

Privileged and Undocumented: Toward a Borderland Love Ethic

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Abstract

In this article, I seek to explore the tensions of what it means to be a “deserving” native researcher. I begin by experimenting with the meaning of a *borderland love ethic* as a theoretical framework that centers on: nurturing our strength to love in spaces of contention, tolerance of ambiguity as a revolutionary virtue, and humbly beginning anew again and again. Drawing from an extended interview with a participant of a larger study about undocumented students, I describe our positionalities with respect to privilege and undocumented status as the central foci. I use my own dilemma of understanding and reconciling my position as a once-undocumented immigrant to a now hyperdocumented (Chang, 2011) native researcher, studying undocumented people, to work through the possibility of a borderland love ethic. Relying primarily on the theoretical works of Anzaldúa (1987), Darder (2003), and hooks (2000), I ask, how we as scholars, enact love in our research amidst our seemingly contradictory positions of oppression and privilege. I contend that one possibility is by employing a borderland love ethic that embraces ambiguity, rejects binary positions and humbly acknowledges our constant state of arriving, both as researchers and participants.

Introduction

As I sit with Guadalupe, one of the undocumented participants in my study, I begin to feel a common dis-ease. It is as if I am outside of myself, looking into the interview process from a corner on the wall. There I am, the once undocumented Guatemalan immigrant now turned hyperdocumented (Chang, 2011) professor at a private university that costs \$40,000 a year to attend, sitting a few feet from the subject of my study - a brilliant activist and a master's student in Social Work from another public university in the area, articulately and generously sharing his story with me. We could easily switch places, be it not for the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), also known as amnesty, when I was naturalized. I am slightly distracted and trying mightily to stay focused. I begin to have an internal dialogue with myself. “Who am I to be interviewing Guadalupe? He could just as easily interview me. He'd probably be better at it. Maybe this is just a common manifestation of imposter's syndrome.” I can't help but wonder what Guadalupe must be thinking about this dynamic, but in that moment of the interview, I haven't established the rapport to ask.

I begin to experience a strong sense of survivor's guilt, the condition that occurs when a person perceives herself to have done wrong by surviving a traumatic event when others did not. The traumatic event we share, albeit completely dissimilar in its details, is our border-crossing. At that moment, I don't see Guadalupe. Instead, I clearly see the larger injustice embedded in this interaction—the inhumane, nonsensical and xenophobic policies around immigration that have somehow deemed me worthy of citizenship and Guadalupe in a limbo of DACAmentation. I heed Dowbor's (1997) words of warning, that capitalism is the generator of scarcity. In a country with an abundance of all things material, the gap between the rich and poor grows each minute. Depending on what is politically and economically palatable to those in power, commodities like citizenship are strategically distributed. My citizenship was bought and sold in the political marketplace of the day. For Guadalupe, it simply is not for sale today. I am perplexed and angry because Guadalupe's situation is unfair and I can't understand where I fit into this power dynamic. Something within me feels culpable. What was once a shameful secret, my undocumented status, is now my ticket to access my study participants.

In this article, I seek to explore the tensions of what it means to be a “deserving” native researcher. I begin by experimenting with the meaning of a *borderland love ethic* as a theoretical framework that centers on: nurturing our strength to love in spaces of contention, tolerance of ambiguity as a revolutionary virtue, and humbly beginning anew again and again. Drawing from an extended interview with a participant (Guadalupe) of a larger study about undocumented students, I describe our positionalities with respect to privilege and undocumented status as the central foci. I use my own dilemma of understanding and reconciling my position

as a once-undocumented immigrant to a now hyperdocumented (Chang, 2011) native researcher, studying undocumented people, to work through the possibility of a borderland love ethic. Relying on previous work on the dilemmas of native ethnography, I explore the specific struggle of being undocumented (native) and privileged (non-native) by comparing and contrasting my experience as researcher and Guadalupe's experience as research participant. I offer a borderland love ethic as an "untested feasibility" (Darder, 2003, p. 502) for approaching our work in a way that sustains both researcher and participant and stays true to our integrity. Relying primarily on the theoretical works of Anzaldúa (1987), Darder (2003), and hooks (2000), I ask, how we as scholars, enact love in our research amidst our seemingly contradictory positions of oppression and privilege. I contend that one possibility is by employing a borderland love ethic that embraces ambiguity, rejects binary positions, and humbly acknowledges our constant state of arriving, both as researchers and participants. A borderland love ethic allows researchers to engage with research participants in a conversation among equally broken subjects. That is, the researcher is a subject of academia, at once studying and being studied, while the participant is a subject of research, at once researching and being researched. In fact, a borderland love ethic feeds this cycle of 're-searching' our own subjectivities, searching again and again, infinitely, as we move dynamically and amorphously within, between, and outside of academic borders.

