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Uncovering internalized whiteness through Critical Race counterstories

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Introduction

Critical Race theorists understand what is at stake in the United States is white supremacy – the social structure that fabricates “races” and creates racial hierarchies based on these fabrications – always placing whites at the top (Allen & Liou, 2019). White supremacy ensures that whites are always the ones in power, despite the fact that the majority of the world’s population is non-white (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Ideologies of whiteness are the various manifestations of white supremacy, including colorblind ideology, meritocracy, and institutional policies that privilege white bodies over all others, notably the notion of whiteness as property (Harris, 1993; Matias, 2016).

In order for this racial project (Omi & Winant, 1993) to sustain itself amidst shifting demographics – like those that edge, for example, Texas nearer to a majority-Latina/o/x state – non-white individuals become integral players in manifesting white supremacy. In other words, white supremacy functions both because whites and non-whites internalize and replicate this system. As Critical Race theorists and faculty members teaching within this broader social and political context at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) with a majority Latina/o/x student body in the U.S., we see and feel the effects of this particular iteration of whiteness daily, particularly the ways that white fragility and whiteness manifest in our classrooms (DiAngelo, 2018), in our communities, and in Latina/o/x institutions as racialized Brown bodies seek proximity to whiteness (Matias, 2020).

This chapter centers our experiences as Chicanas and a Chicano living and working in San Antonio, Texas, at an HSI. Specifically, we draw from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Critical Race counterstories to illustrate the intimate connection between theory and methods for scholars of color within the field of education (DeCuir-Gunby, Chapman, & Schutz, 2019; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT provides a framework from which to analyze the historical and continued pervasiveness of white supremacy, whiteness as property,
and racism as endemic to our everyday lives and experiences. We contend that in using CRT to analyze all structures and articulations of whiteness and white supremacy, it is impossible to separate the theory that guides us (racism as endemic) from the method of telling stories that unmask and debunk the dominant, deficit narratives about our communities (counterstories) that are rooted in a white supremacist social structure. Though CRT is the broader, overarching framework that guides this chapter, we also draw from Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), particularly because the context that we are examining is largely Mexican American centric. In essence, the counterstory we present in this chapter illustrates that critical theories can function as methods and that critical scholars should continue to take them up as legitimate forms of research (Brayboy & Chin, 2019). Importantly, we also note that while Latina/o/x scholars have skillfully employed CRT and counterstories to document various proliferations of whiteness in educational systems (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Yosso, 2006), CRT and counterstorytelling has been infrequently used to chronicle how People of Color either align themselves to whiteness or are lured and co-opted by its power. In other words, People of Color can be co-opted by white supremacy and as a result, so too can theoretical methods such as CRT’s counterstorytelling. Because of this, we caution that folks should be wary of how these methods are being employed. Solorzano and Yosso (2002a) and others (Haney López, 1997; Trucios-Haynes, 2000) reiterate that “people of color often buy into and even tell majoritarian stories” (p. 5), but this chapter extends CRT theories and counterstorytelling methodology to illuminate this particular articulation.

We situate the experiences that we draw from in this chapter within the context of Texas, a Republican state that has a Latina/o/x population demographic similar to that of California, a Democratic state. Our aim is to show the ways that whiteness manifests itself within this majority-Latina/o/x state. White supremacy is deeply embedded in Texas history and politics and as a result have largely impacted the socialization of people who identify as Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x – that is, the subtraction of their language, the loss of an ethnic identity, and the expectation that they will assimilate into whiteness. Next, we expand upon our use of CRT counterstorytelling methodology as a means of highlighting how this approach is a form of embodied theory and therefore, theoretical inquiry. In the next section, we offer a counterstory that allows us to uncover the ways that Chicanas/os/xs and Latinas/os/xs uphold and normalize whiteness, as well as how HSIs and other majority Latina/o/x institutions are implicated in white supremacist matrices of power. Drawn from our experiences working and living in Texas, this counterstory allows us to signal, theorize, and, hopefully, disrupt the internalization of whiteness as it manifests within a context that is predominantly Latina/o/x, and, more specifically, majority Mexican and Mexican American. We conclude by reiterating the interconnectedness of Critical Race theories and its counterstorytelling method – in other words, the ways that CRT as a theory also serves as a
method from which to deconstruct white supremacy and whiteness. Furthermore, we argue that using CRT and counterstories as both the theory and method can inform, disrupt, and challenge majoritarian narratives – even those told and maintained by Brown bodies and institutions.

