Feminist Interruptions: Creating Care-ful and Collaborative Community-Based Research with Students

Kelly Concannon
Nova Southeastern University

Laura Finley
Barry University

Nadine Grifoni
Nova Southeastern University

Stephanie Wong
Florida International University

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Kelly Concannon, Nova Southeastern University

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with

Nadine Grifoni, Nova Southeastern University

Stephanie Wong, Florida International University

Brittney Bartlett, University of Miami

Abstract: This article describes a feminist community-based research project involving faculty and student collaboration to evaluate a dating and domestic violence awareness initiative. Using a critical ethics of care that emphasizes relationships and allows for constant reflection about power dynamics, role, positionality, and emotions, the authors reflect on what was learned during the research process. Faculty and student researchers share their perspectives and offer suggestions for future feminist collaborative research projects. Significant lessons learned include ensuring that all are invested from the outset of the project, guaranteeing that student researchers understand why their role is so critical in community-based research, and acknowledging not just faculty power over students but student privilege as well.

Introduction

Feminist researchers, activists, and educators involved in community-engagement work stress the significance of the interpersonal and interdependent aspects of partnerships between the university and the community (Novek 1999; Derbyshire 2002). Connecting with others from different locations and histories may produce moments of uncertainty; however, these "encounters" (Ahmed 2000) can produce moments of possibility and promise when conflicting histories and competing relationships to power are acknowledged and assessed (Mathieu 2005; Himley 2004).[1] Resisting traditional configurations of power and privilege—between teachers and students, between university- and community-based projects, and among multiple universities—can bring about significant changes that result in safer, more just communities. In these cases, taking seriously the impact *relationships* have on feminist research processes is crucial in creating new forms of knowing and being as we continue to engage in feminist activism.

   Feminist theorists participating in community-engagement and community-research projects illustrate the significance of critically assessing how power dynamics affect the relational elements of the research

process (Minh-ha 2009; Kirsch 1999). Traditional relationships to power and privilege have long dictated what constitutes legitimate forms of knowledge, while oftentimes silencing those who have been marginalized and excluded from various research processes. That is, feminist researchers are cognizant of how hierarchies of power structure inform not only what we know but how the *processes* though which we come to know are structured (Code 1991; Alcoff 2005). As a result, feminist researchers create spaces for subjugated knowledges to be both visible and valuable in the research process. For our purposes, subjugated knowledges include the perspectives of student feminist researchers. We present these perspectives in a way that emphasizes the affective and emotional realm of creating knowledge, as we acknowledge how emotions and feelings structure all our personal biases, connections, and motivations in the very process of knowledge building (Nagy Hesse-Biber 2007; Jagger 1989).

The material realities of any research site produce difficulties in practice. In a university context, traditional relationships to power and privilege prevail even as teachers and students engage in meaningful collaborations. Many feminist researchers invested in service-learning and community-based activism have struggled with the impact of institutional power and privilege on progressive outcomes (Benigni Cipolle 2010; Jacobi 2002). In a teaching and learning situation, faculty often want to appear as all-knowing and thus use largely or even exclusively pedagogical methods that demonstrate their power over students (Sperber 2000). Students, too, are generally accustomed to this dominator-style teaching (Eisler 2000) and may resist methods that are more engaging and in which power is shared. These "student" and "teacher" roles are so deeply engrained, so much taken for granted, that even when faculty seek to share power with students on projects outside of the actual classroom setting, both parties may fall back into this "power-over" dynamic (Finley 2004).

There are myriad approaches to feminist collaborative research that assuage the impact of an institutional context on co-creating knowledges. First, in this project, we acknowledge the power of relationships in the construction of knowledge and draw from scholarship on critical ethics of care to serve as a framework for guiding our relationships with feminist student researchers. Second, we situate the role of reflection at the fore of our efforts, as we critically assess our engagement in a feminist activism project intended to raise awareness about domestic and dating violence. Webb, Cole, and Skeen (2007) emphasize the value of reflection on how power dynamics affect students' and teachers' relationships to feminist service-learning projects:

> We may want to create an activist, change-based classroom, but we must recognize that we continually
> negotiate the tensions between empowering students and imposing our ideologies on them. In the very act
> of inviting students to define themselves, we run the risk of defining them through the lenses of our own
> agendas. (239)

Webb, Cole, and Skeen argue for the creation of spaces for feminist student researchers to claim authority in the research process. This is a difficult task, given competing levels of engagement and buy-in from stakeholders (student and faculty researchers and community organizers). While this article discusses different elements of our community-based research process—the location of a research site, the creation of research questions, the distribution of questions surrounding a community-based project—we are most interested in making visible the uncomfortable and messy processes that accompany any well-intended undertaking of this kind by emphasizing the need for meaningful practices of reflexivity and reflection (Powell and Takayoshi 2003).

Our research offers a description and analysis of the challenges faced by faculty and student feminist researchers engaged in a community-based research project centered on the College Brides Walk. We

describe, assess, and reflect on our third year of implementing this project and in the process we make visible feminist student researchers' reflections in evaluating the campus community collaborative program focused on dating-violence awareness in spring 2013. We reveal how a critical ethics of care can guide how we navigate relationships between researchers in the co-construction of knowledge. Faculty members initiated the process of reflection by creating a set of questions for both faculty and student researchers. All researchers were invited to discuss their roles in different dimensions of the planning of the College Brides Walk initiative as well as in the actual research design. Our intention was to create questions that prompted reflection on our involvement in the *process* of working on the project, rather than on the results collected.[2] We were most interested in delineating lessons learned, and we asked both faculty and student researchers to reflect on how their positionality impacted their relationships to the project on multiple levels. Finally, we asked all participants to discuss how lessons learned can impact future feminist efforts. The three students reveal significant methodological insights that all feminist researchers should incorporate into community-based research. Many of these points include different mechanisms for addressing how institutional contexts shape all our relationships and investments in community-based research. It is our contention that this article, then, can serve as a model to utilize the process of reflection in order to assess and evaluate the outcomes of our feminist work and activism.

