

Translating the Academy: Learning the Racialized Languages of Academia

Lilia D. Monzó and Suzanne SooHoo
Chapman University

This article presents narratives of 2 women faculty of color, 1 early career Latina and the other tenured Asian American woman, regarding their ontological and epistemological struggles in academia, as well as the hope, impetus, and strategies for change that they constructed together. Drawing on a critical pedagogy perspective, mentoring is discussed as a praxis of allyship that develops organically within relationships that recognize each person's strengths, provides instrumental knowledge about the academy, provides intellectual stimulation and reciprocal reflection, and is a collaborative endeavor that helps them to resist erasure and insert visibly diverse knowledge systems into people's academic pursuits and responsibilities.

Keywords: critical pedagogy, mentoring, female faculty of color, epistemology, academia

Women faculty of color often struggle for years in academia without naming the incongruence of the academy from their own worldviews (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Neimann, González, & Harris, 2012; Li & Beckett, 2006). Many have felt isolated in institutions, especially when they were the only or among a very few women faculty of color. Often their scholarship and teaching approaches have been questioned (Yancy & Davidson, 2013) by students, faculty, and administration. Although some of these women faculty of color have been successful in securing tenure, we wonder whether tenure and acceptance were worth the cost. Narratives of women faculty of color suggest that their trajectories through academia were fraught with microaggressions and humiliations, personal struggles over identity, and a painful loss of self-confidence (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012).

We reject the notion that our presence alone in the academy is representative of greater inclusion. We believe racial and ethnic window dressing serves to further entrench the “epistemological racism” (Scheurich & Young, 1997) of the academy by creating an illusion of diver-

sity. We wonder whether dominant groups can see what is outside their ontological and epistemological lenses and, thus, recognize our strengths that are so different from their own? Is it possible for them to recognize the value of our diverse ways of knowing embedded deep in our cultural repertoires and histories of exclusion? Regularly, we encounter instances in which our beliefs and actions come into glaring conflict with the expectations of our administrators, our colleagues, and our students. We experience daily self-revelations of our marginalized difference and of the inability of many of those in power to recognize or understand it. Little by little, these experiences erode our confidence of who we are as cultural beings and negatively affect the potential we bring to socially transform our classrooms and communities in contexts that question and challenge the status quo.

We have found that it is, perhaps, in a dialogical space marked with trust and caring among other women faculty of color in which opportunities for collective reflection and revolutionary action arise—a revolutionary praxis that challenges dominant structure grounded by love and respect (Freire, 1970). Indeed the opportunity to voice our thoughts, silenced throughout history, helps us understand the structural dimension of our oppression and strategize for greater inclusion. In this article, we, two women faculty of color, one early career Latina and one tenured Asian American,

Lilia D. Monzó and Suzanne SooHoo, College of Educational Studies, Chapman University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Lilia D. Monzó, Chapman University, College of Educational Studies, One University Drive, Orange, CA 92866. E-mail: monzo@chapman.edu

share narratives of our ontological and epistemological struggles in academia, as well as the hope, impetus, and strategies of struggle that we have constructed together. Our purpose is to bring awareness about ontological and epistemological exclusion to those who often think that diversifying academia is merely about representation. A second purpose is to share how, for us, our relationship, built on similar worldviews, love, and allyship provided the conditions for interweaving dialogue, faith, hope, and collective action that in some ways challenge dominant structures.

Here, we wish to avoid any suggestion that our relationship or our experiences can be replicated. Rather, our goal is to show what worked for us and to suggest that rather than contriving specific types of contexts, a culture of authenticity and collaboration where people have opportunities to come together and get to know and care for each other are important for the development of relationships that ultimately work to the benefit of all but, perhaps, especially for women faculty of color. We discuss our narratives in light of how they reveal both our pain and our struggle through mutual consciousness-raising and mutual advocacy. We conclude with some recommendations for setting up conditions to cultivate a relational consciousness that allows for the development of collective struggle and action among women faculty of color in the academy.

Languages of the Academy

Critical pedagogy offers a lens with which to view the academy as an institution that supports capitalism and neoliberalism by professing a universal truth to western epistemes that define what counts as knowledge, what is worth knowing, and how human beings come to know. This metanarrative defines our work as scholars in the academy, including our teaching and research and has clear implications for what and how our society understands and responds to our world's most pressing problems. From this perspective, the Cartesian emphasis on a universal truth emanating from western knowledge systems developed alongside an imperialism that sought to conquer and domesticate native peoples, the legacy of which is still evident in the academy today. Monzó, McLaren, and Rodriguez (in press) explain:

According to the work of Ramon Grosfoguel, Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, and other decolonial thinkers, the *ego cogito* (I think therefore, I am) that constitutes Descartes' modernity replaced the prior Christian dominant perspective with a secular but God-like, unsituated and monolithic politics of knowledge attributed to White men. The presumed separation and superiorization of mind over body establishes a knowledge system dissociated from the body's positioning in time and space and achieves a certitude of knowledge in a solipsistic universe by means of an internal monologue, isolated from social relations with other human beings. The *ego cogito* (I think, therefore I am) rises out of the historic and epistemic conditions of possibility developed through the *ego conquiro* (I conquer, therefore I am) and the link between the two is the *ego exterminus* (I exterminate you, therefore I am).

Grosfoguel and Dussel maintain that the *ego conquiro* is the foundation of the Imperial Being that began with European colonial expansion in 1492, when White men began to think of themselves as the center of the world because they had conquered the world. The *ego extermino* is the logic of genocide/epistemicide that mediates the "I conquer" with the epistemic racism/sexism of the "I think" as the new foundation of knowledge in the modern/colonial world. Specifically, the *ego exterminus* can be situated in the four genocides/epistemicides of the 16th century which were carried out "1) against Muslims and Jews in the conquest of Al-Andalus in the name of 'purity of blood'; 2) against indigenous peoples first in the Americas and then in Asia; 3) against African people with the captive trade and their enslavement in the Americas; 4) against women who practiced and transmitted Indo-European knowledge in Europe burned alive accused of witches" (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 77). Dussel and Grosfoguel see these four genocides as interlinked and "as constitutive of the modern/colonial world's epistemic structures" and Western male epistemic privilege, and we can certainly see these genocides reflected in the founding of the United States, in particular the massacre of indigenous peoples, the transatlantic slave trade and the Salem witch trials (pp. 3–4).

A legacy of this violent history has been the systematic epistemicide or near epistemicide of nonwestern peoples—the eradication or near eradication of their knowledge systems, including their languages, their experiences and interpretations of the world, and their ways of coming to know and understand through their exclusion within dominant institutions, including schooling in its functions, curriculum, and pedagogy (McLaren, 2012). Coloniality was and is premised on the power of the colonizers to establish their own episteme as superior and legitimate vis-à-vis the subaltern whose epistemes are rendered erroneous or backward (Mignolo, 2009). The subaltern (literally subjugated difference) is a

term that Antonio Gramsci (1971) used to refer to the peoples that are socially, economically, and politically excluded from the hegemonic power structures of society. In colonial times these were the indigenous groups who lived within colonies controlled from the outside. Contemporarily, the subaltern refers to indigenous or racialized groups who not only experience the social and material condition of marginalization and exploitation but whose entire way of understanding the world is rendered invalid (Spivak, 1988).

