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# “Universities ain’t what they seem like on TV”: A Critical Race Counterstory as a Literature Review about Students of Color in Higher Education

Martín Alberto Gonzalez



Dr. Martín Alberto Gonzalez is a first-generation Xicano raised in Oxnard, California. He completed his undergraduate studies at California State University, Northridge, then earned his doctorate from the Cultural Foundations of Education Department at Syracuse University, where he became the first Ford Foundation Predoctoral Fellow in the university's history. He is currently an assistant professor in the [Chicano/Latino](#)

[Studies Program](#) at Portland State University. In 2021, his dissertation, which is a collection of stories about racism and resistance in higher education, received two national dissertation awards. Because he personally observed his older siblings and his community's talents and interests be denied and repressed due to a lack of resources and opportunities, he became interested in educational issues related to Latinx students across all grade levels. Aside from teaching in a university setting, he is regularly invited to K-12 schools as a guest speaker, and even has a TEDx talk titled, "[Boxnard](#)," which is available on YouTube. As an educator-scholar-activist, he takes pride in telling stories that challenge stereotypes and empower his community and communities alike. He is the author of *21 Miles of Scenic Beauty... and then Oxnard: Counterstories and Testimonies* and *The Key to the City | La Llave de la Ciudad*.

## BRIEF BACKGROUND ABOUT THIS COUNTERSTORY

Like most doctoral students, I was required to write a dissertation to satisfy the requirements for a doctorate degree. And so, from 2017 to 2020, I collected data via in-depth interviews, participant observations, document analyses, and pláticas to document the educational experiences of 20 Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) undergraduate students at a private, predominantly white university in the Northeast. Specifically, these students were part of ¡Poder Xicanx!,<sup>1</sup> an in/formal MMAX-based student organization recently established by a group of students who wanted to educate the university community about the richness and diversity of the MMAX culture through workshops, screenings, lectures, music, and so on. Many of these MMAX students I worked with were first-generation and low-income students, and these shared experiences kept us attuned with one another and allowed us to cocreate spaces of belonging, critical thought, and empowerment.

Still, as a first-generation, low-income Xicano student from Oxnard, California, higher education, and especially the realm of academia, is very foreign to me, and the thought of writing a traditional dissertation did not sound appealing to me for various

## Abstract

As a doctoral student, I was tasked to write a literature review for my dissertation, which focused on the experiences of Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx undergraduate students at a predominantly white university in the Northeast. Rather than writing a traditional literature review, I wrote a critical race theory counterstory to convey my findings. Drawing on a systematic analysis of books, peer-reviewed articles, and reports related to Students of Color in higher education, I wrote a story about a first-generation Xicano student who does a college-going presentation at his former high school about racism and resistance in higher education. Specifically, from my analysis of literature, I created four subthemes addressed in this story: "The Impact of Segregation," "From a Brown Space to a Hella white Space," "Microaggressions in Higher Education," and "Resistance and Counterspaces." Ultimately, I argue that counterstorytelling allowed me to stay true to myself while making my research accessible to nonacademic communities.

## Keywords

Counterstorytelling; Racial Microaggressions; Mexican Students; Critical Race Methodology; Racism in Higher Education

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym for name of organization.

reasons. The primary reason was because I knew a traditional dissertation filled with academic jargon would not be accessible to my community and the communities of the MMAX students who participated in my research project. In essence, I would spend six years in a doctoral program just to write a very lengthy paper that would not be read by read my family and community, not necessarily because they cannot read but because a traditional dissertation is structured and written in a way that is uninviting to those who are not in academia. Fortunately, as a doctoral student, I came across and became a student of critical race theory (CRT) counterstorytelling. I was assigned and went out of my way to read the works of academic counterstorytellers such as Richard Delgado, Patricia J. Williams, Derrick Bell, Tara J. Yosso, Daniel G. Solórzano, Aja Y. Martinez, and many more. Their counterstories created an avenue, a foundation, and a possibility for me to write my own stories in academia.

It became obvious to me that CRT research methods would help me better understand the experiences of Latinx students in higher education without undervaluing their voices, ultimately challenging traditional forms of research (Pizarro, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). I realized storytelling as a research method is very important because it disrupts harshly misleading, oppressive stories, narratives, conventions, and understandings of People of Color that were established by empowered groups long ago (Delgado, 1993). Specifically, counterstorytelling allowed me to tell stories of people whose experiences are seldom told while also exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege grounded in inaccurate, oppressive notions (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). In this way, storytelling became a useful tool for me as a Xicano because stories “invite the listener to suspend judgment, listen for the story’s point, and test it against his or her [or their] own version of reality” (Delgado, 1989, p. 2440).

It is especially important to note that counterstories are not just made-up stories to blow off steam by venting or ranting regarding one’s own racial struggle and that these counterstories are grounded in experiential knowledge and other forms of data (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Counterstorytelling as a research method and methodology allows us to humanize People of Color, a humanity too often denied (Martinez, 2020). So, in the tradition of CRT counterstorytelling, I wrote my dissertation through stories, literally. Every single chapter in my dissertation is a counterstory. Similar to traditional dissertations, my dissertation included an introduction, literature review, methods, findings, and conclusion. However, unlike traditional dissertations, every chapter in my dissertation is a counterstory.

Truth be told, I have never seen a dissertation that is solely storytelling in the field of education. Even the dissertations I looked over that utilized CRT counterstorytelling were traditional in the

sense that they had conventional introductions, literature reviews, methods, and conclusions sections to justify the usage of CRT counterstorytelling as a research method. There is nothing wrong with that. The point I am making here is *not* that my approach is better than writing a traditional dissertation. I see both as valuable. After all, I rely on traditionally written research articles and dissertations as data for my counterstories. Instead, what I mean is exactly what I say at the beginning of this paragraph, which is that I have simply never seen a dissertation that is solely storytelling in the field of education.

The fact that I never read or heard of a dissertation that was solely storytelling in the field of education was discouraging. By way of carne asadas and other family get-togethers, I am a trained storyteller, and I wanted to use my storytelling ability as my research method for my dissertation because I wanted to make my research accessible to la gente from my community and communities alike. Gente who are not in academia. *Gente* who can follow a story, yet do not have time, interest, and energy to decipher academic jargon. In the same way the renowned law professor and critical race theory scholar Derrick Bell uses storytelling to simplify complicated verbiage in the United States constitution (Martinez, 2020), I needed to write stories to illustrate the racially hostile campus environments Latinx students must navigate. And so, for my dissertation, I wrote stories. I stood on the shoulders of the giants before me like Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Patricia J. Williams, Derrick Bell, Tara J. Yosso, Daniel G. Solórzano, Aja Y. Martinez, and many others and used CRT counterstorytelling throughout my entire dissertation.

