



2019

Laurie Bergner: A Bloomington-Normal Community Educator Shaped by Her Values

Jessica Bugayong

Illinois Wesleyan University, jbugayon@iwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/anth_ethno



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bugayong, Jessica, "Laurie Bergner: A Bloomington-Normal Community Educator Shaped by Her Values" (2019). *Outstanding Ethnographic Research Projects*. 19.

https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/anth_ethno/19

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by the faculty in the Sociology & Anthropology Department at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

Laurie Bergner: A Bloomington-Normal Community Educator Shaped by Her Values
By Jessica Bugayong

A Visual Ethnography
ANTH 380

I. Meet Laurie Bergner

Laurie Bergner is a passionate, interested, and highly active and engaged Bloomington-Normal (Blo-No) community member. Laurie has been involved in an array of community organizations since she moved from Washington, D.C. with her husband in 1977 (Figure 1). Laurie's parents and world travels shaped her values that, in turn, guide and shape Laurie's community work.

clinical psychologist. Psychologists in mental health centers often take on the role of educator in order to teach other professionals "cultural competency" when it comes to mental health (Ponce, Carr, & Miller, 2019). However, I later learned that Laurie has not worked in a mental health center for years. Instead, she runs her own private practice that allows her a more flexible schedule which, initially, gave her more time to spend with her children when they were younger. Laurie's private practice also gives her more autonomy when working with her clients. Laurie can provide pro bono work for her clients who are financially struggling and she is not restrained by the paperwork that would be abundant in a mental health center.

Just because Laurie does not work in a mental health center does not mean she is not an educator.

Nowadays, Laurie works at her private practice only three days a week and devotes her free time to helping various community organizations. Laurie is a community educator and organizes informational sessions sponsored by the



Figure 1: Laurie's bright smile shows just how much she loves her community work as the Community Education Chair for the McLean County League of Women's Voters (LWV); former member and past president for the Moses Montefiore Temple (the only Jewish synagogue in Bloomington-Normal) and the current director of their Program Committee; board member and former President of the Board of the Immigration Project; and a clinical psychologist in private practice. (Photo by author and Laurie Bergner)

Before our initial meeting, I assumed Laurie's community work had to do with mental health since she is a

McLean County League of Women's Voters (LWV) and also does community outreach for the Immigration Project.

II. Visual Ethnographic Methods

Laurie and I collaborated on this visual ethnography. Through an array of visual ethnographic methods, I learned about Laurie's life and her work in the Blo-No community (Figure 2).



Figure 2: After attending a LWV event "Immigration in Our Community" at the Normal Public Library that Laurie moderated, she showed me her photographs that were part of the KodaRoamers display and told me the stories behind them. One of Laurie's passions is photography and through photography Laurie can transport people to different places they may not be able to reach. (Photo by author and Laurie Bergner)

During our first meeting on October 11, 2019, Laurie and I met at the DugOut in the Memorial Center on Illinois Wesleyan University's campus.

We discussed the project goals, the various deadlines, and we shared and talked about personal photographs as a way to get to know one another better.

During this first meeting, I showed Laurie photos I had found on the LWV FaceBook page and asked her to explain the circumstances of each photo. Through this exercise, I learned about Laurie's position on the LWV board. One photo in particular caught my eye. Laurie told me that it was a picture of her and a woman who she met while on a LWV sponsored exchange trip to Colombia. Women from local governments came to McLean County to see how small government leaders performed their jobs here in the United States while women from McLean County, including Laurie, went to see the governmental process in Colombia. This was just one example of the opportunities Laurie gains from working with the LWV.

Also, I shared with Laurie several visual metaphors that I created for my visual auto-ethnography so she could get to know me and my story in order to

establish rapport and make her feel more comfortable.

At a subsequent meeting at Ames Library on October 18, 2019, I filmed an interview with Laurie in which she shared more stories from her life and her journey to community work. During another meeting at the Ames Library on October 29, 2019, Laurie and I brainstormed ideas to create visual metaphors for her life. I shared some of my ideas about visual metaphors with her and she changed them in a way that she believed better represented her. We then took photos around the library that I then manipulated to create these visual metaphors. We collaborated and shared ideas with one another throughout the process. I sent drafts of the manipulated photographs to Laurie and she sent me her feedback. The visual metaphors we collaboratively produced can be found throughout this essay.