The College Brides Walk: A Brief Background

Domestic violence has been considered one of the world's worst human rights violations, with former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan calling it "perhaps the most shameful human rights violation" and "perhaps the most pervasive" (Shabazz 2006). An estimated one-third of the world's women will endure an abusive relationship during their lifetimes (UN Commission on the Status of Women 2000). College students are particularly at risk (Leonard, Quigley & Collins 2002; Straus 2008). Kenneth Leonard, Brian Quigley, and Lorraine Collins (2002) found that 30 to 40 percent of college students had experienced some type of abuse from a dating partner. The 2007 International Dating Violence Study—involving 13,601 students from 32 universities across the globe—found high rates of both minor and major assault perpetrated by men and women. Even these astounding statistics are conservative, because we know that abuse on college campuses remains underreported (Schwartz and DeKeseredy 1997).

While the original movement against domestic violence was guided by feminist principles, in particular by the imperative to challenge patriarchal norms, today many eschew those principles as inappropriate and divisive. According to Finley and Esposito (2012), this is reflective of the broader trend toward a neoliberal ideology in which domestic-violence services and prevention efforts are increasingly bureaucratized and professionalized, and advocates promote individual change as empowerment instead of challenges to social norms and community transformation (Bumiller 2008; Ferraro 1996; Finley 2010). Consistent with the call of Kirsch (1999) and others, our feminist project sought to reintegrate these essential components of empowerment into the educational campaign and to challenge the societal beliefs and structures that enable abuse (Edleson and Bible 1999; Gondolf, Yllo, and Campbell 1997; Schechter 1988; Ferraro 1996; Naples 1998).

It is imperative that communities and campuses come together to challenge the underlying social norms that result in abuse. The authors have been involved in the College Brides Walk, which is a campus community collaboration intended to raise awareness about dating and domestic violence and to inspire college students and communities to take action to prevent abuse. The College Brides Walk aims to correct misconceptions about abuse, including who is victimized, why abuse occurs, and how it impacts individuals

and society. Importantly, it is an interdisciplinary, community-based initiative that provides a vehicle for campuses and communities to work together in the effort to end domestic violence.

The College Brides Walk emerged from the Brides March, which was started by Josie Ashton, a South Florida activist and at the time college student, after she learned about the brutal murder of Gladys Ricart on September 26, 1999. Agustin Garcia, Ricart's abusive ex-boyfriend, shot and killed her just moments before she was supposed to marry another man. Ashton obtained permission from the Ricart family to walk in Gladys's memory; then, wearing her own wedding dress, she walked from the New Jersey home where Ricart was killed to Miami, spending nights in 14 domestic violence shelters and visiting 22 cities along the way. Today, annual Brides Marches are held in New York, Wisconsin, Washington, DC, Florida, and the Dominican Republic. The goal is that the "spectacle" of people walking in wedding apparel will create public dialogue about domestic violence.

In 2011, Ashton joined representatives from five universities to plan the first College Brides Walk in North Miami, with the goal of making this educational campaign more accessible to both students and community members. Another key organizer was Stephanie Wong, Josie's daughter, who was a high school senior at the time. Some 300 students, faculty, and staff participated in the first College Brides Walk, an effort that also involved collaboration with six domestic-violence service providers in the area. Close to 400 people attended the 2nd Annual College Brides Walk. The collaborative nature of the event expanded in year three, and three additional universities participated. In addition, the event expanded to include local activist groups and community leaders. A partnership with a local girls' charter school resulted in the presence of 50 high school students at the event. Corporations in the community surrounding the host university provided support as well. In year three, another university was added to the collaboration and a partnership with a girls' mentoring program resulted in some 450 attendees, including 200 high school girls.

Given that the goal of this initiative is to educate the community about domestic violence, each year features much more than just a walk. Speakers before and after the walk share their personal stories that both horrify the audience and build hope and a larger sense of community. These presentations are also intended to show attendees how they can participate in ending abuse and promoting justice in their communities. Hearing the survivors' stories helps attendees see victims as real, not as mere statistics. Listening to the pain and suffering they endured from physical, sexual, and emotional abuse helps attendees understand the true scope of abuse and its impact. Since a primary goal of the event is to correct misconceptions about abuse, organizers are careful to include a diversity of victims, including males, immigrants, same-sex couples, and teens. In addition to participating in the actual event, College Brides Walk organizers sought ways to coordinate more extensive involvement on campus and in the community. Partnering with campus-based service-learning initiatives was a logical fit.[3]

The Project

After two years, College Brides Walk organizers realized that more systemic evaluation of the program was needed. Additionally, we continued to seek more meaningful ways to include students in all phases of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the College Brides Walk. In year three, we continued to work with Stephanie, the founder's daughter, but also involved two other college students. One (Brittney Bartlett from Barry University) attended planning meetings for the actual community event regularly, while the other (Nadine Grifoni from Nova Southeastern University) was more involved with the creation of the research evaluation tools and analysis of the data. College Brides Walk faculty organizers from Barry and

Nova Southeastern received a minigrant for a community-based research project involving students and partners at both universities. This project helped further integrate students' voices, utilize their expertise, and meet important community needs for data about how students (our target audience for the project) experienced our efforts.

