

Gratitude to Ken Plummer

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Abstract

The author weaves her favorite quotes from Ken Plummer’s celebrated book, *Telling Sexual Stories* with her own voice to offer a modest tribute and express her gratitude to him. In this exercise of creative writing, she celebrates his contributions to her intellectual and professional growth as a feminist ethnographer, a witness to endless sexual stories with populations of Mexican origin in both countries, the United States and Mexico. The author reflects on the priceless lessons she learned from him, since that day she listened to him from a corner at the American Sociological Association conference, when she was a shy graduate student.

Keywords

Sociologist, sexual stories, narratives, power

In this book I am concerned with helping develop a sociology of stories, but I do it at an angle. I take as my topic *the personal experience narratives of the intimate*—a story that haunts us everywhere today in ways it did not in the recent past.¹

*Thank you for weaving words of intimate knowledge and
for inviting me to become a witness to an untold sexual story,
the kept-in-secret life narrative of innermost and personal
yet collective silences.*

Once told, what functions might have such stories serve in the lives of people and societies? How might stories work to perform conservative functions maintaining dominant orders, and how might they be used to resist or transform lives and cultures?²

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*Thank you for inviting me to think critically about
the power of stories and the stories of power,
and everything in between and beyond.*

Stories of suffering, surviving and surpassing are personal experience stories which speak initially of a deep pain, a frustration, an anguish sensed as being linked to the sexual. They speak of a silence and secrecy which may need to be broken. They are stories which tell of a need for action—something must be done, a pain must be transcended.³

*Thank you for offering an inspirational light on the path
as I immersed myself in the ethnographic walk,
first in Los Angeles,
and later in Ciudad Juárez,
Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Monterrey.*

My argument is simple. I will suggest—just as I have for rape stories—that for narratives to flourish there must be a community to hear; that for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics. The one—community—feeds upon and into the other—story.⁴

*Thank you for being the clairvoyant voice describing my professional landscape,
one that started years back and has survived the test of time.
“I would like to tell you my story,” many times I have been told.
“But I am done with my research,” I have replied with a clarifying and playful tone.
“It doesn’t matter, I still want to tell you my story,” I usually get as a reaction,
and it is no longer a surprise.*

And the stories keep changing.⁵

*Thank you for validating a professional journey and its unfolding stories.
Life talks to us through stories,
stories broken down into sentences,
sentences talking back slowly through syllables.*

Much of story telling deals with the worlds of emotions, and yet often whole worlds have been left out. Lots of feelings—including ways of feeling not even recognized as feeling—can get written out of the stories we tell of our lives. And more.⁶

*Thank you for highlighting the sociological power of feelings in story telling,
story listening, story witnessing, story documenting, story writing,
and the archives of unwritten stories of feelings
that many of us tell ourselves in silence
inside our inner cultures and worlds.*

Stories clash, sides are taken, different patterns of interpretation are evoked, stories are reread, retold, reclaimed.⁷

*Thank you for the many lessons learned.
Yes, there is always tension, controversy, promise, and much more,
at times, all at the same time...
in story listening, story writing, story publishing
the story of knowledge,
the stories giving life to the sociology of sexualities
and the stories we tell ourselves and others as part of our intellectual growth.*

Weaving a few of my favorite quotes from your book *Telling Sexual Stories* with the lessons they offered to me is my modest way to celebrate your invaluable presence in my academic training and profession. The inspirational book was published in 1995, almost 30 years ago, back when I was an insecure graduate student; I did not even know if I would be able to write a dissertation. A few years later, I listened to you at the American Sociological Association conference, from a corner, lost in my shyness and full of admiration; I was too shy and anxious to come and speak to you. 30 years passed already since 1993, back when I set foot in a doctoral program, with a life story that was yet to be lived and written, a professional journey that took me by surprise. Although I never had the honor of exchanging a word with you in person, and we communicated only via email many years later, I still remember the phrase you wrote me once, one that today I recall with joy as, “we have common friends.”

Thank you for writing and giving life to an abundant archive of sociological knowledge and for sharing it with us, and thank you for paving the road for many of us, for being an inspirational sociologist. Your rich story—one that was not always easy—helped me nurture my academic career, it helped me start writing my own story, one still in the making, and for that, my heart will be forever grateful.

To you, Ken Plummer,
*con mi profunda gratitud,
de todo corazón.*

Gloria González-López
The University of Texas at Austin

7th of February, 2023, after the Winter Storm

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Notes

1. Plummer K (1995) *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. London and New York City: Routledge. Page 19.
2. Ibid. Page 25.
3. Ibid. Page 50.
4. Ibid. Page 87.
5. Ibid. Page 95.
6. Ibid. Page 154.
7. Ibid. Page 169.

Gloria González-López holds the C.B. Smith Sr. Centennial Chair # 1 in U.S. - Mexico Relations, and is Professor of Sociology at The University of Texas at Austin. She is the author of *Family Secrets: Stories of Incest and Sexual Violence in Mexico* and *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrants and Their Sex Lives*; she has published her academic work extensively in Spanish. Because of the kindness and generosity of students, colleagues, mentors, and supervisors, she received the 2021 *Simon-Gagnon Lifetime Achievement Award* and the 2022 *Feminist Scholar-Activist Award*, both from the American Sociological Association, Sexualities Section and Sex & Gender Section, respectively.