The university, then, since inception, has functioned through western epistemes in the privileging of an individualistic and competitive ethos and a narrow definition of what counts as knowledge, research, and best teaching practices. We do not argue for the exclusion of a western episteme but rather for the inclusion of multiple knowledge systems, such that the diversity of our world is represented, valued, and legitimized as appropriate for interpreting and acting upon our world.

American universities today continue to be what many critics have called the ivory tower (Padilla & Chávez, 1995). While the call to diversify the university was heard loudly in the United States during the civil rights movement, the gains made at the time are being lost today as a result of a neoliberal agenda in universities that emphasize efficiency and competition in the market above quality and the diverse perspectives of those whose voices have been lost for centuries (Darder, 2012). According to Antonia Darder (2012) the backlash to the recruitment of border intellectuals into the academy—women, people of color, GLBTQ, and academics and progressive or radical academics—that began in the early 1970s has been a multicultural neoliberalism involving the domestication of critical multiculturalism, wherein diversity is valued but encouraged through an economic Darwinism that encourages individualism and competition to succeed within the existing social structure, effectively circumventing any action that challenges existing relations of exploitation and domination. Darder further argues that under this multicultural neoliberalism, border academics whose histories of exploitation could result in worldviews that would challenge existing structures of domination are being socialized instead to “careerist” orientations, with the primary objective of ad-

vancing one’s career, and thus emphasizing acceptance of dominant norms and expectations as a means to attaining tenure (Darder, 2012).

As must be evident from the previous discussion, diversity cannot be viewed merely in terms of bringing in more faculty of color and other subaltern groups, as important a task as this continues to be. Diversity in our view is also about the inclusion of diverse epistemes—the ability for those recruited faculty of color to be able to make the spaces within the academy to use their own ontologies and epistemologies in the way they engage with traditional White faculty, in the way they teach students, including predominantly White students, and in the way they define their scholarship, including the types of work they deem important and the methods they chose to use. Implicit here is the idea that epistemes rooted in histories of oppression may be more likely to challenge capitalism and its many antagonisms, including racism, sexism, heteronormativity, and ableism.

Unfortunately, those who have exposed the “epistemological racism” in the academy—the structural exclusion (often unconscious) of racialized and other nondominant voices in institutional decision-making, including in funds allocation, evaluation criteria, academic programs and curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and the valuation of certain topics and methods of research over others (Scheurich & Young, 1997) have faced the critique of having proposed an epistemological relativism that runs contrary to the goal of producing knowledge that depicts some truism about the world (Miller, 1998). Philosophical arguments over the nature of truth and whether and how it can be objectively defined and the role of subjectivity have been waged now for decades. Although postmodern theories that emphasize the construction of knowledge have led us to question the relative nature of truth and of knowing, most critical theorists, including ourselves, would argue that the impetus for social transformation embeds a fundamental understanding of oppression as an objective reality (Kincheloe, 2004) but that our understanding of how it is manifested and how we must engage to transform it are subjective realities. Thus, objectivity and subjectivity are always present in a dialectical tension (Freire, 1998).

An important tenet posited by Freire (1970) is that the Oppressed have insights into the nature

of oppression that are necessarily hidden from the Oppressors. It is the Oppressed who must lead the struggle for liberation on their own behalf and for the oppressors, not only because of their insights but because any attempts for the oppressors to lead the struggle is a reenactment of the power relations that exist under conditions of exploitation. It is in the moment that the Oppressed take charge of the struggle for liberation that they evidence to themselves and to the Oppressors a clear understanding of their own humanity as agents in history.

Reminiscent of Freire, Anderson (1995) posits that access to nondominant epistemes cannot be thought of as having multiple but equally valid worldviews. Anderson (1995) posits that a nondominant episteme is critical because it may lead to more accurate and more truthful understandings, especially when dealing with issues that particularly affect nondominant groups. Fricker (2006) points out two important ways in which nondominant epistemologies are excluded from legitimacy. One form of exclusion is through testimonial injustice where individuals' different ways of knowing are simply dismissed because nondominant groups are not considered legitimate knowers—that is, they are not White, male, middle-class, heterosexual, or members of another dominant category. Nondominant epistemologies are also excluded through hermeneutic injustice—the phenomena is not recognized by the dominant group in society as an issue of significance and thus neither language nor shared conceptualization of the phenomena are available from which to draw upon for discussion. These are concerns that nondominant groups experience but are not part of the dominant group's social repertoire of legitimate knowledge. Nondominant individuals who experience hermeneutic injustice may have difficulty explaining what they perceive to be a concern and may even doubt themselves about whether the concern is real. Pohlhaus (2012) points out that this sort of epistemic violence, which she calls “willful hermeneutical ignorance,” is not always a matter of benign ignorance but that there are people who have a vested interest in not having particular epistemologies legitimized because this would threaten the system of privilege and power from which they benefit. Frank (2013) argues that this epistemic injustice positions nondominant

group members as nonknowers, even with respect to their own social and material realities.

Chicanas and Latinas (Calderón et al., 2012) and other women of color (Dillard, 2000) have begun to develop their own theories of epistemology. Drawing on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987, 1990), these epistemologies highlight the borderland spaces that many faculty women of color traverse. Borderlands consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987) refers to identities produced in multiple and often contradictory physical, social, cultural, and political spaces—spaces that are inhabited by both dominant and nondominant forms of feeling, seeing, and doing. In particular these social positionings highlight how our worldviews include homegrown ways of knowing as well as western epistemes. These approaches empower us in that they recognize the advantage of having insights into the experiences of the Oppressed and the Oppressors and may reveal the cracks that support social change. An important caveat to this work is that identity is always produced through specific social and material realities. It is not merely that we can see the world differently but that we experience both oppression and partake in practices that may be oppressive, whether we recognize them as such or not, because they are embedded within the capitalist structure of our world—a structure we cannot step outside of because we are in and of this world.

For us as women faculty of color, our borderlands worldviews come from our privilege as academics, English fluent, U.S.-born and/or “acculturated,” as well as our marginalization as linguistic and racial minorities with our own cultural ways of being and our histories of poverty and exclusion that often contrast sharply with the western epistemes of our institution and the broader society. Painful as it sometimes is, rather than attempting to eradicate these contradictions, embracing our fragmentation is one way to become empowered, realizing that in these spaces we can envision possibilities for equity and liberation (Dillard, 2000). Those who live out these multiple and often contradictory material, social, and political spaces learn to use these multiple lenses simultaneously, sometimes braiding their epistemologies in ways that help them thrive with the new and transformative insights that these spaces provide (Gonzalez, 2001).

Delgado Bernal (1998) has discussed the notion of “cultural intuition” as an essential aspect of a Chicana Feminist Epistemology. Cultural intuition is a “sixth sense” that draws on one’s personal experience, including community memory and collective experience, professional experience, and an analytical research process (Calderón et al., 2012). This concept is one that attends to us as whole persons, what Anzaldúa (1990) depicted as “mindbodyspirit” and serves to acknowledge our body and our spirit as forms of knowing equally valid to mental functions. To remember is to bring our entire selves to the tasks of teaching and scholarly work in the academy, to draw upon *all* of our resources, not only to engage in dominant institutions but to bring forth our nondominant ways as resources for ourselves as faculty and also to be taken up by our students of color and to be valued and learned by our students and colleagues of non-color. Altogether it is an approach that may disrupt the process of epistemicide that McLaren (2012) discusses as part and parcel of capitalism and imperialism.

