

“Apóyame o haste a un lado”: Composite Storytelling as Resistance During an anti-CRT Climate in Teacher Education¹

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Abstract

Recently we have seen a heightened public assault on critical race theory (CRT), anti-racist ideologies and practices, and on scholars, faculty, and activists who employ CRT in their work. In this article we draw upon CRT, Latina/Chicana feminism, and critical raced-gendered epistemology, to situate the experiences of Latina faculty in post-secondary education and provide an onto-theoretical framework to make sense of a composite narrative we collaboratively created: Dra. Rivera. We conclude by offering several suggestions for Colleges of Education and teacher education writ large.

Keywords: *Critical Race Theory, Post-Secondary Education, Latina Chicana Feminism, Composite Storytelling, Anti-Racist*

Introduction

Over the last year, we have seen a heightened public assault on critical race theory (CRT) and anti-racist ideologies and practices, especially for faculty and activists who employ CRT in their work (Cabrera et al., 2017; Matias et al. 2017). While white-supremist attacks are not new (Tensley, 2021), the current climate of anti-CRT bills and public protest has trickled up from the PK-12 setting where teachers are experiencing increased censorship and bans on any curriculum involving CRT (Morgan, 2022). This political tension against CRT impacts post-secondary institutions in a new, insidious way. Although universities proclaim missions for diversity and justice, institutions simultaneously subvert this aim by avoiding or working against mobilized efforts, grounded in CRT, to address issues like hostile campus climates for students and faculty of color. What happens, then, to faculty who do the work that academic institutions proclaim to want but then deny it through their (in)action? Furthermore, how do anti-racist faculty and Faculty of Color (FOC), navigate such an academic space? In response to these issues, we engage the methodology of composite storytelling (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005) to bring to light how academic institutions un/intentionally resist justice work and, influenced by the current anti-CRT sociopolitical landscape, even delegitimize and marginalize FOC whose work engages CRT. Here, we present a composite story of a fictional character, Dra. Angelina Rivera, a Latina faculty member in teacher education whose scholarship centers CRT. While she is consistently asked to further justice, she is also told to not go “too far” by invoking CRT perspectives.

1. We do not italicize words written in Spanish in response to language power dynamics. Not italicizing words written in Spanish addresses the privileging of English as the language of power.

Drawing from CRT, critical raced-gendered epistemology, and Latina/Chicana feminist theories, we use composite storytelling to pull the reader into Dra. Rivera's everyday experience to understand, even feel, what it is like navigating this contradiction of working toward racial justice while avoiding "too much" justice. These mixed messages take a toll, causing overwhelming stress, exhaustion, and racial battle fatigue (Kohli & Pizarro, 2022; Matias, 2020; Matias et.al., 2019). Understanding someone else's experience, in this case a critical-race Latina faculty member at a predominantly white institution (PWI), reveals the racialized landscape of academia.

Through storytelling (Bell, 1999; Khalifa, et.al, 2013) we seek to open up conversations and bring about solidarity. The stories in this piece affirm the experiences of FOC and lay a foundation of understanding for those who may have never experienced the racialized, hidden workings of academia that FOC grapple with on a daily basis. Grounded in the current anti-CRT context, these stories provide concrete examples that respond to the following questions: What's the problem? How are post-secondary institutions not supportive of FOC and justice work? With this structural opposition made visible, we then invite readers committed to CRT and anti-racism to dream of other possibilities—to invoke counterstories. While we pose our own suggestions, we also seek collaboration in addressing the questions: How can institutions better "apóyame o haste a un lado"¹ [support me or get out of the way]? How can institutions authentically join in solidarity with anti-racist faculty and students, rather than superficially subscribing to justice initiatives that only add unsustainable labor on the backs of FOC and, particularly, Women of Color (WOC) faculty (Gutiérrez, et al., 2012; Mizelle, 2006)? And how can all of this be done in the face of public, white-supremacist acts, such as calls to ban CRT and conversations about equity and justice in PK-12 schools.

Latina Faculty Experiences through a Critical Lens

For this article, we draw upon CRT, Latina/Chicana feminism, and critical raced-gendered epistemology to situate the experiences of Latina faculty in academia and provide an onto-theoretical framework to make sense of Dra. Rivera's story.

