However, on college campuses, we oftentimes see students who express humble respect for faculty and administrators, even for those who do not deserve respect. In contrast, these same students ignore or abuse immigrant workers on campus. Similarly, in our communities, we oftentimes see people give humble respect to politicians and other powerful people while ignoring the poor and the powerless. This is why our elders caution us to understand that practicing militant humility requires ideological clarity. Even when we think we understand, we should always reflect on whom we are humble toward and whom we militantly defy. In other words, practicing militant humility relates back to grounding ourselves in a community-based epistemology that connects social change to personal transformation. Through militant humility, we can serve the people and at the same time remold ourselves.

NOTES

This speech was given by Glenn Omatsu on October 8, 2014, as part of the Labovitz-Perez annual lecture series at the University of San Diego. The lecture series honors Dr. Eugene Labovitz's and Dr. Gail Perez's contributions to the USD campus by inviting prominent Ethnic Studies practitioners, theorists, and social action researchers to present their work to "the campus community on the importance of teaching and research on Ethnic Studies in higher education." Given these parameters, "Militant Humility: The Essential Role of Community Engagement in Ethnic Studies Pedagogy" raises questions regarding community engagement and Ethnic Studies epistemology within the university. Omatsu critiques the mainstream academy by arguing that historically students and activists helped create Ethnic Studies and therefore must continue to be engaged in the communities that it serves. He also outlines five key elements of Ethnic Studies epistemology culled from his twenty years of being a professor and mentor at the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at California State University, Northridge. EOP was established in the late 1960s in the University of California and California State University systems to address the lack of access to higher education for students of color and low-income students. Today, it has evolved to improve the access and retention rates of students who are historically low-income, educationally disadvantaged, and first-generation college students. His praxis of militant humility challenges us to continually rethink our role within the university in order to "be militant toward those who oppress our communities" in the struggles toward social justice and social change.

1. The method I used to gather demographic information from students was for them to share their life experiences through their essays, research papers, reflection papers, and so forth. Also, during the EOP Bridge Summer Phase, I invite students to voluntarily submit their first two college essays to me to be published in a small booklet for the class only. Of course, not all students are willing to share their personal writings, but quite a few do because they feel power and pride in telling their stories and inspiring others.

12

Exploring the Intersections between Scholarship and Activism: Our Journey from Community Concerns to Scholarly Work

Yarma Velázquez-Vargas, Marta López-Garza, and Mary Pardo

In this chapter we reflect upon the methodological approaches to community-based field research and we examine our role within Ethnic Studies scholarship wherein the mission is to ground academic research based on community concerns and needs. Our intent is to share stories from the field that focus on our experiences as researchers in Feminist and Ethnic Studies and to engage in dialogue about reflexivity when transitioning our projects from community concerns to advancing the scholarship. We ask ourselves, if Ethnic Studies is established on the epistemology of a "different way of knowing, a different way of thinking" from Western/colonized academic precepts, then how do we as scholars, as the "knowers," conduct research, how do we "collect data" and interpret what we documented?

While our research topics differed from one another, the manner by which we approached conducting research in the field is comparable. As succinctly stated by Glenn Omatsu, a key foundation of ethnic studies scholarship is the conceptualization, collection, and interpretation of information/data is that "unlike other academic programs, our field is not defined by its subject matter. Instead, Ethnic Studies is distinguished by its methodology and its approach to knowledge" (Omatsu 2014).

What we present in this chapter is an examination of our positionality at three notable levels: first our connection to community; second our positionality when conducting research, and, finally, transitioning our projects on community concerns to advancing scholarship. The goals of this chapter are to share stories from the field that focus on our experiences as Latina researchers with these three levels of positionality. The overall objective is to

engage in a dialogue about the various ways Ethnic Studies research engages with different populations in our communities; in our cases with sex workers, formerly incarcerated women, and transgendered Latina immigrants.

OUR CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

As researchers in the field of Ethnic Studies, applying a critical feminist methodological precept, we interrogate power dynamics within society, including our own positionalities or how our own power, privileges, and perspectives influence our research. D. Soyini Madison (2012) argues, "A concern for positionality is a reflexive ethnography; it is a turning back on ourselves. When we turn back on ourselves, we examine our intentions, our methods, and our possible effects" (14). It is this practice of reflectivity introduced into the academic world by feminists and Ethnic Studies scholars that informs an engaged, accountable, and responsible researcher.