It is in this context I would like to introduce the following counterstory. As mentioned earlier, my dissertation focused on the experiences of MMAX students at a predominantly white university in the Northeast. Therefore, this counterstory is a literature review about Students of Color in higher education.<sup>2</sup> For those who are not familiar, a literature review is basically an overview of published work about a specific topic. A literature review is useful for two main reasons: It supplements the author’s overall argument, and it demonstrates due diligence on behalf of the author by demonstrating that they have investigated what other scholars in their field have found. In this particular story, my argument is that Latinx students, along with other Students of Color, suffer severely from climate-related minority-status stressors at their respective predominantly white universities and that they resist in unique ways, such as by creating counterspaces. Basically, Students of Color are discriminated against in higher education because of their race or ethnicity, yet they still find a way to complete their studies by relying on one another for support. So, I spent countless hours conducting a systematic analysis of literature (books, peer-reviewed articles, reports, etc.) related to Latinx students in higher education, and I supplemented this literature

2 Throughout this manuscript, I use Students of Color interchangeably with Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) and Latinx students because MMAX and Latinx students fall under the broader category of Students of Color.

with my experiences and cultural intuition as a Xicano (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

From this analysis, I created four subthemes. The first subtheme is titled “The Impact of Segregation,” which highlights the detrimental effects of segregation and how Latinxs are disproportionately impacted by segregation. Next, “From a Brown Space to a Hella White Space” underscores how Latinx students’ transition into a white mainstream campus is challenging because a white-supremacist culture is engrained in university spaces. Further, the subtheme “Microaggressions in Higher Education” provides insights on the various racial microaggressions and discrimination experienced by Latinx students and Students of Color in higher education. Last, “Resistance and Counterspaces” focuses on the numerous ways Latinx students resist and navigate their racially hostile university campus environments and how these students rely on one another for support, affirmation, and motivation. Taking these themes together, I wrote the counterstory that follows using the literature I found on Latinx students in higher education.<sup>3</sup> You’ll randomly see citations throughout this story, and I urge you to look up the readings yourself to learn more about the topic at hand.<sup>4</sup>

This counterstory is based on a real experience. Early in my doctoral studies, I was readily invited by high schools in my hometown (Oxnard, CA) to talk about college, and over time, I made it my responsibility to discuss racism in higher education with Latinx high-school students (Gonzalez, 2022a). My hope was that I would initiate a conversation that went beyond academic preparation, which I felt schools focus exclusively on, and move toward preparation for the culture shock some Latinx students would experience at universities, especially predominantly white universities. It is important to note that this counterstory is not and shouldn’t be taken as a step-by-step manual on how to use storytelling for a dissertation or literature review. Sometime in the future, I hope to write a methodological paper in which I discuss in more detail the different steps I took to make this counterstory happen. For this reason, I intentionally did not include a lengthy methodological section to explain why storytelling as a research method is valid and credible. As is, this counterstory is simply for you to read, enjoy, and realize that storytelling matters, and I don’t need to justify why I chose a form of communication (stories) most familiar to my community and others alike to write about something I care deeply about (Latinx students).

## THE COUNTERSTORY: THE SETTING AND CONTEXT

The past few years have witnessed a huge push by the high-school district to invite home-grown positive role models to Saviors High

School in Chiques, California, a predominantly Latinx community in Southern Califas.<sup>5</sup> Without a doubt, college-going rates have been on the rise. School administrators have concluded that more exposure to “positive role models” would directly encourage and inspire Latinx students to do more with their lives and graduate from college. So, Ms. Liberty, a white woman who was not originally from Chiques, took matters into her own hands. She had recently received a promotion to become the director of the college-going program for underrepresented students at Saviors High School.

This college-going program became a superficial platform for Ms. Liberty to seek out opportunities to directly inspire her students to shoot for the stars. In other words, this program became a stage for her to accomplish her *Freedom Writers* Hollywood moment, in which she, as a nice white lady, “saves” Brown kids from their impoverished communities and from the world (Yosso & Gracia, 2008). Yet, many of her efforts were very unsuccessful and fell short of Oscar-nominated endings. Still, she used her position as the director of this college-going program to attempt to replicate her flawed equal-opportunity fantasy.

Using the school district’s initiative of inviting guest speakers to her advantage, she established a semiannual College-Going Day and invited a handful of former students who had made it past their first year at their university. In the form of panels and single presentations, successful Brown college students would come back to Saviors High School and detail their academic journeys. The official College-Going Day became a thing, and Ms. Liberty was the proud founder. These conversations and presentations served as basic informational sessions about college. Aware that her students were first-generation with very little awareness about college, Ms. Liberty created prewritten questions for her guests every semester. However, because these questions were written by Ms. Liberty, they did not warrant important conversations or thoughts about the harsh realities of being a, if not the only, Brown person at a predominantly white university—an experience known all too well by her Brown students (Yosso et al., 2009). Very rarely did anyone bring up cultural or social barriers in higher education, such as racism, classism, or sexism.

For years, the college-going panels and discussions remained bland, until Ms. Liberty sought out Alberto, her former student who was eight months away from receiving his doctorate in education. Alberto was the perfect fit as a presenter for the College-Going Day. First, he was a low-income, first-generation Brown college student. Second, he was born and raised in Chiques, California. Third, he was young, funny, and “hip.” And last and more important, he was a direct beneficiary of the college-going program Ms.

<sup>3</sup> This is a modified, shorter version of the entire counterstory.

<sup>4</sup> If you can’t find or do not have access to a specific citation or reading, please email me directly and I will investigate the best way to get you the reading without infringing on any copyrights.

<sup>5</sup> Both Saviors High School and Chiques, CA, are pseudonyms.

Liberty currently oversaw. To put it simply, Alberto was the primary case-in-point example that her program worked but that students were simply not taking advantage of it.

