

# Example of translated woman and in search of respect book review

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



1.

In *Translated Woman*: the person being studied is a woman named Esperanza, a street-peddler who lives in Mexico. Unlike most ethnographic studies, the author does not focus as much on an entire population as she does on one person. However, the relationship between the sample and the population (the whole of Mexico) is made clear in several respects. It is implied that much of Esperanza's story, both as a woman and as a poor person in Mexico, is indicative of the whole of the Mexican experience. In the final chapter of the book, Behar herself is studied as an ethnographic figure, comparing herself to Esperanza in terms of her experience in academia.

In *In Search of Respect*, Bourgois spends five years living with his family in Harlem within the 1980s and 1990s, as they neighbored a crack house. The sample (Bourgois and his family) and the population (the whole of Harlem) are related as the family is presented as a microcosm of what all lower-class Latinos experience in the barrios of Harlem. The experience is also extended to people of all races in lower-class neighborhoods, including blacks, with a special emphasis on the poor and those addicted to illegal substances, like crack cocaine. While the primary focus is on Bourgois' family, dozens of people of all races are interviewed and observed throughout the community.

2.

*Translated Woman*'s study of Esperanza is performed solely on participant-observation and interview. Through Esperanza's stories, we hear of her own beliefs in witchcraft, her life as a Mexican, her often turbulent love life, and other stories. In essence, it is a very experimental ethnographic study in that

no formal instruments are really used. " Staying close to Esperanza's own conceptual categories and producing a book with her voice centrally located in the text, I hope I've allowed for enough creative " misbehavior"" (Behar, p. 270). Since there was the loosest of theoretical frameworks used in the text, Behar instead relies on instinct and comparative analysis to determine a story for Esperanza (she often compares her own life with Esperanza's).

Bourgois, in *In Search of Respect*, used little real instruments, but a clear theoretical approach; " how the United States legitimizes inner-city segregation, or how victims enforce the brutality of their social marginalization" (p. 39). Bourgois used participant-observation and interview, as well, in his study of a Harlem family - all members of the family managed to have their own unique, subjective viewpoints on how being lower-class and socially marginalized affected them. Drug addiction, violence, and more were the order of the day, and many questions about the nature of lower-class citizenry and the effects of drug abuse on their lack of upward mobility were addressed.

3.

In *Translated Woman*, Behar studies Esperanza merely as interesting person, an isolated figure independent of a structured theoretical framework. One of her goals was merely to see just how an individual, given Esperanza's circumstances, would react, and to determine the reasons why her life went down these certain paths. Even when attempting to structure Esperanza's life history narrative, Behar comes up short, particularly when using a feminist model in terms of Latin American women. Because Esperanza "

didn't fit the part of the exemplary feminist heroine for whom Western women are always searching." she found it difficult to quantify exact what made Esperanza so intriguing - just that she was (p. 269).

The purpose of studying his family as a concrete unit, especially next to a crackhouse in Harlem, was to get a birds-eye view of what life is like in such an impoverished, drug-fuelled area. Being close to a crack house permitted close contact with those affected by substance abuse in Harlem, thus facilitating greater investigation. There were many questions asked in *In Search of Respect*. One research question lied within the lower class' ability to hinder its own improvement, and the reasoning behind cross-cultural conflict within the barrio. Blacks and Puerto Ricans were established as not getting along well, and mutual suspicion often leads to violence and a lack of communication. The research Bourgois conducts deals primarily with what factors lead to this mistrust, and what factors contribute to drug use and violence in such an impoverished area.

4.

I found that the apparent lack of framework was troublesome for *Translated Woman*; Behar seems to have failed to find a basis on which to study Esperanza, except for a very loose mention of feminist depictions of Latin American women, or a perceived lack thereof. In the end, this book amounts to what is, effectively, a biography, with little real synthesis of ideas with information gleaned in the study. Instead of coming to conclusions, Behar simply compares her life with Esperanza's, making it feel like a vanity project of sorts.

The notions of drug abuse and violence, as well as cross-cultural conflict, in *In Search for Respect* were fairly well-researched, with plenty of detailed interactions and well-collected data. However, there may have been problems with subjectivity, given that Bourgois used his own family in the ethnographic study. Perhaps a conflict of interest could provide sufficient reason to exclude details, or exaggerate them for effect, thus coloring the results of the ethnographic study. However, given that he studied all ages and genders as part of a family, at least he covered many different perspectives within this culture.

5.

If I were to do a similar study, I would frame it with some sort of theoretical approach. Perhaps I would detail more readily just how feminist portrayals of Latin American women are lacking, and compare stereotypes or previous literature on the subject with my discoveries. I would not focus on one person, but instead try to ingratiate myself in a community of Latin American women, so that multiple perspectives could be gleaned. I would then be able to approach these subjects with a modicum of objectivity, and I would refrain from inserting my own life into the analysis.

For Bourgois' work, I would have tried to study an area in which I had no vested interest in the people I was studying, particularly if it were my family. This way, I could maintain slightly greater objectivity, and I would not have to worry about their safety. However, given that objection, Bourgois performs an admirable job in this ethnographic study, leaving little to substantially improve upon.

## **Works Cited**

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