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Abstract

Recent debates on situated knowledge highlight the issue of the researcher's position in the research process, challenging the traditional assumption of the insider/outsider dichotomy. Drawing on my fieldwork among Korean immigrant parents in an American school, I describe my shifting positions in negotiation and scrutinize the ways my reflexivity intersects with culture, power relations, and political ideologies in the research process. This self-analysis highlights partial and situated knowledge claims, questioning the author's value-neutral, authoritative voice in texts. I argue that the researcher should critically reflect on her location in the field and articulate how this position influences the research.

Keywords

Insider/Outsider, Reflexivity, Autoethnography, Researcher Positionality, Fieldwork, Koreans, Parent Involvement

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Recent debates on situated knowledge highlight the issue of the researcher's position in the research process, challenging the traditional assumption of the insider/outsider dichotomy. Drawing on my fieldwork among Korean immigrant parents in an American school, I describe my shifting positions in negotiation and scrutinize the ways my reflexivity intersects with culture, power relations, and political ideologies in the research process. This self-analysis highlights partial and situated knowledge claims, questioning the author's value-neutral, authoritative voice in texts. I argue that the researcher should critically reflect on her location in the field and articulate how this position influences the research. *Key Words: Insider/Outsider, Reflexivity, Autoethnography, Researcher Positionality, Fieldwork, Koreans, Parent Involvement.*

> When we construct texts collaboratively, self-consciously examining our relations with/for/despite those who have been contained as Others, we move against, we enable resistance to, Othering. (Fine, 1994, p. 74)

It was when I was writing a manuscript that I finally understood what othering means and how researchers opt to practice othering during the research process. Othering is a way of defining one's own identity through the identification of those who one considers different. It enables the researcher to claim objectivity and accuracy by separating herself from the research subjects. I was analyzing data and simultaneously writing an article based on the primary findings from my dissertation study, a school-based ethnographic study on Korean immigrant parents. What concerned me was that I could never claim that my interpretations were authentic, nor could I reach the ethnographic goal of representing insider perspectives in relation to the contexts I studied. As Banks (1998) argues, my interpretation of cultural contexts was intrinsically "mediated by the interaction of a complex set of status variables, such as gender, social class, age, political affiliation, religion, and region" (p. 5). While I am an indigenous researcher who studies her own ethnic group with the ambition of making the voices of Korean Americans heard in educational studies, my knowledge and interpretations of participants and contexts are always partial and complicated with multiple positions vis-à-vis the culture, rendering my presumed insider status problematic.

Given the complex nature of the relationships between researcher and participants, the reflexivity brought to the research setting through the presence and influence of the researcher needs to be thoroughly recognized. Qualitative researchers acknowledge the unavoidability of interconnectedness between the researcher and the culture she is studying. Holliday (2007) describes intermingled interactions between the researcher and the research setting as a "culture of dealing," and cautions that people in

the research setting can be "as adept as the researcher" and be "as much involved as the researcher in negotiating the research event" (p. 140). What the researcher observes and interprets may be situated within the particular thread of this culture of dealing, and a hasty, naïve generalization of research settings tends to involve "the seeds of othering or reducing whole swathes of people to deterministic description" (Holliday, 2007, p. 141). A culture can be defined as any social grouping, and one's sense of self, as an insider or outsider, becomes subject to negotiation. The researcher's presence and the research participants' response to her together make a new culture, modified by multiple sets of background influences such as race/ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, political affiliation, etc. Constant reflection upon reflexivity can articulate this process of culture making, bound in dynamic, ongoing relationships of dealing between the researcher and the participants.