In her study of sex workers, Mary Pardo grapples with the debate among feminists over the exploitative nature of sex work, on one hand and on the other hand, the perspective of a sex worker who sees herself as a Latina feminist artist earning a living wage. Marta López-Garza discusses the ethical considerations of interviewing and filming formerly incarcerated women as they struggle to rebuild their lives, recover from trauma and/or addictions, and work under the confines of institutional miasma. Volunteering at an organization that serves LGBTQ Latino/a immigrants, Yarma Velázquez-Vargas explores the research process of working with a group of transgender Latinas, their relationship with education, the process of identity formation, and access to information about public services. In the following narratives we reflect on our positionality as we introduce the topics and purpose of our respective research:

Mary: My research project focuses on the way feminist scholars and activists during the 1970s and 1980s addressed the issue of pornography—in highly polarized binaries. During this time period, feminist analysis split on the divisive topic of pornography into "censorship" or "anti-censorship" camps (Doyle & Lacombe 1996). Radical feminists argued for censorship of all pornography because it reinforced patriarchy and constituted violence against women vs. liberal feminists who opposed censorship because it infringed on the First Amendment. However, missing from this early literature were the sex workers' voices. Recent scholarship argues that exotic dancers and sex workers may offer alternative insights regarding the women's lives and the cultural construction of sexuality (Barton 2006). I conducted in-depth interviews with Isis Rodriguez, a Latina feminist artist who was among the women who filed a class action lawsuit against the infamous Mitchell Brothers who owned a string of establishments in San Francisco. Isis Rodriguez's narrative captures the convergence of a sex worker's lived experiences during a turning point in the industry and the creative expressions of a Chicana artist critical of patriarchy.

Marta: At the heart of my research are formerly incarcerated women of diverse ethnicities (African American, European American, and Latina) released from prison and attempting to recover their lives. I examine the entities that support their efforts to reunite with family and reintegrate back into society, as well as the barriers that impede their efforts to attain education, employment, social services, and housing. The purpose of this research is to present the stories directly from the women themselves and what they encounter as they endeavor to rebuild their lives upon release from prison.

Yarma: My research evolved from my work at a local organization that serves queer Latino/a immigrants where I taught public speaking skills to a group of transgender Latinas. Our time together resulted in conversations about their relationship with the education system, the process of identity formation, and access to information about public services. Our time together eventually evolved into a critical reflection of the power structures that surround the community.

While our subject matters appear dissimilar from one another, parallel issues and concerns cut across all three of our research topics. In terms of subject matter, we all focus on people who have "transgressed," those who have been marginalized by society at large, and, at times, by members of their own communities and families. Also, in all three cases, issues of sex work comes into play. The third similarity among our respective research areas is our commitment to critical Ethnic Studies' methodological approaches to "data collecting," and our desire to examine our positionality vis-à-vis the women in our respective studies.

METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS: OUR POSITIONALITY WHEN CONDUCTING RESEARCH

Alison Jagger (2008) asserts that "Reflexivity is often recommended as a methodological practice for feminist researchers who are advised to consider how their questions, methods, and conclusion are affected by their own positionality" (459). As critical researchers we assume the responsibility of transforming the personal and meaningful stories we witnessed into research narratives that accurately represent the concerns and viewpoints of our participants. Toward that end, we each were conscious of how we approached and interacted with the women in our respective studies.

Mary: The origins of my research project, sparked in 2000, bear on my choice to interview a stripper who self-identified as a Latina/Chicana feminist artist. Exploring the issue raised many controversial questions; it challenged my understanding of feminist activists, given the previous work that I had conducted years ago. It also compelled me to closely examine my views on sex work and women's subjugation, which is easy to condemn in the abstract theoretical debates. However, compared to theoretical debates, reality is much more complex as expressed through the lived experiences of a woman doing the work.

Reviewing the debate noted earlier led to a number of questions, Was sex work the ultimate degradation of women that furthers the subjugation of women and reinforces sexism and patriarchy? Was sex work a rational choice because it pays better than minimum wage jobs? Or, were all women who enter sex work coerced directly or indirectly by the dire economic options they faced?

