

Community-Based Participatory Research is a unique interdisciplinary collection of activist who critically implement CBPR methodologies in diverse ways. The contributors clearly the complex processes involved in moving toward sustainability via decolonial com- objects."

—ELISA FACIO, co-editor of *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives*

of communities of color in the United States often struggle for equity, autonomy, sur- justice. Community-Based Participatory Research brings together activist-scholars ent personal testimonies showcasing how community-based participatory research in lead to sustainable change and empowerment. The scholars' advocacy work is a core nt of the research design of their studies, challenging the idea that research needs to be unbiased. Recognizing a need to identify the experiences and voices (testimonies) of ies of color, this volume shows how to incorporate the perspectives of the true experts women, farmworkers, students, activists, elders, and immigrants.

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Community-Based Participatory Research

Testimonios from Chicana/o Studies

Edited by Natalia Deeb-Sossa

Community-Based
Participatory Research



3

LIBERATING METHODOLOGIES

Reclaiming Research as a Site for Radical Inquiry and Transformation

VAJRA WATSON

INTRODUCTION

*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong
to each other.*

—MOTHER TERESA

THE BACKDROP of this chapter is the world we live in: an international #BlackLivesMatter movement, the state-sanctioned poisoning of water in Flint, Michigan, the water protectors at Standing Rock who are opposing the Dakota Access Pipeline, and so many other instances of civil society erupting with movements for justice. I write this as President Trump takes office and appoints a slew of racist fundamentalists, among them Reince Priebus and Steve Bannon. Given this state of affairs, I have taken a moment to pause and contemplate the role of the scholar activist in twenty-first-century America.

Research is not frivolous: we, too, have a role to play in the reimagining and remaking of our humanity. Cognizant that research is by no means *the* answer to the woes of the world, it is definitely part of the puzzle wherein we hold sacred space for intentional inquiry and collaborative meaning-making. Toward this end, in this chapter I prod into the methodological tensions and possibilities of

portraiture as a humanization: What does it mean as a process of discovery that inquiry shape the final methods embody a genuineness to help push against settler colonialism that we “be scholarly.”

EPISTEM

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Epistemology refers to the science of how bodies of knowledge of epistemology, what epistemology is based on. The true complexity of a research carefully consider and research as a site of radical inquiry, the science of knowledge itself.

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Thus, research is not. In the seminal text *M*ics and characterizes a re to hear your voice when yourself. No need to hear know your story. And to you in such a way that

portraiture as a humanizing methodology. I am guided by the following questions: What does it mean to truly see one another—and ourselves—through a process of discovery that is personal and political? How does the process of inquiry shape the final stories that unfold? And finally, what kinds of research methods embody a genuine commitment to scholar activism? I offer these questions to help push against the intellectual, cultural, and spiritual entrapment of settler colonialism that infects our lives, including the ways we conceive of how we “be scholarly.”

IES

Inquiry

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF DIS/CONNECTION

They tried to bury us, they didn't know we were seeds.

—MEXICAN PROVERB

Epistemology refers to the body of knowledge, a particular worldview, and the science of how bodies of knowledge are understood. In providing this definition of epistemology, what goes unstated is that in most cases our adoption of epistemology is based on Western philosophy and ideology. In order to capture the true complexity of a reality saturated with white supremacy, it is important to carefully consider and scrutinize all aspects of our own work. In order to reclaim research as a site of radical inquiry, it is imperative that we critique our modes of inquiry, the science of how we understand knowledge, and the production of knowledge itself.

Research practices that reimagine and reconfigure the relationship between the researcher and the researched are fertile ground for this query. Far too often, the rituals of data collection and analysis—objectifying subjects, renaming participants and places, the coding and categorizing process, and then taking credit for someone else's stories—replicate patterns of oppression and misrepresentation. Thus, research is not devoid of racist tendencies; often it is a perpetrator.

In the seminal text *Marginality as a Site of Resistance*, bell hooks (1990) mimics and characterizes a research process that disposes and dispossesses: “No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you I write

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myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer; the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk" (343).