Undoubtedly, in terms of her students' supposed lack of motivation, Ms. Liberty was extremely confident that Alberto was her missing link. To her, Alberto was a walking definition of the American Dream. You know, a true exemplar of "from rags to riches." He had escaped poverty, made it to college, graduated from college, and gone on to pursue his doctorate. In reality, all Ms. Liberty needed was for Alberto to instill motivation in her students through his mere presence so they would believe they could do more with their lives and one day become a doctor just like him. So, without knowing his mission and newly founded purpose to empower his community, Ms. Liberty naïvely invited Alberto to become the keynote speaker at the fifth semiannual College-Going Day at Saviors High School, and he agreed without hesitation.

Although Alberto was about to receive his doctorate in education, he specifically specialized in human rights, racism, and social justice during his graduate studies. Even at such a young age, he had various experiences of activism and protests under his belt. His work regarding the liberation of his own Brown people made other people feel very uncomfortable. Supposedly, we live in a postracial society where race no longer matters and racism doesn't exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Lopez, 2010; Wise, 2010). However, Alberto preached the exact opposite. Alberto was a firm believer that racism is exactly why his gente from Chiques rarely "make it out." His interests in social justice stemmed from his experiences and the observations he made growing up in Chiques, where he witnessed his own community being persistently excluded from college-going resources and facing lowered expectations because they were Brown (García et al., 2012; García & Yosso, 2013).

Nonetheless, Ms. Liberty naïvely asked Alberto to do his thing, so he did, radically. Unbeknownst to Ms. Liberty, Alberto had prior experience giving presentations about the importance of not only going to a university but also navigating and graduating from one. However, unlike any of the ordinary college-going presentations Ms. Liberty had seen in her professional-development conferences, Alberto's presentation focused on racism in higher education. After all, that was what he experienced personally, studied for years, and what he wrote about extensively in his dissertation. In particular, his presentations were specifically tailored for Students of Color from low-income communities similar to his own. In his presentations, he made it a priority to spread the knowledge about social injustices in higher education. He intentionally shared the side of universities seldom shared—the side of the story that exposes universities' structured flaws and racist institutional norms (Harper, 2012).

Needless to say, Alberto's college presentation was one for the books. Because of his astonishing credentials and successful educational journey, Ms. Liberty had mistakenly assigned Alberto

the biggest audience of the day. Over 300 anxious, high-potential high-school students packed into a run-down auditorium—some of whom were already accepted and planned to attend prestigious four-year universities—awaited Alberto's carefully prepared presentation. Given Ms. Liberty's punctuality, the presentation started at exactly at 10:15 AM, 10 minutes after the school bell, giving 40 minutes to spare for the actual presentation. That is, Alberto had 40 minutes to challenge students' expectations about college.

At precisely 10:15 AM, Ms. Liberty quieted the crowd by using the "clap-if-you-can-hear me" exercise. As soon as the crowd quieted, she began by introducing Alberto.

"Hi everyone. You're in luck! We have a very special treat for you. Today we have a very exciting presentation by an extremely successful guest, Alberto," Ms. Liberty welcomed the crowd, which was still chatting quietly without paying attention.

"Alberto is just like you. He was one of our students not too long ago. He graduated from Saviors High School and went straight to a four-year university. Now he lives in New York, where he has been studying for the past four years to become a doctor in education. Look at him. He's young and very successful. He was the first in his family to go college, just like a lot of you. And he came from your 'hood'—Chiques. He wouldn't have gone to college if it wasn't for this college-going program. The same one you're in. There is no excuse. Please help me welcome back the very successful and smart Alberto!" Ms. Liberty stated excitedly while she smiled and showed her pearly white teeth.

Unlike other days, students didn't mumble "Who cares?" underneath their breaths as they had done in the past with more traditional, nerdy, and preppy presenters. Instead, they quickly and quietly gave Alberto their undivided attention. The word "New York," coupled with "Chiques," certainly attracted their attention. But more than anything, they couldn't believe that Alberto, dressed as is, in ripped jeans, rocking clean BRED Jordan 1s shoes, a fresh bald fade, and a black t-shirt with "¡Viva Chiques!" in graffiti text, was successful academically.

Like most of society, the students thought that in order to be successful academically, a person has to give in, that is, assimilate to the academic culture, speak properly, and forget about the "hood" life and their own home culture (Rodriguez, 1974, 1983). Along these lines, they thought that to be successful in school meant you must "act white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Yet, here was Alberto, in front of their very own eyes, swaggered out from his head to his toes and about to become a doctor. To them, Alberto's commitment to and pursuit of an education while staying true to himself culturally directly debunked the "acting-white" thesis (Carter, 2005). Rather than allowing the university to define who he was—how he dressed, spoke, acted, and more—and change him entirely, Alberto defined himself through his unapologetic demeanor and sought to change the university culture (Rendón, 1992).

Unsurprisingly, as soon as Alberto was handed the microphone to speak, the students stared at him dumbfounded, in silence. "What's good? What's happening, y'all? How's everybody doing? Y'all chillin'?" Alberto asked the crowd smoothly, as if he was emceeing a hip-hop concert.

The students remained in shock at his swagger until someone abruptly shouted from the back of the auditorium, "Ayeeeee. I'm hella chillin'."

The students laughed aloud while nodding their heads in agreement. Ms. Liberty giggled, not because of laughter, but because she was nervous.

"Coo. I'm glad y'all are chillin'. I've carefully put together a college presentation just for you, specifically for mi gente from Chiques. I have experienced what it means to be university student personally and now I study it for a living. I read books and reports about higher education. For the past five years, I have been part of multiple research projects where I had the opportunity to interview university students to get a better sense of their experiences. Today, I am going to share some those reports, along with some of my experiences and findings," Alberto stated eloquently.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

"Like many of you, I was the first of my family to go to a university. I didn't know what to expect. Like most first-generation students, I couldn't ask my siblings or parents because they had no idea. Do you? What are some barriers or difficulties you think you will come across as a university students?" Alberto asked, hoping some students had had conversations about this topic.

Immediately, Ms. Liberty stared at her students for responses, knowing she had had this conversation with them.

Without raising her hand, a student in the front row responded, "Well, I am not the best writer, so I am assuming writing papers or just adjusting to college expectations in general. Ms. Liberty has shared with us that she believes that most students do not finish college because of academic and social difficulties (Tinto, 1993). For example, some students don't have good study habits, so they stop going to school because they can't keep up with the school workload."

Ms. Liberty nodded in agreement, confident she was correct in her assumption.