First, our work is guided by CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013), and LatCrit more specifically (Valdes 1996), to understand the structural components of race and racism that are embedded in society and academic institutions. From this combined perspective, social change requires identifying and dismantling institutionalized racism, as well as transforming the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013, p. 3). Building upon this, LatCrit takes up "a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 108). More specifically, LatCrit examines issues around language, colorism, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality (Paredes Scribner & Fernández, 2017), as well as gender inequities through the experiences of Latinas (Delgado Bernal, 2002). CRT and LatCrit also enable scholars to interrogate race-neutral laws and policies that differentially impact POC (Bell, 1992; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). For example, promotion and tenure procedures may seem neutral and applicable to all faculty, however, in practice, the area of service can be interpreted in ways that disproportionately impacts faculty along the lines of race and gender since more service is often requested of FOC and women faculty (Kulp et al., 2019).

While CRT and LatCrit call attention to how racism is entrenched within institutional practices, Latina/Chicana feminism (Anzaldúa, 2007; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006) hones into the introspective and personal side of what it looks like to navigate unjust and oppressive power structures in U.S. society and academia. Chicana feminists have long engaged

with “theory in the flesh” to generate knowledge from embodied and lived experiences (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983; Pitts et al., 2020). This not only produces knowledge about the experiences of Latinas and Chicanas, but it also reveals how systemic oppression works and what it takes to transform society.

Chicana/Latina feminism is an essential lens in making sense of Latina faculty’s experiences within the academy, particularly when WOC faculty are asked to do justice work while CRT is under attack in political discourse (Tensely, 2021). In general, women in the academy tend to experience service labor at higher rates compared to men (Jaschik, 2011); they are often expected to take on roles as caretakers and counselors, under the guise of “service,” while the same is not expected of men (Niemann, 2012). This impacts teaching evaluations (Evans-Winters & Hoff, 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2020) and promotion and tenure (Kulp, Wolf-Wendel, et al., 2019) and is further exacerbated for WOC as they are often asked to serve on *diversity* committees, mentor Students or Color (SOC), lead affinity groups, teach their white colleagues about *equity issues* (Beeman, 2021; Tuitt, Hanna, et al., 2011), and engage in ghost advising (Schultheiss, 2018). According to Isenbarger and Zembylas (2006), the invisibility of emotional labor is rooted in the gendered, raced, and classed histories of education, framed as a natural extension of ‘women’s work.’ WOC must also navigate racist stereotypes and assumptions of Black and Brown women’s labor (Niemann, 2012) and experience microaggressions, including gendered-raced classroom interactions with students (Pittman, 2010), devaluation as scholars (Settles et al., 2021), and anti-Black misogynoir (Lewis & Miller, 2018).

Given the interconnections between race and gender in the experiences of WOC faculty, Delgado-Bernal (2002) argues for a critical raced-gendered epistemology that allows researchers to imagine how race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexuality work together to shape individual experiences with intersecting forms of systemic oppression. Critical raced-gendered epistemologies also offer “unique ways of knowing and understanding the world based on the various raced and gendered experiences of people of color” (Delgado-Bernal, 2002, p. 107).

Using critical race-gendered epistemology, CRT, and Latina/Chicana feminism together, then, helps make sense of collective Latina faculty experiences that intersect with the current sociopolitical landscape in academia—specifically in the field of teacher education where faculty must now also grapple with and prepare their teacher candidates for increasing bans on CRT in PK-12 schools. Latina faculty and other FOC engage with all this while simultaneously navigating the unequal distribution of labor in academia, including more equity and justice work as universities seek to keep up appearance in the midst of public hypervisibility of racial injustice brought about by such events as George Floyd’s murder. While legislation seeks to ban CRT at the PK-12 level, Dra. Rivera’s stories demonstrate how anti-CRT sentiments are carried up into universities. Dra. Rivera’s composite stories, then, demonstrate how individual experiences support the racialized and gendered inner workings of academia—resulting in de facto CRT bans.

Composite Storytelling through Plática

To illuminate the multi-layered realities of navigating intersecting, hostile structures, further exacerbated by the current anti-CRT sociopolitical context within academia, we present three composite stories told through the lens of a fictional character, Dra. Angelina Rivera. According to Solórzano and Yosso (2002), composite storytelling is a particular practice of counterstorytelling:

Composite stories and narratives draw on various forms of ‘data’ to recount the racialized, sexualized, and class experiences of people of color. Such *counterstories* [emphasis added] may offer both biographical and autobiographical analysis because the authors create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination. (p. 33)

We constructed Dra. Rivera and her stories from our own experiences across institutions, the experiences of colleagues at other PWIs, and the stories reflected in scholarly literature. To facilitate this, we engaged a Latina/Chicana methodology called *plática* (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) [sessions of dialogue] to tell ours and others’ stories to both remember and make visible what it is like navigating academia in the present moment. Moreover, *plática* grants space to make sense of contradictions to reveal the structural racism and institutional limitations that serve as roadblocks for anti-racism and justice efforts.