Women of Color in the Academy

Academia has and continues to maintain White dominance. According to the National Center for Education Statistics and U.S. Department of Education (2013), the racial make up of all full time faculty in the United States in 2011 was 79% White, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% Black, and 4% Latino.

Thus, male and female faculty of color comprised only 19% of all full-time faculty. At the rank of full professor, the professoriate was 85% White. Sixty percent of all full-time professors were White males, whereas White female professors made up only 26% and male and female professors of color together comprised 15%. Data on faculty of color that disaggregates by gender are difficult to find yet qualitative studies indicate that women faculty of color face a plethora of difficulties as racialized women in a cultural context that operates from a White and male episteme (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Li & Beckett, 2006; Yancy & Davidson, 2013). Here, we use the term women of color inclusively to denote the racialization that is constructed around those who view themselves or are viewed as non-White or of non-EuroAmerican ancestry, either because of na-

tional origin, ethnic identity, colorization, and/or primary language. We recognize race to be a social construction and one that often cannot be determined by color or phenotype. Rather, race connotes for us histories of oppression that have often resulted for those who belong to such groups in lack of access and opportunity, marginalization or exclusion, and/or discriminatory practices. Although international faculty members may not have experienced similar histories of oppression as people of color raised in the United States, the world capitalist order and colonial reality is defined along similar racialized lines, and therefore, they too may have similar experiences. We make no claims to determine what any one person or one group’s experiences may or may not be but rather speak to our own ways of identifying as women of color.

Given the segregated nature of our society, most White faculty, administrators, and students develop understandings of people of color or racialized Others based on the archetypes that the media presents of them (Lugo-Lugo, 2012). Women faculty of color, therefore, are often expected to and treated as if they adhere to presumed stereotypes, which may include passive, submissive, quiet, incompetent, or even angry characterizations (Arriola, 2012; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Neimann, 2012). When women faculty of color excel or appear too intellectual in comparison to their male or White female colleagues they may be presumed arrogant, evaluated more sternly, and socially marginalized (Neimann, 2012; Pleck, 1990).

Women faculty of color who engage in “brown on brown” research indicate that they are often penalized as doing “soft” or “less rigorous” research (Garza, 1993; Lin et al., 2006; Neimann, 2012). Edwards (2014) reports her research which centers on race, gender, and class framed through a critical lens described by colleagues as “sexy” rather than scholarly or significant. To think of one’s life’s work, the work we find to be of imminent importance and value, as merely entertainment or light reading for others is to portray our worldviews inadequate, and infers we are incapable of recognizing, like *they* do, what is *really* worth knowing. These subtle and sometimes not so subtle microaggressions, performed regularly, take their toll on us and we wonder whether we must be

someone else when we enter the gates of academia.

I am struck by my lived contradiction: To be a professor is to be an Anglo; to be a

Latina is not to be an Anglo. So how can I be both a Latina and a professor?

To be a Latina professor, I conclude, means to be unlike and like me. *Que locura!*

What madness! . . . As Latina professors, we are newcomers to a world deformed and controlled by discourses that do not address our realities, that do not affirm our intellectual contributions, that do not seriously examine our worlds. Can I be both Latina and professor without compromise? (Martinez Alemán, 1995, pp. 74–75).

Women faculty of color also face particular difficulties in teaching at a predominantly White institution (Yancy & Davidson, 2013). White students sometimes publicly challenge women faculty of color in ways that they would not likely do to their White male professors (Liang, 2006; Lin et al., 2006; Lugo-Lugo, 2012). Students expect their professors to be “knowledgeable, wise, and capable” and associate these characteristics with White and male (Lugo-Lugo, 2012). Finding that their professor is a woman of color may challenge White students’ perceptions of people of color. Because these stereotypes help to justify their privilege as deserved, White students often resist this challenge to their belief systems and question these faculty’s abilities to teach (Reyes & Rios, 2005).

Although much research has taken place to understand how the gender and race of faculty influence student evaluations, the research is inconclusive, with many studies suggesting that people generally evaluate Whites more favorably over people of color across varying domains, suggesting that this is certainly a contested terrain (Lazos, 2012). Furthermore, statisticians suggest that teaching evaluations are confounded with a variety of other factors (Lazos, 2012). Yet, student evaluations are commonly used in most institutions and can often make or break a woman faculty of color’s chances for tenure (Lazos, 2012).

As women faculty of color, we often struggle with our own fears sustained through a history of violence against us as Randolph (2013) eloquently describes:

Walking to the front of the class, down the steep stadium styled steps . . . what do I see on that day? . . . a blur of whiteness closing in on all sides . . . And I feel fear, not just the fear of any new teacher, but the specific fear of a Black person in front of a sea of white bodies. When else would I have been standing in front of so many White people with all of their eyes on me? The tight stomach, sweaty palms, and constricted breathing are the residue of racism seeping into my nervous system . . . preparing me to bolt if the room turns dangerous. The history of what those ratios of black to white bodies gathered in a public space have meant is in the room with us; it is part of the lesson even if it is not part of the lecture. (p. 21)

Women faculty of color are often overburdened with service work in committees, community projects, and mentoring students of color (Neimann, 2012). Most of us understand how difficult it is for students of color to navigate the dominant cultural terrain of higher education and both enjoy and make it our responsibility to mentor these students (Neimann, 2012). Although service work is important, it can be very time consuming and it is increasingly less valued in comparison to scholarship (Wisniewski, Ducharme, & Agne, 1989). Because of expectations from colleagues and administrators, as well as our own desire to dispel the myth of incompetence, we may find ourselves often overcommitted with service and having little time left for our scholarship. This little time may be further compromised by family commitments, such as translating, caretaking, and providing financial support and expectations to adhere to cultural definitions of “good” mothers and daughters (Turner, 2002; Vo, 2012).

The tenure process can be a grueling experience for any faculty member, but for a woman faculty of color in which the dominant spaces of academia may be culturally foreign, it can become a nightmare (Arriola, 2012). Tenure is typically granted on the nature of a faculty member’s performance with respect to scholarship, teaching, and service. As discussed earlier, women faculty of color are at a disadvantage in all these areas, which suggest that tenure evaluations may not bode well for many women faculty of color. Even when women faculty of color are at the top of their game, they must also learn how to self-promote by demonstrating their expertise and displaying their successes in White ways (Vo, 2012; Winkler, 2000). This may not come easy in cultures where humility is

highly valued and ingrained from childhood. All of these issues taken together erode women faculty of color's confidence (Arriola, 2012; Neimann, 2012; Vo, 2012). What sometimes transpires is a slow but insidious process of questioning our own abilities, becoming isolated, and losing trust in colleagues and the system, all of which may affect productivity.

Faculty women of color have managed to cope by developing alliances (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). These women provide support for each other as they mutually combat alienation, isolation, and invisibility. However, alliances made up exclusively of early career faculty may be less effective in providing strategies for success. Mentors are critical to women faculty of color because they may be able to help them navigate the system, help them gain visibility and credibility, and may encourage their colleagues to "protect" them from too much service work.

