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Is There Room for More?: Considering the Need for a Decoloniality Community Psychology Core Competency

Jesica Siham Fernández and Janelle M. Silva

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Author Biographies: *Jesica Siham Fernández,* is an Assistant Professor in the Ethnic Studies Department at Santa Clara University. She received her PhD in Social Psychology and Latin American & Latinx Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She engaged in community-based and participatory action research (PAR) paradigms, projects and collaborations to support Latinx communities, youth of color, and student activists in their sociopolitical wellbeing, thriving and liberation. Her scholarship is grounded in a decolonial feminist praxis, and informed by critical race and ethnic studies. *Janelle M. Silva,* is an Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Washington, Bothell (UWB). She received her PhD in Social Psychology and Feminist Studies from the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she examined how elementary school curriculum can teach young children about social justice and community engagement. Her current research includes a collaboration with high school students to create a shared curriculum based on identity, community and social action, as well as continuing her work with student activists at UWB to document the changes they have facilitated on campus.

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Corresponding Author: Jesica Siham Fernández, Assistant Professor, Ethnic Studies Department, Santa Clara University, 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara, CA (USA) 95053. Email: jsfernandez@scu.edu

Re-Examining the Definition of Community Psychology Practice

Abstract

From a decolonizing standpoint, as proposed by Cruz and Sonn (2011), the current community psychology competencies seem insufficient because these often leave power structures intact. Consequently, we propose a decolonizing, decolonial and anti-colonial competency in community psychology practice to facilitate the practitioner's process toward decoloniality, specifically decolonizing language, discourses, relationships and research processes with communities. A decolonial competency in community psychology practice is characterized by an iterative process of critical ethical reflexivity that aims to de-link community psychology practice from hegemonic Western Eurocentric perspectives in order to foster and center community voice, knowledge and power. Through an autoethnographic methodology we offer reflexive vignettes to illustrate a decolonial competency, and the lessons we have learned throughout community psychology practice. As a core community psychology competency, decoloniality can equip practitioners with the skills to engage meaningfully in a critical ethical reflexive practice that aligns with the discipline's values and foundational principles.

Community psychology in the United States has experienced multiple iterations of change and transformation in response to pressing social issues. From the 1950's deinstitutionalization moment to the ongoing anti-torture interrogation campaigns that shed a troubling light on the American Psychological Association (APA), community psychology has long been a beacon of ethical responsibility and justice. Through these agitations toward change, community psychology practitioners have been called to engage with communities in pursuit of liberation and social change (Langhout, 2016).

Informed by this history, and the discipline's values, a set of Core Competencies for Community Psychology Practice were developed by the Practice Council and the Council on Education nearly a decade ago. The groundbreaking publication featured a set of competencies for community psychology practice to further the development and promotion of the discipline. The document made explicit competencies in community psychology practice to help strengthen and support the skills and capacity-building of communities in order to have them meet their needs (Chavis, 1993). Meeting community needs facilitates the achievement of community objectives, such as creating conditions to promote wellbeing, social justice, economic equity and self-determination across ecological systems, including organizational and/or individual change (Julian, 2006). Most importantly, the competencies support the professional training and ethical development of community psychology practitioners (Dalton & Wolfe, 2012).

To date, the competencies remain paramount to the discipline as these continue to be the focus of much writing and reflection on the development of community psychology, especially in the domains of professional

development, training and practice.[1] Dalton and Wolfe (2012) underscored that the competencies were aimed at encouraging dialogue, introspection and a careful, critical evaluation of community psychology practice. We value the definition of community psychology practice, along with the competencies offered by the pioneers. We acknowledge, however, that a critical ethical reflexive practice that attends to the socio-historical roots of social problems entrenched in Western Eurocentric perspectives is necessary. To actualize liberation and social justice at multiple levels through a community psychology practice, practitioners must reckon with coloniality in its multiple manifestations. Thus, it is the promotion of ongoing dialogue and critical ethical reflection, or a dialogical disciplinary recognizance, that guides our engagement with a critical question: *Is there room for more?* In other words: *Is there room for a decolonial competency – or processes toward decolonization, decoloniality and anti-coloniality – within the practice of community psychology?*

In revisiting and re-connecting with these core competencies we believe *there is room for more.* We propose that a decolonial competency in community psychology practice is characterized by an iterative process of critical ethical reflexivity that aims to de-link community psychology practice from hegemonic, Western Eurocentric perspectives to foster and center community voice, knowledge and power. As we relationally reflect with each other on the relevance of some competencies, as well as their application and significance to the discipline, we draw from our experiences as community psychology practitioners committed to a decolonizing praxis to propose a decolonial competency. Grounded in a socio-historical intersectional analysis of power and oppression, a decolonial competency is important for us to consider as we pursue collaboration with communities, as well as students, whose lived experiences and knowledge are often left unseen and silenced within the discipline and the broader context of academe. Even when we strive to be as inclusive in our praxis, the silencing and misrecognition can often be unintentionally reproduced by us, at the same time as we may experience invisibility and marginality within the discipline. A decolonizing, decolonial and anti-colonial competency must inform the discipline's ethics and principles, including community programming and development, social change initiatives and community-based research, as well as training and practice for emerging professionals. We offer our reflections as a starting point for more authentic conversations grounded in a critical, ethical reflexivity on how we can improve upon the existing core competencies for community psychology practice.

Because the existing community psychology competencies seem insufficient to us, as these often leave power, knowledge and positionalities intact, we feel the urgency to center a decolonizing, decoloniality and anti-coloniality competency. One that allows us to make room for more; more voices, experiences and knowledge that reflect the strengths, assets and agency of local and

[1] For examples of articles and special issues focused on community psychology practice consider the following: Kelly, J.G. (2010). More thoughts: On the spirit of community psychology. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(3-4), 272-284.; Lichty, L. F., Palamaro-Munsell, E., & Wallin-Ruschman, J. (Eds.). (2019, February). Developing undergraduate community psychology pedagogy and research practice. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 10(1),* 1-7. Scott, V. & Wolfe, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Community psychology: Foundations for practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.; Wolfe, S., Scott, V. C. & Jimenez, T. (Eds.). (2013, December). Community psychology practice competencies: A global perspective. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice, 4(4),* 1-9.

cultural communities. A decolonial standpoint must make its way into the classroom, field and discipline if it is to reflect its true ethics, values and principles. Cruz and Sonn (2011) define a decolonializing standpoint as one that aims "to develop theory and practice that reveals distortions in individual and public discourse and action that serve to maintain systems of oppression" (p. 128). A decolonial competency, consistent with a decolonizing standpoint, seeks to equip the community psychology practitioner with the critical understanding to engage and challenge the structures of power that are entwined with oppression. Community psychology stands to gain from this intervention, which is the inclusion of decoloniality as a competency. Decoloniality can therefore aid the discipline's aim of deconstructing the coloniality of power in knowledge (Quijano, 2000; Fernández, Sonn, Carolissen & Stevens, in press).