While the mid-1990s marked more nuanced feminist views of sex work, some continued to create binaries—women "forced" versus those who "choose." Others explored the globalization of sex work recognizing the voices of Third World women who emphasized that sex work was simply an income-generating activity rather than the outcome of some social or psychological problem (Jagger 2008, 459). What became clear to me after reviewing the literature is that simple binaries of victim/agent failed to capture the complexity of primarily poor and women of color not merely in the United States, but in countries throughout the world.

At the onset of my research, I conducted content analysis research on pornographic Internet sites that featured Latinas. However, the voices of Latina sex workers were nonexistent in these sites. So when my colleague, artist Yreina Cervantez, referred me to a Latina feminist artist working as a stripper in San Francisco, I immediately followed the lead. As I did so, I was acutely aware of the impetus for the research project—contesting sexualized images of Latinas and the protracted feminist debates around sex work. My original project interrogated the producers of Internet pornography as fostering the exploitation and degradation of Latinas. The project condemned the pornography producers, not the women workers. The underlying assumption was that the women were young, naïve, without options, and connived by ruthless producers into doing highly stigmatized work. The women on the Internet had no voice or agency. Deciding to speak to a sex worker changed my research method and opened a dialogue that allowed me to hear a woman doing highly stigmatized work and reconsider the underlying assumptions of the initial research project.

Marta: Early in this research project on formerly incarcerated women, during a conversation with one of the woman, Lorraine D., she asked me what my plans were for this study. My response was that it was my intent to interview then write about her and the other women in the study and publish my findings. Upon hearing myself, I realize how inconsequential this was for the women themselves, and indeed, that is exactly how Lorraine reacted. I recall her words clearly, "Why not make a documentary. You can reach a lot more people that way." What she said made sense. However, I did not know the first thing about making a documentary. Nonetheless, with the assistance of several young filmmakers,[1] and the support of the women themselves, I created a feature-length documentary titled *When Will the Punishment End?* which is now available free for viewing at www.whenwillpunishmentend.net.

To collect the data and information for my research on formerly incarcerated women, I applied a feminist epistemological approach (i.e., personal oral narratives and life histories), along with filmmaking as forms of data-collecting techniques. Participants for my research were selected largely from three sets of sober living homes for women (Harbour Area Halfway Houses in Long Beach; New Way of Life in Watts; and Time for Change in San Bernardino) as well as among the young women working at Homeboy Industries/Homegirl Café located initially in Boyle Heights (east of downtown Los Angeles) and since relocated to the Chinatown area of the central city.

The first year of my research with the women at the three recovery homes and at Homeboy Industries/Homegirl Café, was a time for us to become acquainted with one another. During this year, I visited each location numerous times, initially merely conversing with the women at meetings, social events, classes, and over meals.

In 2006, we began filming, following the women in their daily lives, at their homes, during their outings with their children, as they searched for employment, and when they attended meetings. I also documented the women in their activist mode, at public hearings, conferences, demonstrations, and meetings with elected officials. We filmed approximately fifty-five hours of digital film footage and transcribed every film taping. We created a script, a story line to follow when editing, and spent an additional two years editing and revising the script to finally produce the sixty-minute documentary.

Methodologically, following the edicts of feminist scholars in Ethnic Studies, I created avenues by which the women became the storytellers, speaking directly to the readers (and in the case of my documentary, the viewers) (Collins 1990). Below is a small excerpt from M. Bermudez.

Charismatic and natural in front of a camera, she featured prominently in the documentary:

> In and out of jail since I was eighteen, I been in and out . . . Civil Brand, Twin Towers, done that kind of time . . . here I was twenty-five years a drug addict, homeless, prostitution. . . . Being in enough pain and fear because prison was . . . not where I would want to live the rest of my life. It's funny but with the disease, the addiction, when you are in there you are like, "I don't want this. There is more for me." But the minute you get out into the streets, if you do not get into a program if you don't get into something to get educated on the problem or work with a therapist then the cycle just keeps going.. . . . I did not want to go back out there and hurt my family and my children. But when you do not have enough knowledge about yourself, because you are so lost, especially if you are on drugs you do not know who you really are and if you have this disease of addiction then you are really lost. So it's just a cycle. (Marta López-Garza interview with M. Bermudez, May 20, 2007)

This passage by Maribel is an example of what we attempt to convey by applying feminist ethnographic methods. Here Maribel tells her story, her experiences and traumas, as well as her hopes. There is a direct link/connection existing between the women and the readers/viewers.