Unfortunately, mentoring practices that are organized (e.g., workshops or the pairing of early career scholars with senior scholars) often do not include the support necessary to deal with some of the more difficult struggles that women faculty of color face, including overt and covert racism and sexism that directly impact access and opportunity. These mentoring practices typically focus only on how to get published and teaching pedagogy (Chandler, 1996). While these are important mentoring activities, there is a need to contextualize many of these professional tasks through the experiences and worldviews of women of color as racial minority women.

Models of mentoring are important to understand because they can guide program development in ways in which senior scholars and administrators interact with early career scholars. These ways of interacting require trust and a sense of shared understandings, which are necessary conditions for the emergence of relationships. Traditional mentoring models that entail monolithic and unidirectionality as manifested by one person holding the knowledge and passing it down to the other are unlikely to be helpful to women faculty of color with some of the more insidious kinds of issues that were discussed earlier. Traditional models may be adequate for understanding logistical kinds of issues that are important to pass on to new faculty, but it tends to embed a deficit perspec-

tive of the mentee as her own experiences and personal and professional insights would be seemingly dismissed.

Kochan (2013) has challenged this model recognizing "all mentoring relationships occur within a cultural context that can have an effect on its operation and its outcomes." She has developed a Cultural Framework for Mentoring that describes three categories of mentoring: (a) Traditional, which aims to transmit culture or methods of operation; (b) Transitional, which aims to bridge cultural gaps and translate the cultures that exist; and (c) Transformative, which aims to create a new reality by becoming unstuck and engaging in collective action. While these three categories of mentoring are separated for the sake of discussion, Kochan describes these categories as fluid and overlapping. The Traditional model holds characteristics similar to transmission models of learning where the mentor is a sage translating the "academy" as a timeless never-changing monolith. Mentees understand they are stewards of the discipline charged with maintaining ivory tower status and inherent power. The Transitional mentoring model questions the status quo in an attempt to blend new cultural resources with what already exists to produce blended cultures that afford mutual respect for the mentee and mentor. Often this relationship takes on a panache of *co*mentoring. The third category, Transformative mentorship, seeks to create a new reality by engaging in collective action to rethink and experiment with different forms of mentoring in a changing and fluid world.

An interesting aspect of Kochan's study is it addresses some of the same issues we address below in our own experiences of mentoring. We have struggled with whether to learn from, learn with, translate across culture, or create something new altogether that would help us grow as women of color and also be successful in the academy, especially for Lilia (first author) who faces the tenure process. What differs is that Kochan focuses primarily on the culture of the institution, whereas we are concerned with our own distinct classed, racialized, and gendered experiences into the academy as a means to bringing our own epistemes to light for ourselves, our students, and our research in order to transform the structures of exploitation and domination of our capitalist world that the academy structurally legitimizes. In the spirit of

resistance, we two women faculty of color intend to understand and problematize the theoretical and everyday experiences of erasure and devaluing of our participation in the academy within our own contextualized space. We believe embodied work like this must be done at each and every institution utilizing the resources from within and the communities of resistance outside.

Who We Are

Lilia Monzó is a Latina assistant professor, on tenure-track, who has been at our institution for 6 years. She immigrated to the United States from Cuba at the age of 4 and grew up in Miami, Florida, until the age of 14, when her family moved to Los Angeles. Of working-class background, Lilia spent most of her life in urban Latino communities and attended “minority” schools where more than 90% of students were of color. Her parents did not speak English, and like many Latino immigrants who arrived as adults, continue to speak very little English to this day. She grew up experiencing the social stigma of being a racial, ethnic, and linguistic minority in the United States. Although she was exposed to dominant spaces regularly through her interactions with teachers, doctors, and the media, this exposure was primarily observed from afar, meaning that she had little connections with White dominant individuals growing up. Lilia recalls that of all the close friends she has had, only one was White. He was one of few working-class Whites who attended her high school. Yet she knew him for only the span of her senior year. Three other White individuals had a strong impact on her academic trajectory, taking the time to offer her assistance with college applications and praising her academic skills, but these too were observed from afar because their status as teachers and professors made them unapproachable for this young Latina. She did not get to know them as persons, see or learn of their struggles, or learn to deconstruct their interactions and the meanings they ascribed to the ways in which they made dominant spaces their homes. At the University of California, San Diego, she represented the stereotyped Latina who sat at the back of the class with very weak study skills, and for whom the curriculum held little interest. She persisted until graduation because she had long internal-

ized that college was necessary for “success”—defined for her at that time as survival, a job that would pay the bills and earn her some greater status in society. She hung out with other Latinos, rarely attended class, and got through college on the fringes of what college is supposed to be. Her doctoral work taught her about what would count in academia—publishing was the key. She was given many opportunities to develop her writing and research skills and excelled in these areas. Yet there too, she escaped learning little about the White world that she would enter.

However, being in the academy was different . . .

Suzanne SooHoo is a third-generation Chinese American full professor who has been at our institution since 1991. Born in San Francisco, California, she grew up at the edge of Chinatown. The primary difference between living in Chinatown and living on the perimeter is the family’s capacity in English—the further a family lived from Chinatown, the greater its English proficiency and correspondingly, its willingness to assimilate into the mainstream White culture. Suzanne first attended a community elementary school made up of exclusively Chinese children. The teachers were the only people who were White and who treated the Chinese children with special care. Then desegregation forced her and half of the school’s student population to move to an all-White school. This is where Suzanne learned about difference: racial, sociocultural, economic, and religious differences. White girls did not wear thickly knitted sweater vests under their dresses. They did not play Chinese jump rope with strung rubber bands. They had mothers who drove and picked them up after school and brought cupcakes for their children’s birthdays. They went to church on Sundays, which was her family’s day to buy groceries from Chinatown. As a result of her parents’ divorce and her mother’s subsequent marriages to White men, she quickly assimilated into American ways. Escaping from family turmoil, school was her refuge. Graduating as class valedictorian earned her entry into the University of California at Berkeley. Here she found an alliance between the Jewish and the Chinese as both groups fought for cultural and social validity. Following her teaching career, Suzanne found herself in an elementary principalship surrounded by a

few White female role models and a gang of “good ole boys.” She learned she would need to teach them how to appreciate her leadership style, because this knowledge did not come naturally to them. In the early ‘80s, men did not know how to work with women—their skills were limited to flirting or competing with them, collaborative teamwork was just emerging within the public imagination. Suzanne was at a crossroads—be like them or establish new ground. Feminists gave her strength to challenge traditional male-dominated power structures. She was ultimately successful because of her dutiful work ethic and eastern style of influence, which she reflects was less threatening to those with influence.

However, being in the academy was different

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Duoethnography: Sharing Our Stories

We sought a research methodology that resonated with the intimacy of our relationship characterized by hours of sharing experiences and baring our pain and vulnerability. Our discussions were framed by our *similarities* as faculty of color working within a dominant culture informed by a western, academic tradition and juxtaposed by our *different* lived realities and cultural ways of knowing and being. Duoethnography (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012) is a methodology in which two or more participants bring different life experiences, ways of knowing, and perspectives to a shared phenomenon—in our case, our shared workplace and our identities as women of color: an early career Latina faculty and a senior Asian woman faculty. It is a collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers share their life histories (orally and/or in written form) to make sense of experience and generate reflection and greater critical understanding (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). It is a dialogic approach to make meaning of particular phenomena and to show how the phenomena are manifested in the lives of the researchers and understood by them. Researchers in this dialogic process are not the traditional detached researchers who “collect” data. Instead each researcher is the other’s sounding board, helping them remember their experiences, asking questions for clarification, and posing questions or alternative explanations that may extend their thinking on the topic or

challenge their views (Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Duoethnography entails a process of sharing experiences, finding similarities, juxtaposing differences, and examining the phenomena through multiple perspectives. It is a process that presumes transformation through self-reflection, critical dialogue, and the opportunity to understand one’s life through another’s worldviews. It is an opportunity to struggle with another and find within the spaces of shared vulnerability and caring the impetus for renewed energy and struggle that leads to transformation. It is important that duoethnography attempts to do more than tell and analyze two life stories but to invite the reader to also be transformed through empathy and critique.