As trained, critical community-social psychologists based in the United States, we have a responsibility to deconstruct systems of oppression that reify colonial power, and the knowledge systems that shape the discipline. Reflecting on the historic and sociopolitical contexts that led to the development of U.S. community psychology, our introspective interrogation of our decolonial praxis allows us to see how the field in its early formation strived toward the deconstruction and rejection of pathologizing, deficit-based perspectives and positivist research approaches. *Have we, as community psychologists, lost sight of our beginnings and earlier values?* We think not, and yet there must be room for more. To do so, however, we respond to the following question: *Is there room for a decolonial competency – or processes toward decolonization, decoloniality and anti-coloniality – within the community psychology practice?*

Community Psychology Core Competencies

A fundamental purpose of community psychology competencies is to equip community psychologists with the skills to think critically and engage sensibly in efforts to create empowering conditions that support community social change via organizational capacity-building. Most importantly, these competencies make explicit the principles and ethical values for community psychology practitioners. The competencies provide a framework for identifying and describing processes and practices within the field that could aid practitioners in training prospective students, communicating with stakeholders and building partnerships for social change. Given these competencies, community psychology practice has been defined as a process of strengthening and supporting communities to meet the needs of their constituents via systemic, institutional, organizational and/or individual level change (Scott & Wolfe, 2014). To be clear, competencies communicate the principles of community psychology to potential partners, budding professionals and colleagues in psychology and allied disciplines.

The standardization of community psychology competencies within education and training programs aims to make explicit the foundational principles that guide the discipline. Yet, the empiricism, positivism and individualism of psychology in general have been at odds with these principles. Grounding ourselves in community psychology's history of responding to the urgencies of sociopolitical moments, these competencies reflect the field's intentions to put into practice its values. Thus, the competencies reveal an attempt to articulate what community psychology practice is and looks like, whilst fostering a set of ethics and values for ecological social analysis, sociocultural awareness, collaboration through

relationship building, innovation in addressing systemic social problems and ongoing dialogue and reflection toward the development of the discipline, as well as the practitioner.

All eighteen competencies are individually explained; however, these must be understood as interconnected. None of these competencies are mutually exclusive, rather they are part of a whole composite of tools and resources that community psychology practitioners can draw from. Each competency is organized under one of the four broad categories: 1) foundational principles, 2) community program development and management, 3) community and social change and 4) community research. Indeed, the competencies offer valuable insight into the guiding ethics and values of community psychology practice, however these do not explicitly offer opportunities or guidance on how to engage with, or reflect upon, interrogate and deconstruct coloniality. To be clear, the current competencies do not center decolonization, decoloniality and anti-coloniality in discourse nor in praxis. In critically approaching the application and relevance of these competencies to our community psychology practice, which we view as inclusive of our pedagogy, we note some limitations and constraints. We are especially attuned to how these competencies, as they stand, are informed primarily by individualistic, deficit-based and positivist research approaches within psychology, which we purport limit possibilities for liberation, transformative justice and anti-oppression.

Decoloniality in U.S.-based Community Psychology Practice

In a fundamental way, decolonization is about detaching oneself from coloniality and colonialism. Specifically, from the perspectives and understandings that created structures of power and oppression that render some communities and their knowledge as inferior, deficient or "backwards." Coloniality is the process of gazing from the outside, of "looking in" through documenting or researching about "others" without ever fully acknowledging that these presumed "others" can think, speak and act on their own terms – that they are knowledge-producers and knowers. Frantz Fanon (1967), known for his critical writings on the psychology of oppression, understood decolonization as a process of humanizing those who have been dehumanized, of re-constituting the knowledge and histories of people's stories, a past that has been silenced. Underscoring these remarks, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016) purports that "decoloniality refers to efforts at rehumanizing the world, to breaking hierarchies of difference that dehumanize subjects and communities and that destroy nature and to the production of counter-discourses, counter-knowledge, counter-creative acts and counter-practices that seek to dismantle coloniality and to open up multiple other forms of being in the world" (p. 31). Because decolonization is a continuous iterative process, it is important to remain critically, ethically reflexive of *how, where* and *with whom* we engage in undoing the coloniality of power.

Colonialism exists at multiple levels, from race, ethnic, gender and class categories, to the structures that reproduce inequities in access to resources, opportunities and wellbeing. Decoloniality and anti-coloniality must be understood as a verb—as actions and behaviors oriented toward challenging the *status quo* by deconstructing systems of oppression at multiple levels. As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) states, decolonization invites the formation of community collaborations that seek to cultivate and build knowledge through relationships and experiential relational knowledge. Decoloniality can contribute to

the transformation of social conditions where the power, liberation and wellbeing of one community does not rely on the oppression of another. With this fundamental understanding of decolonization, decoloniality and anti-coloniality – as the rejection and interrogation of colonial power in knowledge, along with practices that strive to re-center community knowledge – we offer our autoethnographic vignettes as reflections toward a decolonial competency. We share these examples of how we have engaged decoloniality as a core competency in community psychology practice, from our development and training as critical community-social psychologists to our teacher-scholar-activist praxis.[2]

Autoethnography as Method

To illustrate how a competency of decoloniality can transform community psychology development, training, and practice, we utilize an autoethnographic method (Bond & Harrell, 2006; Langhout, 2006). Autoethnography is a qualitative methodology rooted in an ethnographic approach that generally involves documenting sociocultural practices and interactions within a given context. Unlike ethnography, however, autoethnography involves the researcher engaging in critical reflection and reflexivity characterized by introspection and analysis of the self within sociocultural, political and relational contexts where subjective experiences surface to inform the person's understanding of themselves and their experiences thereby producing a story, or an autobiographical narrative, of a given experience.