Care, Ethics, and Feminist Community-Engagement Research: Kelly and Laura

A critical ethics of care served as a framework for this feminist community-based research, because we were interested in creating relationships with students that mobilized values traditionally associated with care. Scholarship on care ethics gained momentum in the early 1980s, when feminists working in moral philosophy (Gilligan 1982; Belenky et al. 1987*)* and educational philosophy (Noddings 1986*)* took seriously the impact of gender on moral reasoning. Care ethics—as a moral and ethical understanding of and within the world—emerged to counter androcentric approaches to ethics that were exclusionary because they marginalized women's perspectives. Nel Noddings, in particular, demonstrated how to infuse the material conditions of teaching with collaboration, attentiveness, and connection by focusing on the relationships between teachers and students. In *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1986), Noddings establishes care as vital to students' development and argues that collaboration, attentiveness, and connection are crucial in cultivating relationships. She defines care as a fundamental component of human relationships and argues that relationships are fundamental to caring and being cared for and involve an affective response from both ends. Although care may involve conflict, the promise of forming connections and experiences of joy contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of caring.

Many feminists have refuted the claims of care ethics. Some believe that adopting the values associated with an ethics of care to guide relationships reifies traditional gender roles and assumptions (Tronto 1994; Morgan 1996), while others argue that an ethics of care does not account for larger questions related to social justice (Held 2006).[4] We acknowledge the work of our foremothers at the same time as we understand the pitfalls of allowing an *uncritical* ethics of care to guide our research project with students. Therefore, we developed a *critical* ethics of care as a model for cultivating relationships.

We have drawn on a critical ethics of care that *responsibly* values cooperation, attentiveness, and reciprocity by engaging in questions of social justice. Such ethics places relationships at the fore but does so in a way that is attentive to the workings of power and privilege (Preissle 2007; Brabeck 1987). Drawing heavily from the work of Fiona Robinson (1999), we started from the premise that people live in and perceive the world in terms of relationships. These relationships serve both as a source of moral motivation and responsiveness and as a basis for the construction and expression of power and knowledge. Robinson's work asks us not only to critically reflect on how relationships of care are structured on both an immediate and systemic levels but also to examine how these relationships shape particular emotional responses elicited (or not elicited) in situations that call for care. Adopting a critical ethics of care to guide our research practices allowed us to move beyond the immediacy of the situation (creating different opportunities to encourage feminist student researchers to care about issues related to domestic and dating violence) and to assess how our relationships were reflective of larger structures of power, privilege, and exclusion as related to care. This framework was an impetus for understanding how relationships are structured and how these relationships impact the research process in the community-engagement site. By framing our feminist methodology as part of a larger collaborative dialogue with student researchers through cooperation and exchange, the group sought to work from our relationships to create ethical and responsible research.

In Dialogue: Faculty and Student Perspectives on the Project

The following section integrates the perspectives of two faculty organizers (Kelly Concannon and Laura Finley) and three student organizers (Stephanie Wong, Brittney Bartlett, and Nadine Grifoni). Individual reflective writing is organized around particular themes that relate back to a critical ethics of care. Personal insights related to role and positionality; power, authority, and difference; relationships and emotions; and care and attachments throughout the planning and research process are shared below. Each segment ends with a summary feminist reflection, authored by Kelly and Laura, which draws together the main themes that emerged. The paper concludes with assessments of the next steps for this collaborative project and implications for feminist collaborative research in general.

Role and Positionality

Each organizer's role in the project varied, as did their input and interpretations based on their position as students, faculty members, and activists.

Laura Finley: As an organizer of the walk and point person for the host institution, I have been actively involved in all phases of the walk and the research process. I sought the minigrant for this community-based research project. I am also responsible for organizing the service-learning opportunities for all the 12 sections of SOC 200, the Sociology course at Barry University.

Kelly Concannon: As a member of the organizing committee and faculty member at Nova Southeastern University, I too have been actively involved in different phases of the walk and the subsequent research process. However, I have been most directly involved with student researchers on the assessment, collection, and presentation of data.

Stephanie Wong: My role as a college student and organizer has ranged from the simple task of taking notes at planning meetings to the more challenging assignments of creating our event flyers and social-network sites such as our website, Facebook page, and Twitter account. I have assisted with creating visual presentations for our College Brides Walk kickoff events and participated in training presentations on dating and domestic violence with a variety of groups, ranging from elementary school classes to college courses.

Brittney Bartlett: I was familiar with the College Brides Walk because Dr. Laura Finley was my professor for many of my courses at Barry University, and she would mention the issue of domestic violence and the College Brides Walk. I also completed an internship with the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office as a Domestic Assistance Response Team Member, where I learned about domestic violence and local services for victims. My role in the College Brides Walk this year was somewhat limited, as this was my first time contributing to the planning and organization of this event. I provided my input from a college-student perspective.

Nadine Grifoni: My portion of the research consisted of formulating the survey questions that were going to be passed out during the College Brides Walk. The goal was to make the questions flow from the standard age/race/education information to more opinion-based questions on the participant's views on the College Brides Walk and what they thought of the methods used to educate people about dating and domestic violence. I met with Dr. Concannon and Dr. Finley several times to discuss our feminist framework and to learn about the College Brides Walk. I briefly attended the College Brides Walk to get a feel for the event, although due to my schedule I was unable to participate for very long.