Another principle of duoethnography is that the method sustains an open stance rather than prescriptive to encourage future duoethnographers to contextualize the method. Previously duoethnography has been grounded in post-structural theory and constructivist epistemologies (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012), where individual are said to construct their own realities through one’s multiple subjective positions. We depart from this tradition and claim instead that our narratives include our subjective understandings of what we conceive as objective realities. We believe fully, based on our own experiences and those discussed in the earlier literature review, that academia is often a hostile and exclusionary context for many women faculty of color, although their specific experiences and interpretations may differ. Furthermore, our goal goes beyond reflection and greater critical insights to transforming opportunities in academia for ourselves and for other women of color.

In our approach to duoethnography, we developed a dialogical and relational consciousness (Berryman, SooHoo, & Nevin, 2013) to help better understand the expectations of the academy and to navigate accordingly. Our co-mentoring relationship and this duoethnography began approximately 4 years ago as we began a research project on how we experienced racism. This work naturally morphed into our experiences as women faculty of color. Our conversations were guided by our continual mindfulness of our question, “How do women of color translate the academy?” Initially, we attempted to bracket our “data” by exchanging a series of

letters (20) to each other in which we shared painful incidents and reflected on our feelings and the broader social implications of these experiences. In addition, we held focused and intentional conversations for the purposes of our research. After about 10 of these meetings, we realized we were attempting to fit our research and comentoring (which had become entangled) into traditionally prescribed methods, rather than embracing the open, organic, spontaneous, and authentic nature of our relationship.

Our data, thus, span the multitude of contexts within which we engage that relate to the academy, from debriefings after faculty and committee meetings, attendance at faculty social gatherings, lunch sessions at our respective homes, e-mail correspondences, and regular (at least weekly) extended phone conversations that often ended when our phones ran out of batteries. The space we held to engage our research was a state of mind rather than distinct geographic locations. Watching each other process information within university settings was often the catalyst of talks that began with, "I wondered how you would respond when she/he said . . ." "I offered support when I . . . did that help?" "What do people think when they hear me say . . .?" "What do you think people of noncolor understand of who I am and what I bring?"

To enrich our research on this topic, we have engaged in various research and writing projects together as a way to examine the different aspects of perceived marginalization within the various structures of the academy. From this position of shared writing, copresentations, dissertation committees, and so forth, we have tried to (a) identify the cultural capital that is necessary to succeed, (b) maintain the integrity of our cultural selves, and (c) identify and reform the conditions that dehumanize faculty of color.

Our comentoring and our duoethnography are entangled. Duoethnography provides the space for critical reflection, but it also creates opportunities for transformative action—as we strategize for best ways to articulate our ideas at particular committee meetings without being dismissed or how to discuss racism with our predominantly White students without alienating or making them defensive or how to make sense of the tenure track process when the rules of the game seem to either

shift or be interpreted differently across actors, units, and time. These are examples that do not merely impact our thinking but that we enact in our efforts to be successful in our respective places in the academy—an early career faculty attempting to find legitimacy and secure tenure and a senior faculty attempting to break down the dominant structures of the academy that exclude or limit opportunities for early career faculty of color.

The narrative each of us developed for this article were informed by all of the many letters, conversations, and observations of each other we have had. Together we decided on the themes we wanted to discuss and then we each wrote our own narratives. We read each other's initial drafts. We discussed how our narratives were representations of our conversations because indeed all of the ideas embedded within each were well known to the other. Second, third, and fourth drafts were then prepared, each informed by the ideas that came from the others' narrative. In this way, excerpts of our written narratives contained here reflect our data gathering. They were dialogically conceived—a critical conversation much like those we have had so many times.

A methodological issue we encounter in using this approach is that there appears to be no recognizable stopping place. We mused, "When does this research end?" It appears it doesn't, it merely pauses and moves in an iterative fashion, recycling and moving forward to new spaces and new challenges.

Our Narratives

Too often the voices of women of color are *benevolently* rewritten or transposed by the voices of the dominant group who tell or explain our stories. We have opted to share our narratives initially without explanation so that readers can hear our authentic voices without translation, allowing the reader to experience difference in the way we experience it as we engage in predominantly White academic contexts. We present our narratives in a side-by-side format, such that our voices find poetic dialogue—a place for authentic voice, uninterrupted, colored by our own vernacular, retrospective of our cultural heritage, and intersected by our problem posing.

Comparing the Ontology of Our World Views

Suzanne

Lilia

I am envious of Lilia's upbringing in a homogenous community, where in her developmental years, she wasn't always asking herself if she was White enough—compared with my protesting my mother's stream of third and fourth White husbands who made evident the sharp contrast that my mother and I were not White. Community-based schools were culturally responsive to the Chinese student population in those days in San Francisco. Integrated schools had a different culture and reminded us Chinese students in numerous ways that our ethnic backgrounds were ornamental and not legitimate. It was not in vogue until recently to speak Chinese. At the same time that I was experiencing a steady erasure of belonging and identifying with my ancestral heritage in my family and within schools, I was also acquiring cultural capital and recognition of the power of White—living with White, understanding Whiteness, acting White. Within this east-west collision, learning to be assertive replaced my value for humility. Like stir-fry, my newly acquired western skills are tossed randomly into a pot of Taoist philosophy.

I am the result of schools that are both places of domination and liberation (McLaren & Jaramillo, 2006). From the margins, I have developed resistance strategies and a bilingualism that allows me to traverse the boundaries between two cultural worlds. It is in this middle dynamic that I live my daily life, resisting erasure while resisting visibility. It is a purposeful place, not one imposed on me, it is the place I have both accepted and preferred.

In thinking about resisting erasure I must distinguish between “marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance” (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). “Marginality is much more than a site of deprivation; . . . it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance” (Hooks, 1990, pp. 149–150). Opting out of an offer to become an administrator maintains my marginality within conventional power structures and challenges me to instead use my full professorship status to work with and for the faculty differently. As a faculty representative, I can advocate *for* faculty *as* faculty. Still I find I must learn the codes of power in order to translate them into a language of possibility and to bring the languages of culture, scholarship, and collaboration into the daily operations of management.

In Miami, I was shielded to some extent from racial discrimination and was privy to the beginnings of bilingual education. I was not shielded, however, from knowing the greater societal status afforded to Whites. This was especially true in Los Angeles where Latinas/os are positioned as economically, linguistically, and culturally impoverished. I am ashamed to admit that, in my youth, I felt embarrassed of my parents' lack of English fluency and I did not recognize or appreciate the cultural resources that they provided.