We began *pláticas* with self-care through friendly and joyful conversation. Our conversations organically melded into discussions of navigating academia during the pandemic, attacks, and anxieties around the increasing anti-CRT climate in education. During conversations, one of us took notes. In our spirit of collectivity and care, we alternated leading as necessary. After initial meetings, we began analyzing our notes (i.e. data) to construct composite stories and then continued dialoguing to build upon one another’s stories.

By the end of our *pláticas*, we arrived at the overarching theme of “navigating contradictions on a daily basis,” summing up the core struggle of what it looks like working for racial justice and equity as critically-minded Latina faculty. Under this theme, we identified three specific contradictions which manifested into composite stories about Dra. Rivera:

- Contradiction 1: Recognition/misrecognition, Dra. Rivera is acknowledged but disrespected at the same time (i.e. microaggression of not being referred to as Dra. Rivera, while another is referred to formally as “Dr.” within the same conversation). Dra. Rivera wonders: “You’ll use my labor, but do you really care to know me?”
- Contradiction 2: Do the work, but don’t really do the work, Dra. Rivera wants to do justice work and is asked to do so at her university, but the requests seem superficial. Dra. Rivera wonders: “The work piles up, but are these requests really about justice?”
- Contradiction 3: Called in to be called out, Dra. Rivera engages with faculty and students to center justice through a CRT lens and offers ideas for institutional change. However, colleagues become uncomfortable and ask her to dial it back. Dra. Rivera wonders: “They ask me to do justice work, then say I’ve gone too far—that now I’m the problem?!”

Who is Dra. Rivera?

Dra. Rivera is a fictional character drawn from various Latina and WOC faculty, including ourselves, colleagues we know, and experiences shared in the scholarly literature about WOC faculty in academia. Dra. Rivera is a pre-tenure faculty in teacher education at a PWI. As a cisgender woman she recognizes expectations are situated in the intersections of gender, race, and other identities. As the first in her family to graduate with a college degree and as one of only three FOC within her department, she often struggles to bury the imposter syndrome she feels. Inspiration from her 10 years of working with predominately SOC in a San Diego classroom, and motivation

from her two children she single parents, carries into her work in the academy as she centers critical race scholarship and Black and Chicana feminism to bring about justice in education.

Below, we use composite storytelling to invite readers into Dra. Rivera's perspective. For example, we use italics to signify her internal dialogue. We hope that the many contradictions she experiences resonate with some to affirm their experiences, provide insight to others, and collectively unite us in (re)imagining a different reality—one in which Dra. Rivera and others like her are able to unapologetically thrive in the academy. We explore this imagined reality in later sections of the manuscript.

Composite Storytelling: Dra. Rivera

“My Name is Angelina.”: Recognition/Misrecognition

So many things on my mind today. I have to email the print shop to make sure the posters are ready for the conference...Oh yeah, I still need to meet with the Associate Dean to discuss cross-course scheduling... I just feel so overwhelmed with all my coordinator work...oh and...

“Angelina Glad I caught you. I need to run a few things by you.”

Interrupted again—a familiar occurrence. Chris Anderson, my department chair and yet another white male in a leadership position, is notorious for unscheduled meetings my time doesn't seem to matter. I have a ton of stuff to get to right now. My service load takes over my entire planner, but I'm cornered now.

“Hi, Chris. I was just on my way back to the office. I have a lot of pressing matters, but what's up?”

Unfazed, Chris jumps in, “I just got exciting news that the Business School wants to partner with the College of Education for diversity training! I think this could be huge for us in terms of opportunities AND our Faculty of Color can get their names out across campus!”

Woah what does he mean by “us?” Who is benefiting from “diversity training” here? I came here because the Dean said the university is committed to real change and anti-racism—and as a Man of Color, I felt he must be sincere—but now they just want mini talks on “diversity!” But talk about interest-convergence. Make it seem like it's about supporting and promoting FOC except in reality it's about making the college look good. But ok, let me calm down. He hasn't said anything about me just yet.

“Oh, ok, thanks for letting me know...” I stutter out looking for a way out of the conversation.

Chris continues, “Yeah, I think this would be a great opportunity for you to get more university service for your pre-tenure review. You're well positioned to take on such a role. This is in your wheelhouse as a Faculty of Color and with the research you do.”

MORE SERVICE??? I'm two weeks behind in grading, have 50 emails in my inbox, and that revise and resubmit is due at the end of the week. All I do is go to meetings and serve on committees. Yet here Chris corners me and positions me as the token Latina who does social justice

work. How can I possibly do more??? And what does he mean by the research that I do? This is exactly the kind of thing I critique.