Love and Research

It may seem counterintuitive to conceive of love in the context of research. This is because we are taught that research is unemotional, distant and objective, rather than centering the self and Others as sentient, complex, and intersectional beings. "Though epistemologically and methodologically indefensible, this view is still largely dominant in social science practice," (Greenwood & Levin, 1998, p. 53) and while this positivistic credo is prevalent, it is in direct opposition to the kind of research practices that are grounded in love because it removes humanity from the scientific process and in its absence, is replaced by a mythological objectivity. Love, in the context of educational research, feels awkward because, as bell hooks (2000) understands, we are perplexed about how to talk about love, hold conflicting beliefs of what love entails and/or perpetuate overly-romanticized myths about the meaning of love. This is especially true as love relates to education. This is how Antonia Darder (2003) articulates love:

I am neither speaking of a liberal, romanticized, or merely feel-good notion of love that so often is mistakenly attributed to this term nor the long-suffering and self-effacing variety associated with traditional religious formation. Nothing could be further from the truth. If there was anything that Freire consistently sought to defend, it was the freshness, spontaneity, and the presence embodied in what he called an 'armed love—the fighting love of those convinced of the right and the duty to fight, to denounce, and to announce' (Freire, 1998, p. 42). (p. 497).

For me, love has always been inextricably bound with education because I have always connected love to struggle, conviction, and voice. My roots as an undocumented immigrant from Guatemala exposed me to the type of tragedy, loss and corruption that could only be understood and combatted with a spirit of armed love. As Darder (2003) so articulately notes, love is not about butterflies and roses: "Instead, it is a love that I experienced as unconstructed, rooted in a committed willingness to struggle persistently with purpose in our life and to intimately connect that purpose with what [Freire] called our 'true vocation' –to be human" (p. 498).

A Borderland Love Ethic

The theoretical framework I propose, a borderland love ethic, is a hybrid of three concepts: borderlands theory, a love ethic, and interactionality. Specifically, a borderland love ethic encompasses: (1) Anzaldúa's notion of borderlands and the mestiza consciousness required to claim all parts of one's identity within a provisional space constructed with one's own feminist architecture (Anzaldúa, 1987); (2) hooks' (2000) and Darder's (2003) reconceptualization of love as an "armed" love that is global in its vision, intimately engaged with the collective good, and oriented toward the continual process of self-actualization; and (3) Chavez's (2013)

notion of interactionality that builds on the critical concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) as “a form of rhetorical confrontation that begins critique from the roots of a problem or crisis and methodically reveals how systems of power and oppression interact with one another in ways that produces subjects, institutions, and ideologies and that enable and constrain political response” (p. 51). I suggest that a borderland love ethic melds Anzaldúa’s (1987) definition of borderland and hooks (2000) definition of a love ethic that leads to agentic action propelled by interactionality (Chavez, 2013). Anzaldúa (1987) says,

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. (p. 25).

bell hooks (2000) defines a “love ethic” as “choosing to work with individuals we admire and respect; by committing to give our all to relationships; by embracing a global vision wherein we see our lives and our fate as intimately connected to those of everyone else on the planet...a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions” (p. 88) and “concern for the collective good of our nation, city, or neighbor” (p. 98). It incorporates the kind of *convivencia* (Coll, 2004) that is had by “getting to know one another by spending time, talking, and doing things together, as well as learning more about their shared collective concerns and experiences” (p. 189). Interactionality (Chavez, 2013) highlights the complicated and dynamic way in which our intersectional identities, power and systems of oppression intermesh, interlock, intersect, and interact. In this way, “it holds in tension both the predictable ways oppression and power manifest in relation to and upon particular bodies while also carrying possibilities for creative and complicated responses to oppression” (p. 58).

A borderland love ethic, then, is an ethic that can be understood as, at once, undetermined and specific to each individual, resulting from the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary as manifested by varying dichotomies. A borderland love ethic encourages us to make purposive public and private choices as researchers about how much we give, to whom we give and why we give, all in a quest for an interconnected collective good with a clear understanding that rejects essentialist compartmentalization of identities and embraces the inherent tensions involved in the power dynamics of conducting research. A borderland love ethic must engage three tenets: (1) nurturing our space to love in spaces of contention, (2) tolerance of ambiguity as a revolutionary virtue, and (3) humbly beginning anew, again and again.