Counterstorytelling as a theoretical construct

Critical Race counterstories function as a way to center the narratives of the multiply marginalized (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Matias, 2013; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002a, 2002b; Yosso, 2006). Derived specifically from Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), counterstories provide insights into the lived realities of communities that experience intersectional oppressions (Crenshaw, 1991) and help situate moral and ethical questions tied to our understandings of these oppressions. In particular, however, “[c]ounterstories make the study of race so salient and dynamic because they unveil intricate nuances embedded in everyday life” (Matias, 2013, p. 292). That is, counterstories serve as a useful pedagogical tool that illuminates what oppression, but more specifically racism, feels like. They function to subvert the status quo and not only “make the invisible visible” (Brayboy & Chin, 2019, p. 52), but furthermore push us to reimagine the role of the marginalized within a racialized, hierarchical structure that privileges whiteness. Counterstories also function to connect communities together who share similar experiences with oppression as a means of providing support and validation – recognizing that their experiences are shared.

Aligned with women of color feminists who have long argued that the body is a site of developing theory and resistance (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1983), we argue that counterstories are theoretical tools that illuminate our lived realities. In other words, counterstories function as theory – they help us uncover, challenge, make sense of, and process the various oppressions we face and live through. Counterstories function as embodied theory because they reflect experiences that are lived and breathed in the everyday. Though many scholars have written about the process of developing counterstories, there is no empirical formula that fits what a counterstory is. Suffice it to say, counterstories do not neatly fit within the limited empirical definitions of data and thus it behooves us to consider what is the methodological process of counterstories. Thus, counterstories are not merely another form of empirical method to be used by whomever – they are specific to experiencing oppression and function pedagogically to help us better understand that oppression.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Solorzano and Yosso (2002b) note that whites are not the only ones who tell deficit, majoritarian narratives about racism, sexism, and other “isms.” They argue that People of Color can and do tell these deficit narratives as well. Matias (2016) argues that People of Color can also embody and be indoctrinated by whiteness, noting there can be several reasons for this including (1) survival and (2) believing they will have some protection against whiteness. We agree with Matias that oftentimes People of
Color can perceive a false sense of security that comes with aligning themselves with whiteness. What has been less theorized within the realm of counterstorytelling is how People of Color, and in our case, Brown folks, respond to other Brown folks who have internalized whiteness. In other words, there are few counterstories that explicitly examine what the internalization of whiteness can look like and furthermore, how one might respond to or make sense of that internalization. Bell (1992) in his infamous parable “Space Traders” included a character by the name of Dr. Gleason Golightly who is intended to represent a person of color who has internalized whiteness and acts as a token for white folks especially since Golightly is a Black, conservative economics professor. Though “Space Traders” is not considered a counterstory, we bring this example in because several CRT scholars have previously suggested that People of Color can certainly be used in the service of whiteness and to the detriment of themselves. Thus, our hopes in this piece was to create a counterstory that more explicitly centers a dialogue regarding internalized whiteness by Brown people and places. Meaning, the counterstory we offer is a model of how to methodologically apply counterstories in ways that reveal whiteness rhetoric. We do so because we find it concerning that approximately 28% Latinas/os/xs nationally voted for 45 in the 2016 election, while 34% did so within the state of Texas (2016 Election Results). Voting for 45 was in stark contrast to the ideals of what is best suited for Latinas/os/xs, especially when he ran a presidential campaign that was anti-Latina/o/x. Though we certainly pinpoint white supremacy as the disease affecting all of us, albeit differently depending on whether you are white or a person of color (Matías, 2016), we feel there is a need to continue pushing the conversation regarding the effects of the internalization of whiteness by Brown people. Furthermore, we argue that counterstories, given their ability to relate nuance in ways that can be accessible, should center internalized whiteness by People of Color as a means of further theorizing what this looks like, feels like, and what we may decide to do about it.

**Application of counterstory as method of exposing internalized whiteness**

**Arrival to Texas**

“That is a beautiful sight. I know we are back home now,” said Dr. Malaquías Tamez to his wife Dr. Esperanza Tamez, as the first Whataburger restaurant became visible on the outskirts of El Paso. His excitement had remained high during the long drive back home, but his giddiness became more apparent as he continued chatting to his wife.

“You know – we will get back to Texas nearly 20 years to the day that we were married in San Antonio,” he announced to the kids for what seemed like the 20th time during their trip. They were returning to be faculty members at one of the largest Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) in the country. With
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four additional degrees, three kids, three cross-country moves, and a dog, they were now headed back to the capital of Tejano music and bean and cheese tacos. Specifically choosing to work at a university with such a high percentage of Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x students, many of whom are the first in their families to attend college, the Tamezes were having a full-circle moment, returning as seasoned professors who hoped to work with the local Mexican American intelligentsia and community leaders.

Ixchel’s drive to Texas a month later was mostly uneventful. She tackled the 21-hour drive alone, energized by the security of her new position as an incoming assistant professor to the same university. Ixchel was both excited and nervous about her move to the southwest, in particular because her roots are in California. Being a queer, first-generation college, second-gen immigrant, low-income Chicana from Fontana, Ixchel never even knew what a graduate degree was until the end of her sophomore year in college – and yet, here she was, moving across the country for a faculty position at an HSI.

