the sample area were missed due to irregular housing units. A number of buildings which were at one time one or two family homes have been converted (in many instances illegally) to multi-unit housing. The configuration of housing units inside these converted buildings is utterly confusing. Mail boxes for the various housing units in a building oftentimes do not match the numbering system on the apartment doors. Various manifestations of this type have made a confusing labyrinth which would have confused anyone trying to locate individuals in these buildings.

A sub-corollary to this hypothesis is the very nature of what constitutes a "housing unit". Converted garages, campers, hallways, sheds, converted spaces of all types are used for living space.

The second hypothesis states that irregular household arrangements are a contributing factor to the undercount. This hypothesis is based on the fact that, in the sample area, there are extended consanguineal, affinal, and other unrelated kinship groupings representing many generations as well as non-relatives within the same housing unit. It is also based on the frequency with which families double up, or clusters of unrelated

adults share housing arrangements.

The third hypothesis is concerned with the fear of outsiders. The sample area is replete with examples of "officialdom" and the particular brand of mistrust which has developed between many barrio residents and the bureaucracy. On any given day one can find in the sample area city police, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents, U.S. Marshals, social workers from the County Welfare Department, from Child Protection Services, and so on. It would not be unusual to say that a vast number of daily contacts between the "system" and the target population are based on one or more forms of negative and punitive interaction. In many cases, therefore, the public's reaction to "officialdom" is negative, distrustful, bordering on paranoiac.

When enumerators from the Bureau of the Census made their appearance in the sample area, many residents probably chose not to interact with these "agents of the system." Harmless as enumerators may have been, the public's own past history dictated a "don't get involved" attitude. This fear is pervasive in barrios in general and in the sample area in particular because many residents are in the U.S. without documentation, many do not speak or understand English, while others have already come into contact with the social service system and are therefore reticent.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Accounts of specific examples will illustrate and explain the complex nature of locating and counting persons in an area that is characterized by irregular housing, unconventional household arrangements and suspicion of outsiders (particularly government officials) by community residents. We believe that these characteristics were notable barriers to the conduct of a complete and accurate enumeration of the sample area by the Census Bureau. The following examples are representative of the situation in the sample area and support the hypotheses noted earlier.

The First Case: Irregular Housing

A number of buildings in the sample area were originally single family dwellings that have been converted into multiple housing units. Two buildings in particular illustrate the difficulty that persons not familiar with the structure might have in enumerating housing units and individuals.

The first example concerns converted housing units in what was originally a large and beautiful mansion belonging to a single family. This historic house was built in 1890 overlooking a massive expansion of acreage stretching all the way down to San Diego Harbor. Today this same building is subdivided into twenty-two apartments on four different floors (six apartments on the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd floors respectively and four apartments on the 4th floor). An inoperable elevator centered in the very middle of the building further subdivides the structure between the front and rear apartments. Because of the nature of this separation, persons unfamiliar with the building have difficulty locating the apartments.

The layout of the building is awkward and downright confusing. In the main lobby there is

an array of mail boxes which are numbered differently from the numbering system expressed on the apartment doors. Moreover, not all doors in the building have a unit designation. A rather long, dark, and dingy hallway connects the rear portion of the building to the front lobby on each floor. These hallways begin behind the elevator and are not easily visible from the lobbies on each floor. The mislabeled designations, the obscure rear housing units and the forbidding hallways all add up to a difficult enumeration.

The layout of the building is so confusing that we were required to conduct four visits in order to construct a map showing every housing unit in the building. Even when the actual Alternative Enumeration began we discovered that we did not have the correct configuration for the building. The ethnographic team had to redo the map one last time.

During the Alternative Enumeration, a research assistant had to visit the building a minimum of ten times before all of the work was complete. Bear in mind that by this time the research assistant had a map of the building's layout and it still took over ten visits to identify every housing unit and enumerate its occupants. This particular building illustrates the complexity of counting people, especially under time constraints and in unfamiliar settings. (See Diagram I for an illustration of the configuration of the first, second, and third floors.)

Into this building walked the Census Bureau's enumerators. The results were that four households in the rear of this building were left off the census. In the first floor back portion of the building two households were missed by the census and in the back portion of the second floor an additional two households were not enumerated by the census. In all eight persons who were sample area residents on April 1, 1990 were left off the census.