As decoloniality seeks to push the field to reflect and interrogate the role of coloniality within practice, research and pedagogy, autoethnography positions the writer to do just that. Autoethnography gives validity to scholars who want to unveil their multiple selves within their work (Chang, 2016). Through autoethnography, voice is given to silenced experiences whilst marginalized standpoints are amplified (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Denzin, 2003a, 2003b; Madison, 2012; Silva, 2017; Spry, 2001). As a reflective process, autoethnographic writing surfaces complex contradictions that are often absent or misrecognized in academia. As part of a decolonial competency, autoethnography provides the author with an opportunity for the "living body/subjective self" (Spry, 2001, p. 711) to be centered. For scholars from marginalized identities, autoethnography involves a dialogue between the reader and the author by building knowledge that is shared through the lens of the oppressed.

Because autoethnography speaks directly to the importance of illuminating systems of oppression rooted in colonial power, we engage in this methodology. Autoethnography as a tool to facilitate a critical, ethical reflexive practice invites practitioners to engage decoloniality and decolonization by unsettling the power dynamics tethered to colonial relationships and subjectivities, and how they surface in research. Our autoethnographic vignettes

[2] We identify as critical community-social psychologists as those are the sub-disciplinary threads that have served as our foundation for our research and practice. We approach research as praxis, specifically as the process and practice of putting theory and knowledge into action. While we recognize that there are valuable distinctions between research and practice, we are grounded in our positionalities as practitioners who engage in research and practice actively and often through pedagogy. We therefore use the term practitioners to refer to those who engage in both research and practice, as we do. A discussion on the distinctions between community psychology research and practice is beyond the scope of this paper; however, we acknowledge the importance of nuancing these dichotomies, including how for some practitioners the lines between research and practice are permeable and intertwined.

make visible the invisible challenges of a community psychology practice through a decolonial competency. We purport that a decolonial competency can further the development of a critical ethical reflexive practice that fosters a socio-historical, cultural awareness and refuses and rejects Western Eurocentric logics. Specifically, this methodology is useful where community partnerships are oriented to centering community voice, power and knowledge as fundamental decolonial and decolonizing elements of a community psychology practice. As the existing core competencies seek to provide a framework for practice, training must go beyond mere reflection toward a decolonial and decolonizing praxis. Amplifying community voice and sustained agency is crucial to challenging the coloniality of power in the production of knowledge. Our goal is to contribute to the development of a critical community psychology practice aligned with a decolonizing standpoint (Cruz & Sonn, 2011).

Brief Overview of Community-Based Research Projects

Janelle's autoethnographic vignettes focus on her community-based partnership and how that has informed her classroom pedagogy. Drawing on her work at Graham High School[3], she discusses how the Latinx high school students pushed back on community psychology methods. Her narrative illustrates how community partners are also "mirrors" that make us stop and look back on how the colonized tools and terms we were taught to use need to be reconsidered for us to move to a decolonized community psychology. Research does not happen in a vacuum, nor do the lessons Janelle learned from the high school students. Therefore, in the second vignette, Janelle incorporated their voices and guidance as she worked to decolonize her college classrooms. Consistent with Janelle's experience of interrogating research approaches that fail to uplift community voice and knowledge, Jesica's autoethnographic vignettes draw from a community-engaged research collaboration and ongoing relationships with the Madres Emprendedoras, a group of Mexican immigrant mothers trained in participatory action research (PAR). The first vignette highlights the importance of decolonizing language to cultivate connection and support to facilitate research grounded in community experience and knowledge, a point similarly illustrated as well in the second vignette. An overview of our projects sets the context for the lessons we relationally reflect upon in our call for a decolonial competency.

Janelle's High School Chronicles. In many ways, the origin of this project was an act of decolonization, in itself. I did not find myself at Graham High School by chance; rather, it was an undergraduate student who invited me to this place that would become a site for collaboration. In my classes, I emphasize the importance of bringing knowledge "home," whether that be your family, community, church, friend group or on social media (Rendón, 2014). I would share how my research is an example of that because I value bringing knowledge to local schools to facilitate students' sense of agency in shifting their campus community to be a space of healing and connectedness for themselves (hooks, 1994, 2003; Rendón, 2014). During a lecture on feminism, intersectionality and education, a student followed me back to my office, rattling off questions before I could even answer them. A long-time resident of South Seattle, Yoli spoke about her excitement for what she was learning but also her anger. "I wish I had known this sooner," was a common phrase Yoli would use. When more privileged students would reference

[3] All proper names have been given pseudonyms where appropriate.

learning about feminisms in high school or attending district events featuring guest speakers, Yoli felt more and more that she was denied these same opportunities in her youth. "Schooling is not equal," she said. I would ask her how she wanted to change that for the next generation of Yoli's. As she looked around my office, her eyes turned as she said, "you need to be at Graham" (Fieldnote, 2014).

One of 12 high schools in the largest school district in the state (seattlepublicschools.org, 2019), GHS is the most ethnically and racially diverse. A recently designated STEM school, the high school excels in math and science courses but has struggled to find ways to support its diverse student body beyond ethnic clubs and events (Fieldnote, 2012). At my first meeting at GHS, I was astonished to see the STEM curriculum and medical path for students. As the administration walked me through these academic paths, Yoli's voice kept appearing in my head, "Don't forget to ask about diversity classes." As I visited the sports facilities, music room and career services, I stopped and asked Yoli's question. The principal smirked and said, "Well, they read *Native Son* their senior year. But students are here for STEM. It's not an issue" (Fieldnote, 2014). I was both shocked and unsurprised by his response. With no ethnic studies curricula mandate (Castro Gill, 2019), this was a common theme in schools across the district. For the principal to assert that it wasn't an issue, for a school as diverse as this, I was stunned. Diversity was everywhere in this school. Posters were written in at least seven different languages, there were ethnic clubs, and tagging on the cafeteria wall read, "We see us. Do YOU see us?".

The tagged wall stood with me as I drove the 15 miles back to my office, escaping the chaos that comes from being in a high school environment. Seeing my office door open, Yoli stuck her head inside, fully knowing I had gone to GHS that morning. I told her about what I heard, observed and the tagging in the cafeteria. "It hasn't changed," she said as she started to furiously text on her phone. She showed me a secret Facebook page the GHS students of color had created three years prior that was still active and thriving. When I had asked about the different ethnic groups on campus, the administration kept emphasizing how they "fully supported these causes" but could not "force" the students to show up. On this online forum, the students of color showed up for one another. Current students posted questions on how to deal with certain well-meaning faculty, Ramadan support groups were being run, questions about how to talk to their families about wanting to go to college knowing that they were undocumented or the financial burdens that question would open up and how to hang out at lunch without "getting in trouble." Alumnae offered their advice, and students connected with one another. "We connect here because we don't have space to connect there," Yoli explained. A few days later, I received a follow up email from the administration, saying there was interest from the Latinx students for me to be on campus. "If you are interested, we are happy to discuss what this could look like to best serve GHS" (personal communication, 2014). I knew "best serve GHS" was likely code for "we will help you and you will help us." That email also implied I would be granted access to work with the Latinx students and the students wanted me there. I said yes immediately.