Nurturing our strength to love in spaces of contention

As researchers with multiple identities, we are inevitably bound in spaces of contention. Our identities can be in conflict with one another or with those of others. Our work is contentious because it is not in isolation, rather it is inextricably connected to the worlds around us. This contentiousness takes a toll on our health (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012) if we fail to nurture the necessary strength to remain centered and exercise love in our practice. hooks (1994), in her discussion of engaged pedagogy, states that holistic education emphasizes well-being:

That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well being if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students. Thich Nhat Hanh emphasized that the ‘practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or Any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people.’ (p. 15).

What if we were to translate this engaged pedagogy into an engaged research practice where the research actively commits to a process of self-actualization, where she directs her own practices toward herself first and in this way models for and empowers participants in this process? As a once-undocumented immigrant, I must acknowledge my privilege as a current U.S. citizen and active member in the same institutions that oppress those undocumented people that I claim to advocate for and write about. Yes, I love working with undocumented

people but at times I feel emotionally spent because I am not taking the time to acknowledge the sacredness of my own intactness. What good am I in a situation where I don't have the energy or disposition to truly be present in listening to their stories? Audre Lorde (1988) proclaimed, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare" (p.132). Likewise, caring for ourselves, refusing to give in to dominant narratives of unworthiness and undeservingness as researchers, especially as marginalized researchers, is absolutely necessary for self-preservation. It is a love ethic manifesto, screaming, I will not allow this process to dehumanize me, to damage me, to crush me. Furthermore, I would proffer that a borderland love ethic honors the emotional well being of undocumented students themselves involved in navigating love, in all its iterations, across borders (Abrego, 2014). Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We're split up and divided against ourselves. And there is something of a civil war going on within all of our lives. There is a recalcitrant South of our soul revolting against the North of our soul. And there is this continual struggle within the very structure of every individual life" (*Loving Your Enemies*, Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church Montgomery, Alabama, November 17, 1957). We require a respite in warring with our multiple selves, a borderland space that allows for dynamic movement and repositioning.

Tolerance of Ambiguity as a Revolutionary Virtue

Anzaldúa (1987) spoke of the importance of our tolerance for ambiguity. She notes that for a mestiza: "In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries" (p. 101). A borderland love ethic embraces the intersectional, oppositional and transgressive border identities that embody us. As Negrón-Gonzales (2014) notes through her work with migrant youth, "As their lives are fundamentally characterized by the legal and social contradiction that arises from growing up in the United States yet facing barriers to full participation in US society, the production of migrant youth illegality is a process marked by both distinct forms of regulation and exclusion as well as a sustained connection to institutions central to U.S. society" (p. 275). As undocumented people, we embody ambiguous contradictions. We are implicated in our positions as academics. We are oppressed as faculty of marginalized backgrounds. We were once a part of an othered community. Now we are part of privileged communities as well. We have entered into new realms of otherness we knew not existed. Our very bodies and mouths silence the otherwise powerful and incite the roots of hatred. All at the same time and ever changing, our identities sway, ebb, shift and evolve. We, like those we study, are native and semi-native and non-native within our own communities. Rather than see this as a deficit, we need to consider adopting this ambiguity as a revolutionary virtue. It takes extraordinary courage to accept every part of who we are and engage every part of who we are in our research process. In the gathering of patience and quiet within a space of not knowing, we can sit with our contradictions and "operate in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good, the bad, and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 101).

Humbly Beginning Anew Again and Again

These contradictions require us to constantly reconstruct our identities. Our research processes require us to engage with a new set of people, emotions, and identities. A borderland love ethic embraces the capacity to always begin anew, to make, to reconstruct, and to live in the split. Not only does it embrace intersectionality but further evolves this paradigm through a framework of radical interactionality:

an idea that builds on the women of color feminist notion of intersectionality. It is a form of rhetorical confrontation that begins critique from the roots of a problem or crisis and methodically reveals how systems of power and oppression interact with one another in ways that produce subjects, institutions, and ideologies that enable and constrain political response. (Chavez, 2013, p. 51).