Insulated in spaces of color, dominant spaces felt foreign to me and I lacked the cultural capital to understand educational contexts and to *feel* confident, popular, interesting, or intelligent, even though I now recognize and have been told that that was not how I was perceived.

I was chronically absent in high school and in my first 2 years at UCSD. There were key people who literally took me by the hand and *pulled* me toward success. Even as a doctoral student, I thrived by finding Latino sanctuaries within my program. I engaged in research that brought me into communities like the one I grew up in and interacted mostly with faculty and colleagues who were Latina/o like myself. We even had a multicultural center where we spent our time before and after class.

Theories of power and exploitation (Bourdieu, 1991; McLaren, 2012) applied to my social positioning and personal experiences have brought great insights into the ways in which academia functions as a context of power but little in the actual day-to-day normalized expectations and values associated with successful participation. I find myself constantly struggling to enact an expected position of power that inscribes the colonizing ideologies that I have spent a lifetime learning to resist.

My academic accomplishments, despite my marginal status in schools, has taught me that learning is not confined to formal spaces and that experiential knowledge are fundamental to theory and practice.

When my colleagues lovingly caution me to not give doctoral students (most are Latinas) so much time, I realize that they do not understand how my trajectory informs my goals as a faculty member. Surely, I want tenure—but attaining it must fall within an ethics that has developed through my own history of exclusion.

I am not afraid of sharing my own ambiguities and am quick to explain that I have more questions than answers. While some students and colleagues may appreciate this, others may find it uncharacteristic of a professor and a signal of lack of knowledge or confidence. I cringe, however, at enacting whiteness, presenting myself as all knowing, as if knowledge systems were objective and politically neutral. To enact Whiteness, if I could even do it convincingly, would feel like selling my soul—letting go of my Latina ontologies and epistemologies that are inscribed with resistance to dominance, celebration of difference, and an ethical stance of authenticity.

Resisting Erasure/Resisting Visibility

Suzanne

As a Chinese American woman in education, I find myself resisting erasure and resisting visibility concurrently. I learned from my Chinese father to be humble and compromising. Yet my western identity demands assertiveness and a strong articulated public presence. On any given day, I navigate between the cultural contradictions of bystanderism and activism, standing back and standing up, silence and voice. I am both a cultural schizophrenic and a changing chameleon, adapting to different environments and expectations.

I resist the dominant western metanarrative that defines me as “less than” with the zeal of a Chinese woman warrior and a conviction to demonstrate to others that Chinese women are more than compliant model minority service workers. I challenge their right and authority to define me and other nonwesterners as deficit or culturally impoverished. And with the vengeance of a Tiger Mom, I remind them if everyone on the planet had a vote, 1.5 billion Chinese would be hard to beat.

But using a language of dominance is both threatening to others and antithetical to the Taoist philosophy of my upbringing. The message of worthiness and deference to the wide spectrum of humanity must be facilitated in respectful ways. I continually seek the translations.

When I address conflict, I often don’t use words. Instead I try to perfume the air with an incense as a way to leave the essence of my being among others—with hope and not judgment. Sometimes I am content with this approach, other times not. Because I am regularly self-critical, I am inclined to find holes in my thinking and am never satisfied with what is. I am aware I am afflicted with the condition of always *becoming and never being*.

I remember when a small subgroup of the faculty started up the “Difficult Conversations” group, its intent was to work out diversity issues among the faculty. The group included a White male, a Black male, a White lesbian, a Black woman, a Latina, and an Asian woman. Our conversations over a 7-month span focused on perceived microaggressions aimed at faculty of difference. We wondered how faculty and staff might be more respectful of diversity as we witnessed eye rolling and dismissive body language when people disagreed with each other. By participating in this group and becoming allies to LGBTQ faculty, we strengthen the culture of the unit toward tolerance for different worldviews.

Students of color have sought us both out as members of their dissertation committees because of our shared epistemologies. I think they feel safe with us as they bring forward their cultured voices in their scholarship. I’m glad that in addition to our White colleagues, we are also here for them. I had White allies mentor me through my doctoral work as I documented in my poem, “I am who I am because of a White man” (SooHoo, 2006), where I placed both blame for marginalization and deep appreciation for their allyship.

Lilia

I have struggled to develop a public voice that is strong and authentic. I still struggle with volume as I hear countless times in contexts of power that I can’t be heard—my voice is apparently too soft. Do they not know that my voice is soft because what I have to say can only really be heard through their hearts? Still, softly spoken, I use my voice at appropriate times—when I have something important to say. I refuse to give up my voice—not for any reason.

I struggle to analyze my own use of coded messages and have recognized both my resistance to dominant pedagogy and my unconscious mimicking of it. A Latina once corrected my attempts to strategize with the class to create more spaces to hear voices of color. She defended her preference to listen and speak when she had an important point to make. Immediately, I recognized my enactment of a cultural imperialism that reveres the competition of participation. Where was my homegrown value for listening carefully to learn from others and the knowledge that for Latinas such competition cannot be an adequate judge of their engagement or of the value of their softly spoken and sparsely laid out ideas? Indeed not long after the same concern was expressed of me—a colleague observed my silence at faculty meetings and remarked on my presumed enactment of the stereotype. After careful deliberation with Suzanne regarding the merit of this conversation and determining that there were many faculty who did not speak out regularly, including Whites, and my deliberate, although infrequent, comments and questions on key issues related to my interests and expertise, at Suzanne’s suggestion I met with this colleague and articulated my epistemological value for the voices of those who bring institutional history and or particular expertise. It does not escape me that this observation could mark an unconscious form of surveillance. Indeed he remarked that although I embody some of the stereotypes I also challenge them. But even in the space of validation, I recognize a western episteme for I would not merely question the stereotype but also the interpretation that choosing to listen is the same as silencing oneself.

I have slowly come to accept that I must translate myself so that others can *see* and *hear* me. Recently, a colleague expressed the idea that fear of the Other is real—that there are some things (perhaps hoodies worn over our heads?) that create fear. I expressed that having grown up in what is perceived as a “dangerous” area, what I fear are Whites-dominant spaces. My White colleague seemed at first not to understand that while he associated fear with physical safety, I associate fear with exclusion and the power to limit my opportunities, truncate my “success,” or worse render me homeless and incapable of economically taking care of myself and my child and family. Having *faced* this reality and *felt* this fear, it is a reality and a sensation that never leaves me no matter how financially or professional stable I may become.

(continues)

Suzanne

Lilia

Unfortunately, I fear I am not very kind, for although I may accept my role as translator, I question why women of color must do all the work? When will White men and women seek *our* hands to be guided to understand our ways? Lovingly and with tremendous patience and generosity, Suzanne has helped me understand that I cannot expect others to understand what they simply cannot see. Yet, to translate myself so that my differences can become acceptable, and White folks can feel at ease as if I were one of their own, in spite of my brown body is to adopt a colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), in which we think we are all the same—except for that which should not matter. Don't we need people in academia to accept who we are, not in spite of our difference, but *because of it*?

Learning and Drawing Strength From Each Other

Suzanne

Lilia

I wish I could be Lilia when I grow up. The problem is, I am 20 years older than her.