Yarma: The first summer after my academic appointment in a tenure-track position I decided to volunteer at a community organization that serves the local LGBTQ community. The organization provides education about immigration, civil rights, LGBT equality, and healthcare to the queer Latino/a community. I spent several months that summer volunteering and teaching public speaking classes to some of the support groups at the organization. The first support group to take the public speaking course was a group of male-to-female transgender Latinas. The goal of the classes was to improve their public speaking skills and job prospects. However, it also became an exercise on understanding and performing femininity. This ten-week course on public speaking to the group of transgender women became the basis of my research. Additionally, I conducted a focus group with them during our last meeting.

The participants in this research project were immigrants from different towns and provinces in Mexico, Guatemala, and Cuba. All of the women in the group consider themselves long-term immigrants; their lengths of stay have ranged from twenty-eight years to eight years, and although there are some occasional new arrivals in the support group, they were not part of our study.

The focus group with the participants revolved around issues of health and migration. The conversations during the public speaking lessons were very informal and included some formal exercises of instruction as well as community-building socializing. The moderator of the group, a staff member at the organization, made occasional interventions to manage our lessons more efficiently or to clarify our dialects in Spanish. In addition to the formal focus group, I participated in several social events inside and outside of the organization.

As I started transcribing my notes, I quickly realized the difficulties of writing the piece. The writing process reflected the tension between the style and tone required in an academic journal in my field and a format that allowed me to be more descriptive. After several drafts I abandoned my attempts for a more empirical style and moved toward a more descriptive outlet. I felt a descriptive writing style would be more appropriate for the stories of the women and my experience as a researcher. Choosing the right publication venue requires the researcher to consider the impact readership could have on the community, as meaningful data about the Latina/o queer community becomes accessible to the greatest number of readers.

TRANSITIONING OUR PROJECTS ON COMMUNITY CONCERNS TO ADVANCING SCHOLARSHIP

As Latina researchers steeped in Feminist and Ethnic Studies theories and methodologies, our priority became choosing the methodological approach and methods tools that would allow us to relate our participants' stories with the same intimacy and emotional complexity with which they were originally shared. Unlike traditional researchers, feminist scholars—particularly those whose gender intersect with race, class, sexual preference, and immigrant status—reflect upon the prerogative we supposedly hold to speak on behalf of those we study. Alison Jagger (2008) ponders upon this dilemma, "How can feminist researchers learn to listen, hear, read and represent the experience of other women and even of men without distorting or misrepresenting it? What criteria can researchers use to determine whether they have succeeded? If experience is socially constructed, is there any sense in which each of us is an authority on her own experiences? If power is inherent in the construction of experience how can feminist researchers struggle against dominant categories of interpretation or decide whose account is authoritative?" (271).

Our position as professors has given us privileges not provided to the majority of Latinas. Along with these privileges, add the ethical responsibility of all critical ethnographers to critique power structures and expose injustice while considering the possible ways our research may be received. Our

publications have consequences for the people that we interview and observe as well as for others who read and reflect on our analysis. As Ethnic Studies scholars, we also feel the responsibility to our working-class students negotiating worlds of difference—cultural/ethnic differences, class differences, and changing gender expectations.

This privileged position within which we as women of color academics and scholars find ourselves, even as we remain "marginal" within the academic world, allows us the luxury of delving into the methodological and the epistemological dimensions of our research, to reflect on our positionality. We have the opportunity to write about those topics of importance to our respective communities and to share them with our colleagues, students, and hopefully with those who can help change the conditions within which our participants find themselves, be they sex workers unprotected by labor laws, formerly incarcerated women who are constantly discriminated against even after serving their time, or economically and socially marginalized transgendered Latina immigrants. In the following section we delve into the interpretation and dissemination of what we learned in the field.

Mary: Cognizant that researchers face a moral responsibility to be respectful to the people that they write about as well as aware of the message conveyed by their interpretations, I felt vaguely uneasy about the way to address key questions. Was being a Chicana feminist artist and a sex worker a contradiction in terms? How would I tell this story? What was my position as a professor in Chicana/o Studies who teaches courses on Chicanas and Third World women from a Chicana feminist perspective, including the sexualization and racialization of women of color in the media? Would telling the story of a talented Chicana artist with a college education who "freely chose" to strip for over a dozen years endorse a risky occupation?