Chavez (2013) elaborates on her term, interactionality, by stating that it "is equipped for addressing the

complexity of a problem's roots" and "has been advanced to understand the complicated interworking of power that constitutes the situation of people who experience interlocking oppressions" (p. 57). Interactionality "works against reductionism and purity, promoting instead a perspective that accounts for differences that make a difference in how people can maneuver their worlds" (p. 58). We operate interactionally, under consistent change and are naïve to resist this state of always arriving embodied in our interactional selves. As Freire (1993) declares: "Refuse to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live as a process—live to become—is something that always accompanied me throughout life. This is an indispensable quality of a good teacher" (p. 98). I believe that as researchers, we too, can benefit from honoring our process by understanding that our identities are never concretized; we are always in a state of renewal. When we engage with our participants, we start anew by explicitly sharing our vulnerability as works in progress, co-producers of knowledge and people with pain. Our research process can be one of renewal where we gather what we have learned from our previous experiences and then incorporate those lessons into our new practice. We will never be experts because knowledge is never static therefore our expertise is always obsolete. That is why we begin again, each time, knowing that we enter this work with a spirit of awareness, humility and regeneration.

The Moment

What follows is a moment during my interview with Guadalupe that prompted my reflection of the intersection of undocumented status and privilege. Following the advice of Abu-Lughod (1991), I "focus[ed] closely on [a] particular individual and [his] changing relationships" in an effort to "necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness" (p. 476). In other words, Guadalupe does not necessarily represent all undocumented students nor does our exchange represent all of my exchanges with all of my participants. Instead, this moment serves as a phenomenological window into discussing how a borderland love ethic might play into our research process. I thought I was alone in recognizing the national discursive disease around immigration advocate strategy and my aforementioned disease as a researcher. Like a cancer, essentialized notions of depictions of undocumented immigrants, can insidiously toxicize immigration reform discourses, creating a single story that privileges "deserving" immigrants as uniquely "DREAMers," as an example, at the expense of the other millions of immigrants that have not had the same academic opportunities, forms of capital, and/or luck. These singular notions feed my own dis-ease as a researcher, a form of epistemological discomfort, that emerges from my apparent undocumented experience's lack of politically expedient authenticity (that of poor, uneducated, brown immigrant crossing the desert or river, drawn to a better economic life in America). They also underscore the nature of my 'nativeness' to the undocumented student lived experience. However, Guadalupe revealed that he too was grappling with his own struggle of duality around his position as a "privileged" undocumented student:

Interviewer: How do you feel about the DREAM Act and DACA?

Guadalupe: So I never liked the DREAM Act. So I don't like the DREAM Act. I didn't apply for the DREAM Act. I don't know whether it is because I was like, it is just going to be me. It is not going to be our parents; they are still deportable. I mean they can get deported. If you look at my friends that dropped out of high school - so now they can apply for the DREAM Act. So I mean I don't like DACA because it assumes that people just came here and are doing things that are not the right way or whatever. It kind of goes with this idea of pull yourself by the bootstraps society that we live in. I mean what is going to happen with the rest of the immigrants here? We don't even talk about who has been deported because they don't have DACA.

Guadalupe spoke adamantly about the lack of fairness implicit in legislation like the DREAM Act and DACA, explaining, in so many words, that to apply for and receive such benefits equated to leaving others behind such as his parents, friends, and other students. He asserts that such legislation makes a lot of assumptions, particularly about the deservingness of a tiny minority of immigrants to obtain minimal rights while leaving millions of others to fend for themselves. Guadalupe honed in on the very minute sliver of the undocumented

population that both benefits from such legislation and those of us (he and I included) who luxuriate in academic conversations around DACA-related issues.

Unless you are an academic, there is no talk in the media of who has benefited from DACA; the poor haven't benefited because they can't afford the paperwork fee and most of them had to drop out of high school to help the parents. I think now it's even harder because of the ways that they are framing the DREAM Act. Sure if I am the valedictorian of Harvard University, of Stanford University or whatever, then I'm good. But it is hard to find those students; there are so few valedictorians. I mean there is going to be only one valedictorian in every school.

He situates himself as part of that minority and explains his perceived privilege as perpetuated by the assumptions others make of him.

Yeah I mean so sometimes I feel like I hang out with two different crowds. Like more of my work crowd which seems to be kind of Whiter and young people ... most of them are older. But there, you have some kind of privilege; there are certain expectations of you being a typical Latino. And then my fellow students wonder... my classmates that I went with to high school that always see me as the guy who is going to do good things. My dad had a decent job, a stable job. I was a nerd in school so they always see me as the guy that is going to do good things, the guy that is happy, the guy that has economic stability. But you don't know, I mean they don't know beyond that. I think right now that I am in Midwest City University, there are a lot of assumptions when I tell them that I am an undocumented student, even to my friends.