Building on this scholarship, nearly a decade later, in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) critiques Western forms of research because they dehumanize people of color. She opens by announcing that "the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful" (1). Explicating how research practices are interwoven with histories, ideologies, power relations, and cultures, Smith examined the ways the Maori in New Zealand were simultaneously researched and colonized. Expanding on this literature base, Eve Tuck (2009, 2010) makes the important point that even with the best of intentions, most social science research is overloaded with a preoccupation to document damage; voices of victimization further perpetuate powerlessness and oppression. Essentially, "communities are left with a narrative that tells them they are broken" (Tuck and Yang 2014, 227). The above scholars draw important conclusions about research that implicitly and explicitly strips research participants from their own locus of power and knowledge. This gaze, however, is still on those being researched—and not on the person (potentially) doing the damage.

To further the discussion, my hope is to find tools and tactics that help us disrupt dynamics that perpetuate colonial relationships. As a catalyst, we need to bring ourselves—as academics—under scrutiny. To some extent, we have all been trained and conditioned in school to replicate colonizing practices through a white worldview. Ryba and Schinke (2009) make the important point, "During the years of disciplinary socialization (i.e., formal education within mainstream universities), we tend to internalize and take for granted disseminated *hegemonic* research methodologies so that research becomes a ritualized practice. We know how to participate in it and make sense of it as we learn to associate research with a positivistic discourse. What often goes unnoticed is that positivistic discourse is grounded in a Eurocentric vision of the world, which has always preceded and already shaped its methods of inquiry" (268). Positivist research methods are a by-product of a white ontological orientation: construct walls and build borders around people, ideas, and findings. Thus, the goal is to eliminate the researcher's humanity in service to a controlled, rational set of procedures that result in validated answers. Our findings are then further

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Audre Lorde was adamant master's house." As scholars, master's tools. I suppose that t tive worldviews can expand o harmonious investigative pro binaries between theory and subject and researched/object. process (Anzaldúa 1987; Smith political process, knowing, ar shared, signifies a kind of po toolbox and consciously dev engage in a process that recla

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Audre Lorde was adamant that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” As scholars, we are often trained to use and depend on the master’s tools. I suppose that the toolbox itself is part of the problem. Alternative worldviews can expand our understanding and nurture a more holistic and harmonious investigative process. Indigenous methodologies often challenge binaries between theory and practice, objectivity and subjectivity, researcher/subject and researched/object, and can help elucidate that knowing is a political process (Anzaldúa 1987; Smith 1999; Spivak 1999; Yosso 2005). And beyond the political process, knowing, and the subsequent knowledge that is created and shared, signifies a kind of power. Recognizing and rejecting a racist positivist toolbox and consciously developing alternative modes of inquiry allows us to engage in a process that reclaims histories and revives our collective futures.

Along this continuum, we start to move from research as a site of compartmentalization and disconnection to inclusivity and unification. Thus, the goal is the alignment of the intellectual and spiritual, analytical and emotional, scientific and intuitive. This signifies a triangulation of the self with the subject that is intensely humanizing.

Harmonious ways of being, as depicted in the next examples, are diametrically opposed and incongruous to Western colonial structures that rely on divisions, hierarchies, and inequalities. Let us consider that in *Education and the Aim of Human Life*, Pavitra (1961) discloses, “You must find, in the depths of your being, that which carries in it the seed of universality, limitless expansion, timeless continuity. Then you decentralize, spread out, enlarge yourself; you begin to live in everything and in all beings; the barriers separating individuals from each other break down” (74). Building on this worldview, there is a similar word in South Africa—*ubuntu*—that reflects a profound idea that humanity is bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye yet gripping to the soul, a oneness that inspires compassion and ignites innovation. Rastafarians use the term “I-and-I” to denote the same idea of coexistence and harmony. I-and-I is used as a substitute for “me” and “you” which Rastas consider exclusionary, divisive words. Since there is divinity in all beings, I-and-I becomes the linguistic expression of this tradition: revel in, reinforce, and reconnect through our oneness. In yet another tradition, the Mayan law of *In Lak’ech Ala K’in* means “I am you, and you are me.” Chicano playwright Luis Valdez adopted this concept and put it into a poem:

In Lak'ech
Tú eres mi otro yo.
You are my other me.
Si te hago daño a ti,
If I do harm to you,
Me hago daño a mi mismo.
I do harm to myself.
Si te amo y respeto,
If I love and respect you,
Me amo y respeto yo.
I love and respect myself.