But, who decides who is entitled to be a feminist and what is antithetical to a feminist project? Isis was far from being a Third World woman with a family to feed and few options for other work, but she found stripping to be more lucrative than working as a waitress or sales clerk, typical low-paid "pink collar" jobs. The hours also allowed her to continue producing art. As I listened to Isis explain her work, the notion that sex work reinforced patriarchy flashed before me.

When I asked Isis to describe her stage act, she explained, "I saw that when I did play the sexy Latina that I could compete with the white girls and hold my own ground . . . the stereotype of the Latina is positive in that situation because men view Latinas as being more humble, more motherly, more caretaking. I go up to a guy really nice; he is going to interpret that because that is what he wants. He is looking to be comforted; he is looking to be nurtured. I will play mommie if I have to."

However, she followed the description of strip club work by reflecting on her artwork with images of women on a large chessboard, "That's why I put women on the chess board . . . all the different roles women have to play . . . truth is there is a lot of sexual harassment in the workforce, regardless of whether you work in a strip club or elsewhere. And it creates a lot of anxiety, unnecessary anxiety. Women think, well if I wear my skirt this high, will I sell this car to this guy? But if I wear the skirt thigh high, and try to take a cab, every guy who passes will be hassling me. The strip club is the most honest place to work because it is what it is. In other workplaces, sexual harassment gets done on the sly. If you complain, they treat you like an idiot."

Her frank responses hit the mark. The response may seem to illustrate how a woman who does sex work caters to men's sexual fantasies often including submission, but it also reminds us how many other workplaces parallel the strip club, albeit more subtly. All women are expected to conform in varying degrees to gender norms. Strippers demand pay for playing the roles. Isis is well aware of what she does and her reflections deepened my understanding of sex work from the point of view of the actor.

When I asked if she found the work liberating or exploitative, she quickly responded, "Sex work is only liberating when the women have control over services and earnings and their environment is safe and comfortable. Sex work is exploitative when women are coerced into prostitution by giving up half of every dance and their environment is dirty and unsafe." (Mary Pardo interview with Isis Rodriguez, August 5, 2005)

Socially conscious and artistically talented, Isis joined in the San Francisco–based movement to unionize sex workers. She also exhibited a one-woman show in the Galeria de la Raza in the Mission District during that time. Isis's firsthand knowledge of sex work and her political awareness are clearly reflected in her artistic endeavors. In the art exhibit, she placed an assortment of children's toys—a Selena doll, a Hot Wheels kit of surfer guys and girls, a "Saloon Girl" Halloween costume that allows a female child to dress up like a prostitute to highlight the pervasiveness of sexism our children endure.

Reflecting on Isis Rodriguez's work as a stripper and her work as a Chicana artist offered valuable insights into the material world with all of its contradictions—her experiences as a stripper amazingly parallel the experiences of other Latina workers; home care workers who care for the elderly, garment workers who take bundles of work home, and

domestic workers who are often labeled "independent contractors" so they are not entitled to job security, unemployment benefits, or health insurance. They are exploited similarly, unprotected by labor law and benefits. If feminists want to make life safer for women, sex work should be regulated the way other hazardous work is regulated (Alexander 1997, 93). Isis's story also problematizes the image of sex workers as victims and compelled me to reconsider who I think deserves protection under labor laws, who becomes "the other" in feminist discourse, and how the daily onslaught of sexualized images dramatizes the need for liberating images that speak to women of color. Regarding sex workers, Cherrie Moraga's (1983) commentary on radical feminist positions on pornography aptly captures how I came to terms with my initial uneasiness with the research, "pornography is an issue, but the anti-materialist approach is problematic and makes little sense in the lives of 3rd world women. Plainly put, it is our sisters working in the sex industry" (119).

Marta: I knew I was working with a population and community which had been dissected and "over studied" by scholars, government agencies, and journalists. Yet little has taken place to better the conditions within which these individuals and communities find themselves. All this leads to understandable mistrust and wariness on the part of the community. Therefore, in many respects I believe I have no authority but only concern for the issue, and for the East and South Los Angeles communities within which I have been working for decades.