Guadalupe describes the pressure he feels as an undocumented Latino with academic, social, and economic privilege to live up to certain expectations and to carry himself as one who is happy, successful and ultimately, a good guy with few problems. Guadalupe's conflicted identity as both oppressed and privileged do not fit neatly into a compartment. His identity resides in a borderland, a location that is in direct opposition to the essentialist depictions of the undocumented Latino. A borderland love ethic moves away from this tension to one of embracing and nurturing our ability to love in this space of seeming contention. Rather than viewing Guadalupe's borderland identity as a space of angst, it can be refashioned as a revolutionary virtue that is at peace within its ambiguity. It resists the need to hide aspects of our identity that seem incongruent and instead invites us to boldly and humbly announce its complexity as an agentic tool of resistance.

One, you have money, you are nerd, you are happy, your life is solely happy and I mean that's not necessarily true. Like I work hard. I am happy but I mean there are some days that I'm happy, there are some days that I am not happy. But there are just a lot of assumptions. Mainly I don't even tell my friends that I go to Midwest City University or that I have this job. Every once in a while I complain about my job to someone and they are like, what are you complaining about? That shit happens to me every day, friends that are working in restaurants, friends that are working in different places. For them, my complaints are their day to day life. I don't even go there...

Everyday talk such as complaining about work become sources of contention for Guadalupe, as, relative to his friends who do manual labor and/or operate under abusive work conditions, he is in a place of privilege through his office job. Even his upbringing, where his father albeit undocumented, made a decent living; his academic achievement; and his general upbeat disposition situate him uncomfortably as one who simultaneously struggles through being undocumented and has the luxury of having the financial means and academic capital to access what is deemed as success.

Through Guadalupe's discussion of his own perceived privilege, I was prompted to further think about my own complex identity as researcher relative to my participants. In him, I saw a reflection of myself. He was beating himself up, questioning his right to complain, feeling guilty about what he does have and can use to help

others. He withdraws. He “doesn’t go there.” He puts on a happy face. How often have I reacted the exact same way in response to my study participants, disconnecting from my genuine feelings? And what does this say about my research process? How can we, as undocumented people at different ends of the immigration status spectrum, be kinder to ourselves and in this way, refuse to reproduce the kind of blaming and shaming already imposed upon us by the master narrative of undocumented immigrants as undeserving, criminal and inhumane?

Guadalupe’s Border-Crossing

Here, I relay a bit about Guadalupe’s border-crossing experience, followed by my own, as an exercise in contrasting knowledges of what it means to *ir al Norte*. I contrast our border-crossing experiences to highlight the heterogeneity of undocumented experiences and simultaneously expose the commonality we share in our framing of, feelings about, and struggles with this so called position of occupying spaces of both privilege and undocumented status. I chose Guadalupe as one participant to situate my analysis of my positionality as a native undocumented researcher, emphasizing the particularity of our conversations rather than generalizing. Guadalupe is a 30-year old Mexican immigrant who came to this country when he was eleven years old. He crossed through Tijuana, Mexico.

At the age of 11, my grandpa, my dad, decided we all needed to be in one place instead of everywhere but this time I had a brother, two brothers and a sister so we made the journey to the United States. I didn’t really want to leave, my first attempt to cross the border kind of ended sadly. I was deported. We were trying to cross with this 65-year-old man through Ciudad Juarez. My grandparents had left us in Juarez so they didn’t know where we were. So we crossed my brother and me, he was 8 or 9. I was 11. To add to it, we were going to tell the agencies that we were going to the mall that was on the Ciudad Juarez side. But that didn’t work out. So we were taken to the equivalent of the United States Department of Child and Welfare Services; that is what it is called in Mexico. So my grandparents didn’t know where we were; they looked everywhere for 2 ½ days to see where they can find us. So finally they found us. We were back but for those two days I didn’t want to eat; the only thing I wanted to do was cry.

So we went back to the Tijuana, we have family members in Tijuana and about two weeks later I was ready to go back but my younger brother and my sister were already in the U.S. They crossed the first time so now it was just me and my mom who also got deported, detained because of the time we were in Tijuana but my sister and my brother were already on this side. So there was a question whether do they go back, how do we do this? Should we come here? So I was the last one to enter the country and I mean I didn’t want to come I just wanted to leave. I remember the perception in my town especially from my teacher was kind of a bad perception of El Norte; you are going to El Norte which is kind of bad. The imperialist, capitalist place; this is what my teacher would tell us; she was a very revolutionary teacher. Besides, in third and fifth grade, I had the same teacher and she just had a bad perception about it and I learned that in the elementary school.