Summary Feminist Reflection #1

Kelly and Laura: The initial description of both faculty and student researchers' roles in the process of organizing and collecting data for the College Brides Walk set the stage for an unequal division of power and ownership over the project. Given that the project was initially created by a local activist rather than by traditional college students, these reflections reveal that the power relationships between faculty and student researchers are somewhat maintained. Faculty perspectives delineate leadership roles related to the project (organizers), while much of the reflections provided by student researchers indicate that they were positioned into the role of "student." Stephanie, for example, identifies herself as a student in the first sentence of her reflection. In addition, Brittany indicates that she became involved with the project because of her relationship to the faculty member in a course. Similarly, Nadine notes that she met with faculty members (to whom she refers by their formal titles as "Dr. Concannon and Dr. Finley") for information and discussion. Not all student researchers were previous students in our courses; yet, all self-identified as students (either directly or indirectly) while reflecting on their overall agency in the project. Significantly, unlike much service-learning and community-based research, our project was not linked to final grades and/or an overall assessment of "student" performance. This initial description, in many ways, sets the stage for larger issues related to power and privilege that we worked through and is replicated in the comments below that outline an overall reflection on the research process.

Power, Authority, and Difference

Several of the organizers recognized the importance of acknowledging who has power and how that power is used. Our critical ethics of care allowed us to look carefully at how we might share power with students while being attentive to how difficult power sharing might be, given our institutional positions and pedagogical histories with different students. As was acknowledged earlier, faculty have a great deal of power over students. The fact that these feminist student researchers were not involved in the project as part of a course may have altered that power dynamic, but not as significantly as we had assumed. Further, as the comments below demonstrate, perhaps students, too, hold power over faculty members and thus must also be reflective and careful to minimize the workings of privilege.

Laura Finley: My active role in co-creating this movement has placed me in a unique position. I am part organizer, part professor, part researcher, and part event planner! I have found this multiplicity of roles to be generally positive, but it has created some specific challenges as I have worked with others who have different experiences and relationships to the project. For instance, at times I have felt overwhelmed because I have had to balance pieces of the project that others were less involved in. When other organizers attempted to add or change things about the event as the date of the actual walk came close, I found myself somewhat frustrated, feeling that the burden for navigating the systems and institutions needed to make those changes would fall on me, given that the event was at my university. In a sense, I had a lot of power, but with that power came additional responsibility not to use it as a form of privilege to simply get my way.

In working with the students from another campus, I again experienced mixed feelings related to power, authority, and privilege. We often scheduled meetings around the busy schedules of our students, sometimes at the inconvenience of the other organizers who are also busy with work, families, and other activities. This struck me as an instance of student privilege and was at times quite frustrating. I felt conflicted by my urge to fully share power, when it felt as though the students actually retained more of the power to drive our progress on the project. Eventually, multiple phone conversations and email exchanges resulted in a

clearing of the air about these issues, but they remain points for much needed reflection.

Kelly Concannon: My role in this project was inextricably linked to my position as a researcher and mentor. I have played a small role on the planning committee for the actual event; yet, I drew from my position as a writing professor and used my training in writing and research to help students craft responsible research questions and engage in ethical methods. I was excited about the opportunity to work with former NSU students. These students had been trained in both college writing and advanced college writing. In those courses, we had worked together to create classroom-based research projects and practices, and I assumed that this new opportunity would allow us to see how real research happens. Yet, in practice, oftentimes traditional power divisions—although invisible—materialized and affected most aspects of the research process.

I assumed that the lack of institutional constraints would offer us more freedom and collaboration (there were no grades assessed, no particular assignments to construct). Yet, even as the institutional constraints were not visible, it seemed as if they still shaped interactions with students. As Laura mentioned, we scheduled meetings around students' schedules. However, students were sometimes unable to meet the demands of the project, "asking" for extensions on deadlines, needing specific guidance and deadlines for different elements of the research project, including proposals, gathering data, etc. Thus, in practice, I had difficulty engaging in collaborative dialogue and in sharing power.

Summary Feminist Reflection #2

Kelly and Laura: A careful analysis of these reflective narratives highlights how uncertainty and anxiety affect faculty's ability to set in motion opportunities for students to engage in feminist research projects. As faculty, we have access to local resources. We have access to academic knowledges and discourse communities that college students either cannot access or do not feel authorized to claim. It is here that feminist researchers can learn the most about collaborations with students. Although all had high expectations for *trying* to resist traditional power relationships between students and faculty, it should not be surprising—given that all teachers and learners have been schooled in dominator-style methods of learning (Eisler 2000)—that doing so in practice was far from easy. Even if faculty have good intentions as they attempt to work alongside students, oftentimes disruptive or uncomfortable moments push feminist pedagogues to evoke their institutional power.

The moments each student researcher and faculty member chose to reflect on reveal emotional and affective encounters. The details of the previous accounts indicate that faculty assumed the role of authority as they set deadlines "students" were unable to meet. Faculty describe their experiences as "giving" students the opportunity to collaborate in determining the structure of meetings. When student researchers did not hold up their end of the relationship, in other words, when they did not demonstrate reciprocity in terms of how time was managed, this often brought on feelings of anxiety and discomfort for faculty members because of their overall investment in the project. In contrast, student researchers did not seem to express the same level of frustration about scheduling and meeting deadlines, perhaps because they felt little institutional pressure to do so.