Trying to veil my frustration I firmly respond, “I am actually committed to several other obligations right now, I don’t think it smart for...”

Just then, the Associate Dean approaches.

Pero, great! A way out—plus I’ve been trying to meet with her!

“Dr. Anderson...Hi, Angela...how are you both? I’ve been meaning to reach out to you, Angela, about the course schedule you asked about. And also, we have a photographer coming who wants to take some pictures of faculty and students to showcase the college and our social justice work—I told her you would be great.”

Wait. Did Dean Fairchild just call me Angela? She referred to Chris as “Dr. Anderson,” then tried to use my first name but got it wrong? And she wants me to be in ANOTHER promotion photo?? Now they’re just chatting casually. Well I’m going to at least tell her my name is not...

Abruptly Dean Fairchild turns, pats my arm and says, “Well, it was good running into you both. Angela, let’s schedule that photographer to come to your class!”

“Good seeing you Dean Fairchild. Let’s catch up at our kids’ soccer game this weekend!” Chris says, smiling as he walks away.

We never finished our conversation. If it could even be called a “conversation.” My concern over additional service? Dismissed. Yet they want to tokenize my brown body for diversity talks and photo shoots. I feel so dehumanized and infantilized. Just talked at...like I wasn’t even standing here. I tried to advocate for myself, but I am unheard. Worse...they don’t even know my name! I wish there was someone else who understood—someone I could talk to.

“It’s the Work You’re Here to do Right?”: Do the Work, but Don’t Really do the Work

Of course this meeting is going over. They always go over, but I can’t leave. Colleagues have already made comments about me leaving early or canceling for my kids. They don’t understand what it means to be a single-parent in a new space without a support system. So here I sit. And now I’ll be late picking up the kids from school. Again.

Chris’ voice interrupts my thoughts, “Thanks, Bob, for that outstanding presentation about your work to bring Students of Color into the program.”

Great. It’s over. Ten minutes late—if I leave now I can make it to the school as the last of the students are being picked up. Oh, great, here comes Bob.

Get ready to dodge another “social justice” service request. Yes, I am a LatCrit scholar, but I am not a puppet to parade around. But that’s asking for privileged people to understand complexities of racism, of symbolic and performative acts of social justice palatable to a white audience.

“Hey, Angelina, do you have a second?”

“Actually, Bob, I’m already late for my next appointment and gotta run.”

“This will be quick, I promise,” Bob assures. “First, I value your perspective during these meetings. Every time we talk about topics like this, I feel uncomfortable. I recognize my privilege as a white, tenured faculty and don’t want to overstep or say something that offends you—I mean people. So, there’s an ad hoc committee to collect data on the experiences of Students of Color in our program. It’s the work you’re here to do right? And it won’t require much. You can use a couple graduate Students of Color and host some focus groups. Then you can have 10 minutes of the next program meeting to present your findings and provide recommendations for supporting and bringing in Students of Color. Like I said, you can distribute this work to the grad students—they need this research experience. And you can develop this into some publications. We can talk about that later—I’d love to help you publish about this. Oh, and, I’ve been listening to you about the free labor asked of Faculty of Color and agree. So, I think I can secure \$300 in professional development funds for you. Let me know if you need help finding grad students!”

Wow. What... even... where do I start? Thank goodness I’m wearing a face mask. I mean, the audacity—asking me to take this on and also put the labor on grad Students of Color. When I advocated for a program, department, and college-level statement against acts of racism after George Floyd’s murder and for public admonishing of attacks on CRT, I was met with quick excuses as to why it would not be in the best interest of the college to publicly take a stand... we don’t want to anger potential funders and alumni. BUT it’s okay to ask—expect—me and Students of Color to take on all this extra emotional labor for a measly \$300 dollars in professional development funds—all so they can bring in more Students of Color into this hostile environment and have more photo ops?! Que me creen, una pendeja o que?

Yet, I’m stuck. I’m un-tenured and the only Faculty of Color in the program. And I am committed to humanizing spaces for our Students of Color. But why does it always have to fall on me?! Can’t they all see that I’m struggling to stay afloat. Even with the 1:2 pre-tenure teaching load I negotiated, I’m struggling. My communities are under attack. I’m trying to survive. Who am I kidding, the institution doesn’t care about me—they care about their interests. Their reputation. Their fundraising. They think they can stay “neutral” in the face of violent, perpetual attacks on historically marginalized communities—my communities—then turn around and use us? Ahhh the kids!!