Nonetheless, the way indigenous researchers describe their own culture is essentially related to the overarching cultural pattern to which they belong (Cerroni-Long, 1995). Specific choices such as which aspects do or do not deserve discussion and how interpretations should be practiced and to whom, cannot be totally explained without defining the researcher's location in a given larger cultural context. Research processes, like all social relations, are fluid, multilayered, and political in nature. However, for indigenous researchers maintaining detachment from the contexts they study has been significantly challenging, demanding consistent reflexive choices in relation to their participants, who are rarely a homogeneous entity as determined by ethnicity, region, and political interests (Jones, 1995). Advocacy, more often embraced by indigenous researchers studying their own powerless and marginalized groups, also requires critical self-examination of how a researcher's well-intended stance is negotiated depending on the politics of power in a research setting.

In this essay, I address the issues of reflexivity and power relations in the indigenous researcher's relationships with research participants who share similar cultural backgrounds by drawing on my research on Korean immigrant parents. Using a mode of autoethnography that provides "a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts" (Spry, 2001, p. 710), I describe my shifting insider/outsider status in relation to multiple positioning in given contexts. I begin with a brief discussion of the personal goals that guided my research and analyze details of my fieldwork through which I locate myself within the complicated, contradictory relations between researcher and research participants. My self-analysis highlights how partial, situated knowledge intersects with culture, power relations, and political ideologies during the research process, questions the author's value-neutral, authoritative voice in texts, and instead seeks "a dialogue between researchers and those whose cultures/societies are to be described" (Angrosino, 2005, p. 731)." By doing this, I invite the reader to recognize the blurred boundary of insider/outsider status in the research setting and to "work the hyphen," which ultimately leads to the dialogic transformation of existential understanding (Fine, 1994).

Insider/Outsider Boundary and Reflexivity

Over the last two decades, feminist, postmodernist, and post-structuralist critiques on social science and social research have provoked strong debates of legitimacy in

knowledge construction, resulting in an emerging crisis in evaluating research validity. The realization that knowledge is "situated, partial, local, temporal and historically specific" (Coffey, 1999, p. 11) problematizes the traditional methodological assumption of objective, value-neutral researchers in relation to research contexts, placing the relationship between the researcher and the researched at the center of the research process. The early conceptualization of insider/outsider status as an exclusive dichotomy (e.g., Collins, 1986; Merton, 1972) has been also challenged by a critical recognition of the researcher's positionality vis-à-vis the research context that makes her "always located somewhere" (Griffith, 1998, p. 374), depending on the politics of fieldwork. Narayan (1993) points out the multiplicity of researcher identities that intersect with one's location in social relations:

> The loci along which we are aligned with or set apart from those whom we study are multiple and in flux. Factors such as education, gender, sexual orientation, class, race, or sheer duration of contacts may at different times outweigh the cultural identity we associate with insider or outsider status. (pp. 671-672)

The multiplicity of researcher identities and the blurred boundary between insider/outsider status have been extensively discussed in qualitative research (Coffey, 1999; Griffith, 1998; Mercer, 2007; Mullings, 1999). In particular, indigenous researchers who study their own cultures call into question the ambiguity of the boundary between the researcher and the researched in knowledge construction, which is complicated by multilayered, connected fieldwork in nature (Kanuha, 2000; Kondo, 1990; Kusow, 2003; Okely, 1996; Sherif, 2001). Insiderness is no longer considered a static or prescribed position bestowed by the researcher's biography; instead, it is an ongoing process of negotiation between the researcher and the researched, situated in the power relations of the field (Beoku-Betts, 1994; England, 1994; Parameswaran, 2001). For example, Villenas (1996) describes her challenges from the indigenous researcher position as colonizer/colonized during her fieldwork within a Latino community. While she consciously strived to reconstruct her relationships with the Latino community as a privileged ethnographer, she encountered her own marginalization by participating in the dominant discourse of an English-speaking community that considers Latino families to be a problem. Her in-between position made her realize the multiplicity of researcher identities that must be revisited with respect to research participants.