Laurie and I established rapport quickly through keeping in communication through text messaging and meeting weekly. Laurie sent me various photographs and from these I understood how influential Laurie's

travel is to her life and values. The various visual ethnographic methods we both employed helped to guide and focus our work together.

III. Shaped by Her Values

Throughout our many meetings, emails, and text correspondences, I learned that Laurie is greatly driven by her values that have been instilled in her from her liberal middle-class Jewish Democratic parents and her travels.

From a young age, Laurie was raised with an increased awareness about the struggles of others due to her Jewish background and her awareness of the injustices of the Holocaust. The Jewish tradition urges Jews to help the needy and government officials to “deliver equal justice to the rich and poor” (Lewyn, 2009, p. 21). Laurie follows this Jewish tradition through her work that educates the community on various political topics and by providing assistance to groups who need it such as under-served immigrants.

Laurie also values the importance of education, another value instilled in her by her parents. She believes in the

importance of teaching history and sees it as a way of preventing repeating past mistakes (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Laurie believes in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and believes everyone around the globe should have these basic human rights. Education is especially important because an educated citizenry is essential for a strong democracy. She works daily to protect these rights for all people around the globe. (Photo by author and Laurie Bergner)

During our interview, Laurie told me about how she and her family traveled often when she and her sister Julie were young. She recalled a distinct memory from their first trip to Mexico where she saw children around her age shining shoes for money. She also remembered her father pointing to the tiny shacks along the side of the road. Laurie remembers how fortunate and grateful she felt for the things in her life and this is an experience she has recalled throughout her life.

Laurie travels around the globe in order to gain more of these experiences (Figure 4). Although Laurie does sometimes visit the tourist spots of



Figure 4: This collage includes photos of Laurie during her travels in Peru, India, Colombia, Ethiopia, Turkey, Mexico, Colorado, Togo, Utah, Tibet, Morocco, Paris, China, Guatemala, and Prague. In several of the photos, Laurie is posing with people from the community she is visiting. In others, she is with her husband and children. The collage forms a circle to indicate how Laurie's travels around the globe have shaped her world view. (Photos by Laurie Bergner and collage by author)

the country, she enjoys going to places off the beaten path much more. For example, while in India, Laurie watched a Sadhu ceremony that consisted of the naked Hindu ascetics sharing their wisdom with the people in attendance. In Ethiopia, she visited a hospital that specifically treated women with fistula. These women were outcasted by their husbands and other family.

Yelich Biniecki and Conceicao (2014) discuss how world travel influences a person's worldview by impacting and changing the traveler's

beliefs about one's culture and place in the world. These travel experiences have greatly shaped Laurie's worldviews and have given her a better understanding of others' struggles.

IV. Translating Her Values into Community Work

Laurie's worldview and values of awareness and education have translated into her work at both the Immigration Project and the LWV.

Laurie works to better the lives of others through her work at the Immigration Project. The Immigration Project provides legal work for immigrants in central Illinois. Laurie helps the Immigration Project by organizing community outreach (Figure 5). Laurie's awareness of other people's

struggles became apparent during our interview. As Laurie explained, "There's also things that go on in other countries that people can't even conceive of here [in the United States]." During our conversation, Laurie demonstrated her understanding of the different conflicts people of other countries face that may push them to immigrate to the U.S. It is this heightened awareness of immigrant struggles that drives her to support immigrants in central Illinois.

Since 2004, there has been a steady incline in state policies that support civic learning in youth; including changing high school graduation requirements so it is necessary to take a course in civic engagement (Wilson, Sadler, Cohen-Vogel, & Willis, 2019). Policy makers understand the importance of having an educated citizenry. Laurie's strong belief in education has led to her LWV work that helps to educate those who were in school when these policies were non-existent. Laurie hosts monthly educational sessions, sponsored by the LWV, on various political topics at the Normal Public Library. Some of these



Figure 5: Through Laurie's informational panels for the Blo-No community, she is able to communicate the Immigration Project's mission to others, who may become more compassionate for immigrants and their struggles. Laurie also works with the Immigration Project on an annual fundraising luncheon, where people can donate to the organization so it can continue effectively providing low cost legal services to immigrants, who need it the most.

sessions have covered topics such as immigration rights, environmental sustainability, affordable housing, and civil rights. Laurie assembles a group of experts on the various topics from the community and during the sessions, she moderates a panel of these experts, and leads a discussion with audience members. These sessions help give context to various topics that may be important in upcoming elections. Laurie's LWV work helps make the Blo-No community more aware and informed of important issues that the community is facing.