Epistemologies of community are a direct threat to the nature, function, and reproduction of white supremacy. As an example, the *In Lak'ech* poem by Valdez was actually outlawed by the Arizona legislature in 2010 for “politicizing students and breeding resentment against whites”—though it had no mention of whiteness.¹

PAUSE: FOR THE LOVE OF LEARNING

I love to learn, yet I recognize that my passion for scholarship exists within a milieu of injustice. Understanding this context is crucial; without a prudent analysis of colonizing research practices, the notion of using research to disrupt subjugation remains shortsighted and ill-informed. In the subsequent sections I examine areas for disruption, giving particular focus on the research relationship and how to show up differently within and beyond the walls of the ivory tower.

To put it simply, who we are impacts how we research. And at the most fundamental level, the academy could be based on an insatiable quest to learn. Patel (2016) eloquently shares, “Learning is fundamentally a fugitive, transformative act. It runs from what was previously known, to become something not yet known” (6). Scholars across all disciplines spend decades searching for the right questions and refining our quest for answers; ideally, we embrace the creative and curious nature of exploration. Exploration, however, as a mode of operandi within Westernization, is wedded to exploitation.

Extending the metaphor of the research toolbox, I propose that the microscope limits our understanding and can contrive our findings. How would our

findings shift if instead we held a mirror to ourselves? In the realm of community research, what comes later into work that focuses on the relationship between the directive to reclaim research as a

In conjunction with a transformative inquiry, a spiritual quest serves as a place just as much as a source of potential to open up new possibilities (432). Based in liberation theology, the goal is to challenge structural inequalities by embodying practices inside the factory. In another work (2009) consider the ways oppression is reproduced by studying the function of “love laboring,” underscoring the importance of racism without simultaneously ignoring the ways we have with one another. The idea, but a critical ever-present

In *Teachers as Cultural Workers*, hooks discusses the importance of love in education. Teachers can survive the negativities of the profession as the poet Tiago de Melo would say, “love is a skill set that allows for love is an important guide into the heart of the matter or to any place and feel myself in that space allows me to enter this space of the heart and ate within myself, as a light and a fire that can bridge the sense of otherness and love out. It takes work” (162). hooks (2003), is a willingness to embrace the transformation described by hooks is something inherently fugitive. Quintessential to the liberating state—to alter and a new way of being. Although it is rarely reified or institutionalized, love can act as a key that unlocks

In the noteworthy volume *Love and Learning*, hooks compile stories of colleagues who have found solutions that support equitable

findings shift if instead we held up a mirror that reflects us back into “my other me?” In the realm of community engagement and scholar activism, this translates into work that focuses on intersectionality, connectivity, and an explicit directive to reclaim research as a humanizing practice.

In conjunction with a transformative learning process that is germane to inquiry, a spiritual quest serves as a “force of creative disturbance in the workplace just as much as a source of peace and comfort, and that this has the potential to open up new possibilities for meaningful social action” (Bell 2007, 432). Based in liberation theology, Bell’s work provides examples of challenging structural inequalities by embodying creative disturbances and radical alternatives inside the factory. In another significant piece, Lynch and her colleagues (2009) consider the ways oppression is perpetuated through various professional dynamics by studying the functions of affective equality. They provide examples of “love laboring,” underscoring the ways that we cannot address structural racism without simultaneously considering the daily interpersonal interactions we have with one another. The notion of love within the academy is not a new idea, but a critical ever-present one.

In *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach*, Freire (2005) discusses the importance of love in education, noting: “I do not believe educators can survive the negativities of their trade without some sort of ‘armed love,’ as the poet Tiago de Melo would say” (40). Developing a research practice and skill set that allows for love is often taboo. Yet hooks (2003) describes love as an important guide into the heart of community. She writes, “When I come here, or to any place and feel myself to be somehow not fully present or seen, what allows me to enter this space of otherness is love. It is the love that I can generate within myself, as a light and send out, beam out, that can touch people. Love can bridge the sense of otherness. It takes practice to be vigilant, to beam that love out. It takes work” (162). A defining principle of intellectual life, explains hooks (2003), is a willingness to change and be changed. The praxis of transformation described by hooks is similar to Patel’s (2016) assertion that learning is inherently fugitive. Quintessentially, this is the nature of research—in its most liberating state—to alter and add to our personal and collective consciousness. Although it is rarely reified or even discussed in traditional methods courses, love can act as a key that unlocks the doorway of discovery.