Over the last six years, I have been welcomed by the GHS community, attending school events, collaborating with teachers for their summer school programs, chaperoning dances, helping build out family engagement activities and mentoring Latinx students, many of whom will be the first in their families to attend higher education. I knew I was walking a fine line between researcher and community member (Silva, 2017). As an ethnographer, I felt it was necessary to

embed myself within the community (Behar, 1996; Fine, 1994; Gone, 2006; Langhout, 2006). At the same time, as a scholar, I knew that the bonds I was building with the students on campus would complicate my ability to "pull myself out" of the research (Silva, 2017). Was I going to GHS to do research or was I going to be immersed within this community I cared deeply for? Was caring allowed in research? Is there such a thing as getting too close? These questions would stay with me throughout the project and are still present each time I bring this work to an academic audience. The process of sharing this work-work that might appear as me being "too close" and "too intimate"- carries much anxiety for me, especially as a woman of color in psychology. With tenure, I have felt less restrained and more vigilant on the need to provide reflective examples of how I have wrestled with decoloniality in my practice. This autoethnographic vignette is one example of how a core competency of decoloniality can help move scholars toward a practice that centers reflection to better serve those we collaborate with.

Jesica's Engagement with the Madres Emprendedoras. In the fall of 2017, a participatory action research (PAR) course was offered as part of a community-university collaborative project to support the leadership development and research skill training of local members of the Guadalupe Washington (GW) community, located in a predominantly working-class Latinx community in the city of San Jose (CA, USA). Approximately 82% of the more than 9,679 people that live in GW are Latinx. Scenes of upscale apartments in the process of being built or occupied starkly juxtapose the *pueblito* (small town) feeling of GW. Many families in the community are not able to afford rent for adequate single-family housing, and often have no choice but to live in garages converted into subpar housing units. Thus, it is within this community where the Madres Emprendedoras project began as a PAR course that was supported through Santa Clara University's (SCU) Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education under the Thriving Neighbors Initiative (TNI). As a private Jesuit institution in close proximity to GW, SCU has maintained longstanding ties to the GW community via TNI. Since 2013, SCU has run several education, health and community enrichment programs and projects in GW to support wellbeing, education access and leadership of families and youth. The PAR course was offered at no cost to any one from the community who was interested in participating. Several quarters prior to offering the course I (Jesica) was invited to contribute to the development, design and implementation of the PAR course by an SCU colleague and faculty member in sociology (Dr. Laura Nichols).

Together and in collaboration with the former TNI program director (Irene Cermeño), who oversaw this community-university partnership program, we crafted a vision for the PAR course. From the beginning, our process was intentional in serving and supporting the GW community. I was keen on having the PAR course be structured with and by the participants. We held meetings with GW community members to discern their interest in the course, welcomed their input and connected with a community member (Patricia Rodriguez, "Patty") who served as the liaison between us, the community and prospective participants who would join the PAR course. We agreed that I would teach a modified version of the PAR course in Spanish to participating members from the GW community. The PAR course participants who joined were already engaged in the other programs and initiatives affiliated with TNI, as well as the local elementary school, where we meet regularly, and our PAR sessions took place. As the course proceeded, several of the women began to refer to themselves as "*madres*" (madres), as that was the most salient and shared identity among them, and

they referred to me as "*maestra*" (teacher). We informally and relationally established a name for the group, Madres Emprendedoras, and a caring relationship that has continued well beyond the initial eleven weeks of the quarter.

Striving to include the madres in the PAR course required building relationships, as well as a holding space where I could learn from and listen to the madres. Specifically, it required that as a researcher and outsider to GW, I decolonize my entry into the community, including my researcher-teacher positionality with the madres. Instead of going in with a research plan or agenda tied to some particular outcome or metric of scholarly productivity, I had to deconstruct *what research is* and *who research is for*. To aid me in this process of decolonization, I turned to the work of decolonial scholars, such as Smith (2012) who writes: "Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practice" (p. 21). Engaging a decolonial competency was fundamental in guiding my process of co-building the development of a PAR course that would meet the interests and needs of the madres. Additionally, it required that I relinquish assumptions of what I thought would be best for the community based on my previous experiences with other Latinx communities, including those that I grew up in, and where I had been involved as a researcher and community advocate. My initial experiences in GW were centered on being present, learning, listening and finding opportunities to connect with the madres and the greater GW community. These actions helped inform my understanding of the diversity of experiences and struggles within GW, and the importance of holding space for community members, including the madres, to reflect on their concerns, needs and hopes.

Our interactions in the PAR course were oriented toward understanding how the madres would like to engage, and what they would like to see in the context of the PAR course. At one of our first meetings, Socorro (Soco), a mother of three, immigrant from Guanajuato and long-term resident of the GW community, asked "*Y que vamos aprender maestra?*" (What are we going to learn?), and I responded, "*Lo que ustedes quieran aprender, eso aprenderemos*" (Whatever you want to learn, that is what we will learn). The initial hesitation with claiming the space and collective autonomy to determine what we would learn shifted with another remark offered by Patty, "*Queremos aprender a mejorar nuestra comunidad. Contar nuestras historias. No lo que otros dicen de la comunidad*" (We want to learn how to better our community. Tell our own stories. Not what others say about the community). I was keen on connecting, building community and learning from the madres of GW, and putting into practice what one of the madres, Maria, a mother of five and immigrant from Jalisco, underscored "*Aprenderemos en comunidad, y lo que no sepamos lo averiguamos*" (We will learn in community, and what we don't know we will find out) (Fieldnote, 2018). The madres' engagement in the PAR course reflected their efforts to "*emprender*" (undertake, challenge, begin) "*cambio*" (change) in their community; a meaning that subsequently led the madres to embrace their group, and their PAR course, under the banner of the *Madres Emprendedoras* (Entrepreneurial Mothers) Project.