Laurie's father raised her to be active in her community and this is something she has maintained throughout her life with her work. When I asked Laurie how her parents influenced her educational goals and social activism, Laurie explained, "Those were all deeply felt values that I absorbed and have always lived by, myself." Laurie also values awareness and strongly advocates for voting and informed voting. Her LWV work helps the community around her achieve this.

Laurie is an agent of change as a community educator (Figure 6).

Laurie's numerous leadership and community awards are evidence of her important and informative work and

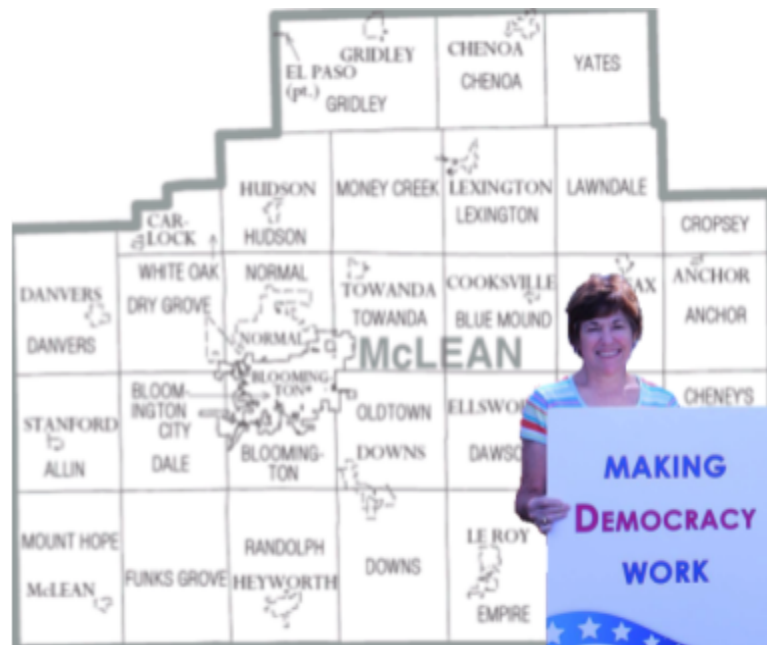


Figure 6: Laurie is making democracy work through LWV. Laurie believes education leads to a more engaged McLean County community, the largest county in Illinois. (Photograph by author and Laurie Bergner).

their overall effects on enhancing the Bloomington Normal community. In 2006, Laurie won the Young Women's Christian Association Women of Distinction Award in Professions. In 2011, Laurie was awarded the prestigious Carrie Chapman Catt Leadership Award for her work in the McLean County LWV which includes promoting greater awareness of public issues and wider participation in the

democratic process. She also won the 2016 Community Service Award from the McLean County Bar Association for her work helping the LWV on various legal studies.

Without her strong values and worldview, Laurie would not be the woman she is today. They have guided her daily community work and driven her to make the Blo-No community a better place with both her community education and outreach. During our interview, Laurie conveyed to me, “A value that I have is to leave this world better than you found it- than when you came in...that you provide something good for this world” and this is something that Laurie is clearly achieving through her volunteer work at both the Immigration Project and the McLean County LWV.

Works Cited

Lewyn, M. E. (2009). Suburban sprawl, Jewish law, and Jewish values. *Southeastern Environmental Law Journal*, 1(1), 20-23.

Ponce, A. N., Carr, E. R., Miller, R., Olezeski, C. L., & Silva, M. A. (2019, July 25). Psychologists as educators: creating change in community mental health. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 2(5), 15-22.

Wilson, J. J., Sadler, J., Cohen-Vogel, N., & Willis, C. (2019). An examination of changes to state civic education requirements, 2004-2016. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 94(1), 48–62.

Yelich Biniecki, S. M., & Conceição, S. C. O. (2014). How living or traveling to foreign locations influences adults' worldviews and impacts personal identity. *New Horizons in Adult Education & Human Resource Development*, 26(3), 39–53.

Ethnographic Interview of Laurie Bergner, October 18, 2019