In the noteworthy volume *Humanizing Research*, Paris and Winn (2013) compile stories of colleagues who, like them, are struggling to become part of solutions that support equitable research practices with young people, families,

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and communities. I have been on a similar journey. In my own progression as a scholar, I yearned for a methodology that would humanize the data-collection process and let love in. Portraiture was a natural fit.

PORTRAITURE

In the opening of *I've Known Rivers*, Lawrence-Lightfoot (1994) asserts, "For a portraitist to see her subject clearly, she must fall in love" (xv). I remember reading this in graduate school. I underlined that sentence so much that I almost ripped through the page. Lawrence-Lightfoot's statement served as a breath of fresh air, and her body of work became like an oasis that helped me survive scholarship with my voice and integrity intact (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1983, 1988, 1994, 1999).

The Art and Science of Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997), in particular, serves as a seminal text of a relatively new methodology that illuminates the complex dynamics and subtlety of human experience and organizational life. As the pioneer of this qualitative research process, Lawrence-Lightfoot's own work becomes a road map for ideas and insights about how to mine for answers and develop the arc of the story. Her scholarship serves as a source of inspiration as well as an intimidating mountain that more and more social scientists are trying to climb (e.g., Catone 2014; Chapman 2007; Harding 2005; Hill 2005; Ononuju 2016; Watson 2008, 2012, 2014).

As a qualitative tool, portraiture shares commonalities with ethnography but is distinct in five particular ways:

1. The portraitist does not simply listen to the story; she or he listens for the story.
2. The portraitist utilizes the entirety of her/his being to unearth answers to complex questions told through the lives of individuals who embody some semblance of the answers.
3. The portraitist explicitly guards against fatalistic, pessimistic inquiries into problems but searches for solutions by examining nuances of goodness.
4. The portraitist does not make participants anonymous, nameless factors but seeks to acknowledge, honor, and validate their stories by using the real names of people and places.
5. The portraitist is committed to sharing findings that are accessible to audiences beyond the academy as an explicit act of community building.

These tenets of portraiture guided the research I conducted on the Office of Educational Equity at the Unified School District, I

It is important to note that this is an evaluation report—this is interesting in that it is on the leaves, that is, the fact of the work. Then there are stories of how, why, and where the work was that simultaneously considered what was to dig (literally and figuratively) for seeds of discoveries, constantly tending to the seed of the story—for it is in the soil. Building on this idea of a tree, a tree with leaves, limbs, or roots, and beyond, seeds need to be

Grounded in other forms of research, a wide range of investigations (Watson 2008, 2012, 2014) have been co-constructed, and through this process, integral to the multidimensional experience amplifies the experience and allows for filtering their voice. This is a determined set of measures that are to unfold, as it will. Thus, portraiture is self-reflective as a way to build on (Davis 1997, 148–49).

Therefore, I am part of this process as a human-as-instrument, my role is to attend to the particular and to contribute to the work. Lawrence-Lightfoot and I have co-constructed, then, I must take a stance that is both particular. That is, while documenting the meaning and implication of the work, I am thinking about who I am and how I am plus the heart and soul in

In my own progression as a
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These tenets of portraiture guide new ways of producing scholarship. In a study I conducted on the Office of African American Male Achievement in Oakland Unified School District, I explained my methodology in the opening chapter:

It is important to note that *The Black Sunrise* may not read like a traditional evaluation report—this is intentional. Relying on a tree metaphor, many reports focus on the leaves, that is, the facts and figures that are the byproducts of certain kinds of work. Then there are studies that emphasize the branches, those correlations of how, why, and where the leaves connect. And there are plenty of examinations that simultaneously consider the historical context: the roots. My focus, however, was to dig (literally and figuratively) through years of information and layers of discoveries, constantly triangulating among multiple sources, to uncover the seed of the story—for it is the seed that holds the soul of the work—the essence. Building on this idea of a tree, neither policymakers nor practitioners can plant a tree with leaves, limbs, or even roots. To authentically grow this work in Oakland and beyond, seeds need to be planted, nourished, and cultivated. (Watson 2014, 6)