Another example is a two story building that was once a single family dwelling but presently contains ten housing units. This building has four housing units on the first floor, four on the second floor and two housing units in the rear of the main house. The configuration of this building was very confusing. Two housing units faced the front exit, one unit faced towards the side neighbor while the another faced the backyard. On the second floor there were four more housing units asymmetrically facing a dingy dark hallway. In the backyard were two more housing units. Moreover, housing units and their respective households were mixed up and out of sequence on the census list. Our Alternative Enumeration count did not match the census count. We concluded that the very nature of the buildings was confusing for the census enumerators. In short, two out of the ten households in this building were not enumerated by the census. In all, six persons were left off the census count.

The Second Case: Hidden Backyard Housing

Another example of irregular housing are four owner occupied California Bungalow style homes with a building containing eight housing units in the rear. The bungalows look like single family homes but have rental units upstairs. This situation was confusing and misleading and it required five visits in order to get an accurate map of each housing unit. In all three housing units were missed by the census accounting for thirteen persons.

The building with eight housing units situated in the rear of the bungalows was not visible from the main avenue. Accessing this rear building was not easy. In order to access it we had to walk past the bungalows in the front. This was not an easy task since on the way we encountered watch dogs, strangers, abandoned automobiles and other unsavory items. In all there were four households missed by the census, totaling twelve persons.

The Third Case: Fear of Outsiders and Irregular Household Arrangements

This example is similar to those discussed above in that housing units are irregular and unconventional. However, in this example there is an interaction effect between irregular housing, unconventional household arrangements, illegal drug dealing and use and the presence of undocumented immigrants. The net result is poor census enumeration.

The building in question was at one time a single family home, now it has three housing units. One housing unit is in the front of the building, another is upstairs and the third is in the back which must be entered from the rear of the building. Adjacent to this building is a make-shift collection of three housing units. We determined that one of the apartments was a shooting gallery and "conecta" for drugs. The term "conecta" is "calo", slang for connection, or drug dealer. The word "calo" itself means slang.⁹ In any case, great numbers of intravenous drug users frequent this complex of buildings in order to buy their "stuff."¹⁰ This criminal activity greatly complicated the process of counting people by the Census Bureau. The principal factor complicating the count here was fear of outsiders (especially government officials) by site residents. This is understandable given the illegal use of drugs and the fact that most residents are undocumented Mexican immigrants.

The research assistant who conducted the field work in this complex was also an outreach worker for a project on intravenous drug users. As outreach worker he had to locate intravenous drug users, bring them into the local office for an interview and an HIV blood test. The research assistant, was therefore, familiar with a number of the drug users who frequented these apartments and was also acquainted with the drug dealer. This unusual coincidence allowed the research assistant to count everyone living in this complex and collect demographic and behavioral data.

Another factor which made it difficult for the Census Bureau to account for all of the persons living in this complex was complicated living and working arrangements. One of the housing units in this complex was a shed that had been converted into a one bedroom apartment. A total of eleven men, all undocumented Mexican immigrants, lived in this unit. These men were all employed and worked different shifts, thus not all of them were in the housing unit at the same time. Their work schedule permitted them to sleep in shifts. This irregular living arrangement coupled with distrust and fear of the government (resulting

⁹. Polkinhorn, Harry, Alfredo Velasco, Malcolm Lambert. *El libro de Calo: a Chicano slang dictionary*. Encino: Floricanto Press, 1986.

¹⁰. Fromer, Geoffrey. *Digging for diamonds: a lexicon of street slang for drugs and sex*. USA: All-Tec Printing, 1989.

from their undocumented immigration status) served as barriers to census enumeration. The census enumerator who visited this complex counted seven of the eleven men residing in this housing unit. In all, twenty-one persons were omitted from the census in this complex, in addition to the seven men missed an additional fourteen were missed because two entire housing units were not included in the census.

The presence of undocumented immigrants as well as drug dealing and use were important contributing factors to the census undercount in the sample area. An exact count of undocumented immigrants is not possible but we estimate that over half of sample area residents are undocumented immigrants. Some sample area residents freely provided us with this information while others were less straight forward. Nonetheless, in our conversations with sample area residents it was evident that many were immigrants without proper papers. For example, some asked us where they could go to get immigration counseling from an attorney.

With respect to illegal drug dealing and use, residents who were involved in this activity were very leery of outsiders. Some were not willing to talk to us. For example, one of our research assistants visited an apartment where there was illegal drug use. The apartment residents refused to answer the door or even talk to the research assistant from behind a closed door. The research assistant tried to make contact with this household five times. Finally information on this household was obtained from a neighbor. Four out of five persons in this household were missed by the census.