“You Understand the Complexity of the Situation, Right?”: Called in to be Called Out

Well, that was a shitshow...The walk to my office could not happen fast enough after that awful program meeting. Our grad Students of Color conducted such an in-depth study and analysis of the BIPOC undergrad students in the program, only to have their work questioned, held suspect, and dismissed by most. I invested so much time into guiding the grad students and even met one-on-one with several students to talk through the emotional labor of listening to BIPOC undergrad experiences of feeling like outsiders. And this after the undergrads shared how much they valued the space, were really feeling heard and valued, and appreciated connection with a faculty member of color—something they said made them feel more like they belong. I was already overwhelmed and exhausted, and now I feel like my spirit has left my body. I just can’t...

There’s a knock at my door. I quickly put my mask on and say, “Come in.”

Bob and Chris stroll in.

Oh no...I can't take any more right now. What now?

Exchanging quick greetings, Bob begins the conversation, “Angelina, I’m amazed at how in-depth your grad students conducted their work with our undergraduate Students of Color. We can certainly do better as a program to be inclusive and help them feel more welcomed. But, I hear faculty’s concerns about whether it is practical and the best course of action to integrate CRT into the core of the program—especially when our teacher candidates are being told not to talk about race in their field placements. And we’ve already talked about how writing a statement as a program that denounces anti-CRT legislation may be too much and make other students or supporters feel uncomfortable.”

Chris chimes in, “Yeah, we agree CRT is central to justice work—and I think our faculty are actually doing this work—but we also have to consider other perspectives for the collective good. You understand the complexity, right?”

Under my face mask, I clench my jaw.

What does he expect me to say to this?! The students and I worked tirelessly on this. We told the undergrads this was their chance to be heard. They want a public statement denouncing anti-CRT legislation. They demand more CRT and anti-racist curriculum. They want to deepen social justice teaching in the program. I did the work they asked, yet it is too much now? Too in-depth? Not in the interest of the collective good?

I respond, “Look, I just did what you asked me to do. The grad students and I provided the feedback you asked for from the undergrad students. Their demands and needs are clear.”

Chris shifts in his chair, “Let’s find a compromise. I just don’t want others to see you as not being collegial. That came up in last year’s review, you know. You have to be careful to not push your agenda so aggressively. How about you create a 30-minute workshop for our faculty to learn how to integrate anti-racist pedagogy in their classes? This will show our undergrad students we are working on their feedback. In regards to the statement, we can talk more about that later.”

WHAT?! They want more. Esto es un cuento de nunca acabar! My child is sick, I am already packed with meetings next week, I still haven’t completed that revise and resubmit, the emails have piled up more. And now, to make matters worse, I have formed all of these relationships with my Students of Color, and now I feel like I am failing them. Most of the faculty aren’t interested in another professional development, but at the same time, I’m accountable to my students. What do I do? Why me? I know why; who else will do it? ¿Que hago?! I’m carrying this on my back. ¡SOY UNA BURRA!! ¡YA NO PUEDO MÁS!!!!!!

Bob and Chris get up to leave, but as they do, Chris turns back to me, “Oh, and Angelina, we still need to talk about the opportunity with the Business School. Let’s schedule something.”

THAT’S IT!!!! NO MÁS!!! I need to act now. Here goes... ¡Apóyame o haste a un lado!

Image 1. Apóyame o haste a un lado



Nuancing the Contradictions

Collectively, these composite stories and accompanying illustration (see Image 1) illuminate the insidious and oftentimes covert ways racist ideologies and practices exist and are perpetuated within academia. For instance, Dr. Rivera's encounter with the Associate Dean exposes the daily and persistent racial microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012) that FOC are often left to navigate. Dismissing and infantilizing her presence (Alexander-Floyd, 2015; Puwar, 2004) while also misnaming Dra. Rivera reflect how institutional agents, in this case the Associate Dean of the College of Education, center their own whiteness and comfort (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). In this case, this meant referring to Angelina as Angela—a name that is perhaps more comfortable for an English linguistic palate. This moment allows Dra. Rivera to “articulate[s] [her] own realit[y] in dignified, wholesome, and culturally nuanced ways” (Khalifa, et.al, 2013, p. 494).

Moreover, Dra. Rivera and other CRT FOC, are forced to navigate, survive, and resist marginalizing and dehumanizing structures on a daily basis. Through Dra. Rivera's interactions we see inherent contradictions existing within the academy. For instance, Dra. Rivera, like other FOC and critical scholars, was promised opportunities for substantive change yet found this promise falls short. These faculty are caught in a web of superficial enactments and buzz-word jargon that are devoid of transformative action—except antithetically, when action is taken to avoid implementing progressive ideals so as to not discomfort those benefiting from the status quo. This was illustrated when Dra. Rivera advocated for statements against the CRT attacks but was met with excuses to alleviate any responsibility for living out the vision and mission that was symbolically portrayed on paper.