She anticipated feeling at home amongst Texas’s largely Latina/o/x population. Indeed, the demographic similarities between Texas and California quelled some of her nerves about relocating. For example, although California is a more populous state, both Texas and California have approximately 52% Latina/o/x students in their public school K-12 system (California Department of Education, 2018; TEA, 2018).

It was only on the last 75 miles into San Antonio along Texas’s interstate highway 35 that her serenity was jarred. A billboard posted alongside the highway caught her attention. It read, “California? Too late. Texas still great. Vote Republican.”

Struck by this initial introduction to Texas, Ixchel began to wonder what it would be like to teach a predominantly Latina/o/x classroom with Republican political leanings. How would her curriculum rooted in notions of racial and gender justice be received by Brown students whose political views favored an individualistic, free-market, neo-liberal perspective?

Early into the semester

Descended from five generations of native-born South Tejanos – gente from south of San Antonio but north of the Rio Grande – was a source of pride for Malaquías, also known as Dr. Tamez, an incoming professor to Alamo University. With the lore and mythologies about the Alamo (Acuña, 1988; Montejano, 1987; Ramos, 2019), the murderous Texas Rangers (Johnson, 2003), and the King Ranch – what had once been the “biggest ranch in the world” (Hollandsworth, 1998) – most people new to Texas were struck by the Texas-sized and Texas-centric culture. But after returning home, Malaquías acutely sensed the hegemonic racism, patriarchy, and internalized oppression that afflicted the majority Brown population in South Texas.

At the beginning of the semester, he attended a gathering of superintendents that reminded him of the importance of moving back to prepare the
region’s next generation of school leaders. There, he noticed his colleague Chuck Duvall, a senior professor in his department, greeting many school district leaders. When Chuck saw Malaquías walk into the educational regional center, he waved him over to introduce him.

“Dr. Tamez,” he said as Malaquías approached, “this is Dr. McCandless, the leader of this group of school superintendents.” Malaquías recalled that McCandless had just been reelected to his second term as chair of this organization of superintendents from the south Texas region. His thick Texas twang spoke for the organization in the media, at the legislature, and at state-wide conventions. Shortly after exchanging pleasantries, Malaquías observed Dr. McCandless’s commanding presence as he circulated the room, watching as other superintendents yielded physical space to him.

Malaquías did a quick tally. Although he recognized a good number of Latino district leaders, of the 55 superintendents in the room, only 14 were Latina/o/x. Of those 14, only three were Latina.

“Let’s get down to the business,” McCandless ordered, interrupting Malaquías’s thoughts. “We have a full agenda, including discussing the new accountability measures that will go into effect this academic year.”

As McCandless moved through his talking points, Malaquías noted that the majority of their meeting was dominated by the voices of two to three white males. In a state where over half of all enrolled public school students are Latina/o/x, and in a county with over 60% of its public school enrollment identified as Latina/o/x students, the most powerful voices at the table were 70% white and 88% male. A well-publicized report published in San Antonio’s daily newspaper earlier that year revealed decades-long inequities in access, opportunities, and educational attainment for Latina/o/x students, yet not one item agenda addressed them. Furthermore, even though at least three of the districts in this region housed a federal detention site – or what some activists more accurately describe as “concentration camps” – within their boundaries, the superintendents did not consider their roles as educational leaders regarding the humane treatment of children.

No one called for a discussion of these two vitally important policy issues. Although McCandless gave an opportunity to amend or add to the agenda, no one objected, and the meeting proceeded.

As he surveyed the room, Malaquías saw that the Latino superintendents were assembled on the right side of the room, while the three Latina superintendents were scattered throughout. Although few in number, Malaquías expected at least one of the Latina/o/x leaders to question the absence of a discussion of the migrant children, or even mention the negative impacts standardized test scores have on Latina/o/x communities. Instead, he observed an erasure of policy issues that had direct impact on Latina/o/x-Chicana/o/x student success, such as the lack of opportunities for first-generation students who want to pursue higher education, or the separation of children – namely Indigenous and Brown – who were being held in hieleras by for-profit companies
that were being rewarded handsomely by government contracts. Why weren’t school leaders advocating for the well-being of those children, too?

Despondent, Malaquías waited for and walked out with the two newest Latina/o/x superintendents, Dr. James Sanchez and Dr. Alice Guajardo after the meeting. Both were known as outspoken leaders. He met the two at a back-to-school event at his university and had lunch with each of them his first few weeks on the job.

Malaquías asked, “Was this your first superintendent regional meeting?” When they nodded, he continued, “What did you think?”