I initially entered this field of study with only the cursory knowledge that most sociologists possess on the subject, that being a passing understanding of the prison-industrial complex and an awareness of the increase in the numbers of incarcerated women and men for nonviolent, drug-related transgressions. Prior to 2005, when I began this study, it had not been my area of "interest" or research, but I was drawn to the topic as a result of my involvement with Community Coalition for Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment. A community-based organization, Community Coalition staff meet regularly with South Los Angeles's service providers who work directly with community members returning from prison to assist them in their search for employment, housing, drug treatment programs, and to regain custody of their children. So while I felt I needed to tread carefully and respectfully within the various Los Angeles areas within which I conducted my research (Long Beach, San Bernardino, the Watts in South Los Angeles, and the Boyle Height area of East Los Angeles), I was not exactly coming to these communities entirely from the outside, inasmuch as I have been working within South Los Angeles for approximately eighteen

years and previously with Proyecto Pastoral affiliated with Father Greg Boyle's parish at Dolores Mission in Boyle Heights, for six years. I should add that I was born and raised in South Los Angeles. So, from a standpoint theory perspective, the intersection of my reality as a Chicana raised in a working-class South Los Angeles neighborhood created the marginality within the academic world, where I remain the "outsider within." Yet, as Patricia Hill Collins (2008) discusses, this very positionality allows me to enter the communities from the standpoint of someone with a particular socio-personal understanding of the complexities of working class, People of Color communities along with the interlocking nature of their oppressions.

Nevertheless, despite my origins, the reality of my current position within the academic world comes with the accompanying socioeconomic class privilege and power and thus creates the unequal dynamics between the women in my study and me. I must be cognizant of this reality otherwise I step into the misguided thinking afflicting a number of academics, that I am objective and unbiased and thus my positionality will have no effect on my research, or that because I am Chicana from with a working-class background I can speak for others of the same gender, ethnicity, and class.

How to best represent their work and lives? This is indeed the quagmire upon which I reflected throughout the process as I was "collecting data," filming, editing, and even now as I write this chapter. The question arises as to how best to share the stories and the struggles the women revealed to me. I originally thought that by turning the cameras on the women and having them look into the lens, and tell their own stories directly to the viewers, that would be a step in the right direction, and it was. But then, after editing fifty-five hours of footage down to 1 hour, so many wonderful, moving, enlightening scenes with the women were left on the proverbial "cutting room floor." Therefore, in the final analysis, my editors and I made the ultimate decisions as to what the viewers would hear from and see of the women, hence interfering with the pure story lines.

This was, however, somewhat mitigated by the fact that I screened the documentary several times to at least five of the women and service providers during the editing stages and incorporated their comments, observations, and criticisms in the re-editing. The women offered constructive and encouraging feedback, asking to see more of a particular segment or for technical changes, such as with the music and sound. Juanita Diaz-Cotto (2008) explains that the most comprehensive and accurate results are obtained when researcher and participants are engaged together in the research project. She further explains that because

of the challenges of multicultural communities, an active collaboration between community members and researcher is an important part of avoiding the misrepresentation of understudied communities (137–59). I believe that if we remain conscious of the unequal relationship of power and our privileged position, our methods of research will continue to progress.

Yarma: In my role as a researcher I always have two important areas of consideration: to acknowledge my position of privilege (a middle-class, heterosexual woman) and avoiding the academic voyeurism that leads many researchers to visit and exploit the communities they study. Thus my "authority" as an Ethnic Studies researcher resides in my role as a cultural coyote or as Foley and Valenzuela call it, "cultural broker," a facilitator between the community and my readers.[2]

On the first day of class the participants asked me if I was a social worker or psychiatrist, because those are the professionals they are most in contact with. By the end of the course, I established a strong connection with the women in the group particularly the Cubans, because I am Puerto Rican and there is a shared history between the two islands. Even though I was aware of the social gap between us, I made an effort to address the risk of any representational betrayal. I also acknowledge that my interpretations of the women's experiences are limited to my conceptual framework (i.e., by my understanding of oppression and transgender studies acquired from academic literature).

In the process of writing I had to first acknowledge my many positions of privilege (gender, sexuality, class, education) while embracing my role as a facilitator into a world unfamiliar to most readers. Second, I wanted to represent the stories and work in collaboration with the participants. All while achieving a balance in the writing so that my presence in the text would not take a protagonist role vis-à-vis the stories of my participants.