When we debrief meetings, looking for explicit and implicit meaning, she typically views the “issues” from several vantage points, not allowing the conversation to end without troubling through all the possibilities. Whether in thoughtful deliberation or deep frustration, there is a sense of impatience and eagerness “to know” more about her world and her transactions in that world and “to be” consistently ethical and true to her indigenous self.

I struggle between the development of this free yet critical thinker and socializing her to the inequities and politics of the tenure and promotion game. I try to make transparent what my experiences have been so she may critique the system on her own terms. I pray she does not lose her activism and spirit while she makes her way through the rituals of passage.

Lilia is bold and forthcoming publically. She knows that every persona she manifests is political, and therefore, carefully places what she wants people to know in the right context, hoping they “get it.” I get to see this side of her because we have an ongoing dialogue about our unique ontologies and we are continually reinventing and redialoguing questions, appreciation, concerns, and uncertainties, a kind of “Mentoring the Mentor” (Freire, Frase, Macedo, McKinnon, & Stokes, 1997, p. xi).

Suzanne is someone I love and admire for her strength and commitment to her ideals and values. I see how she strategically places me in positions that let me shine and is always quick with praise.

In her quiet calm and introspective attention to my thinking aloud, she provides the spaces for reflection and critical analysis. I have grown more as a scholar—a critical thinker—in the past 5 years than anytime prior and this has to do with her ability to listen, be responsive, and to reframe when necessary.

Her affirmation of my ideas, even on issues where most would scratch their heads has given me the space to take intellectual risks and to dare to finally say what I've only previously dared to think. That she can sometimes finish my thoughts or nod her head before I've finished voicing my thoughts validates my reality.

She sometimes says I have great courage, but it is her willingness to stand with me both symbolically and in actuality that has made me courageous—with her by my side, my voice, a mere whisper at times, becomes strong and capable.

Suzanne's time and commitment to the institution has paid off and she can make things happen or have those who *can* listen to her recommendations. It's good to see first hand that there are women of color who can take a place at the table while maintaining a strong sense of ethics, an openness of heart and spirit, and an uncompromising stand for equity.

Understanding the need that we all have for White allies, Suzanne has consistently sought for us to share our stories with White men and for us to hear their thoughts. Very recently, I found one who, although a superstar scholar, was able to see my strengths and has gently and generously taken me under his wing and is teaching me to fly.

(continues)

Suzanne

Lilia

Our styles are different. While she strategizes over where she will place her words in a public meeting. I seek to *find the words* and I question if I have the *right to speak*. These internalized oppressions come from the arduous task of mentally translating from an Asian language of silence to Western predominance of orality and from the long held traditions of humility. My father used to say, “Don’t say anything unless you can improve upon the silence” and also taught me to enter public spaces taking up as little room as possible—to enter small, almost invisible. “There is an ongoing East/West tension within me. Natural tendencies of submission fight urges to be assertive: obedience versus independence, fatalism versus change, self-control versus self-expression (Chow, 1989, as cited in SooHoo, 2006, p. 31)

She gives me courage to speak up for her about things I never spoke up before, for myself. I see hope when we talk instead of being jaded by my own experiences.

Sometimes I have wanted to retire because it is clear to me some things will never change.

Now I am clear when I do retire, it will be because I am confident she is there to take the mantle forward.

I worry about who I will become—will a tenured (legitimized) faculty position, change who I am? Will I forget where I came from and my ideals? What will happen to those ideals if I make myself comfortable? Yet, I know that if I don’t find some sense of comfort in dominant spaces I will not be able to stay for the long haul and I owe it to all the Latinas and people of color who were just as bright and worthy as I but were not pulled through the system to make my opportunity count. It is a responsibility I do not take lightly.

I have a tendency to rage inside—to deconstruct everything in a way that makes the world bleak and leaves me with little hope for change. This is devastating for me since I need to know that my work means something. And I am impatient with change. In Suzanne’s wisdom and centeredness, I have found safe spaces for reflection and emotional healing. I have learned to see the hope in the small glimmer of understandings that some people show, in the spaces for reflection and *willingness* to hear me—even if they can’t really hear what I mean. It is this hope and the possibilities it engenders that supports my continued struggle.

Discussion

In this article, we have attempted to shed light on mentoring women faculty of color in the academy—mentoring that *secures* their ontologies and epistemologies while simultaneously navigating success in the academy. Securing requires the purposeful protection of nondominant epistemes that are becoming extinct with the continued spread of western knowledge systems. Securing requires valuing nondominant faculty epistemes and creating spaces to draw upon them. It requires recognizing these knowledge systems as resources for new insights to world problems and strategically passing them onto new generations of women of color and others.

Our narratives indicate a dialogic relationship in which we each valued our diverse ways of knowing and worked together to develop spaces for our voices to be shared and heard and to challenge racist, genderized, and capitalist structures. Although there was a clear greater knowledge about the academy that Suzanne held, Lilia brought to our interactions a resistance and questioning that brought different kinds of insights into the nature of oppression. Our relationship was built upon the notion of deep caring for and support of the other and a

strong belief in our *right* to be who we are. The knowledge that someone else was there to stand with us was the encouragement we needed to resist the invisible yet systematic erasure of our epistemes.

Our narratives suggest that retaining our ontologies and epistemologies that inform how we go about our daily lives, our teaching pedagogy, and our research activities, is tantamount to preserving identity and to challenging existing structures built upon exclusively western knowledge systems. We seek not to transplant dominant epistemologies with our own but to braid together multiple dominant and nondominant epistemes to develop the spaces where new ways of challenging oppression can develop and flourish. As difficult as it may be for those of us whose histories cry out for resistance, we must learn to also strategically translate ourselves to affect change in our institution for ourselves and for those women faculty of color that will traverse our path behind us.

The dismissal of nondominant ways of knowing and being in the world as “folklore” and “illegitimate” is not an accident but aspects of the social conditions that result in antagonisms such as racism and sexism that sustain the colonial and imperialist order of the Euro American capitalist class in the United States and the

world. For example, the values expressed by both of us in our narratives for silence, listening, allowing others to shine, and sometimes deferring to those who may have greater knowledge or experience in certain contexts has been thought by colleagues to signal common stereotypes of the quiet and submissive Latina, who lacks intelligence or the quiet obedient Asian who lacks decision-making skills. Here, the stereotype is presumed to “come from somewhere” even though we know many White female and male colleagues who often refrain from being the most outspoken. What may be conceived of as “negative” stereotypes is a western presumption. We are not silent or quiet because we are shy and submissive but because we reject the western assumption that being bigger, louder, first, or above the rest are “naturally” superior way of engaging in the world. Furthermore, [Onwuachi-Willig \(2012\)](#) notes that although there are some silences that are unforgivable, silence can also be used strategically to survive hostility or to expand our voices and gain power. These “backward” characteristics ascribed to Latinas and Asians facilitate the paternalistic stance toward Latin America and Asia that the United States often takes on “helping” them by providing jobs instead of noting how the transnational capitalist class benefits from the maintenance of a highly exploited, female ethnic labor force abroad.

Recognizing this broader schema of social relations of production, racism and sexism must be continually challenged at all fronts but especially in the realm of epistemology in the academy—where knowledge production is legitimized. As long as the majority of society persists in believing that western epistemes are superior or more advanced than the epistemes of other nondominant groups and societies, the exploitation of diverse groups in our nation and across the world will continue. Only challenging these views will result in the *conscientization* that may lead to structural transformations.