Rather than being empowered to work for change, FOC and CRT-committed education faculty often get worn down or, worse, completely consumed by a system of contradictions, lies, symbolic gestures, and co-optation. Below we describe two of the most salient contradictions that Dra. Rivera, and others like her, are left to traverse and resist amidst the ongoing legacy of white supremacy and historical oppressions—particularly in the midst of recent anti-CRT manifestations.

“I Value your Perspective and Voice but Only When...”: Institutional Co-Optation

Dra. Rivera's narratives reveal the internal and external struggles faced as she navigates daily microaggressions (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Solórzano, 1998) and institutional actions that delegitimize her identity and work as a Latina, CRT, education scholar. From an institutional perspective we see these same actions weaponized by institutional actors to dissuade Dra. Rivera from engaging in transformative and humanizing work. In other words, institutional actors, in these composite stories, Associate Dean Fairchild, Chris (department chair), and Bob (program chair), all work in tandem to dismiss, evade, and perpetually overwhelm Dra. Rivera with service requests that are disguised as “social justice” or “DEI” (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) work but instead serve as “a bunch of freedom checks [the institution] never intends to honor” (Bell, 1992, p. 19).

We saw Dra. Rivera receive various institutional freedom checks. For instance, Dra. Rivera was, like many FOC, lured to her institution via seductive tactics (Stanley, 2006), in this case a reduced course load and promises for change. These insidious tactics make potential Candidates of Color and CRT scholars think these institutions are different—that they are committed to social justice and DEI initiatives. This was further complicated when the Dean, a Man of Color, leveraged

these tactics. Through this particular Dean of Color's actions, we can assume internalized whiteness (Morales, et.al., 2021) was enacted as he has seemingly benefited from a system that reifies and rewards a proximity to whiteness transforming him into a token of racial equity. As noted by Greene (1999), "[a] regime of tokenism is one of symbolic equality in which the professional lives of tokens exist within the paradox of isolation as a person of color within a majority White institution and the heightened visibility and scrutiny to which professors of color are exposed" (p.179).

While hyper-aware of the institutional violence academia has inflicted on Communities of Color (including students, faculty, and staff), Dra. Rivera, and many like her, recognize the risks involved in entering a violent space and relationship with academia (Dutt-Ballerstadt, 2019), however, recognizing the risks and actually navigating the risks on a daily basis are two entirely different things. This is further compounded by the multidimensional nature of navigating predominantly white spaces as a multiply marginalized (Martinez, et. al., 2017) critical scholar. In other words, despite the fact that Dra. Rivera negotiated a contract that gave her five years of a 1:2 teaching load, she soon realized the excessive requests for service were not requests. Rather they revealed how her administrators truly thought of her: a mere symbol and token of diversity and equity that they could point to when it benefited them.

As presented, it is Dra. Rivera's gendered and raced identity along with her critical scholarship that the institution attempts to co-opt to better position and promote itself. On the one hand, Dra. Rivera is consistently reminded that her perspective is *too critical* and that her Latinidad is *too much* for a white palate, resulting in institutional actions that seek to silence, block, and dehumanize her and her work. For example, when Dra. Rivera provided the list of demands that emerged from undergrad SOC and the need to integrate CRT, faculty and administrators refused it, pushing back with claims that that would be too much for donors, alumni, and current students to support. On the other hand, Dra. Rivera's Latinidad, womanhood, motherhood, and criticality are put on full display to those looking upon the institution, such as when she is singled out for a *diversity* photo. She becomes a symbol that institutional actors can point to as a marker of DEI priorities. So while the institution may publicly proclaim to generically support social justice, equity, and inclusion publicly, in private spaces it intentionally intercepts, blocks, evades, co-opts, and/or criminalizes those who authentically seek to engage in transformative work. In the end, institutions and institutional actors often work to maintain systems that have benefited them, whereas anyone working to challenge the status quo risks being "called in to be called out."

"Que me Creen, ¿Una Pendeja?": (Re)clamando Power and Space in Academia

Dra. Rivera's critical raced-gendered epistemology allowed her the means to navigate the contradictions of the academy by actively critiquing experiences. Dra. Rivera traversed, survived, and actively nuanced the daily contradictions of the academy, using her critiques to find ways to speak out about injustices and advocate for SOC. This was seen when she accepted the forced labor of leading the ad hoc committee but leveraged it in support of SOC and the call for statements admonishing anti-CRT bills. Critical race theorists (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013) acknowledge this contradictory dynamic of educational structures, processes, and discourses holding potential to both oppress and marginalize and to emancipate and empower.