"Ahh. Good. That's exactly the response I expected. Most of the times I ask that question, that's the response I get! Of course, academic and social difficulties are important barriers, but it gets more complicated than that," Alberto responded in encouragement.

## THE IMPACT OF SEGREGATION

"Look around you. Look at the person to your left and to your right? Do you see anything fishy? Do you see a pattern?" Alberto said in a suspenseful tone.

Everyone followed Alberto's directions, yet no one had the nerve to answer. They didn't seem to quite understand what Alberto was talking about.

After five silent seconds, Alberto intervened. "It's all good. I didn't notice it either when I was younger. Have y'all noticed that most of your classmates, if not all, are Brown!?"

The students looked around in shock as they finally realized what Alberto was talking about.

He continued, "This isn't a surprise! Educational researchers have found Latino students have been excluded from serious desegregation efforts and are becoming even more segregated than Black students in Southern and Western regions (Orfield & Lee, 2006, p. 4). It's not a coincidence this is happening here in Chiques. In fact, in a more recent report, researchers found that at a national level, exactly 60 years after the *Brown* decision, which was supposed to end racial segregation in schools, students are still segregated by race (Orfield et al., 2014)."

"But why does it matter that there's segregation. So what? Aren't all schools the same?" a student asserted, harmlessly.

Alberto disagreed, "The importance of desegregated schools falls on the foundation that some schools, often predominantly white, offer more opportunities, such as more demanding courses, higher college going and graduation rates, better equipment and facilities, more qualified teachers, and so on (Orfield et al., 2014). On the other hand, the overall environment of particular segregated schools feels completely different in that the conditions contribute to a climate of hopelessness (Du Bois, 1935)."

Before any student could provide input, Alberto continued, "For example, Jonathan Kozol (2005), a former teacher turned researcher, explains this in his book, *The Shame of the Nation*. In this book, he documents how messed up segregated schools are in impoverished Communities of Color. He exposes the ugly truth. Some of the classrooms he taught in were so cold during winter the students had to wear their coats to class. Another school smelled so nasty because of an overflow of sewage the city had to shut it down" (p. 7). Imagine that!"

"That's believable. The schools around here are surrounded by pesticides (California Environmental Health Tracking Program, 2014). How we supposed to stay focused if we slowly dying out here?" a Latina student wearing a "Track & Field" sweatshirt protested.

"Where's the lie?" Alberto paused to make sure students processed and comprehended the severity in this message.

After ten long, thoughtful seconds, he proceeded. "This book made me realize many schools serving mostly Black and Brown students are overcrowded and have less funding and resources, which creates a sense of desperation. White schools are given the money and attention, but Black and Brown schools are not (Kozol, 2005, p. 7). This nation should feel ashamed they allow this to happen!"

"Wow! This whole time I thought Saviors High School was super diverse, but now that I think about, it ain't at all. Look! It's all Brown people. Hispanics. Latinos. Mexican. Mind you, beautiful Brown people. But Brown people nonetheless. Well, except for the teachers. They're mostly white," a student confessed jokingly, looking for affirmation.

Laughter filled the auditorium. Alberto raised his eyebrows and he smiled. "She said it. All jokes aside, across the nation, teachers are mostly white, too (Taie & Goldring, 2017).

"Nonetheless, that's a very good observation," Alberto said in encouragement. "And that's exactly why I am here today. To talk to you about this exact issue." He grabbed the computer clicker from the podium and then clicked to his title page as he read it aloud: "Universities ain't what they seem like on TV: University Preparation for Students of Color."

A few chuckles came from the crowd, but a majority of the students made duck lips in awe.

"That's right. These universities ain't what they seem." Alberto clicked to the next slide.

## FROM A BROWN SPACE TO A HELLA WHITE SPACE

"Here's a thought. Imagine going from a predominantly Brown community like Chiques where everyone, for the most part, looks, dresses, and speaks like you, to an almost all-white space where you are immediately alienated simply because of the color of your skin or the minor accent in your English (Jones et al., 2002)," Alberto stated.

He continued without skipping a beat. "Because we don't go to school with or get a chance to interact with white students before we attend university, Students of Color like us Brown students find ourselves navigating a foreign space when attending a predominantly white university. The very little exposure to white people partially explains why efforts to help Latinx students transition into a white mainstream campus culture have been unsuccessful (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Tatum, 2007). The other part of the explanation has to do with the fact that predominantly white universities are culturally hostile places for Latinx students (Harwood

et al., 2012; Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Yosso et al., 2009). In other words, this is why I believe Latinx students are not completing their studies at universities."

"That makes sense. Universities don't know what to do with us—our swag, and our brilliance. But I do have a question. What does 'Latinx' mean? Why do you use a the 'x'?" a student with a basketball jersey asked timidly, while everyone else wondered the same thing.

"Ahhh. Good question!" Alberto responded. "The term Latinx is used to replace Latinas/os. It is a gender-neutral label for Latina/o. Things are changing nowadays and not everyone identifies as a boy or girl, so the 'x' begins to disrupt traditional notions of gender and aims to make society more inclusive of all gender identities (Salinas & Lozano, 2019)."

"Does this make sense?" Alberto asked.

The students nodded their heads slowly up and down.

Alberto looked lost. "Okay. So what was I talking about?"

"About how we have too much swag and how we are too beautiful for white universities," a student reminded Alberto, laughing out loud.

"That's right!" Alberto snapped his fingers and then clicked to the next slide. "Things get complicated when you are a beautiful Brown person at a predominantly white university. Why? Look at the screen."

Alberto pointed at the screen with the laser installed in his clicker. "Well because most of these universities were never meant for us. For example, a professor of American history at MIT recently published a book in which he carefully documents that Ivy League schools such as Princeton and Yale were established and have historically remained accessible exclusively for whites only (Wilder, 2014). In this book, the professor argues that these universities were literally built on the backs of Enslaved Black people but were never made for them. This means universities' buildings, structures, practices, and ideologies help reproduce white students' privileged status while reaffirming the subordinate statuses of Students of Color (Cabrera, 2014; González, 2002; Gusa, 2010; Lipsitz, 1995). At universities, Students of Color encounter barriers white students don't (Solórzano et al., 2000; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Yosso et al., 2009)."

Alberto paused. He knew what he said was very theoretical for high-school students. "Y'all look hella confused," he laughed. "What I'm trying to say is that even though more and more Brown and Black students like y'all are attending universities, your university experience will be drastically different than that of white students. You will perceive and experience the campus climate

differently than your white classmates (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin & Reason, 2005). Trust me, this will make more sense throughout the presentation," he assured the students.