Grounded in other forms of qualitative methods, portraiture accommodates a wide range of investigative techniques that I have written about elsewhere (Watson 2008, 2012, 2014). It is important to note, however, that the narrative is co-constructed, and through this interactive exchange the researcher's voice is integral to the multidimensional story that emerges—and integral in a way that amplifies the experience and perspective of each participant without obscuring or filtering their voice. This humanistic approach does not restrict data to a predetermined set of measurable factors but instead allows the human experience to unfold, as it will. Thus, portraiture forces the researcher to be inquisitive and self-reflective as a way to bring the story to light (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 148–49).

Therefore, I am part of the analysis, not removed from it. From my perch of human-as-instrument, my goal as portraitist is to discover the universal within the particular and to communicate that in recognizable terms (Glesne 1999; Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997; Maxwell 1996). When doing portraiture, then, I must take a stance that is simultaneously inside and outside the moment. That is, while documenting conversations and taking in the subtle nuances of meaning and implication—and details like the color of the walls—I am also thinking about who I am. This encourages a free association of the five senses plus the heart and soul in fluid qualitative description and does not seek to

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isolate conditions to make them duplicable. As such, it is a practice of emancipation, unfolding in the form of human archaeology (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997, 139).

Advancing the idea of human archaeology, Dahlberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) discuss reflective lifeworld research that can help scholars identify and stay mindful to the acutely attentive process of “vulnerable engagement” (98). Openness is the mark of a true willingness to listen, see, and understand. It involves respect and a certain kind of humility toward the phenomenon, as well as sensitivity and flexibility (98). Moreover, when fully present, the researcher is ready to respond to whatever emerges and is prepared to cope with not-knowing, uncertainty, and ambiguity (Evans and Gilbert 2005). Being fully awake to the other person ultimately allows the possibility of mutuality in the “between”; neither researcher nor participant controls the other and where they stand—both together and apart—in their vulnerability and difference (Karin, Nyström, and Dahlberg 2007). Altogether, this kind of investigation, they argue, demands courage and commitment to stay in “the process,” to be emotionally available, even transparent, while being prepared to take some risks in the co-creation of experience, understanding, and knowledge.

For those of us who struggle against Eurocentric positivist shackles, humane research and its subsequent scholarship requires a repositioning of the social, historical, and cultural dynamics of inquiry. As Chapman (2005) notes, the decisions we make, the relationships we form, and the narratives we create that represent people’s lives are deeply connected to the past and present experiences of us as researchers and our epistemologies concerning the research topic and participants. This results in a research relationship that is reciprocal and interconnected and yields a greater potential for analysis and theoretical findings that were otherwise inaccessible or dangerously misconstrued. In the words of Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005), “We engage in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences, and in the process, we face ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility” (12). The great moral responsibility is to problematize and critique traditional modes of inquiry that perpetuate oppressive systems—both affectively and effectively, interpersonally and structurally. A possible solution to this quandary is to transcend the role of researcher, slowly and intently, as one gains the communal trust as a member of the larger collective.

In their recent compelling article, “The Formation of Community-Engaged Scholars,” Warren, Park, and Ticken (2016) provide examples of doctoral

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students being vetted by community-based organizations. As one of the researchers in the project explains, "It almost felt like we were being tested . . . It seemed that the organizers were intent on agitating us for our stories, to get us to be more vulnerable, perhaps because that's what we'd be expecting from them as we conducted our research" (243). As this article undergirds, we have to show up, become exposed, learn, and grow. In other words, instead of asking, *what can we learn* as receivers and receptacles, we also ask *what are we bringing* and *who are we* as comrades in the struggle. Thus, participation is political—and we should not shy away from it. As scholar activists, we prod ourselves to become more fully human through a research relationship that is reciprocal—that calls into question who we are and how we be. We aim to become allies instead of participant observers. This is the impetus of authentic, collaborative, liberating methodological experiences.