The notion of reflexivity is relevant for understanding the complicated relationships between self and others that shape and are shaped by the politics of the social world under study. Reflexivity is "a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself" (Macbeth, 2001, p. 35). It has to do with "the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher" (England, 1994, p. 82) in search of the emancipatory transformation of the research, against a modernist, objectivist representation of the social phenomenon. By critically reflection upon her own presence and influence on research subjects, the researcher herself may also become the subject of research, both in the research process and its representation (Denzin, 1997).

Locating Myself before the Fieldwork

> Much like different-colored shards of glass in a kaleidoscope, these identities can merge to create a wide variety of images that are temporal in nature and reflective of the particular positionalities we occupy at any given moment. (Merchant, 2001, p. 15)

From Fall 2007 through Spring 2008, I conducted fieldwork in an elementary school located in a city in the southeastern U.S. I was an international doctoral student from Korea, working on my dissertation research on Korean immigrant parents' ethnic networking in relation to school participation. The purpose of the study was to examine whether Korean immigrant parents as a group create ethnic-based social capital conducive to effective involvement in school. Immigrant parents often encounter structural barriers that constrain their sense of ownership in schools, and turn to their own ethnic groups in search of supportive social capital (Ceja, 2006; Lew, 2006). By using a critical ethnographic case study, I aimed to unpack complexities in Korean immigrant parents' participatory experiences, and to challenge the hegemonic discourse of parent involvement prevailing in American schools.

My decision to study Korean immigrants' involvement in an American elementary school derived from my own history, underlying who I am as a researcher. Since my junior year of college, I have been active in an urban community-based organization and have had long-term relationships with families in an impoverished community in Korea. As an educator, I came to recognize my privilege and develop a critical awareness of the social inequalities embedded in educational institutions. My experiences with children in poverty necessitated a comprehensive understanding of educational contexts, leading me to pursue a doctoral program in the U.S. This changed position, from a member of the mainstream to an international minority student, further reinforced my consciousness of social inequalities within the mainstream society. With this sympathetic identification, I became strongly intrigued by the lived experiences of minority groups in the United States, particularly the ethnic agency offered through ethnic communities. I considered this topic as representative of collective "frontiering" in which minority ethnic groups attempt to create space and networks for themselves within the host country (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002).

I decided to focus on Korean immigrant parents specifically among the many minority groups for three reasons: (a) I knew that gaining access to the groups of Korean immigrants would be relatively easy through my cousin, who is a Korean immigrant; (b) Korean Americans' strong ethnic ties and the community-driven benefits of their ethnic enclaves have been well discussed in immigrant studies; and (c) I wanted to make the voices of Korean Americans heard in educational discourse, because I became one of them in the United States after earning my Ph.D. Through my personal experiences, I realized that a close relationship with one's own ethnic group could hinder one from active involvement in the mainstream society, and could reproduce one's marginality within the social structures. I planned to investigate whether and how Korean immigrants move beyond their ethnic-based comfort zone in forging their social relations by selecting an American elementary school as my research site. Initially, my committee members cautioned that conducting school-based fieldwork would be challenging for an

international student and would be unnecessary given my research focus on parental social interaction. Despite their concerns, I insisted on conducting school-based ethnographic research because I wanted to obtain a holistic, multifaceted understanding of parental participation that could reflect different perspectives from the social actors involved in the school.

In retrospect, my committee's concerns were both accurate and acute; although I expected that multiple selves would play differently in the field, I was certainly unprepared to navigate the politics of fieldwork and the complicated relationships that existed even within a single ethnic group. Due to my limited exposure to cultural diversity, my epistemological standpoint about cultures was more or less essentialist and monolithic, and for that reason, I was naively convinced that my Korean ethnicity would position me as an insider, at least to the Korean immigrant group. My binary assumption of insider/outsider based on ethnicity turned out to be too simplistic and ignored the power relations embedded in social interactions as I spent more time in the field.