Summary

Situating generally and broadly the background for our respective projects, we – Janelle and Jesica – offer our autoethnographic reflections of two experiences, or lessons that illustrate

decoloniality as community psychology competency in the section that follows. We present these as vignettes, organizing each one along two lessons. The first lesson focuses on decolonizing terminology in training and practice, as illustrated by Janelle's experience with facilitating high school students' "decolonial dictionary," which relates to Jesica's process of engaging with the madres in re-defining "community agreements." The second lesson is on decolonizing community relationships and modes of inquiry, which both Janelle and Jesica illustrate through their stories of "walking the walk" and *acompañamiento* (accompaniment).

Lessons toward a Decolonial Competency in Community Psychology Practice

First Lesson: Decolonizing Terminology in Training and Practice

Janelle Supporting High School Students' Decolonial Dictionary. Colonial ways of research advocate for separation of the researcher from the subject (Smith, 2012). Many scholars have written about the complex nature of fieldwork and the need to be neutral (Behar, 1996; Smith, 2012). As a decolonial scholar, this felt counter to who I (Janelle) am and to decoloniality as a framework. Decoloniality has taught me the value of un-learning and re-learning to move away from dominant paradigms that continue to speak for groups, and not amplify their voices. As a decolonial ethnographer, I fully integrated myself (if possible and I am welcomed) into this space. I understood that I arrived with the privilege that comes from having an institution and title attached to my name. I stepped back when needed and continually reflected on my role in this process. The students were my guide. I was there to join them.

Rather than approach the campus administration with research questions, I developed on my own, within the ivory tower and informed by academic journals, I allowed the Latinx students to dictate my research agenda. It was that phrase, "research agenda," that raised flags for the students. "You got an agenda?" they would say with sideways glances. I could see them beginning to question my authenticity when I used these terms that had been drilled into me during graduate school, such as "research agenda," "study," "collaboration," "community-based work," and "agreements." "Pssh, like why you got to be like that, Profe? We thought you were cool" (Fieldnote, 2015). It was in that moment I realized that these colonized terms I had adopted needed to be adjusted for and with the community's input. I needed to find a new word that made sense to the Latinx students, and myself. If I wanted to work with them, I needed to decolonize my language, a skill I was not taught as a graduate student. I decided to do this with the Latinx students so we could develop a common language. Decolonizing the language we used would help us begin to decolonize the practices that embodied colonized approaches to research.

As we worked toward what would become our future project, we first started with reimagining how certain phrases and terminology could be decolonized. For the Latinx students, agendas were met with suspicion and automatic distrust. Administrators had an agenda. Authority figures had an agenda. They did not want to continue to be in communion with someone who had an agenda. Agendas were one-sided, not shared, void of discussion, and biased. Research was done to people like them, not something they were able to construct on their own. A study was another way to 'other" them. Collaborations were (as one student put it) "what white people would say when they come to GHS but all they wanted was our words and not our voices" (Fieldnote, 2015). Community-based work meant they were a project that needed to be fixed. Agreements

were rules that were followed by a punishment that lacked input.

I spent hours with these students going over the terms that had become a part of my everyday research jargon. Before this moment, I would use these terms without abandon; now, I stop and pause, considering if this is what I want to convey. I shared with the Latinx students what the terms were and how they were defined; they understood that words had power and wanted to know the origins of these terms before dismissing them. "Connection" became our first term that they wanted to use to describe our collaborative projects together. Connection to them called attention to the relationship component that they felt was absent from the word "collaboration". "People collaborate with us all the time and then bounce," a student said during a meeting. "You have been here. You are invested. You connect with us" (Fieldnote, 2015).

As we worked on decolonizing our shared language, we spent a good deal of time thinking about "agreements." I brought the idea of creating "community agreements" to the group so we could establish a shared vision and goals that we could fall back on in times of need (Dalton & Wolf, 2012). Community agreements worked well in my courses and the phrase had been adopted by different student organizations on campus. When the Latinx students pushed back, I had to see how this term has been used to disempower and "police" them. As students of color in the K-12 system, they felt "agreements" have been used to elicit unfair punishments. Indeed, I was aware of how punishments were disproportionately allocated to students of color, boys of color and first-generation students (Silva, Langhout, Kohfeldt & Gurrola, 2015). For me, "community agreements" were central to our future "connections" and that meant decolonizing our language. "Agreements" became "check-ins" to signal that we would use our shared vision and goals to begin our meetings and "connect" with each other. Instead of a set of rules or agreements to keep us on track, these became central to strengthening our group bond.

When I reread my fieldnotes on this moment, I was struck by two things: (1) how this experience catalyzed the decolonizing of our project, and (2) that I have never shared this with a public audience. I cringed when I saw that I wrote the students "pushed back." Yes, it felt like a push back to me because they were challenging the academic language I had accepted as legitimate. However, describing students of color who were challenging colonized language as "pushing back" was an example of the continuous work I have done to decolonize my language and framework for working with community partners. They were not pushing back on me to be disrespectful, but they wanted me to question why these words were acceptable. In many ways, it was not them "pushing back" on me but it was the students moving me forward. Together, we engaged decoloniality by deconstructing language through reflective writing, lived experiences and unlearning. When I shared with one of the teachers our process, that teacher gave me a baffled look. "Why would you let them tell you what to do? You have the degree. You are the teacher-not them" (Fieldnote, 2015). Having spent several years collaborating with K-12 schools, this comment did not surprise me. Yet, it stuck out to me more than before. Schools were intended to be spaces that challenged students' curiosities, facilitated critical thinking and connected to their lives. If these students were denied the opportunity to question, or seen as "pushing back on authority," they were not being given the chance to decolonize their minds. Clearly work needed to be done at GHS beyond my time with the students. If this was the space where they were able to challenge language and question colonial thinking, we would walk that path together.

Madres Re-Defining Jesica's Proposed Community Agreements. In the university classroom "community agreements" serve as a set of principles students and I (Jesica) will mindfully engage to support each other in our collective learning and growth through in class reflections, discussions and activities. In the context of the community PAR course, however, these "community agreements" had to be translated to "*acuerdos comunitarios*" (community agreements). When introducing them by their literal Spanish translation several of the madres were confused by their meaning. The Spanish term was too academic, formal and felt sterile. I was intent on having the "community agreements" extend beyond the physical space of the classroom where our PAR course took place. I hoped the "community agreements" would inform the development of our relationships with each other, open and transparent communication, as well as a mutual commitment to our learning, research and community advocacy work. Clearly, the phrase "*acuerdos comunitarios*" (community agreements) was not translating well; we were getting lost in translation and meaning.