RESEARCH INTO THE HEART

Scholarship carries with it profound privileges and unique responsibilities. As they say, *the more you know, the more you owe* (Watson, 2012). This section grapples right at the nexus between theory and practice, portraiture and community-engaged scholar activism.

Research is relational. And, like all relationships, it is nuanced, dynamic, and complex. There is no one-size-fits-all kind of data collection and analysis. Even progressive methodologies like youth participatory action research (YPAR) or portraiture can become overly voyeuristic if not mapped with care and co-construction. Moreover, the final publication(s) may not have the intended results: community members are left feeling alienated, misused, or misinterpreted. Or the empirical work did not shift any material conditions, like helping acquire funding for a new youth center. Essentially, the research might have supported a student to acquire their degree or boost an individual career but did little to shift the collective pursuit of justice.

While I was collecting data for my dissertation, these tensions came to the fore at the Youth Guidance Center—also known as San Francisco's juvenile detention facility. Below are my field notes:

When all the students have left, Jack asks everyone to come together and he introduces me to his comrades. "This is Vajra . . . she got a real good spirit." Despite

the introduction, I feel that a few of the guest speakers are skeptical of me. On our way out to the parking lot one of them questions my motives: "What do you do? Is this work in vain?" As the young man asks me this, his stare is so bold and piercing that I step back. I piece together some sort of response about my previous experiences and say that inevitably "time will tell." Looking unimpressed with my answer he shrugs, "We'll see," and begins a conversation with someone else.

As I drive home, I cannot get the young man's question out of my mind. His suspicions about my intent make me feel insecure and unworthy. Compared to Jack's legacy, I am not doing enough for the cause, am not as dedicated, and am not as real. Do I walk the walk? No. I type. Later on Jack will advise me, "Don't sit at a computer all day. We ready to blow ourselves up, I mean, human life." Because of this urgency, "one of the best things we can do," he says, "is reach out."

I wonder if my research will reach out in any way. Will it make any difference? Or will it sit, in vain, on a shelf—useless? I fear that this might happen and all the years I spent collecting data will be purposeless. Even for Jack to take an hour out of his day to talk with me seems like a waste of time; he views it as a waste and on some level, so do I. Instead he could be doing something more important, more hands-on. I suspect that if my dissertation impacts people and shapes the way they reach and teach, then and only then, will Jack consider his time with me worthwhile. Until then, in Jack's eyes, my research process is futile. Similar to Rudy, the only way to fully grasp effectiveness is to be effective—and this requires action. I must, as Jack touts, get on board the freedom train.

In the above scenario, I was told to get on board the freedom train and do something to enact change. While I wanted to work alongside my research participants, I was challenged by an academic discourse and personal insecurities that echoed—sometimes roared—in the back of my mind that made me constantly second-guess my authenticity. To push through my own paralysis, I explained to colleagues, mentors, and committee members that I was able to move forward, even under scrutiny, precisely because, as Lawrence-Lightfoot warned (1994), I was falling in love. This type of radical love that I experienced—a love that hooks (1990), Lawrence-Lightfoot (2009), Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997), and Darder (2002) all describe—does not undermine the research process, does not negate complexity, and does not hinder our responsibility to critically examine participants. In actuality, it unlocks greater understanding because of the depth of *seeing*: "fully attended to, recognized, appreciated, respected, and scrutinized" (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2005, 6).

As a case in point, I received feedback from Dereca Blackmon, who, like Jack and Rudy, is a participant in *Learning to Liberate* (2012). She challenges me to use her story as its power as an act of radical

From: Dereca Blackmon
Date: April 17, 2013
To: Vajra <vmwatson@ucdavis.edu>
Subject: Tears of Joy

SiStar,

It has taken me a month to get to this point, admitting that I hadn't read your book. Shawn's description of me in your book, through someone else's eyes, was so powerful, but even though I have had a lot of feedback, I hadn't done it.

To make a long story short, I wanted you to tell me that his class was so powerful, shocked and it took me a second to realize.

A few weeks ago, I finally read your book. I sobbed for an hour. I have never felt so die complete. Your words were so powerful and I felt like a three-dimensional person. Nature life so often makes us.