He glanced at Ms. Liberty, and she looked extremely anxious. Her arms were firmly crossed, and she had a pouty face, as if she had just dropped her ice cream sandwich.

Ms. Liberty wasn't expecting a presentation about racism in higher education. She thought that, rather than "keeping it real," Alberto was going to preach the good word of meritocracy. You know, the good ol' "I'm from the 'hood and I did it by working hard. So can you. No excuses (Rodriguez, 1974, 1983; Villanueva, 1993)." But it became obvious to her that Alberto had different intentions—he was on a mission to expose what he considered the hypocrisies of higher education and to educate his community about racism at universities.

Alberto continued unapologetically. He clicked to the next slide. "In most university brochures like the one pictured in this slide, college represents a time of unbridled optimism, exciting challenges, and myriad opportunities. Few students would anticipate their university experience might be marked by racism, sexism, and classism. Yet, this is the hardcore reality for Brown students, which results in them questioning their academic merit, cultural knowledge, and physical presence (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 659)."

A student interrupted without raising his hand, "Yo! This is facts! I remember my older prima who went to a fancy university stopped going because she felt like that university was not for her, culturally, socially, and academically. She was constantly questioned about her academic abilities (Smith et al., 2007). She told my tía she felt isolated at the university—like she didn't belong or something. Well, at least that's what she told her mom. We couldn't believe her because she was the smartest in our family, yet she didn't graduate with her degree (Hurtado et al., 1996)."

"Sorry to hear about your prima. But Dang! You beat me to the punch line!" Alberto added while he moved on to his next slide, "Yes, that's exactly what happens! There's an actual word that describes what your prima experienced. Researchers call it 'imposter syndrome,' which is this idea that Students of Color feel isolated or as if they do not belong at the university because they feel they are not qualified, when in reality they are. Students of Color often ask themselves, How is it that I 'arrived' when so many others like me haven't? Will someone discover a mistake was made and I don't really belong here? How long will it take for 'them' to realize I am an imposter, an 'other,' I'm not 'one of them'? (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 485). Imposter syndrome places the blame on Students of Color rather than addressing the hostile and toxic campus environment that makes these students feel as if they are 'imposters' when they are not (Hollingsworth, 2022)."

"Dang! That's cold. It's a Cole World out there," the same student remarked quietly, referencing the rapper J. Cole. "You know, I once heard someone talk about how sometimes student athletes get questioned, too. Like they're only at school for sports and not because they want an education."

"I've heard those conversations, too," Alberto nodded in agreement. "Not just sports, though. But a study documented experiences of Students of Color whose abilities and success have been questioned because of programs such as affirmative action, a policy that gives opportunities to members of groups known to have been discriminated against historically (Solórzano et al., 2000)."

Alberto took a deep breath. "But don't ever let anyone tell you that you don't deserve to be at a university. I believe in you! You're not an imposter! You can't be an imposter, you're from Chiques! We are too real! The streets educate us, so we're ready for anything!"

## MICROAGGRESSIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

He drank some water and moved on to the next slide. "After all, universities allow for this to happen. Latinx students suffer severely from climate-related minority-status stressors. That is, various forms of racial discrimination, whether overt or covert, have a depressing effect on Latinx students' adjustment in the academic and social arenas, attachment to the institution, and personal-emotional adjustment (Hurtado et al., 1996)."

"Oh!!" Exclaimed another student who was sitting near the closest aisle to Alberto.

"Yes?" Alberto pointed at the student.

"I think I know where you are going with this one!" the student stated with confidence.

"Okay. You tell me," Alberto replied patiently.

"I saw a YouTube video that talked about microaggressions. It said that whenever someone faces discrimination it's called a microaggression, I think. I don't quite remember what exactly microaggressions mean, but that video reminds me of what you're talking about. Am I on to something?" the student asked, unsure if she was correct.

"Have y'all seen this presentation already?" Alberto responded sarcastically.

"No!!!" the students yelled all at once.

"You're definitely on to something," Alberto admitted as he clicked ahead exactly three slides. "Since y'all want to act so advanced, I am going to skip a few slides."



"Ahh. Here it is. They're called 'racial microaggressions.' Can someone please read the definition on the slide loud and clear?" Alberto requested.

Immediately, a student volunteered and read the slide accordingly: "First coined by Pierce in 1970, 'racial microaggressions' refer to subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs' (Sue et al., 2007, pp. 272–273)."

"Thank you!" Alberto responded. "Racial microaggressions have also been described as subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward People of Color, often automatically or unconsciously (Solórzano et al., 2000). Simply stated, microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send degrading messages to People of Color because they belong to a racial minority group (Sue et al., 2007)."

"Now, do y'all think Latinx students at universities experience racial microaggressions?" Alberto asked in a suspenseful tone.

A collective "Yup!" came from the students.

"Shoot! We don't gotta go that far. I experience microaggressions here at this high school (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). My teacher doesn't even try to pronounce my birth name. Instead of calling me María, with a heavy accent over the 'í,' she calls me Mary," a student stated loudly as she curled her hair with her index finger and rolled her eyes at Ms. Liberty.

Ms. Liberty remained quiet and ashamed—she was naïvely unaware of her offensive exchanges.

Alberto disrupted the awkwardness. "Latinx students at universities absolutely experience racial microaggressions, which ultimately result in emotional, mental, and physical strain (Yosso et al., 2009). It ain't a joke! These microaggression are so emotionally and physically draining the damage of them has been referred to as 'racial battle fatigue' (Smith, 2004). It's a war zone out there, y'all! The real life Fortnite, but with racism."

Laughter filled the auditorium.

"It's kind of funny, but not really," Alberto quieted the crowd. "There are so many monsters in higher education. I'm not talking about cute monsters like in the movie, *Monsters, Inc.* I am talking about systemic monsters...monsters like white supremacy, settler colonialism, racism, erasure, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism (Tachine, 2022). These monsters will tear you down slowly. These monsters will tell you that you do not belong on campus. That you are an imposter. These monsters will give rise to so many racial microaggressions."

"But like what are some examples of the racial microaggressions that happen at universities? I'm going to one next year, so I want to know," a boy asked innocently while adjusting his reading glasses.