Negotiating Insider/Outsider Status across Cultures

I was born in Korea and lived there until I came to the United States for my doctoral degree in my mid-thirties. In Korea, I was a teacher and educational researcher. My life history and physical appearance were key factors of who I was and who I became in my fieldwork, directly affecting my access to the field and my relationships there. I was keenly aware of the immediate impact of my ethnicity on my position within the field, as I found myself interacting differently with two cultural groups of participants, Korean immigrants and Americans. Nonetheless, "Culture is a dynamic, ongoing group process which operates in changing circumstances to enable group members to make sense of and operate meaningfully within those circumstances" (Holliday, 2007, p. 12). Distant from the essentialist cultural paradigm prescribed by ethnic, national, and international groups, a boundary of culture can be permeable and shifting, depending on one's relative positioning in specific contexts. To become an insider within a particular group at a particular moment, one must acknowledge and exercise a certain "set of behaviors and understandings connected with group cohesion" (Holliday, 1999, p. 248). I will illustrate these negotiated selves across cultures by reflecting on the processes of my culture making with different groups of participants. Some individuals align themselves with different groups at different times or simultaneously occupy two groups, whereas ethnicity is a clear marker of their social grouping.

First, as a salient signifier of culture, my Korean ethnicity helped me gain access to and establish rapport with Korean immigrants. Research on Korean Americans has proven Koreans' strong ethnic ties and networking (e.g., Lew, 2003; Min, 2001). In most cases, such characteristic focus on ethnic solidarity gave me a ready connection to the Korean immigrant parents, allowing me certain insights into their lived experiences. Korean parents and I were a "we" who shared cultural beliefs and values, and more importantly experiences of being marginalized in American schools. For instance, Korean parents frequently described language barriers and lack of competence in their stories of school involvement. "With reference to [my] own [racial and cultural] group," I could fully understand what led them to feel and think in those ways, which might be unnoticeable by outsiders (Greenfield, 1997, p. 310). At the same time, my ethnicity

directly influenced how the Korean immigrants perceived and responded to me. A key informant who helped to recruit several Korean participants always introduced me to other Korean immigrants with a supplementary comment that I was a Korean doctoral student in an American university who, as a fellow Korean, deserved their support for my research. The Korean language exclusively was used in my conversations with Korean immigrants, regardless of their length of residence in the United States, and when I interviewed Korean participants in their homes Korean food was usually provided. Nonetheless, I was constantly conscious of the need to manage and produce an acceptable self to the Korean immigrants, seeking culturally desirable ways to represent myself. As Coffey (1999) claimed, "Fieldwork is personally experienced through and by our body" (p. 68). While my shared ethnicity with Korean immigrants may have granted me temporary insider status, there are multiple ways of culture making, nuanced by dress, speech, demeanor, and other normative codes that might be indiscernible to outsiders to the group. For instance, in Korea, personal pronouns tend to be determined by one's social position. Married women, like the Korean mothers in this study, use their child's names as terms of self-reference. If a woman has a daughter named Yuna, she refers herself as Yuna's mother, rather than using her first name or husband's surname. The key informant mother cautioned me to adopt this traditional custom of naming after she noticed that I followed the careless naming practice of the United States.