Thank you, sis, you are such a blessing. Continue to shine light on what we are doing for ourselves and our children.

The Most High has given you the courage to use it.

Dereca's feedback demonstrates her as a researcher and participant. It is a craft portraits that are highly

As a case in point, I received the email message below from Dereca Blackmon, who, like Jack and Rudy, was one of the research participants in my study, *Learning to Liberate* (2012). She expands on this idea of *seeing* and demonstrates its power as an act of radical love and critical inquiry.

From: Dereca Blackmon
Date: April 17, 2013
To: Vajra <vmwatson@ucdavis.edu>
Subject: Tears of Joy

SiStar,

It has taken me a month to write this, probably because I have to start with admitting that I hadn't read my profile in *Learning to Liberate*. I was scared. I read Shawn's description of me in *Black Youth Rising* and it was so hard to see myself through someone else's eyes. I did read the draft you sent me years ago in 2008, but even though I have had ordering the book on my to-do list for two years, I hadn't done it.

To make a long story short, last month, my high school boyfriend contacted me to tell me that his class was reading about me at Wayne State University. I was shocked and it took me a second to even figure out what he was talking about.

A few weeks ago, I finally bought the book and read it through to my portrait. I sobbed for an hour. I have never felt more seen in my entire life. I felt like I could die complete. Your words were powerful and elegant and gritty and thoughtful and I felt like a three-dimensional being in your presence rather than the caricature life so often makes us.

Thank you, sis, you are such an amazing blessing to me and the world. Please continue to shine light on what is alive and vibrant and complicated about loving ourselves and our children.

The Most High has given you an incredible gift, thank you for having the courage to use it.

I love and appreciate you deeply,

~Dereca

Dereca's feedback demonstrates the spiritual and interpersonal dynamic between researcher and participant. It also underscores the researcher's responsibility to craft portraits that are highly nuanced and deeply humanizing.

dary of the scholar appropriate to inter-what comes to mind frica." These images : photographer stop back to Lawrence-ity" of research. our skills, and even arn from and serve nents this dilemma:

ne last eleven years, load has increased : organization that d Misha—is very elling CDs, selling an Francisco, CA] , "I did not resort fo' anything." As I potential benefits s interested in the ng this conversa- ed Playaz is now

United Playaz story ice of community- l leave (Lawrence- fy improvements. 2011. In the years um as his full-time d a building in the vated it into a fully : UP Clubhouse is nt. Also, once my as board president acity. To date, the

annual budget for United Playaz is more than 1.5 million dollars and UP has created dozens of jobs for brothers and sisters from the neighborhood. Moreover, one of the findings from *Learning to Liberate* was that "it takes the hood to save the hood." This slogan is now part of a citywide campaign throughout San Francisco to promote grassroots community-based revitalization.

Altogether, through these three examples, I sought to demonstrate principles of community-based participatory research, giving particular attention to the ways we are disrupting and challenging traditional epistemologies and methodologies rooted in colonization and oppression (Patel 2016). Although I entered these research sites as a peripheral participant, I slowly became an active participant in a larger fight for equity and social justice. Eventually, I was referred to as "sister"—an explicit recognition of membership. I have come to understand and appreciate that we do not make ourselves community-engaged scholars, but rather, this is a title and role given to us by the people, organizations, and institutions we are in relation with and who have come to respect, even admire and appreciate, our commitment to activism within and beyond the academy. At a metacognitive level, my various empirical studies have taught me to reimagine and reclaim research as a powerful tool that does not just produce information but cultivates social change. I also recognize that this is not necessarily a destination, but a journey. As Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (Horton et al. 1990) teach, we must "make the road by walking."

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS: SOULFUL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

It is our duty to fight for our freedom. It is our duty to win. We must love each other and support each other. We have nothing to lose but our chains.

—ASSATA SHAKUR

If we're gonna heal, let it be glorious.

—WARSAN SHIRE AS DEPICTED BY BEYONCÉ IN LEMONADE

I struggle with the ideals of liberating methodologies against a backdrop of ivory tower ideologies and elitism. Conducting research is the cornerstone of the university, but ongoing tensions need to be addressed: universities should

not just fuel industries; they should help democratize and transform society. For this to occur, a drastic interdisciplinary tsunami would have to wash over higher education so that new life could grow.