This moment served as an opportunity for me to re-think the colonial elements of language, and how certain phrases and their meaning may become inaccessible even though they are devised with the best of intentions. Patty's question about what I meant by "*acuerdos comunitarios*" (community agreements) and whether these were meant as "*reglas*" (rules) opened upon an avenue for me to unravel their true meaning and purpose. I clarified that these were not meant to be rules, instead they were to be "*maneras de pensar y actuar que nos unan*" (ways of thinking and acting that can unite us). Maria proposed that we refer to them as "*promesas que reflejan nuestros valores*" (promises that reflect our values). I asked the madres if "*promesas*" (promises) would be a better word, and several agreed to re-brand the "acuerdos comunitarios" (community agreements) as "*promesas*" (promises) because the latter would more adequately reflect our values and commitment to each other.

We then began to reflect and describe those instances when the madres feel heard and seen. I invited the madres to identify the practices that allow for a sense of belonging. They mentioned the importance of "*respeto*" (respect), "*hablar desde el punto de vista propio*" (to speak from their own experiences), and "*escuchar para entender*" (listen in order to understand). We jotted these on the white board for us to see, elaborate on or question. As we continued the activity of collectively developing our "*promesas*," I heard stories of experiences where the madres were seemingly included yet not a part of the decision-making process, or where someone in a group took the lead without considering the opinions or thoughts of others. In listening to their stories, which reflected problematic power dynamics, we agreed that we would follow a consensus decision-making process: "*todas en una sola voz*" (all in one voice) as Patty remarked.

For the madres "*ser incluidas*" (to be included) and "*comprometerse*" (to commit oneself) seemed to be fundamental values that they cultivated amongst themselves through their daily interactions and relationships. "*Compromiso*" (to commit oneself) relied on the importance of working together to support and care for each other. Thus, inclusion and commitment founded upon an ethic of care, collaboration and support were added to our "*promesas*" (promises). In line with the values of showing up and caring, the madres proposed "*estar presentes*" (to be present). Responses to this comment surfaced different experiences. Some madres acknowledged difficulties with staying focused, while others elaborated that attending events allowed them a break from responsibilities as mothers, caregivers and providers for their families. We agreed to add

"*cuidarse a uno mismo*" (self-care). A portion of our meeting centered on creating a version of the madres' community agreements. As a group, we developed a list of "*promesas*" to guide our collaboration grounded in a decolonial process and practice. Our "*promesas*" included: "*respeto*" (respect), "*hablar desde el punto de vista propio*" (speaking of one's experiences), "*escuchar para entender*" (listen to understand), inclusion, commitment, consensus decision-making, being present and practicing self-care. We agreed to revise and revisit these "*promesas*" as the PAR course continued and our relationships unfolded (Fieldnote, 2018).

Reflecting on this fieldnote, it was in those moments when we opened up to share our individual and collective experiences with one another, and how we wanted our learning space to be, that we engaged decoloniality. A decolonial competency was fostered through reflexive dialogues that challenged research language, relationships and decision-making. The objectives and expectations of a structured course and project, tied to and reflective of the institution, did not set the foundation for our PAR course. On the contrary, we engaged with and experienced what Bell (2018) characterizes as a decolonial atmosphere, imbued with stories and emotions that helped us discern the space and relationships we sought to cultivate. We did this by sharing stories, which called for us to engage in a critical, ethical reflexive practice that helped us shift away from the conversational conventions of turn-taking speech. The often methodical and structured process of research, language and training can often prevent opportunities for deeper meaningful learning, that in turn, maintains power dynamics of research that I sought to interrogate. As I reflect, this vignette demonstrates the development of a decolonial competency. Our "*promesas*" (community agreements) mirrored our feelings and desires, rooted in reflections of lived experiences that allowed us to build "*comunidad*" (community) as we troubled the dynamics of colonial power in knowledge and practice.

Second Lesson: Decolonizing Community Relationships and Modes of Inquiry

Janelle "Walking the Walk" to Cultivate a Decolonizing Practice. This autoethnographic vignette showcases how I integrated the lessons I learned from the students at GHS within my college classrooms. As we continued our work on decolonizing our language, we started to rethink the overall process that I had previously presented to them on how we would work together. This was a process that I had established based on my schooling and the ethics and values of community psychology (Dalton & Wolf, 2012). Yet, this was a process that I did not develop in collaboration with the Latinx students. What follows is how decolonizing our language led to decolonizing our entire process and centering our lived experiences and voices within all aspects of this project. These lessons transformed how I approached my college classrooms and how I taught CP. Reflecting on my pedagogy, I offer this vignette to illustrate my continued investment in decolonizing all aspects of my practice.

Once we established an agreed upon language free from colonized ways of knowing, we were ready to work on our first "connection." Following our "check-in" set up, I knew the students would not agree to a project that was disconnected from their experiences. They were well aware of how others used the stereotypes attached to their social identities to shape and shift commonly held ideologies that they struggled to debunk. For these students, anyone who entered their space wanting to work with them-even if they shared identities with them-was "suspect" (Fieldnote, 2014). It was not enough to decolonize research terms-we had to

decolonize what I represented and what my presence meant in that space.

Our need to decolonize our language taught me that I also needed to center all of us in this space beyond the future "connection" we would develop. I did not want anything we did to feel disconnected from their lived experiences or devoid of the pain they conveyed when speaking about the institutionalized oppression they felt, both at school and in the community. To get us to the point of brainstorming, we decided to "break down the walls of 341 and be real to get real" (Fieldnote, 2016). To initiate our brainstorming, we each brought in something that was meaningful to us. I told the students it could be a photo, book, song lyric, drawing or an object-any artifact that would spark conversation and that they felt comfortable sharing with the group. Family photos, serapes, Mayan statues, jewelry, rosaries, Cardi B. lyrics, feminist posters, buttons, soccer jerseys, work badges and city maps took over our classroom. Each artifact was central to the students' sense of self and what it meant to be a Latinx high schooler. Being a Latinx student could not be defined by what was already written about them. As we slowly shared our artifacts, stories of frustration, anger and pain were shared. Students were angry about the texts that were used in their classes that supposedly "told their histories" (Fieldnote, 2016). For a campus as diverse as GHS, the Latinx students felt "trapped" by "old ideas" (Fieldnote, 2016). This process took several weeks for us to process and determine where to go next. I knew research (in the traditional sense) had a timeline and a part of me was concerned that this activity was taking too long. Yet, I knew that was my colonized approach to research talking. They were guiding me on this journey, and I needed to trust them. A researcher does not always have all the answers. Two months later, our weeks of brainstorming, crying, sharing and laughing brought us a breakthrough. The students wanted to explore who they were as our first "connection." Together, we developed what would become our "research" or "connection."