His classmates remained quiet as they wondered the same thing.

"Well," Alberto answered, excited, "A well-known educational researcher from UCLA by the name Dr. Daniel Solórzano (1998) found Latinx students experience a variety of discriminatory occurrences in an academic setting, many of which are downplayed or oftentimes unnoticed by offenders."

"Like what?" a student wondered.

"Well, in particular he discovered three forms of racial and gender microaggressions Latinx students suffer from. One is that Latinx students experience a sense of feeling out of place because of their race or gender or both. This is kind of like what happened to the prima from earlier." Alberto referred to the student who spoke about his older cousin who didn't graduate from her university.

"Another form of microaggressions he discovered was that professors have lower expectations of Latinx students (Solórzano, 1998)," Alberto said.

"Like the professors don't think Brown students are smart enough?" a Latino student suggested.

"Algo así," Alberto responded in Spanish, unapologetically. "I know for a fact professors question whether Students of Color wrote their papers when they use 'fancy' words."

"OMG! I saw that on Instagram," a student interrupted accidentally.

Alberto laughed. "Instagram? What you mean?"

"A couple years ago, a blog post called 'Academia, Love Me Back' by Tiffany Martínez (2016) went viral. It was all over social media. Twitter and Instagram, especially!" the student responded.

"It sounds familiar." Alberto squinted his eyes. "Tell us more."

"So, basically a Latina student wrote a paper in college and included the word 'hence' in her paper. When she received her paper back, the instructor circled the word 'hence' and wrote, 'This is not your word,' with 'not' underlined twice!"

Everyone, including Alberto, sighed loudly.

"Shake my head!" Alberto asserted, while literally shaking his head. "Unfortunately, that's a perfect example of lowered expectations. It sucks because I feel the only time expectations are high is when Students of Color are called upon as experts of their own

race and ethnicity to explain why their people are the way they are (Solórzano et al., 2002), which is also problematic AF.”

The students in the audience stared at Alberto, silent and intrigued.

“What’s the last form of microaggression,” someone reminded Alberto.

“Oh! That’s right! The last form of microaggression is straight up accounts of both subtle and not-so-subtle sexist and racist incidents (Solórzano, 1998),” Alberto explained.

“Whatchu mean by sub-tle? What’s sub-tle mean?” another student stuttered, trying to pronounce “subtle.”

“Su-tle,” Alberto enunciated slowly to help the student pronounce it correctly. “Su-tle racism basically means it’s very hidden or difficult to analyze.”

“It’s like a backhanded compliment,” the student next him explained. “Like when someone tries to compliment you, but it’s hellu rude. Like bruhhh.”

“YES! That’s it.” Alberto chuckled. “For example, racial microaggressions can result from subtle backhanded compliments, such as ‘You speak such good English,’ ‘You’re not like the rest of them,’ ‘If only there were more of them like you’ (Solórzano, 1998). Like, for reals? White people really think these are nice compliments, but in reality they are depressingly offensive.”

“Hmmm hmmm. That’s right!” a student agreed while loudly chewing his gum.

“A more recent study also found similar results. In this study, Latinx students experienced the following at their respective university: getting stared at and feeling isolated, online hatred, being ignored at the bus stop and an angry bus driver, stereotyping, and insensitivity and ignorance (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013). In my own research, I have interviewed Mexican, Mexican American, and Xicanx (MMAX) university students the past three years. Unfortunately, the findings aren’t any different,” Alberto confessed.

Alberto clicked his way to the slide with his research findings. “In an in-depth interview I conducted, a Mexican American senior majoring in political science assured me she faces discrimination frequently by classmates on campus: ‘Yeah, I mean . . . even just Cinco de Mayo passing around the corner, that was last weekend or something. It’s just something . . . people who would just say rude stuff to you here and there. Discrimination just happens.’”<sup>6</sup>

He continued, “Along these lines, another first-year Mexican American student majoring in business management was irate because her white professor butchered, if not entirely neglected, her ‘Spanish’-sounding name throughout the semester. At times, her professor referred to her using stereotypical ‘Mexican’-sounding names.”<sup>7</sup>

“That must be extremely exhausting. Students of Color should be focusing on getting their schoolwork done, but they can’t even do that because they’re stressed out about all this unnecessary nonsense?” a white girl stated in a frustrated tone.

“Exactly,” Alberto concurred. “This unnecessary stress has been referred to by experts as ‘Mundane Extreme Environmental Stress,’ which is defined by ‘the stress of living in such an environment where one is subjected to daily microaggressions due to race’ (Solórzano et al., 2002, p. 2).”

“But it can’t be all that bad,” a Latino student added. “I visited my sister’s dorm at the university two years ago, and the dining halls and dorms were very nice. There was a lot of diversity, and students from different backgrounds were eating together and talking to one another.”

Alberto acknowledged his observation. “Well, you’ll be surprised when I tell you that not even the residence halls are safe from microaggressions (Harwood et al., 2012). Not too long ago, I came across a study that interviewed Students of Color at residence halls, and it identified four different types of racial microaggressions that happen in dorms. From what I remember, the Students of Color were victims of racial jokes and verbal comments, racial slurs written in shared spaces, segregated spaces and unequal treatment, and sheer denial and minimization of racism (Harwood et al., 2012). In other words, offenders played it off as if it was just a joke. But racism is nothing to joke about,” Alberto stated loud and clear.

Alberto walked over to his laptop to look up the exact study. “Ahh. Here it is.” He opened up the document and proceeded to read a paragraph from it. “Here’s an example of a ‘racial joke.’ A Latina undergraduate student stated, ‘There was a girl there [in the residence hall on her floor] who was joking around and making nicknames for everybody. Just like little subtle things about them and joking around. And then she named me “Tacos” . . . She’s like, “Ha, ha cause you’re Mexican” (Harwood et al., 2012, p. 165).’

The Latino student was shocked. He couldn’t believe this was happening even in dorms.

“I could see how you didn’t catch those dynamics during your visit,” Alberto told the student. “Microaggressions don’t happen every

6 This response was taken directly from an interview conducted May 18, 2018.

7 This response was taken directly from an interview conducted February 1, 2019.

second. And when they do happen, they could be very subtle, almost unnoticeable, yet serve as a way to keep People of Color 'in their place' (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015)."

"It just doesn't make sense," a student complained. "Higher education, specifically universities, should be sites of openness to learning and should be 'welcoming.'"