These brief reflections on how power operated during our community-based research project are intended to emphasize how the material realities of doing ethical work grounded in a feminist practice of care are always already mediated by forces beyond our control. In these reflections, it is clear that students and faculty oftentimes evoke multiple relationships to power and privilege even if they were not aware of these relationships in the immediate situation. These cases illustrate that different relationships to institutional

power and authority surfaced among the participants even when efforts were made to ameliorate these differences. Further, conflicting positions of authority (who is authorized to conduct research, create and meet deadlines, and make final decisions) are embedded into each reflection.

Even as faculty mentors deliberately sought to minimize the power we held over students by creating an ethical framework, engaging in constant reflection and dialogue with students, and operating outside of a traditional classroom space, more established elements of our identities that led us to evoke power emerged when the conditions of the project became challenging. For instance, faculty members used guilt to prompt student researchers to meet deadlines by reinforcing how important this work was for their career development. Reflecting on these experiences is an important reminder that everyday interactions are determined by competing relationships to power and privilege—relationships that may not be fully visible in the moment yet saturate even our best intentions.

The reflections from this project reinforced the need for faculty to continually assess the degree to which they bring rigidity and a level of presumed authority to even casual interactions with student researchers. For example, when meetings are held, if it is the faculty members who create and follow the meeting agenda, the message to students may be that faculty have the authority and are ultimately in control. Feminist researchers working collaboratively with students might be advised to negotiate with them in order to alternate who creates agendas and selects times and places for meetings, for instance. Further, although our project involved in-person meetings, feminist researchers might seek to use any number of the technologies available for communication, which would not only help alleviate some of the challenges of getting together physically but might also be another way to allow greater power for students who are generally accustomed to these technological advances.

Relationships and Emotions

Stephanie Wong: As a college student, the process of creating the College Brides Walk was very intimidating for me. I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to contribute to our community-based research project effectively because without a college degree or documented work experience in the field of domestic violence I felt underqualified. After reminding myself that our project's target audience was, after all, composed of college students like me, I was able to delve into the planning process with confidence but did not feel like I had as much power as those that I was working with. In this project, I understood power to be anything that organizers could contribute to make the College Brides Walk a success. For example, through the years I observed that our organizer, Dr. Laura Finley, who was the contact person for the university hosting the College Brides Walk, had the most power. Because the actual event was at Dr. Finley's campus, most decisions about the event would need to be made with her clearance, understandably so. I believe that type of power would be found with any organizer who wanted to use their home institution as the site for our College Brides Walk event.

What I specifically enjoyed about our organizing committee was that even though we each had our portions of power or our own ways to contribute, I never felt that there was an abuse of that power. I also appreciated the fact that although there were newbies on the team, or organizers who may not have had as much of a hand in the planning process, everyone was still respectful and did not belittle others.

Nadine Grifoni: As strange as it may seem, I believe that my position as a student allows my emotionality on the subject to better play out. This position allows me to channel the voice of a younger generation and help out my instructors in understanding the effective ways to communicate with people my age. I was devoted to this project, but I did face certain difficulties. I found myself stumped at several points due to

the fact that I was working with professors and faculty members—so, although I was passionate with my questions and writing, I still needed to critique it and make it (by proper writing standards) acceptable and perfectly grammatically accurate, along with meeting deadlines, all while having other commitments. There was miscommunication and misunderstandings and differing opinions. By nature, I am a stubborn person, so working collaboratively with others spiked my aggravation at some points; however, I was always able to find my way back with the guidance of close professors and friends. I believe the fact that I *did* in fact get angry ended up helping my ability to create better research.

Summary Feminist Reflection #3

Kelly and Laura: The perspectives offered by students reveal the vital role of emotions and affect within community partnerships that are inextricably linked to care. Reflections offered by both Stephanie and Nadine illustrate how they felt intimidated by the process of working with faculty. In some cases, students were uncertain about what type of perspectives or knowledges they could contribute to the already established project. For example, Stephanie indicates that she had observed the organizers' labor and felt intimidated by her lack of credentials. The same pattern is repeated as Nadine reveals that she was unsure how to make her work "acceptable" to a specific target audience. Clearly, these students struggled to resist the traditional "student role." In both cases, students articulate that their positionality as such was initially viewed as a deficit. However, it is important to resist static and simplistic readings of these narratives. Students also assumed a role of power from their particular locations, oftentimes indicating that their emotions led to better and more effective research. These accounts point to the idea that students often do not feel that the knowledge and vantage points they possess serve as a legitimate resource, especially when they are positioned in relation to others who are presumed to know.

These accounts illustrate the vital role of emotions and affect as students and teachers attempt to create careful and responsible *relationships* within the feminist research process. Nadine, for example, indicates that she eventually believed her perspective to be valuable because she represents the "younger generation." Her account creates an argument not only for the role of students *in* the research process but, more specifically, for the role of emotions when engaging in projects that are inextricably linked to care. Nadine uses the term "emotionality" and emphasizes moments of anger and frustration; further, she argues that it was these emotions that helped her be a better researcher. Here, student perspectives reveal the possibility of providing academic spaces through which students can reflect on how they perceive their identities and experiences in the research process. Continuing to make these tensions visible helps resist stereotypes about the role of students in the construction of legitimate and useful knowledge.