Building on the tradition of civic engagement, Craig Calhoun, president of the Social Science Research Council, recently declared that academic silos of learning rarely lead to solutions to social ills. Rather, we are living in a time when scholars are being called on to think and act differently about knowledge production. As Ellison and Eatman (2008) advise, publicly engaged academic work “encompasses different forms of making knowledge about, for, and with diverse publics and communities” (iv). In a similar vein, at a research forum in 2013 at New York University, Tuhiwai Smith was adamant that “scientific research is deeply implicated in the forms of colonialism and that it must stop. That research as an institution of power that has been viewed by others as the misuse of power must cease. But that also the idea of research for knowledge is something that all human societies seek. That includes us, as indigenous peoples. Research can enhance knowledge and can generate solutions and benefit societies.”

This chapter sought to enter into this discussion about community-engaged scholarship by delving into our epistemological toolbox and dissecting some of our methodological tools. As I explored the tensions, my goals were to support and revitalize the research relationship as a site for radical inquiry that is reciprocal and transformational. Building on a legacy of revolutionary scholars and public intellectuals (e.g., DuBois, Fanon, Noguera, West, and Woodson, to name just a few), we can strive to participate in purposeful acts of radical love—a love that seeps through the cracks of the concrete within the ivory tower, a resistance that lives within the confines of an academic environment that is patriarchal, hierarchical, and hegemonic.

Often, academics venture into a community—albeit our lab—to collect data and, when we have what we need, we leave abruptly. We exit our research sites with loads of information that then get scrutinized, charted, categorized, and coded. Analytic memos are written and matrices are developed and we sift through and triangulate answers to our research questions. These rituals of research are not neutral; rather, they are often rooted to legacies of conquest and colonialism. The quest to redefine the nature of knowledge production means shifting the perspective of how research is done. This process often requires a transition from positivist modalities to those that require the researcher to exhibit our own vulnerabilities. How much better would the world be if we truly understood and engaged one another and the planet as an inextricable part of ourselves? For liberating

methodologies to find fertile and even the final product sl in the academy. Isabel Allende love each other more. She de and emotional. Creative for just one of the ways that se push the boundaries and bo

As a body of work, my se tive. Even these final words a process of connectivity. It is these pages with more quest relation to the communities mation, may we all continu during, and after any investi selves up to the process of in observers who are able to p into the soul of the story. A begin to transcend, we beco

- *What is it that you really*
- *Why do you want to know*
- *Where does your curiosity*
- *What will you do with it*
- *Who is your research for*

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Austin: University of Tex

methodologies to find fertile ground, the research epistemology, methodology, and even the final product should embody a new mode of being in life as well as in the academy. Isabel Allende once shared that she writes in circles so people will love each other more. She describes this genre of writing to be feminine, intuitive, and emotional. Creative forms of production, like the writing process itself, are just one of the ways that scholars can find innovative outlets to prod, play, and push the boundaries and borders of empiricism.

As a body of work, my scholarship is not meant to be prescriptive, but generative. Even these final words are not a linear destination, as Allende embodies, but a process of connectivity. It is my hope that emerging and seasoned academics leave these pages with more questions and a deeper appreciation to inspect ourselves in relation to the communities we seek to work alongside and serve. As final summation, may we all continue to ask ourselves the following five questions before, during, and after any investigation. By researching ourselves first and opening ourselves up to the process of inquiry, we become reflective researchers and vulnerable observers who are able to put down the pen, open our hearts, and gain insights into the soul of the story. As the narratives unfold and the divisions between us begin to transcend, we become more fully human(e) to one another and ourselves.

- *What is it that you really want to know about?*
- *Why do you want to know about it?*
- *Where does your curiosity come from?*
- *What will you do with the findings?*
- *Who is your research for and why?*

NOTES

1. It is unfortunate to note that this poem is deemed illegal to recite in schools in Arizona: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/01/13/in-laketch_n_6464604.html.

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PART II

CREANDO CONFIANZA (BUILDING TRUST)

Doing Community-Engaged Work