My participatory experience in the Korean mothers' meeting further demonstrated this embodied nature of fieldwork. The Korean mothers' meeting was an avenue for collective participation among Korean parents at the elementary school where this study was conducted. At the school, parents played supplementary roles in operating school functions, primarily through volunteering. However, traditional American forms of participation were challenging for many Asian parents, including Koreans, whereas approximately 55% of the student population was categorized as Asian and about 11% were first or second generation Korean Americans. In order to increase Korean parents' active involvement in the school, a group of Korean parents voluntarily organized a Korean mothers' meeting in spring 2006. Since then, the meeting has taken place monthly or bimonthly. As I regularly attended the meeting, cultural values and norms specific to this group became visible. In East Asian culture, interdependent ways of being are strongly encouraged: "[N]ot calling attention to the self, deemphasizing the specialness of one's self, and adjusting to the immediate situation of which one is part" (Shweder et al., 1998, p. 907). To the Koreans affiliated with the meeting, being opposed to collective modes of discourse implies one's standing out from the group, which is an indication of immaturity or selfishness (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997). In fact, I found that oppositional or conflicting ideas were seldom mentioned in the meetings. For example, I conducted a focus group interview with the meeting participants regarding the meeting's goals and activities. Because some parents voluntarily addressed these issues during their one-on-one interviews, I expected to gain free-floating ideas generated by the group dynamics in a more natural setting than the interview format. However, the results turned out to be the opposite of what I expected; during the hour-long focus group meeting, two leaders dominated the conversation and the rest of the participants paid close attention but remained silent. I wondered whether the mothers' silence reflected their anxiety about being audiotaped, and they did become more talkative after the audio recorder was turned off. Nonetheless, it was evident that the East Asian value of

collective harmony, rather than one of individualism, appeared to be inscribed within the Korean group affiliated with the meeting.

Moreover, in contrast to individual interviews in which Korean participants spoke of their problems and frustrations in their everyday lives as minority immigrants, the participant mothers' discussions in the meetings primarily revolved around school events and their children's education, reducing my connection with them. I found that the level of receptivity toward me varied according to the strength of a particular individual's connection to the Korean meeting, whose members maintained relatively immediate relationships with one other. With some exceptions, my difficulty in gaining permission for interviews from attendances of the meeting was partially attributable to my status as an outsider to this social group. In order not to disrupt the existing group dynamic, I consciously maintained a reserved demeanor while participating in the meetings. I often found myself constrained from being involved in collective conversations, instead striving to fit into the group's collective order. Although I was approximately the same age as many of the participant mothers—some of them were even younger than I—I explicitly acknowledged my lack of maternal experience so as to reduce any intimidation caused by my researcher position. My deliberate self-representation may have been instrumental in underscoring my Korean student-researcher identity, yet this position on the boundary provided me with the least intrusive place to be an insider, accepted into the collective culture within the Korean mothers' meeting.

At the same time, ethnicity was a clear marker of my distance from my non-Korean participants, including American parents and the school staff. Not surprisingly, they clearly positioned me as a Korean whenever my questions crossed over into cultural territory. The American participants tended to provide positive compliments or avoid concrete responses related to Korean parents, saying things like, "I've been fortunate; I had the best parents." In other cases, they objectified their issues or problems with Korean parents as problems with all Asian or other minority parents by using broader terms such as, "not just my Korean parents but Asian culture," and "very general." These responses reflected how my ethnicity contributed to my position as an outsider to the non-Korean, American participants, revealing the unavoidability of the researcher's biography in the research process.

However, as Narayan (1993) stated with precision, "there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us up with the people we study, other facets that emphasize our difference" (p. 680). My multiple identities included some joining points with the American teachers in the school. My academic background in education and professional experience as a teacher allowed me to identify situated meanings in their everyday lives, shaped by the distinctive professional culture of teaching. Compared to my interviews with parents that included Koreans and Americans, I felt at ease emotionally and cognitively, enjoying my familiarity with the subject. At certain moments, the teachers appeared to perceive me as one of their colleagues, or at least as a partial insider who had a connection to their profession. On one occasion, a teacher shared her challenges in building relationships with some Korean parents, pointing out emerging tensions during conferences. As a former teacher, I immediately sympathized with the teacher's point of view, affiliating myself with her professional culture. Intentionally or unintentionally, to some extent, I chose to maintain this educator position when possible during my

interviews with the American teachers, in an attempt to negotiate my acceptance into their professional culture.