Care and Attachments

True to a critical ethics of care, our community-based research project, which assessed different elements of the College Brides Walk, involved the building of empathic relationships between the various organizers and researchers, as highlighted below. In particular, reflections emphasize how working *through* the emotions and power issues—the messiness of research and social justice education in general—was integral to building relationships that will endure past this project and that will aide both faculty and student researchers in future feminist endeavors. As Brittney notes below, it was through forming attachments to other researchers that she has come to see herself as a valuable scholar and activist, and as a leader for community change.

Laura Finley: I very much enjoyed working with the two college students who participated throughout the planning of the College Brides Walk. I found both to be passionate about the cause and dedicated to helping. It seemed to me that we were really breaking down some of the traditional hierarchies and boundaries so typical of higher education in the Unites States. We would generally meet at my home or someone else's house for planning sessions, which was not only fun but allowed us to form deeper relationships with one another that furthered our cause of building a caring, socially just community. Although I found it challenging to rely on a student researcher that I did not know well personally, it was interesting to navigate the process and was, I think, ultimately effective.

Kelly Concannon: I too appreciated the ability to work with students outside of a traditional classroom setting in the planning and gathering of research around the College Brides Walk. Even as there were different elements of the research process that were frustrating and anxiety-producing, student researchers created their own projects that they were proud of, and that were ethically responsible and intended to bring about change on our college campuses. In this way, I proudly watched as students created research projects that they later presented at symposiums and a regional conference alongside faculty.

Stephanie Wong: The College Brides Walk has given me amazing relationships with other organizers to whom I now look up as mentors and also see eye to eye with as friends. It has always been very gratifying to see the impact that the College Brides Walk has on the community and on my fellow organizers on the specific day that our walk takes place. Our walk, attire, and peace messages have really shaken the hearts of those around us to join the movement and raise awareness about domestic violence.

A difficult lesson I learned was that my passion for making change in the community will not always be shared by others. Between hate emails, negative bad-mouthing, or disapproving looks from observers in the community, it is clear that even in the promotion of something positive there will be opposition. I leave this experience knowing that it is just a matter of correctly preparing for the battle in order to be successful.

Brittney Bartlett: I have lots of emotions about the College Brides Walk. First, I am happy that I was considered a person who had enough value to participate in the organizing. I feel like my involvement with the College Brides Walk is part of my personal emotional growth and my transitioning from "student" to adult community member. I graduated in May, will be attending graduate school, hopefully at the University of Miami, and I think the involvement with the College Brides Walk and with the dynamic mixed group of students and adult professionals helped provide closure to my undergraduate experience. Finally, I have made some really good friends throughout this process!

My role in the College Brides Walk has definitely added to my knowledge about domestic violence. It has also helped me see myself as a person who can make a change in the community and whose perspective is valued not just by my peers but by adult professionals as well.

Nadine Grifoni: Throughout the course of this project I was always proud of the research I was conducting and thinking about; however, I knew that whoever I spoke to about it wouldn't care as much as I did. It is not only about the quiet housewife who stands silently beside her husband while her arm is being broken behind her back, but about *awareness* and *messages* that important, influential outlets spread into our culture. Figures such as the president, leaders of movements, television shows, movies, magazines, the Internet: these sources are what people look at and internalize every day of their lives, and they need to start writing, speaking, and showing that violence against anybody is not an acceptable form of communication or power.

All of these thoughts, emotions, and reactions were bursting out of me as I sat down to write my survey questions; however, all I chose to write were simple questions regarding opinions about the College Brides

Walk, because it was the *community's* time to voice their opinions and thoughts. It was *their* chance to tell me what needed to be done to better the future.

Throughout this research project, I personally learned that it is a long process that requires a lot of compromise. All parties need to be understanding and flexible, and it takes a special patience to learn how to balance research of this caliber with other assignments and commitments. Research about domestic violence takes a lot out of you, as it *should*, but it was important to keep a level, strong head during the process. I treated this strictly as research, with femininity woven within each word and interaction I made. And that's where I believe a special kind of influence lies within every woman; her ability to create and observe every situation while being able to comprehend the sentimentality underneath. This is not weakness. It never has been.

Summary Feminist Reflection #4

Kelly and Laura: Faculty and student perspectives about their investment levels—their *care* for the project—reveal that, while it was a difficult process in which the participants sometimes reverted back to traditional roles, this project produced meaningful knowledge with implications on both individual and systemic levels. Both faculty members discuss their overall satisfaction with the results produced through student involvement and emphasize that while the perceived institutional constraints were at times challenging, changing the time and structure of meetings and creating venues for students to present research together with faculty was productive. It is no coincidence, however, that students came to the project with a strong level of privilege. Student researchers either approached faculty researchers or were directly asked to be part of the project. Therefore, we knew that students were interested in issues surrounding dating and domestic violence, as well as in activism and social justice. The student researchers' level of investment in *caring* for this type of feminist activism, then, was high. This raises some larger issues about how to cultivate relationships of care with and for feminist student researchers who may not come to given projects with this degree of personal investment and motivation. What we learned from our experience is that providing students with resources for their energies and passions does not necessarily lend itself to reifying traditional relationships to power and privilege if faculty are able to create spaces through which feminist student researchers can claim power through assuming leadership roles. In addition, their reflections illustrate just how critical it is to get students invested in feminist projects. Brittney, for example, indicates that her experience allowed for "personal emotional growth," while revealing that she was initially just happy to be considered for the project. Similarly, Stephanie states how she feels "gratified" about the event, emphasizing her individual growth, yet she also stresses the impact of the message on a larger, systemic scale insofar as she sees the value of the project on a political level. Nadine directly emphasizes care as she discusses how she perceives other college students not to be as invested as she is, given particular stereotypes about the nature of domestic and dating violence. Her narrative reveals a passion for the cause and contains suggestions for the future.