In many ways, the hours spent with the Latinx students at GHS informed my pedagogy and I discussed community practice with my undergraduates. Working through the core competencies with undergraduates really highlighted how inaccessible students of color found them to be. Although the competencies were written for graduate programs, I believe in sharing them with my undergraduate students in our community psychology program. Teaching them the values and principles of CP also includes the core competencies of the field that they are considering as their future careers. The frustration that my students felt that these competencies were written for graduate students and neglected to consider undergraduate training is for another time and place. What my students fixated most on, was how to engage in a decolonial community psychology practice through re-imagining the field.

As my high school students pushed back on terms they found colonizing and detached from their experiences, so did my undergraduates. In my senior seminar community projects class, undergrads rejected the competencies. The communities they were interested in working with were their communities, ones that were ethnically/racially diverse, with complex histories related to the land and social institutions. What my undergraduate and high school students were seeking was a decolonial community practice. Both groups wanted to take something back to their communities that felt authentic to who they are. "Why can't we create a manifesto instead?" (Fieldnote, 2017) a student raised in the seminar course. "If there are no CP core competencies for us, we should make our

own that reflect us," said another student (Fieldnote, 2017).

I can remember leaning back against the classroom wall as I watched my undergrads take each core competency, reframe it to reflect their needs, and reimagine what new competencies might look like. The first competency they reimagined was number two, empowerment (Dalton & Wolfe, 2012). They wanted to know who first theorized about empowerment: *What is that person's positionality? What does it mean to empower communities? Can you empower a community that your social group has disempowered? Should empowerment come from community insiders only?* As they wrote down their questions on the whiteboard, they decided that what they wanted to know was more about the community psychologist's whose work they were reading. *What is their backstory? How do they position themselves within their work?* As competency number five encourages an ethical reflective practice (Dalton & Wolfe, 2012), my students were struck as to how few academic articles required a reflective paragraph to be included when discussing research. "Why do they [academics] get to stop reflecting? Does the degree and commitment to competencies mean you just do it but don't have to actually show it?" one student asked. Their need for a reflective practice that re-centered their lived experiences and humanized research echoed the frustrations of my GHS students. As decolonial scholars (Buttaro, 2010; Portillo, 2013; Tejada & Espinoza, 2003; Quijano, 2000) note, decoloniality surfaces the systemic oppressions marginalized groups face by amplifying their voices within the project. The sense of urgency that came from high school and undergraduate students- although miles part and in different locations- was palpable and intertwined. As the high school students engaged in a project that centered decoloniality beginning with language, the college students developed a decolonial framework to guide them on their emerging journeys as budding community psychologists. In both settings, we sought guidance in texts by women of color who were feminists (Collins, 1990; Hurtado, 1996) and decolonial scholars (Lissovoy, 2010; Portillo, 2013; Quijano, 2000) as we considered the field we wanted to engage with. The practice we developed in the high school and university became markers to seeing ourselves/themselves reflected in research beyond being a "subject."

Jesica's Acompañamiento with the Madres Emprendedoras'. In the next autoethnographic reflection, I (Jesica) illustrate how the madres applied and implemented their PAR skills to develop their own research project, the *Finding Kids Project* (FKP), with support and resources from TNI. Unlike the action-projects the madres developed and implemented in the context of the PAR course, the FKP was of their own making and design. The madres' initiative and leadership in developing the FKP, demonstrated their skills in community engaged research. Additionally, it underscored the importance of cultivating a decolonial competency of re-centering experiential knowledge as a legitimate and valuable source of knowledge, and one where curiosity, inquiry and research can unfold. The initial interests expressed by TNI about children's experiences in the afterschool program animated the madres' initiative to implement the FKP to document the impact of the afterschool program, as well as the needs and interests of families in the GW community for additional education resources. As Soco, one of the madres shared, "*Muchos de nuestros hijos han pasado por el programa [TNI], nosotros sabemos lo importante que es para nuestros hijos. Pero debemos demostrarles con hechos el impacto*" (Many of our children have gone through the [TNI] program, we know how important it is for our children. But we must demonstrate the impact with evidence). Setting themselves up as a team to document and demonstrate

the impact with "*hechos*" (evidence) required them to begin with their stories about the afterschool program.

In striving to be resourceful and supportive of the madres, it was I who gained a valuable resource through a hard-learned lesson, however. During one of the initial FKP meetings, I shared with the madres a few peer-reviewed research articles, which were in English but annotated and summarized in Spanish by me. I wrongly believed that these sources would be useful and assumed that what these articles had to say would help validate the madres' experiences. I assumed the implications of these articles on the benefits of afterschool programs for youth of color from low-income communities would serve as a starting point for their research. I was wrong. I learned then that what is most valuable is not what others have written, but what one has witnessed or what humanizes their experience. Embarrassingly, after summarizing and presenting some of this research, I listened to Juanita kindly remark that this was not news for her, that she had seen such benefits and outcomes among her daughter, and that most all of the madres could speak from a place of personal lived experience: "*Maestra, todo eso ya lo sabemos, lo hemos visto y vivido, no leído en un libro*" (Teacher, we already know that, we have seen and lived it, we didn't read it in a book) (Fieldnote, 2018).

My intentions with sharing the research were to aid the madres in the development of their project, yet I soon realized that what I was offering was knowledge "from the outside," from the colonial gaze that is antithetical to a decolonial competency (Dutta, 2018). Purporting that research must and should begin from a review of past literature erases and overlooks the knowledge that already exists within communities. The madres did not need an empirical, peer-review, published set of articles and my translations of these to tell them that afterschool programs, which are culturally and community-centered, are beneficial to students' learning and wellbeing. The madres knew this to be true because they had personally experienced this. That was a moment of reckoning that brought me to the realization that not all research must begin with past research. On the contrary, research can begin with stories, with reflections of experiences that have shaped understandings of others and ourselves, as well as the thriving conditions we wish to see in our communities. For the madres, they were interested in telling a story about their children's' afterschool program experiences. Through the development of the FKP they sought to advocate for programming and resources they had long been wanting to see for youth in their community.