Politics of Fieldwork: Power Relations in Between

Negotiating the researcher's positionality requires a great sensitivity to one's location within the power relations of the social setting, which is complicated by the situatedness of both the researcher and the researched. Shared positionalities based on the researcher's biography cannot guarantee avoiding unexpected power dynamics inherent in fieldwork and subsequent dilemmas in establishing trusting relationships with the people whom she studies. Mullings (1999) described the ethical dilemma of her unintentional position "in the middle of the quiet conflict between the two groups" in her research on managers and employers in Jamaican information processing companies (p. 347). Seeking a neutral space, neither insider nor outsider to both groups, she resorted to clandestine meetings with workers outside the office buildings to set interview schedules, which caused her to doubt ethically appropriate ways that appeared trustful to both parties. How could the researcher seek trustful relationships with managers without informing them about her intended interviews with their employees? What repercussions might revealing the interviews have for workers?

My relationships with Korean parents and the American school demonstrated similar dilemmas and challenges, fundamentally situated by power relations in the field. Beoku-Betts (1994) shows how her professional status as a university researcher provided a "stumbling block" in establishing trustful relationships with her participants (p. 429). In my case, my professional status as a doctoral student affiliated with the university differently intersected with the power structures of two groups: the school personnel and the Korean parents.

Initially, the power of my professional status facilitated connections with the gatekeepers of the school, including the principal and other American parents on the PTA board. The principal repeatedly expressed his support for my research and his hope that I would obtain critical implications from the findings. He wanted to know if my research was going to be shared with the school, and the PTA board members explicitly expressed their interest in my research implications. My professional status was an instrument for gaining entry to the school, based on mutual interests of the researcher and the researched. While my professional status made it easy for me to gain entry into the school, it restricted access to the subtle power relations between the school and the Korean parents. In East Asian culture, a school tends to represent an authoritative, separate space marked by a clear boundary between home and school (Walsh, 2002). This Eastern Asian heritage of separation between home and school tends to exacerbate asymmetric power relations between the Korean parents and the school, which already exist in the parent-school dyad (Fine, 1993). To the Korean parents, my easy access to the school personnel emphasized how my position was different from theirs, which may have worked to contradict the Korean cultural value of collective harmony as mentioned earlier.

My unintended power positioning was particularly problematic in my relationships with the participants affiliated with the Korean meeting. Because I represented myself as a marginal insider within the power structure of the meeting, my

confidence in connecting to the school administration was perceived as threatening by certain mothers, counteracting their existing power hierarchy. One mother in particular found my involvement in the Korean meeting disagreeable. I have wondered whether her opposition to my research should be attributed to my personality, or rather to my comfortable relationships with the school personnel. She was the sole liaison between the meeting and the school, and she may have seen me as a rival for this role. For instance, when I planned to conduct a focus group with Korean parents, I considered a trailer room within the school as the meeting place because of its convenience. I had discussed this plan with the leader of the meeting and announced a brief overview of the focus group to the meeting members. On my way home after the meeting, I received a phone call from the liaison mother that questioned the private use of the school building for my research interest. I was surprised and bewildered by her resistance: "Would it be inappropriate to contact the school for such personal business?" While I hardly considered a focus group an exclusively personal matter, I subsequently found a new location for the focus group meeting outside of the school. This situation of resistance from this participant reflects negotiated power relationships, which are more complicated than the simple binary relations between the researcher and the researched. Subtle negotiations in power relations in the field have been illustrated in other studies (Merriam et al., 2001; Parameswaran, 2001).