A critical ethics of care necessarily requires faculty researchers to assess their privileged positions in relation to care. Scholars like Fiona Robinson (1999) call for action on behalf of those who are caring—mainly through asking those who are in positions to care to think critically about how their relationships are embedded in power and privilege and through drawing attention to the global dimensions and responsibilities associated with care. In making sense of how our relationships have been historically constructed across borders, we can also begin to make sense of why we reacted the way we did through our affective responses when students did not perform as we had assumed they should. In these cases, it is not uncommon that

both faculty and student researchers experienced emotional responses based on the types of positions we assumed in relation to the research project. Robinson argues that we must continue to address how differences and traditional forms of exclusion factor into the types of knowledge that make their way into discourses. In other words, we need to be cognizant of how representatives of universities take on particular perspectives about how knowledge is produced and, consequently, utilize their power when these agreed upon practices are not kept intact. What this means is not simply that the powerful must learn to "care about" student researchers who have traditionally been denied agency within multiple community-based projects; rather, those who are in positions of power have the *responsibility* to "approach moral problems by looking carefully at where, why, and how the structures of existing social and personal relations have led to exclusion and marginalization, as well as how attachments may have degenerated or broken down so as to cause suffering" (Robinson 1999, 46). In these cases, when engaging in a critical care ethics that stresses the *relational* aspect of creating knowledges, the needs and concerns of students must be concrete rather than generalizable—in other words, feminist student researchers should be recognized as real, rather than as a product of agreed upon assumptions, repeated through our engagement in institutional contexts.

The Need for Ongoing and Open Dialogue

Organizers are clear that this effort was the first attempt at what needs to be an ongoing, reflective process. Students in particular offer important suggestions regarding how the College Brides Walk can better reach a college demographic. Feminist researchers also note the importance of assessing the program's emotional impact and of maintaining the bonds that were developed.

Laura Finley: It is important to me, as a feminist researcher, that we resist the urge to completely quantify the emotional experience people have with the College Brides Walk. As such, I believe we need to incorporate other evaluation tools besides just surveys. I would like to see some focus groups conducted with participants, both those who served and those who only attended the event, as focus groups provide voice, allow for deeper reflection, and build community.

Stephanie Wong: One way that we can better evaluate the College Brides Walk would be through paying more attention to what demographic attends the walk by requiring registration and contracts completed via the Internet instead of on the day. We could add a box in the registration form to gauge if attendees are college students, faculty, high school students, or community members. Those numbers would allow us to see in what area we are lacking and where we need to reach out to promote the walk to underserved groups.

As a final suggestion, pre and post surveys via our College Brides Walk website could be another possibility for research. Pre surveys would tell us how knowledgeable attendees are and post surveys could show what they learned from participating in the College Brides Walk. We could even assess how prepared people feel to handle a domestic-violence situation if they see or hear about one. This survey concept could also be applied to the college classes that are participating for service-learning or extra credit.

Nadine Griffoni: For the future, I would suggest implementing more age-appropriate research methods, such as gathering information through Facebook and Tumblr, because that's where younger people go and talk about how unjust they feel the world is today. Social networking sites can be used to collect data, and feminists can make their own Tumblr accounts to share the stories and opinions of victims of domestic violence about what should be done to address the issue. Also, I think there should be more feminist researchers branching out to influential outlets and pooling together to make commercials or

articles for magazines. The beauty of this is that we could include factual research with a strong voice. Educated, level-headed feminists sharing stories of people who can't always speak for themselves would be very powerful. Lastly, I think it is important to rally more men into this cause because no difference can be made if only women (who already understand the struggle inherently) know about this epidemic.

Patterns in Our Research Process

Several key themes emerged from faculty and student researchers' reflections on their roles and understanding of the project. First, feminist faculty researchers must devote thoughtful consideration and energy to getting students invested in a community-based project from its outset. The students who got involved in the later phases (Nadine and Brittney) seemed to feel behind in their "institutional knowledge" and thus were less invested in the project than Stephanie, who was involved from the outset. While student perspectives can be valuable at any stage of the feminist research project, our research illustrated that bringing some students in later in the process served to inadvertently reinforce more rigid and stereotypical notions of who has power and whose knowledge is most valuable. While Stephanie expressed greater comfort critiquing suggestions and offering her own ideas, Nadine and Brittney did not seem as comfortable doing so, perhaps due in part to their later adoption of the project. One strategy that was employed to address this was meeting outside of a campus setting, which helped student researchers feel less like students and more like equally empowered members of the team. Meeting on "neutral ground" changed the dynamics of meetings, making them feel more collegial.

Second, another dimension of power that emerged was related to the privilege student researchers had in terms of accountability. That is, while faculty mentors Kelly and Laura were held accountable for completing the research project by institutional requirements (including those of the grant they received to conduct the community-based research project), the students did not have these commitments. Thus, students were able to miss meetings and deadlines when the faculty members were not. This can be viewed as a form of "student privilege," which might be related to the increasing emphasis on education as a commodity, with faculty viewed as providers delivering a product to students (Sperber 2000).