López (2003) noted, "There is a problematic silence that surrounds issues of racism—a silence that is difficult to broach. In fact, most people would rather not discuss racism whatsoever because the topic itself is uncomfortable and unpleasant" (p. 81). Dra. Rivera saw this first-hand as she engaged with Bob and Chris. Despite an opportunity to release a statement speaking against

current white-supremist CRT attacks, they opted to remain silent. Yet, this silence did not stop her and, as mentioned, she leveraged a public statement, supported by SOC's request. Amid the ontological dissonance she experienced, and in spite of receiving a bunch of freedom checks that are seemingly worthless (e.g., \$300 in PD funds), Dra. Rivera did not give up and her stories end on an empowering note—one where she is beginning to recognize institutional contradictions and reclamar [reclaim] her agency and her liberation.

From a methodological standpoint, leaving Dra. Rivera's story without resolution, engages readers to imagine what a solution might look like. A "critical raced-gendered epistemology, grounded in CRT and LatCrit, [...] affirm[s] experiences and responses to different forms of oppression and validates them as appropriate forms of data. By incorporating a counterstorytelling method [...], a story can be told from a non-majoritarian perspective—a story that [w]hite educators usually don't hear or tell (Delgado, 1989, 1993)" (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 118). While we certainly agree, we also argue that storytelling serves as an opportunity and space to (re)imagine possible alternatives and to do so without any immediate fear or risks of institutional gazes. We recognize that enacting acts of resistance includes undertaking additional risks (e.g., further marginalization, retaliation, and/or worse denial of tenure and/or promotion), especially now when CRT is being targeted, banned, and criminalized. In an effort to reduce this risk for readers, we hope that readers might not only see themselves in Dra. Rivera as she navigates the seemingly endless pliegues [folds] of institutional contradictions (Anzaldúa, 2007, 2013), but, through that familiarity, also dream of and rewrite a different reality—one that reclaims our/their humanity, dignity, and liberation from institutional constraints, gaze, and worthless freedom checks, and to imagine what actions Dra. Rivera—we—might take in this reclamando and liberatory process and journey.

“Apóyame o Haste a un Lado”

Understanding the experiences of FOC navigating the limitations, contradictions, and hostility of institutional structures and discourses in academia—and in teacher preparation programs in particular where anti-CRT bills are now impacting curricular and departmental decisions making—is an important move towards future action. These composite stories demonstrate the reach that anti-CRT legislation and public protest is having on higher education (Liou & Alvara, 2021) and in teacher preparation programs in particular (Jett et al., 2022). They make visible the operations of white supremacy and racism within the academy and help make sense of current (in)actions around CRT. The consistent evasion and intentional silence on the topic from university administrators reflects the strong hold that white supremacy has on the academy (López, 2003; Viesca & Gray, 2021). Such understanding is integral in order for FOC and other critically-minded faculty to mobilize through collective action across institutions. No matter the political climate, FOC need the unequivocal support and commitment from their institutions to fight for justice and anti-racism and prepare future teachers who can do the same within their own classrooms and schools. We invite readers to dream alongside us as we (re)imagine a different, not yet realized, academy.

More specifically, if academia and teacher preparation programs claim they want to increase the enrollment of SOC (Kohli et al., 2021) and recruit and retain FOC (Turner et al., 2008), support for CRT is essential and necessary. Following are suggestions (dreams) we offer for College of Education and university leadership to humanize, validate, uplift, and advance the work of FOC and CRT scholars in the midst of current anti-CRT pressures.

Institutional Mentorship

Mentorship has been a central component supporting our wellbeing. While we have experienced some formal support for mentoring, we have needed more and have organized ourselves in tight-knit and meaningful ways. We recommend leadership:

- Formally support mentoring opportunities, especially for/with FOC (Davis et al., 2021; Thorne et al., 2021). For example, a department might set up a mentoring system between more senior faculty and junior faculty members and fund meetings and resources. Additionally, support for mentorships across departments as well as institutions is crucial.
- Recognize and voice the need for those in positions of power, and those who hold privilege (e.g., white, male, and tenured faculty) to “pay it forward.” These groups must engage in conscious, strategic decisions around FOC’s service and teaching loads, equity assessments, and bias and discrimination they navigate in the classroom, on evaluations, and beyond. Additionally, those in positions of power should actively mentor FOC into leadership and critique inequitable advancement structures, while also learning from FOC’s concerns about roadblocks and needs for pathways (Gause, 2021).
- Create spaces for mentoring collectives to form. Institutions can provide resources for FOC to account for the time and leadership in developing organizations and groups (Han & Onchwari, 2018). When FOC organically form collectives, this should be valued and supported (e.g. through a dedicated space, institutional recognition, funding, counting toward promotion, etc.) (Pour-Khorshid, 2018).