Guadalupe’s story is not one of eager departure to escape poverty, seeking opportunity in the land of milk and honey. As he so vividly recalls, going to El Norte was not something that his community members reveled. Quite the opposite, this traversing of the border was more of a paradigmatic shift, leaving one’s home culture and stepping foot into the disturbing land of imperialism and capitalism. There is a common myth that immigrants come to the United States looking forward, but, as we well know as immigrants, we may be walking forward but our heads are always looking back. Guadalupe, not unlike many immigrants, came to the United States with the intention of temporarily resettling but always with the hope of going back to his native country. It is less of an American dream we seek and more of an American daydream we long for that we will one day snap out of only to return to our national reality.

My border crossing resulted from different circumstances yet, again, not for the reasons that the dominant

narrative would have us believe; we did not seek a land of opportunity. In fact, we were destined to lose our once upper-middle class socioeconomic status by leaving our native Guatemala. Amidst the multiple and multi-terrained borders that Guadalupe and I crossed—geographically, academically, and personally—I theorize about the ways in which we might embrace these topographies.

Researcher's Crossing of Multiple Borders Geographical Border

When I was five years old, my papa fled to the United States, unbeknownst to my pregnant mama and my then sister and brother (we would grow to a family of eight). It was Good Friday, 1979, thirty-six years ago to the day. Eventually, my mama, being who she is, found my papa and we landed in West Covina, California (I have skipped over a mirage of important details but as with most immigrant stories, there are secrets I will not share, *cosas que no se dicen*). My parents were the first in their families to attend college. My papa had his master's degree in civil engineering; my mama had some years of college under her belt – this socioeconomic status allowed us to get a visa through Guatemalan consulate connections. In a Guatemalan context, we were financially well off. As we know, class is something that rarely rears its head in the context of the immigrant narrative since media images would have us believe that all immigrants share a monolithic experience that begins with crossing the border by desert or river. However, the less told story (probably because it does not incite xenophobic sentiments therefore serving no political purpose) is that many undocumented immigrants go to *El Norte* by obtaining a temporary visa, flying on a plane, and overstaying their time limit. This was my family's case.

Academic Border

Fast-forward to my life as a tenure-track assistant professor engaged in research about currently undocumented people. I am no longer undocumented, benefiting, through no effort of my own, from all the rights and privileges associated with American citizenship. I sit at my desk, overlooking Lake Michigan, reviewing interview transcripts, coding data, reading books of theory and slowly in time recognizing only a blurring of the life I once occupied. The 37th floor at Lakeshore East is far away from the realities of my family's once undocumented life. The distance—geographical, spatial, and emotional—renders me floating in a space that is “betwixt and between,” as Anzaldúa (1987) might say. I am certainly not the first nor will I be the last to reside in the borderland of research and researched, native and non-native, oppressed and oppressor.

Personal Border

In the same vein that Guadalupe questions his position and deservingness as an undocumented person with privilege, I question my own deservingness of this role as researcher, given my once undocumented status, and work to chart my path towards a *borderland love ethic* as a native researcher (Villenas, 1996), to understand and reconcile my position as a once-undocumented immigrant to a now hyperdocumented (Chang, 2011) researcher studying undocumented people. I want to explore the ways in which love of self and love of the Other play out in my research process. As Abu-Lughod (1991) explains, “because of their split selves, feminist and halfie anthropologists travel uneasily between speaking ‘for’ and speaking ‘from’” (p. 470). Similarly, I speak in the borderland tongue from being once undocumented and for those who are currently undocumented. I own the tensions I experience around “deservingness” and representation as a native undocumented researcher. I find it necessary to unpack my positionality as it relates to my current work with undocumented students and specifically, in relationship to Guadalupe, one of my undocumented student participants who led me to problematize my position an insider (native) researcher. My once undocumented status feels null and void amidst those who currently live their undocumented status.