Third, it is essential to be clear with students about *why* their participation in feminist research is so critical. While it may seem intuitively true that diverse perspectives are beneficial to any collaborative endeavor, it is easier for students—who have largely experienced dominator-style education (Eisler 2000) in which their views are rarely solicited and their primary role is to complete the tasks assigned to them—to see their roles in this kind of project as also limited to specific tasks. The fact that the two faculty researchers initiated the project and then took the lead in authoring this article illustrates the difficulties of sharing power even when all are committed to doing so. Instead, careful and purposeful dialogue between faculty and students about why they are important participants in the entire project should occur immediately at the outset and be reinforced and reemphasized through ongoing reflection and dialogue.

Conclusion

These reflections highlight some of the challenges involved in conducting feminist community-based research projects with students. In particular, our experience in this project clearly indicates that simply being committed to a critical feminist ethics of care and the process of reflection is not enough to dismantle the traditional power relationships between faculty and students. The authors acknowledge that outlining a feminist framework and reflecting on the process of conducting research with students does not necessarily

assuage all power dynamics between teachers and students. Rather, the impetus is to make visible the lessons learned from engaging in feminist mentoring of the research process and activism that extends beyond the classroom. All parties involved must be constantly reminded and committed to careful consideration of the ways power over one another is manifested, even as all accounts provided confirm that bringing together multiple voices is an integral part of feminist research, as well as, more importantly for this project, that doing so is an essential *community*-based means of addressing the *community* problem of domestic and dating violence. Feminist researchers also note the importance of assessing the program's emotional impact and of maintaining the bonds that were developed. Student perspectives and ideas need to be integrated even more from the beginning of the process.

Part of this project implores feminist researchers to continue to be cognizant of how our institutions structure our relationships with others—especially those who have not mastered all of the conventions of established discourses. To that end, feminist researchers need to be both critical and mindful of their moral obligations to involve traditionally marginalized voices into the research process, as all too often even the very methods we use in order to represent "students" create problematic assumptions about their relationships to knowledge production (Barton 2008; Kirsch 1999).

In this way, faculty researchers could begin to reconceptualize how knowledge is co-constructed with students, as they cultivate relationships to student feminist researchers that allow them to both learn and teach. Further, feminist faculty researchers need to be more cognizant of how our past experiences delineate assumptions about what we come to know and, more importantly, what student researchers know and how they know it. Faculty researchers, then, could engage in the process of "critical listening," where they resist the impulse to assume power and authority and learn from the rich perspectives that feminist student researchers offer (Ratcliffe 2006). These shifts allow for a more kaleidoscopic approach to reaching outcomes related to feminist activism and produce more viable opportunities for solidarity (Mohanty 2003).

This project sought to create a caring and ethical community of activists not just to challenge the power and control issues that result in abuse but to engage in critical self-reflection to confront our own issues of power and privilege that are too often components of the anti-domestic-violence movement (Finley 2010; Finley and Esposito 2012), of research about abuse (Williams 2004), and of higher education in general (Sperber 2000). Our research emphasizes the need for feminist perspectives to directly challenge and influence how knowledge is constructed both within and between the university and the community. To that end, our impetus is to continue to confront how researchers experience difficulties and disruptions when constructing, practicing, and assessing research outcomes, especially when feminist researchers maintain competing relationships to power and authority. This is especially challenging as we seek to engage students in meaningful feminist activism, since instructors inevitably hold power over students. It is the authors' hope that this project ignites additional conversations about how to revitalize the values associated with care and with continuously engaging in difficult conversations with students—and with ourselves.

Notes

1. Sara Ahmed uses the concept of encounter to reveal relationships between histories of colonialism and the (re)production of varying relationships to power that are infused throughout our daily lives. The concept of encounter troubles a narrow focus on the immediate interaction between two individuals insofar as those encounters reveal hidden relationships that are the product of history. Ahmed argues that encounters involve interactions between at least

two embodied individuals as well as textually mediated encounters; however, they are understood as involving not just individual knowledges but also collective histories that inform the encounter beyond the immediate contact experience (2000, 7).

2. The article focuses on the process rather than any outcomes of the research, which is still a work in progress. While all the authors contributed to this paper, Kelly and Laura are the primary authors, given their initiation of the project and their background in working with the feminist theoretical framework.

3. Service learning has been shown to help students develop deeper connections to their peers, nurture their empathy and pride (Koliba 2000), enhance critical-analysis and writing skills, and more clearly identify and analyze the connections between theory and practice (Aberle-Grasse 2000; Calderon and Farrell 1996; Kuh 1995; Parker-Gwin 1996; Roschelle, Turpin, and Elias 2000). Importantly, service learning helps students see themselves as part of the broader community and can help them consider continuing to serve after graduation and even pursuing careers in service and advocacy (Aberle-Grasse 2000). In sum, service learning is a powerful way to teach about and for social justice (Koliba 2006; Osanloo 2009).

Students in Barry University's Perspective Consciousness and Social Justice (SOC 200) and Theology: Faiths, Beliefs and Traditions (THE 201), required courses for students in the College of Arts and Sciences, must complete ten hours of service learning. Since year one, the College Brides Walk has been one of their choices, as the issue of domestic violence connects to many of the topics addressed in each course. Additionally, many student groups and organizations from Barry University and other participating universities have completed service hours with the College Brides Walk. Students can earn ten hours during the actual event as well as in the course of planning and preparation for the event. They help conduct research about domestic violence cases locally, make posters and other visuals, and help with everything involved on the day of the event. Further, interested students earn service hours by presenting about the issue of domestic and dating violence to community groups and in schools in advance of the walk, as the goal is to make the educational component something that occurs year round, not simply for one day.

4. See Applebaum 1998, Clement 1996, and Bowden 1997 for a critique of Noddings's (1986) definition of care ethics.

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