Shortly after a few planning and design meetings, the madres began to develop their own survey questions to include in their afterschool program assessment. Several drafts of the survey were developed that included a combination of open and close-ended questions written in colloquial Spanish that the madres articulated would be accessible to GW families. The madres were intent on keeping the language, questions and length of the survey as accessible as possible. Each survey draft was piloted with other parents, mostly other madres in the community who enthusiastically offered their input, feedback and recommendations on the survey. Their feedback helped develop new questions or remove those that were repeated in various ways and those that were confusing or irrelevant to the goals of the survey. With each iteration of piloting, editing and revising, the madres gained skills in fine-tuning their questions and narrowing the scope of their project. Although initially interested in the outcomes of the afterschool program, the madres decided to specifically focus on the youths' academic experiences and how the afterschool program supported or challenged their academic engagement. The questions included in their survey

reflected the knowledge and information they sought to document in order to advocate for their youths' academic needs and wellbeing.

The FKP provided the Madres Emprendedoras with an opportunity to "*poner en practica*" (to put into practice) that which they had learned in the context of the PAR course. However, rather than beginning with or drawing from past research, surveys and empirical evidence, the madres began with their stories and experiences; they reflected in community with each other, and together they pieced survey questions together and then consulted with other parents in their community. Although supported through resources from TNI, the survey was done through a collaborative, community-lead process determined and guided by the madres. Via this autoethnographic reflection, I illustrate how a decolonizing competency is one where the research is guided by the intellectual curiosities and humility of not-knowing and wanting to know, instead of the conventions of scientific inquiry. The desire to understand, document and tell their story on their terms, and to serve, advocate and improve one's community, is the cornerstone to a decolonial competency. Instead of adding knowledge to the cannon of social sciences that is reserved for a few, yet excludes the many, I maintain that research, and community psychology in particular, must strive to decolonize itself – where and how it begins, and who it serves.

Implications and Possibilities for a Decolonial Competency

The process of naming, claiming identities and discourse, what language to use for example, can help facilitate decolonial community engagement in community psychology practice. Decoloniality, tied to the reclamation of land, resources and power while crucial to the broader decolonial project, or what Maldonado-Torres (2016) describes as the decolonial turn, is also fundamentally about the right to name oneself instead of being labeled or influenced by an outsider, such as a researcher. Our autoethnographic reflections offer snapshots of moments where a decolonial competency was centered and put into practice in order to support the power, agency, and research training development of Latinx students (Janelle) and the Madres Emprendedoras (Jesica). Supporting the students and madres' process to use language and knowledge of relevance to their experiences in order to appropriately cultivate their research skills and critical inquiry attests to the value of incorporating a decolonial competency in community psychology practice.

An iterative process of critical, ethical reflexivity that unsettles a hegemonic community psychology practice rooted in Western Eurocentric perspectives, characterizes a decolonial competency in community psychology practice. The aims of unsettling or de-linking are to cultivate and amplify community voice, knowledge and power. Attuned to the colonial gaze in research we therefore offer four specific principles toward engaging a decolonial competency in community psychology practice that build from our autoethnographic reflections. These principles, informed by the two lessons we described via our vignettes, include: 1) engaging in an critical, ethical reflexive practice of how colonial power is reproduced in language, or discourse, 2) de-centering power hierarchies in community settings via the development of mutual understanding and commitments, 3) fostering opportunities for co-learning that embrace multiple ways of knowing, difference and refusal and 4) cultivating collaborative research partnerships grounded in connection, especially accompaniment. Together, these principles underscore the value of a decolonial competency in community psychology practice that acknowledges lived experience, community wisdom and

relationality as fundamental sources of inquiry toward a liberatory, decolonizing praxis of social justice and change.

In addition to these principles, and grounded in our autoethnographic vignettes, we offer two takeaways to help orient the budding (or seasoned) community psychology practitioner toward a decolonial competency. First, a decolonial competency that deconstructs academic language and discourse can facilitate a community psychologist's practice of engaging in a critical, ethical reflexive practice. This requires embracing values of cultural humility, compassionate self-criticism and openness to unlearn in order to un-learn/re-learn with and alongside communities. Keeping these values central to a community psychology practice allows the practitioner to become attuned to the community's needs, and less complacent and complicit in the use and application of discourses that do not serve nor uplift the community.

Second, a decolonial competency necessitates that practitioners engage in deep introspection and an interrogation of our training, and how this can reproduce and sustain the coloniality of power in knowledge in unconscious yet significant ways. We must contend with how ways of thinking, being and relating to others in the context of research have kept dynamics or structures of hegemonic power intact. What are the consequences of engaging in a community psychology practice that prioritizes community empowerment, yet expects community voices to be analyzed, contextualized and theorized in particulars ways often without community engagement or input? We need not speak for the communities as they speak for themselves. We refuse to partake in the hegemonic reproduction of knowledge as we acknowledge that communities hold wisdom and a repertoire of knowledge, language, discourses and practices that can guide them. And, if we humble ourselves, they can guide us as well into more meaningfully applying our skills and resources to better meet their needs and interests – not those of the academe, or even the discipline.

A decolonial competency invites us to engage in ongoing reflection, specifically a critical ethical reflexive practice that is a response to the socio-historical, cultural and political/social conditions of communities. We engage a decolonial competency by questioning what we say, do and think, and who it serves. We remain mindful – even vigilant of ourselves – and critically, ethically reflecting by asking: *Who benefits from this work? Is it serving the community, academia and/or the institution?* In decolonizing our community psychology practice, and our ways of knowing and being, we encourage practitioners to go beyond surface-level reflections, and to dig deep into how we have been trained to see – through a colonial and colonizing gaze – the community as "other" when in fact we are often embedded in similar communities (Dutta, 2018).

Our lessons and reflections urge practitioners to strive for connection, as this allows us to humanize the community. Our experiences illustrate how we have come to listen and talk less – with students and madres. We embrace not knowing how the research process will unfold, yet prioritizing the direction, voice, agency and power led by the community, whether these are high school students or Mexican immigrant, working-class women who are madres. Our autoethnographic reflections highlight the value of decoloniality as a community psychology competency to support community leadership, agency, voice and power. Competencies that reflect decoloniality in theory and praxis, as well as the development of anti-colonial research approaches, relationships and modes of inquiry that must begin with a recognition that community knowledge and lived experience are fundamentally important as

communities work toward socially just liberation.

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