The Insider (Native) /Outsider Dilemma

Many scholars have problematized the insider/outsider dilemma. Arguments regarding this dilemma have ranged from lack of objectivity, an insider's knowledge not being sufficient, to questioning the extent of a

native anthropologist's nativeness, to enacting colonizer and colonized practices. Abu-Lughod (1991) explained that "the problem with studying one's own society is alleged to be the problem of gaining enough distance" and continues on, "these worries suggest that the anthropologist is still defined as a being who must stand apart from the Other, even when he or she seeks explicitly to bridge the gap" (p. 468). Narayan (1993) asked, "How native is a native anthropologist?" In her discussion of native anthropology, she problematizes the value given to so-called native anthropologists and the dichotomous nature of the native (insider) vs. regular (outsider) researcher, arguing for enactment of hybridity in our texts where researchers are "viewed in terms of shifting identifications amid a field of interpenetrating communities and power relations" (p. 671). After all, she insists, who is this generic subject, "the native"? Instead she focuses on the importance of seeing our participants as people with voices, views, and dilemmas rather than as an essentialized Other. She claims that by situating ourselves as subjects simultaneously touched by life experiences and swayed by professional concerns, we can acknowledge the hybrid and positioned nature of our identities.

Sofia Villenas (1996) asked, "What happens when members of low-status and marginalized groups become university-sanctioned 'native' ethnographers of their own communities" (p. 712)? She argues that while qualitative researchers theorize their own privilege in relation to their research participants, native researchers must deal with their own marginalizing experiences in relation to dominant society. The native researcher becomes both the colonizer, via her position as university expert investigator and the colonized, as a member of the othered community she studies. She finds herself complicit in the manipulation of her own identities and participating in her own colonization and marginalization. She challenges majority culture researchers to call upon their own marginalizing experiences and find a space for the emergence of new identities and discourse in the practice of solidarity with marginalized peoples.

Jacob (2006) discusses the ways in which power dynamics affect the knowledge production processes involved in research. She focuses on researcher reflexivity and the problematics and power dynamics involved when a Native attempts to "go researcher." She finds how the complications of researcher subjectivity, research ethics, and identity work took shape during her research process. Chicana scholars, Patricia Zavella (1996) and Maxine Baca Zinn (1979) explore racial subjectivities within their research, discussing the dilemmas that insiders face during the research process, such as abiding by community norms and writing in a way that accurately and respectfully represents the community while adhering to academic protocols. Because we present the Other as we present ourselves (Abu-Lughod, 1991), native researchers "speak with a complex awareness and investment in reception ... forced to confront squarely the politics and ethics of their representations. There are no easy solutions to their dilemmas" (p. 469).

Many of these dilemmas lie in shifting/evolving identities of the researcher relative to the researched. For example, researchers, once part of a lower socioeconomic class trouble their new positionality as upper middle class professors. Others who came from families with little formal education note the challenges with their newfound highly educated status. Still, others discuss evolutions of their sexual, racial, and ethnic identities over time and the ways in which these identifications contrast with that of their participants who are from communities which they once identified with but no longer.

As a once undocumented immigrant conducting research on currently undocumented immigrants, I am met with similar conundrums of native researchers but specifically with one very poignant impasse. Immigration status is an entity that, while remaining with you as an aspect of your identity (regardless of immigration status), is something over which individuals have little to no personal control over. In other words, immigration status is not an identity that you can self-select; the state determines that identity. Therefore in engaging with my participants, I am, in fact, an institutional agent acting from the same place where others once limited my life's potentiality. I did not pull myself up from my bootstraps to arrive at this documented point—the state determined my status. And because the nature of migration and immigration policy is one that is always in flux, what applied then is not what applies now. The political environment, the laws and executive orders, the resources and the global climate around immigration require a relevant, current and thorough understanding in order to then disseminate appropriate, responsible information to those seeking a pathway to citizenship. When I have conducted studies on another native community of mine, the Multiracial community, I was able to envision possible scenarios down the road, commiserating with my participants and anticipating possible outcomes with regards to identity development and life choices. I don't have this vision with undocumented students because I,

we, am at the disposition of lawmakers. Certainly, we can and have exerted agency in this regard, but there is a ceiling. There is a dangerous line I tread that balances hopefulness with the political and legal realities of this country. There are too many unknown variables in the lives of undocumented students to determine what may be ahead. So as a researcher who strives to be socially just, what is my role as I interact with my participants? In one of my researcher journal entries, I focused on the visceral discomfort, symptomatic of my duality.