Institutional Support

We have experienced helpful institutional structures (e.g., funding opportunities at the College level), but have found that more substantive support across all institutional levels is needed. Specifically, we suggest:

- Internal funding that supports FOC and is easily accessible, not requiring tedious amounts of labor to access such “support.”
- Available administrative labor to work *with* faculty, aiding in reports, scheduling, and other processes that take time away from teaching and scholarly work.
- A valuing and backing of the critical scholarship that FOC, and particularly CRT scholars, are hired to do. This includes leadership joining in and institutions responding when there is backlash or subversion against FOC (including curricular decisions and scholarship) by other faculty or students.
- A focus on diversifying practices in hiring (Kayes, 2006; Lopez-Perry et al., 2021). As a part of this, institutions should avoid a focus on hiring FOC into temporary and vulnerable positions so that FOC do not have to, in effect, undergo an extended institutional gaze and interview before they are awarded with a permanent position. Critical evaluation of the hiring practices of FOC must be consistently engaged in.
- Transparency about budgets, staffing decisions (including course releases), leadership

- opportunities, and other structures and processes at all levels (i.e., departmental, college, and university-wide) so that FOC are equitably included. Leadership should also create space for FOC to respond to structures and offer solutions to inequities as a part of this.
- Holistic support of mental, spiritual, and general well-being of faculty, especially for FOC. This might include built in mental-health days, access to and coverage of mental health providers, access to meditation spaces, time for physical activity and free access to recreational spaces, support (e.g., adequate leave beyond a few weeks that isn't hidden and doesn't require exhaustive processes to access) during times of prenatal, post-natal, parenting, medical, and other needs.

Institutional Cultural Change

The previous recommendation lists point to a far larger and necessary need—a cultural shift within the academy. Universities have been historically constructed to center the ontologies and epistemologies of white men of upper classes in Western societies, preserving their social standings and the status quo. The very cultural foundations, then, of these institutions are hostile to FOC and CRT scholars who hold collectivist and critical orientations. We dream of:

- Promotion, tenure, and retention metrics and structures that intentionally center social justice and equity work with this commitment required, recognized, and strongly valued across teaching, service, and scholarship. This includes member selection for evaluation committees.
- Leadership and tenured faculty that engage in work before asking vulnerable faculty to lead projects, chair committees, direct programs, and take on additional service roles. This includes respecting the nuances of FOC's work and not simply lumping all "justice" work together (Arnold et al., 2021). While being protected, FOC and CRT scholar's voices will be amplified and valued by leadership.
- A compensation that equitably honors all faculty across the university so that a faculty member in one college does not receive a generous wage, while a faculty member in another college (e.g., education) qualifies for government assistance in order to support her family.
- A collectivist orientation in which collaboration is normalized across all levels of institutions rather than positioned as suspect (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2022). This includes valuing co-written articles and creative scholarship as much as or more than individual papers written in white masculinist and Western formats. Co-teaching and other collectivist approaches to teaching, service, and scholarship would also be supported, not just through appreciation, but through formal structures (e.g., a reconstructed teaching load).
- Programs, departments, divisions/colleges, and universities that change the culture from one that avoids conversations centered on race and that marginalizes, penalizes, and criminalizes racial justice and equity work to one that authentically and meaningfully embodies and lives it (Pham, 2021).

Conclusion: An Invitation

Through our experiences and the process of developing this manuscript, including the composite character, Dra. Rivera, and her stories, we were reminded that it is a desperate struggle to stop and imagine what could be. Ultimately, we are able to engage in this work out of our collectivity and, thus, we end by inviting others to dream with us and, from a CRT foundation, begin adding counterstories, invoking a decolonial imagining that works toward another academia—an academia for all. Our hope, then, is that this manuscript is a catalyst for you to join us in this work. Through the collective bringing together of our own and other's stories, then, we assert: academic institutions need to “Apóyame o haste a un lado.”

Dedication

Noriah Hope [January 17, 2017 to March 23, 2022]: We dedicate this manuscript in your memory and the beautiful presence you had on this Earth. This manuscript was a labor of love between us and we know you're smiling down on us from Heaven.

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