After this experience, I was conscious of the need to efface my status difference. I realized that my easy connection with the school personnel might exacerbate anxiety about confidentiality and fear of teachers' judgmental assumptions among the Korean parents. To maintain my trustful relationships with the Korean parents, I needed to present a culturally appropriate self who was respectful and conformed to school authority rather than being an ally-researcher. Nonetheless, whenever I positioned myself or was positioned by others in between the school and the Korean parents, I was frequently alienated from both sides, unable to be an insider in either group. This marginalization became apparent while participating in the Korean parents' volunteer activities within the school. During my initial participation, I tried to join the Korean parents by doing activities with them and developing informal conversations with them. Despite these deliberate efforts, at times I overheard half-curious, half-suspicious comments among the Korean parents about me, such as, "who is she?" and "what is she doing here?" Because a few parents were "regulars" in the school activities, a sense of collegiality had been established among the volunteer groups. Even to the school personnel, my presence in the school was troublesome, provoking a certain anxiety about privacy protection. One day, after I had participated in a school event, the assistant principal called me and conveyed certain complaints from American parents about my taking pictures of the event. Her voice sounded both uncomfortable and solicitous; she explained that some parents were suspicious of my research purposes and considered my involvement in the school as an intrusion into their territory. Despite the assistant principal's understanding of my research, our relationship was inevitably situated in the politics of the field, involving multiple interests of different parties.

With my increasing recognition of the political nature of research, I tried to stand separate from both Korean and teachers' groups and be cautious about my visibility while engaging with the school activities. In so doing, I wanted to protect my political stance as neutral, impartial, and detached from the contextual contamination posed by my shifting

positionalities. However, research is personal. As England (1994) pointed out: "We are differently positioned subjects with different biographies, we are not dematerialized, disembodied entities" (pp. 84-85). I found myself implicated in defining boundaries between groups, admitting my unavoidable reflexivity to the field.

Situated Knowledge in Advocacy Dilemma

I am an indigenous researcher who studies my own people. I have a strong commitment to advocate for marginalized people through my research practice. My research is value-laden, emancipatory, and critically colored. In educational studies, Asian immigrant parents tend to be positioned as either subordinated to the "culture of power" embedded in school cultures (Delpit, 1988) or the model minority stereotype (Chun, 1995; Schneider & Lee, 1990). My research project had the political goal of deconstructing these polarized discourses, revealing instead the complex negotiations authored by Korean immigrant parents through collective networking.

However, my overt advocacy paradigm became problematic as I encountered the self-interested orientation of the Korean mothers' meeting. Participants in the meeting were middle-class Korean parents who possessed substantial economic capital and time to help their children succeed in the school. Although as immigrants they experienced disadvantages in their daily lives and school involvement, the Korean parents appeared to have clear privileges compared to other poor and working class immigrants. Nonetheless, most Korean parents rarely spoke for others who were not as visible at the school as they were, excluding working or non-participant parents from collective intra-group support. As a critical researcher who aims to challenge the status quo, I found myself ambivalent, resistant, and even opposed to advocating the function of the meeting. Through my critical lens, I viewed the Korean mothers' meeting as a more or less class-based enterprise that ignored the collective well-beings of minority parents at the school. After all, what was sought or gained through ethnic networking was the relative privilege of a selected group of parents.

Advocating research for social change, Kobayashi (1994) described the privilege of studying her own community: "Working within my own cultural community, I have gained legitimacy, access, an insider's view of cultural practice, and the potential to achieve political ends more effectively" (p. 74). In my case, studying my own community caused me to doubt my insider status because my ideological identification appeared to be distinct from my cultural identity. At many moments in the study, I had to question where my consciousness came from and for whom. As my major professor cautioned me, "It is easy to criticize, but the issue is how authentic the claims could be." As an indigenous researcher who pursues the political ends of advocacy research, I must take account of my responsibility to my own community by critically analyzing my inner voice. This was an ethical matter. Smith (1999) points out the moral issues in doing indigenous research:

> The struggle for the validity of indigenous knowledge may no longer be over the recognition that indigenous people have ways of knowing the world which are unique, but over proving the authenticity of, and control over, our own forms of knowledge (p. 104).