I am pulled. My body feels as if it will split in half if I continue to do this work. Every time I interview another undocumented student, I feel that I will come undone. I know this work is important. I feel a deep connection with my participants. I push hard through feelings of inferiority. It is like grieving. The once undocumented Guatemalan immigrant in me feels survivor guilt. The researcher in me feels the potential lack of ethics involved in the lack of reciprocal benefit. The teacher in me mourns for the wasted educational potential. The neighborhood girl in me is wading in a new adolescence where the more I learn, the less I know, the less I understand. The border lives and dies in me and through every interview I conduct, every word I transcribe, every memory that reemerges. And I have it easy, so easy. But this work of researching is not fate; it is a choice. This is not a feeling, this is an action. I am lost in love. (Research journal entry, 1/15/2015)

In another piece, I discuss in detail my journey from undocumented to hyperdocumented immigrant, perhaps perpetuating the now common belief that in order to qualify for U.S. citizenship, not only do you have to follow all the rules and be behaviorally upstanding, but also a straight-A student, activist and community heroine. I often think of this notion that Guadalupe also raised in his interview, of “deserving immigrant” and ruminate on the psychological and emotional stakes that we are holding. How does my own research (including my choice of participants) feed this myth?

How do we so-called native researchers reconcile luxuriating in the powerful abstraction of the ivory tower while claiming a native stance in solidarity with our study participants? How do we negotiate dichotomous positions of oppression and privilege as we carry out our research, specifically in the context of studying people of undocumented status? Villenas’ (1996) notion of the colonizer/colonized Chicana ethnographer:

I am the colonized in relation to the greater society, to the institution of higher learning, and to the dominant majority culture in the research setting. I am the colonizer because I am the educated, ‘marginalized’ researcher, recruited and sanctioned by privileged dominant institutions to write for and about Latino communities. (p. 714)

While undocumented people are dying crossing borders, their remains often unidentifiable from the scorch of the desert heat; mothers and children are detained at privately funded, grossly profitable detention centers (Heidbrink, 2014) often called *hieleras* (iceboxes) because of the chilling air conditioning that remains on 24 hours a day; LGBTQ detainees suffering horrendous abuses after fleeing their home countries from persecution only to find worse treatment within disguised prison walls—I write. I want to believe that this is my activism. But to go from a once undocumented child, crossing the geographical southern border to a now hyperdocumented professor, crossing the metaphorical border is a leap that situates me in a unique borderland of sorts. Like Guadalupe, I grapple with the ways in which my privileged status interrupts, impacts and colors my interactions. I believe we must be intentional in the ways in which we approach our research so that we leverage our multiple, often-ambiguous identities as sources of strength, love, and humility. I offered an approach that might help to take us closer towards a borderland love ethic.

Contradictions

A borderland love ethic is an attempt to reconcile a removed privileged identity with an identity in

solidarity with research participants' struggles against oppression. My borderland identity as a now documented researcher is quite different than Guadalupe's identity as an undocumented graduate student of color. The act of writing about having once been undocumented creates an immediate riff between researcher and participant with the ironic twist that such an identity perhaps facilitated my entrée into the lives of my participants and initiated a type of familiar rapport. The truth of the matter is that I am able to enact a borderland ethic because of my privilege. Guadalupe, on the other hand, is always arriving. Even though he resides in the United States and is considered successful, he is still absent in many ways, living his social reality with the knowledge that legality remains an impossibility.

Conclusion

Often, researchers of marginalized statuses and identities privately wrestle with powerfully mixed emotions regarding their positionalities as researchers and the positionalities of those who they research. This can lead to debilitating feelings, including imposter syndrome, survivor's guilt, and analysis paralysis. This inquiry is important because it invites a conversation, one that is open, nonjudgmental and courageous about the emotional and practical realities of a native researcher in academia. As hooks (2000) so beautifully notes:

To live our lives based on the principles of a love ethic (showing care, respect, knowledge, integrity and the will to cooperate), we have to be courageous. Learning how to face our fears is one way we embrace love. Our fear may not go away, but it will not stand in the way. (p. 101).

The seemingly contradictory positions of privilege and solidarity with our study participants are important in understanding how we can purposively instill love in our research practice and perhaps become transformed in the process.

We have all heard the adage that love is a verb, not a noun, and this is particularly true in research. As researchers, we have been trained, for the most part, to see participants as the researched, the subjects, the nouns versus seeing them as living, dynamic, active verbs. This paradigmatic change transforms the research process from one of bystander, objective observer to engaged, subjective partaker. It allows us to "live and love in the present—as much personally as politically" (Darder, 2003, p. 499). As researchers, we must transgress the rules of academia by showing up to our research fully with our beautiful mess of powerful contradictions, engaging a borderland love ethic that moves us to face our work with nurturing strength, compassion, and renewal.

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