The current neoliberal agenda that is increasingly infused within our universities prevents new and alternative ontologies and epistemologies from emerging. At the base of neoliberalism are privatization, standardization, and accountability systems that are affecting the ways in which universities are structured, including how moneys are allocated, how tenure and promotion is determined, and how the curriculum in our classrooms

is determined ([Edu-factory, 2009](#); [Peters, 2011](#)). In such an atmosphere, difference is rejected because it fails to be sufficiently standardized to become marketable and competitive. Among other approaches, we must resist the demand for greater quantity of publications that contributes to a proliferation of articles and journals, often at the expense of quality. Of course, this is fraught with the tension that to resist the numbers game may cost us tenure and forfeit our ability to create change from the inside. Thus, we find ourselves living out the contradiction of playing the same game that we condemn.

Internalized oppression, that fear among the nondominant groups that the dominant group has been right all along and we may not be as bright and deserving of success as the dominant group are ([Pyke, 2010](#)), obscures our passage and sabotages our actions even when we recognize its existence. Internalized oppression shows its face when we question what we know to be true but generally goes unrecognized by the dominant group and when we fail to react to the dismissal of our ideas or the assumptions made about us. However, in the space of reflection and critical dialogue we find that we are not alone in our observations or analysis and we begin to develop a deeper understanding of oppression and to rehearse turning “common sense” ([Gramsci, 1971](#)) assumptions on their head. We continually seek these spaces of reflection and production where we can rage against the cruelty of oppression, allow hope to strengthen our resolve to master the dragon of hegemony, and strategize against the “politics of erasure” ([McLaren & Jaramillo, 2006](#)). Here, we legitimize that space as ongoing research. Although our naming of oppression is often met with the critique of victimization, we argue that the critique itself is a form of silencing. We are fully aware of our responsibility to use our agency to challenge structures but also argue that naming the problem and developing social consciousness is a necessary aspect of taking action for transformation.

The early career, woman of color faculty is unlikely to manage an assault on her personhood (her whole person) on her own and still succeed in the academy. The tenured scholar of color may facilitate success for another by validating, strategizing, and helping her white colleagues and administrators understand. Together, women faculty of color can learn from and support each other

and become stronger. However, not all women faculty or faculty of color are ready ideologically to face or challenge the racialized and gendered ideologies and material conditions that sustain systems of deficit theorizing and inequity within the academy. Senior faculty may become jaded. After all, they have knelt before the master for so long, their legs may no longer be able to stand up against oppression. We must resist the temptation to vilify their competencies. They have walked the path of disbelief, resistance, rage, and consciousness. Together we can lift ourselves toward action and we have done so in ways that although seemingly small strategically plant seeds of transformation that we hope to grow.

We have found dominant group members willing to sacrifice their privileged status and commit “class [and race] suicide” (Torres, 1993) to take up the fight against colonialism and imperialism that serves the interests of a White supremacist, patriarchal, national and transnational capitalist class. We need and want our White sisters and brothers whose alterity is found in their souls, rather than on their skin, to stand beside us as both mentoring and mentored allies. They have the power that their dominant status ascribes and they also sit in positions, as tenured colleagues and administrators, from which they can make change happen. We ask that they be genuine in their value for us and our ways of knowing. “False generosity” (Freire, 1970) is hurtful and humiliating and those who cannot understand how to be genuine allies must learn from their peers to purposely *look* for our strengths.

An important aspect of our relationship is the strength that each individual voice adds to the other—that each is seen as knowledgeable, creative, innovative, and moving the agenda of inclusion forward. Each unique person in their own way advances an ideology and a commitment to act toward inclusion, equity, and transformation. The conversations we had required more than casual research rapport to conduct, rather there was a growing sense of trust, allegiance, love, and a deep commitment to reciprocity and intersubjectivity that maintained the relationship and the dialogue over time. To question the dark underbelly of the academy is risky—Done alone, it can defeat you. Done together, there is solidarity and hope for possible conjoined pathways. Transformation occurs when the other helps one to reframe a perspective or position. The objective is to surface critique over empathy in order to better under-

stand and act. The critiques we offered each other were nested in a history of relational understanding.

Implications

The relationship of allyship that we have described must develop as an organic process, one in which each individual is invested and the actors have found an affinity together, a shared purpose and a similar vision. Such a relationship cannot be arranged through matching. However, spaces for these relationships to take hold and develop can be created. Opportunities that bring faculty together to interact in intimate spaces, to see each others’ vulnerabilities, strengths, and needs are crucial for the development of these organic mentoring relationships. In our case, writing together and talking about our teaching of a mutual course brought into view our similarities and our differences and created opportunities to shed our white masks and show our vulnerabilities, which led to caring and empathy, critique and action. Administrators can play a crucial role here by creating a culture of collaboration and a caring relational ethic among faculty. Relational ties may be culturally familiar to women faculty of color who come from large families and whose family members continually reinforce one another. When institutions provide space for these relationships, they are perceived as structurally open to collective ways of developing human beings. Therefore, instead of individuals fitting into university individualist structures, the university accommodates the individuals to form communities of support.

Related to this notion of communities of support is the notion of having “difficult conversations” among faculty, as shared in Suzanne’s narrative. Rather than only addressing faculty needs to develop as teachers and scholars, creating opportunities for faculty to share, listen, and learn about each other and to discuss issues that affect them personally within the institution could potentially be a great opportunity for creating awareness and serve as a catalyst for action among an entire group. Within such spaces, people come to know each other beyond the workings of their teaching and scholarship, which may allow for the development of relationships that lead to mentoring among women faculty of color.

We appreciate the Kochan (2013) model as a schema for thinking about relationships in mentoring. Our relationship has characterized all

three of her categories at different points in time and we have found that no one category has been more salient at any particular phase of our relationship. Rather than temporal movement across the categories, our experience suggests that the type of mentoring is predicated on the expertise, topic, and context of experience. For us as women of color, instrumental factors associated with the academy are more often the domain of Suzanne's expertise. However, Lilia adds a different kind of dimension to the notion of instrumentality—as her questions often reveal the hidden nature of dominant ideologies, market values, and system maintenance within routines of implementation. Both of us consistently interrogate issues related to the subaltern—because we each bring a different set of cultural experiences, racial/ethnic identification, and social positioning to our ontologies and epistemologies. We have found that institutional factors may differ across institutions, making the search for solutions through the literature impractical. Furthermore, we considered that although mentoring dyads or groups of color are likely to support the unique nuances of the subaltern that our personal histories provide, the hegemony of whiteness that prevails in academia allows for its invisibility, such that in some cases, there may be limited cultural capital among mentors of color, making the case for the need of White allies to help translate the system. The first women of color pioneers on the academic scene attribute their success to white allies who “get it.” Finally, an important note is that in our attempt to make visible invisible knowledge systems, we question the notion of models that are neatly laid out categories, taken out of context of social relationships that cannot be objectified and determined outside of the personal, interpersonal, historically situated, economically and politically contextualized realities of our lives. It is critical that conceptual models include the intersections of social positionings that differentiate the lives of women faculty of color from the lives of women and faculty of color. We ask what we consider a crucial question to moving forward in what is both a critical and loving attempt to bring people of color into the academy: how should spaces for the subaltern be negotiated to allow for full expression and legitimacy of their ontologies and epistemologies?

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