"Yup, but that's not necessarily the case. Regardless of how much money their parents make, money can't buy Students of Color freedom from racism at universities (Feagin & Sikes, 1994)," Alberto halfway joked.

Noticing the students and teachers, as a whole, looked discouraged and frustrated about racism at universities, Alberto quickly proceeded to the latter part of his presentation, which concentrated on survival and hope.

## RESISTANCE AND COUNTERSPACES

"Hey. But don't get too down. Now let's talk about positivity. About survival. About resistance," Alberto said, optimistically. "Even when we are not given structural support, Latinx students, along with other Students of Color, find ways to cope and manage a hostile campus environment. In fact, it has been carefully documented that Latinx students use knowledge learned at home to help them navigate, survive, and succeed at universities that often silence and exclude us (Delgado Bernal, 2001)."

"How's that?" a student wondered verbally.

"In order to help overcome our status of being treated as less than and succeed in higher education, Latinx students have developed 'critical resistant navigational skills,'" Alberto stated eloquently, which indirectly referenced Solórzano and Villalpando (1998).

"That sounds super fancy. That don't sound like something I can learn," another student joked cynically.

"It's not as difficult as it sounds," Alberto assured the student. "The so-called fancy critical navigational skills Latinx students acquire and display can be something as simple as joining a campus protest, but oftentimes these skills are more covert and subtle. For instance, actions such as changing a major or simply deciding not to complete a degree can be seen as forms of covert resistance (Rodriguez, 2005; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998). Yeah, in a research study I recently came across, I found that in response to frequent racial microaggressions, Latinx students often sought out Chicana/o or Latina/o studies classes that served as academic counterspaces in which they fostered skills of critical navigation and learned to see themselves as contributing to a legacy of resistance to oppression" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 679).

"Yup! That's exactly why I joined the Mariachi music group here at school. So that my cultura survives and so I'm around people who remind me of who I am," a Latina student said in prideful tone.

"Yassssssss!" her friend sitting next to her applauded.

"Nice!" Alberto stated. "At white universities, Students of Color join organizations that are made up of people who look and think like them because they feel isolated and disconnected from their campus environment (González, 2002; Hurtado et al., 2007). They join racial-ethnic student organizations as a way to deal with the messed-up campus climate (Museus, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Membership in these organizations increases their sense of belonging to their university (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). At universities, Latinx students rely on peers from similar backgrounds for support (Flores & Garcia, 2009; Villalpando, 2003)."

"And that's exactly why all the Black kids sit together in the cafeteria (Tatum, 2003)," a Black student commented, quick as a flash. "In this circle, we feel accepted. We turn to one another for reaffirmation, encouragement, and support. Because people who are not Black do not know what it feels like to be Black, they are unprepared to respond in supportive ways. So, we turn to each other for the much needed support we are not likely to find anywhere else (Tatum, 2003, p. 60)."

"That's very true." Alberto sided with the student's testimony. "Especially in racially mixed settings, racial grouping is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism (Tatum, 2003, p. 63)."

Alberto elaborated, "In a university setting, educational researchers found Students of Color created academic and social 'counterspaces' as a response to 'racial microaggressions' and racism on and off campus (Solórzano et al., 2000)."

"How would you define these 'counterspaces?'" someone asked in sincere curiosity.

"Counterspaces can be described as horCHATa (Gonzalez, 2022b)." Alberto half joked.

"Una horchata sounds bomb right now." Someone yelled anonymously from the back of the room.

"It does." Alberto laughed. "I am being serious. Think about it. hor-CHAT-a . . . get it?" He annunciated slowly to ensure everyone heard the "CHAT" part.

"Students of Color get together and chat with one another to help each other navigate the racially hostile spaces at their universities. Students of Color, or other students with marginalized identities, create spaces where they can challenge stereotypes, deal with racism, and empower one another. Creating space with

one another allows for them to create a home away from home, sustain and practice their cultural ties, and collectively build critical consciousness (Gonzalez, 2022b).” Alberto explained.

He continued. “In my own words, I would say they’re spaces of empowerment. These counterspaces are dynamic sites where marginalized people engage with one another in critical discourse, bring their whole (and multiple) selves, challenge each other, and make sense of the multitude of contradictions they embody, which are always present, as a means of undergoing moments of transformation (Morales, 2017). They come in all shapes, sizes, and forms, so there’s no perfect example.”

“But is there a formal definition?” the same student wondered.

Alberto proceeded by looking up the exact definition on his computer and then projected it on the screen. “Technically speaking, ‘counterspaces’ are defined as ‘sites where deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained’ (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70).”

“But why are these important?” the same student questioned Alberto again.

Everyone looked at the student as if he was challenging Alberto.

“That’s a really good question! Students of Color have expressed that counterspaces are important because they give the students an opportunity to meet others with similar experiences and discuss race-specific issues that are otherwise swept under the rug (Solórzano et al., 2000),” Alberto explained.

“You know,” a Latina student intervened, “this reminds me of a conversation I had with my tía about her college experience. She told me some of her friends and her created a ‘Latina space,’ where Latinas would gather for the purpose of letting out their painful experiences with oppression on campus (Flores & Garcia, 2009). I guess this an example of how a counterspace serves as an adaptive mechanism to oppression and provides security, solidarity, hope, respite, and healing (Case & Hunter, 2012, p. 268).”

“Exactly,” Alberto replied as he listened carefully. He was excited that some of these students had had these conversations before.

“But isn’t that self-segregation?” a white student complained.

“Is it self-segregation or self-preservation? (Villalpando, 2003)” Alberto responded cleverly. He took a long pause to ensure the students understood his vital question.

He added, “These seemingly ‘self-segregated’ Latinx student spaces and peer groups have been found to empower and nourish Latinx students’ success. These spaces allow for Latinx students

to attend a university without feeling the stigma of being considered a foreigner or an outsider (Villalpando, 2003).”

The auditorium was filled with silence.

“Do universities provide counterspaces?” a Latino student wearing a hood over his head asked.

“Kinda, but not really. It’s complicated,” Alberto replied.

“How so?” someone else inquired.

“Well, universities usually have cultural centers, right?” Alberto asked, rhetorically, assuming students wouldn’t know the answer.

“They should,” a Latina insisted.

“These cultural centers didn’t just magically appear because universities cared so dearly about Students of Color,” Alberto stated sarcastically.