CONCLUSION

The examples provided above illustrate that census enumeration in the sample area was difficult because of irregular housing, unconventional household arrangements and fear of non-community members by sample area residents. Even though each of these factors alone can pose enumeration problems, empirically all these factors are intertwined and difficult to separate. These factors combined, resulted in the omission of 60 persons (who were sample area residents on April 1, 1990) from the 1990 census count.

Irregular housing was a big problem in the sample area. Not having a firm understanding of the configuration of housing units in buildings that look like single family homes made it practically impossible for the census enumerator to account for all housing units and households. Even though our research team had been working in the neighborhood for a number of years, we still found it very difficult to identify all housing units. In fact, on several occasions we were surprised to find that we had omitted housing units in buildings that we thought we knew rather well.

Unconventional household arrangements were also an important barrier to complete enumeration by the Census Bureau. This coupled with reluctance on the part of sample area residents to provide information to non-community members made the enumeration process very difficult. The reluctance of undocumented immigrants to provide information is one example. Similarly the unwillingness of intravenous drug users also had a negative impact on census enumeration. In many cases undocumented immigration status and

drug use went hand in hand with unconventional household arrangements.

We recommend that in future censuses the Census Bureau make every effort to hire census enumerators who are active in the community they census and are known by community residents. Even though the Census Bureau did this in 1990 its efforts were not very successful in some communities. This approach will also address another problem of hard to find housing units. Census enumerators who are residents of the communities they census have a better chance than the typical census enumerator of locating hard to find housing units. Further in order to better prepare community enumerators the Census Bureau should provide specialized training on how to identify hidden housing units. And finally, the Census Bureau should actively seek and secure the endorsement and participation of community based organizations in conducting its future censuses.

TABLE 1

**Crime Rates Per 1,000 Inhabitants By
Sample Area and the City of San Diego**

<u>Type of Crime</u>	<u>Sample site</u>	<u>City wide</u>
Murder	0.41	0.11
Rape	0.83	0.38
Armed robbery	3.73	1.61
Aggravated assault	9.13	5.53
Residential burglary	17.43	11.12
Non-residential burglary	11.20	4.98
Larceny + \$400	5.81	15.18
Larceny - \$400	24.07	30.64
Motor vehicle theft	18.67	23.54
Property crime	77.18	85.47
Car prowling	23.65	27.81
Purse snatch	0.00	0.12

Source: San Diego Police Department, Crime Analysis Division. Data for the sample area are for the 1989 calendar year and the first five months of 1990. Data for the city of San Diego are for the 1989 calendar year.

REFERENCES CITED

Brownrigg, Leslie and Elizabeth Martin

1989 Proposed study plan for Ethnographic Evaluation of the Behavioral Causes of Undercount. Background paper prepared for the Census Advisory Committee of the American Association and the Census Advisory Committee on Population Statistics at the Joint Advisory Committee Meeting, April 13-14, 1989
Alexandria, Virginia.

Garcia, Jenoveva and Alicia Martinez, Alfredo Velasco, editor

1986 Sherman Heights assessment study. Chicano Federation of San Diego County, Inc. San Diego.

Fromer, Geoffrey

1989 Digging for diamonds: a lexicon of street slang for drugs and sex.
USA: All-Tec Printing.

Polkinhorn, Harry, Alfredo Velasco, and Malcolm Lambert.

1986 *El libro de Calo*: a Chicano slang dictionary. Encino, California: Floricanto Press.

Spradly, James D.

1980 Participant Observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing,

1983 Census Tracts, San Diego, California: Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. PHC80-2-320. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. .

U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing

1991 Summary Population and Housing Characteristics: California. 1990 CPH-1-6, Aug. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. Issued August 1991.

Velasco, Alfredo, Joseph Nalven, and Craig Frederickson

1980 Undocumented immigrants: their impact on the County of San Diego. S a n Diego: Community Research Associates.

This is the Final Report for Joint Statistical Agreement (JSA) 89-42 between the Bureau of the Census and the Chicano Federation of San Diego County, Inc., San Diego, California 92102. Manuel de la Puente was Technical Representative. This report was issued as in October, 1992, as Report #22 in the Ethnographic Evaluation of the 1990 Decennial Census Report series (EE92/22). Cite as Velasco, Alfredo (1992) Ethnographic evaluation of the behavioral causes of undercount in the community of Sherman Heights, San Diego, California. For more information, contact Dr. de la Puente in Population Division or Dr. Leslie A. Brownrigg (Manager) in Statistical Research Division.