Acknowledging situated knowledge by explicating differences between the researcher and the researched can be one way to address this ethnic dilemma. My lived experience was significantly different from the Korean mothers affiliated with the meeting, despite our commonalities in terms of gender, social class, ethnicity, age, and region. Banks (1998) argues that "it is not their experiences per se that cause individuals to acquire specific values and knowledge during their socialization within their ethnic or cultural communities; rather, it is their interpretations of their experiences" (p. 5). While my career experiences contributed to my critical awareness of social inequalities, the mothers affiliated with the meeting were mostly housewives; some of them had never worked outside the home. Their romantic, uncritical views of American lives may have been rooted in their unique social realities, which were sheltered from hostile treatment by the host society as well as privileged by their middle-class backgrounds.

Some recent indigenous and feminist research has called for confronting the hegemonic ideals of identity solidarity along the lines of gender, race, or ethnicity that neglect heterogeneity and inequalities within and between groups (e.g., Gilbert, 1994; Jones, 1995; Sherif, 2001). For instance, in her feminist ethnography study, Parameswaran (2001) included Hindu middle- and upper- class women's othering discourses toward other social groups in order to reveal privilege and power complicated by multiple social identities. Ultimately, I decided to describe the limited functions of ethnic networking within the Korean meeting and tension among the Korean parents in my analysis on their experiences in an American school. I admit that my choice was made in light of situated knowledge from my particular personal location; nonetheless, this suggests that indigenous researchers reconsider the meanings of social advocacy through reflecting on their own political commitments.

Conclusion

I have described the blurred boundaries of insider/outsider status in my research process that underline partial, situated knowledge claims intersecting with cultures, power relations, and political ideologies. To recognize situated knowledge is to admit the limits of one's perspective due to particular and personal locations within the field (Narayan, 1993). Insiderness shaped by the researcher's biography cannot ensure the authenticity of knowledge claims, nor can it lessen our moral accountability in working with our own community (Labaree, 2002). As revealed in my fieldwork, the complex negotiations of culture making blur the binary perceptions of insider/outsider status and problematize the benefits of assumed cultural knowledge granted by insiderness. The researcher can be an insider and outsider "to a particular community of research participants at many different levels and at different times" (Villenas, 1996, p. 718). Reflecting on the multiplicity of researcher positionality enables the researcher to locate and relocate where she is in the research process, and to recognize her situatedness in knowledge claims.

The blurred boundaries of insider/outsider demand to acknowledge "betweenness" in fieldwork (England, 1994, p. 86). Fieldwork is personal, relational, and political. The researcher is not free from power relations in the field that fundamentally affect her relationships with the researched. At the same time, the researcher herself makes up this "betweenness." My marginalization from both the Korean parents and the

American school was partially attributable to my ignorance of the unintended power that I brought into the field, and became sharpened by my identity as a critical researcher who intends to challenge the status quo rather than simply describe it. Moreover, it is the researcher who defines the problems, interprets the data, and ultimately presents the social reality as though it is truth. Specifically, indigenous researchers need to be cautious about their presupposed cultural knowledge and potential to distort meaning, whether culture-specific or personal (Jones, 1995).

Nonetheless, as the feminist researcher England (1994) points out, "Reflexivity can make us more aware of asymmetrical or exploitative relationships, but it cannot remove them" (p. 86). Researchers should constantly reflect on their own meaning constructions with the participants and the data through "working the hyphens" (Fine, 1994); simultaneously, they should articulate their location in relation to research and how this position influences their texts. My political stance colored my texts; I had to negotiate my ethical dilemma of advocacy among heterogeneous groups with multiple interests, and I privileged the voices of the most marginalized over others. My texts were partial, subjective, and situated between myself and my participants, my writing, and you, the readers. "We can begin with all the maps of qualitative research we currently have, then draw some new maps that enrich and extend the boundaries of our understandings beyond the margins" (Smith, 2005, p. 102). My self-narrative constitutes avenues of critical conversations that discuss the fluid, contradictory, and complicated relationships between self and other, subject and object, the researcher and the writer, and most importantly, the text and the reader.

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