Writing also highlights the challenge of interpreting their lives from our lens and our particular positions. While certain aspects of their stories affected and bothered me, I had to write them from their perspective. I had to represent their life challenges without presenting them as martyrs. However, the research process was so intense that I had also to struggle with achieving a balance between my voice as a narrator, scholar, and activist without becoming the protagonist of the story.

Cultural homophobia and sex work are inevitably linked. The social pressures to leave home at an early age affect their possibilities for attaining an education and any chances of social mobility. Lack of training and family support at an early age forces most transgender Latinas to sex work. In order to save their families from any public embarrassment, many transgender Latinas leave home in their teens. Most of the participants noted that by age fifteen they had already left their homes; thus leaving them with little training or schooling.

In the process of interpretation it was hard to detach myself emotionally from the work because while at points I grew very resentful of the social conditions and family situations that led to their migration; my participants do not resent their families. I had to respect the participants' negotiations of their social environment and represent them honestly and fairly.

Alison Jagger (2008) discusses the methodological dilemmas associated with when conflict arises when researchers interpret experiences differently from the individuals taking part in their study. The question of which account to take as authoritative has political and ethical as well as epistemic dimensions. Does proffering an alternative account mean disrespecting our research subjects? How can researchers recognize and give accounts of their own roles in the construction of other people's experiences? What are the ethical responsibilities of feminists of color toward their informants? (271)

These negotiations are at the core of Ethnic Studies research and achieving a balance requires a constant effort for fairness and representation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we share stories from the field in order to engage in a dialogue about research grounded by community needs and concerns. We did so, as Díaz-Cotto (2008) suggests, by presenting our respective research studies and examining our positionality as Latina feminist scholars and the challenges faced when conducting research that is inclusive, ethical, and representative (137–59). Much like Díaz-Cotto we believe that researchers must develop collaborative methods to achieve comprehensive and fair results. Toward that end we have developed a list of recommendation for other researchers:

1. Begin research with the understanding that the traditional epistemology of "objectivity," of research from the "empire," "the colonizer" viewpoint, is in fact fallacious and unethical. An Ethnic Studies feminist approach is to acknowledge one's bias, one's standpoint (as the researcher, the "knower") and, by doing so, not play into it.
2. To help mitigate one's bias, let the community—the participants in one's study—speak for themselves. Hear what they are saying, not what one expects, wants to hear, or assumes they will say. It is insufficient to

simply give "voice" to those who are marginalized and oppressed. It is imperative to reveal the structures and power dynamics that produce oppression and it is, in fact, one's moral responsibility within the context of the discipline and the current war on Ethnic Studies to do so.

3. Start with this raw data, then apply theory. Do not begin with theory and attempt to fit reality into an abstract theoretical framework (idea). Instead, begin with raw data and see what theory, etc. best explains (fits with) that reality.
4. As growing numbers of feminist and Ethnic Studies scholars propose, researchers must approach the community—the participants—from a nonexploitative position (despite an unequal power relationship between oneself, the researcher, and participants), with compassion and with a commitment to inclusion. In other words, apply the concept of "connecting knowing" by collaborating, being nonjudgmental, and honoring the participants' wisdom through lived experiences. (Collins 1990; Belenky et al. 1986)
5. Understand your positionality. Be careful not to essentialize. A researcher's race, class, sexuality, gender may not make a person better equipped than others to study "her people." We are not really insiders ever if we are doing the research. While a researcher may share a common race, class, gender, and/or sexual orientation with the community an aware researcher must also incorporate important skills and humanistic values.

Our intent was to not only share stories from the field that focus on our experiences as researchers in Feminist and Ethnic Studies but also to engage in dialogue about reflexivity. We are acutely aware that reflexivity and the ensuing dialogue have helped us through the mire, through our individual struggles to do justice to the communities where we conducted our research, and for whom we are grateful. When we document women's lives, when we interpret what they share with us, and when we compare it to what has been previously published, we are in a conversation with different worldviews. We understand that our positionality and our political allegiances shape what we study, how we study it, and how we interpret our findings. As we face the new cultural struggles in Ethnic Studies it is important to continue to chart the space where different ways of thinking and knowing prevail by transforming our understandings, using the lived experiences as our guide.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Brandon Lopez, Maritza Alvarez, Miguel Duran, Luis Colina, and Arturo Torres.

2. "Cultural broker," according to Foley and Valenzuela (2005), is one who plays the role of a democratic facilitator and consciousness raiser between institutions and disenfranchised citizens (220).

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