“No freaking way! They have to love all their students,” a student replied, adding to the sarcasm.

“Hell nah!” Alberto stated in a more serious tone. “Historically, Students of Color protested, fought for, and basically single-handedly created cultural centers and other resources tailored to their needs (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017; Chang, 2002; Patton, 2010). They created these centers and demanded resources as a form of resistance and survival in ‘hostile’ university settings (Yosso & Lopez, 2010).”

“So,” Alberto returned to his main point, “to answer your question as to whether universities provide counterspaces, NO. But cultural centers, which happen to be at universities, develop resilience and resistance and ultimately promote retention and academic achievement well beyond graduation. Furthermore, cultural centers do the work, which, for the most part, historically white universities fail to do (Yosso & Lopez, 2010, p. 99).”

“Dang! These cultural centers sound important. What exactly happens in them?” a random student wondered aloud.

“Magic!” Alberto joked. “I’m kidding! But seriously, a lot happens at cultural centers. Social justice activism, political education, community outreach, and much more takes place at cultural centers (Lozano, 2010).”

Ms. Liberty raised her “5 Minutes Remaining” flash card to notify Alberto that his time was almost up. At this point, it instantly became obvious that everything was starting to make sense to the students. Alberto saw that rather than texting or scrolling through their social media accounts, a majority of the students were jotting

down studious notes. Truth be told, he even noticed one student had titled her notes "How to survive racism at universities."

Alberto scratched his head, pressured to say more about this topic. "But don't get caught up in thinking counterspaces exist only as cultural centers. Student organizations are very important, tambien."

"Like MEChA?" shouted a student wearing an "Ethnic Studies Now!" t-shirt.

"Yup!" Alberto raised his Brown fist.

"That's right!" The student raised her Brown fist back at Alberto.

"Ethnic and racial students orgs help Students of Color maintain strong ties with their culturas while also helping them adjust to the campus environment (Museus, 2008). These organizations help Students of Color survive, flourish, and more important, exist! Students of Color benefit from both formal/academic AND informal/ social counterspaces."

"What's the difference?" a faint voice asked from the audience.

"On one hand, in formal/academic counterspaces such as a student-organization and cultural centers, Students of Color are educated about the importance of ethnic pride and are also given a space to discuss issues affecting their own communities, on and off campus. On the other hand, in informal/social counterspaces such as a social gathering, these Students of Color build strong relationships with one another, which makes them feel like they belong (Carter, 2007, p. 549), Alberto elaborated."

"Oh? Informal. Like a networking group?" someone suggested.

"Yup! Exactly," Alberto agreed. "Networking groups that serve predominantly Students of Color can absolutely function as counterspaces. They provide students with safety, connectedness, validation, resilience, intellectual stimulation, empowerment, and a home base on campus. In addition, they also allow for collective wisdom for helping students cope with and respond to microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Grier-Reed, 2010, p. 187). I know through personal experience. I've been part of such networking groups."

With very little time remaining, Alberto wanted to make sure his overall message was understood.

"Does everything make sense to y'all? Did everyone understand my overall message? I hope my message wasn't discouraging. But I want to make sure you're told universities aren't exactly what they seem like on TV," Alberto stated cleverly, referencing his presentation title.

After three motionless seconds, a Latina student raised her hand: "Honestly, thank you for keeping it real. For students who look like us and come from communities like ours, obstacles such as racial discrimination should become an important factor in determining what universities we enroll in and what we should expect when we get there. The choice of college for Students of Color like us involves serious dilemmas and major struggles not generally faced by white Americans (Feagin et al., 1996, p. 48)."

Students shook their heads in accordance. Another student added, "Facts. You showed us that even though we will face adversity and unfavorable obstacles, we will find ways to excel academically, graduate, and ultimately navigate our future universities. It's inspiring. Thank you so much for this presentation."

"No. Thank you for listening. With that, I will end this presentation." Alberto thanked the students one last time as he bent forward and put his hands together as if he was praying.

All at once, the students, including some teachers, stood up, clapped, and cheered loudly, replicating the excitement and energy in the student section at their school's basketball games.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Take this counterstory as you please. If counterstorytelling is your thing, then let this counterstory be a reminder that storytelling is necessary, especially in academia. If counterstorytelling is a research method you'd like to pursue, then let this counterstory be a source of inspiration. Let it be a citation. Let it be an invitation to initiate your own investigation (or literature review) of what counterstorytelling as a research method entails. Using counterstory as a research method allowed me to stay true to myself and use the storytelling ability I learned from my family and community (Gonzalez, 2017). With this method of communication, I was able to convey the findings of the literature review I conducted on Latinx students in higher education in an accessible manner. For instance, I know from past experiences presenting in K-12 schools that I'll be able to read excerpts from this story to high-school students, and it will spark a very necessary, yet not often-had, conversation about racism in higher education. To this end and as evidenced through the stories of academic and nonacademic counterstorytellers before me, counterstories can be useful teaching tools to simplify very complex topics, shed light on injustices, and make information not only relatable but also understandable (Martinez, 2020).

Further, in synthesizing actual experiences and literature, this counterstory challenges the idea that counterstorytelling is "just a bunch of storytelling" to vent about social injustices (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Rather, it is important to keep in mind that "stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory" and that these stories are "real and legitimate sources of data and

ways of being” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). As such, our stories serve as lessons for our communities (Brayboy, 2005). Truth be told, stories about race and racism have always proved to be powerful engines of social and cultural reproduction and resistance, ultimately serving as revolutionary acts (Baszile, 2015).

Undeniably, counterstorytelling in social science research raises awareness of issues impacting the access, retention, and success of Latinxs in higher education while also motivating a discussion of strategies that more effectively serve students from nontraditional backgrounds in various spaces and practices (Martinez, 2014). Further, through the utilization of counterstorytelling in research, researchers challenge traditional Eurocentric epistemologies imbedded within and perpetuated by notions of white supremacy in higher education (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002). We must continue problematizing traditional forms of research methods and methodologies, which have historically suppressed and misrepresented historically marginalized Communities of Color. Instead, we must seek out and utilize research methods and methodologies that allow us to express ourselves in ways we are accustomed to. Research methods and methodologies that allow us to communicate findings to those whom we care deeply about. The same people who have been historically and strategically excluded from knowledge produced in academia. We must engage with research methods and methodologies that allow us to be our whole selves, unapologetically. Counterstorytelling is that for me.

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