Both superintendents smiled and paused awkwardly. They referenced the highly top-down nature of the process for getting on the agenda, and although they had previously met many of the school district leadership in the county, they mentioned that it still struck them how white and male the space was.

After speaking for a few minutes about the test scores in their district, Malaquías broached the topic that most bothered him. “Why didn’t anyone bring up the separation of immigrant children from their families?” he interjected.

“I’ve been told to not rock the boat and to play nice, and for sure don’t be seen as militant,” Dr. Guajardo chimed in. “As one of the very few Latinas in the room, you have to pick your battles. Most of the men in that room are conservative. There is no benefit to me or my district to call them out in that space.”

“But what about your colegas? There are other Latino superintendents who could have said something, gone on the record?” Malaquías pressed.

“Look, no one has to tell me how to feel about this. It’s very distressing,” Dr. Sanchez said forcefully. “But we have to be smart about this. Whether we like it or not, the ‘good old boy’ network is real and it’s powerful and pushing against them could cost us our jobs.”

Malaquías sensed Sanchez’s defensiveness. He changed the topic and asked them both about their families in South Texas and what brought them to San Antonio. Their experiences were very similar. They were first in their families to leave home, attend college, and to then complete graduate degrees. Like him, they decided early in their careers to enter the field of education and saw it as an opportunity to give back and to transform community. On the way home, Malaquías could not help but think about how deeply entrenched white supremacy undergirds all policy, educational and economic development renewal strategies in the heart of Mexican American South Texas.

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With jittery fingers, Esperanza Tamez logged onto the classroom computer. She breathed a sigh of relief as her newly issued password was accepted and looked up to survey the students shuffling into the classroom. Since earning her Ph.D. six years ago, Esperanza had imagined herself in such a space, teaching students whose eyes, faces, and sounds echoed those of her siblings, primos,
and former classmates. During that time, she taught at a Research I institution in the Rocky Mountain West, a campus whose demographics mirrored the predominately white student populations of other Research I institutions across the U.S. Having been raised in a majority-Mexican American community in South Texas and having attended a small, private, Catholic HSI as an undergraduate, Esperanza attributed her strong sense of identity and self-assurance to those formative years where a bicultural and bilingual identity was the norm. She held onto her goal of teaching at a minority-serving institution and providing that type of validation and belonging to students like herself. Today was the first day of realizing her dream, teaching at an emerging Tier I school that served a population of 56% Latina/o/x students.

By mid-semester, Esperanza made a disconcerting observation. She detected an overwhelming lack of knowledge among her students about the histories and experiences of Mexican American, Chicana/o/x, and/or Latina/o/x communities. For instance, when discussing the evolution of Chicana/o/x art, Esperanza asked, “Who graduated from the high schools in town where students walked out in 1969?” as a way to localize this artform. Students were unaware walkouts had even occurred in San Antonio. When examining the motivation for corridos like the Ballad of Gregorio Cortez, students had little to no understanding of the bigotry, terror, and misery anti-Mexican violence corridos addressed. She asked, “How many lynchings of Mexicans or Mexican Americans occurred in Texas?” Upon this, students were shocked to hear that Latinas/os/xs were even targeted in this way. It seemed that every cultural expression discussed – ballet folklórico, danza Azteca, Spanish colonial writings, murals, reggaetón, Tejano music – revealed a disturbing lack of knowledge. In order to provide the necessary context for the cultural expressions of Latina/o/x communities, Esperanza found herself adjusting her syllabus to accommodate discussing these historical moments, experiences, and figures.

“¿Como te va, Esperanza?” Citlali Montez, Esperanza’s colleague, greeted her after one of her class periods. They were meeting for lunch to check in with one another.

“Pues, en casi todo bien,” she replied, after they found a nice shaded table. “I am a bit taken aback by how disconnected my students are from their racial, ethnic, and cultural histories. My experience growing up in South Texas included these narratives, but my students are hearing them for the first time in my class and it is not the starting point I imagined being at an HSI in a predominately Brown city. At times, it feels like I am back in the Rocky Mountain West teaching a classroom full of white students who don’t know the difference between a Mexican American and a Guatemalan.” Citlali chuckled. “I know what you mean. As a product of many of the public schools our students here attend, I can tell you that they know shockingly little about the struggles their antepasados faced just so they could attend this very university.”

“Could you tell me more about that?” Esperanza asked. Citlali continued, “Well, the HSI we worked at only resulted after decades of tireless efforts by various stakeholders in the Mexican American community.” She explained it
took a lawsuit and legislative order to rectify how the largely working-class Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x communities making up the majority of one of Texas’s largest cities had been “underserved by higher education” (de Oliver, 1998, p. 274) for years, since the majority of these families “could not afford to send their children to an out-of-town university” (p. 274). The legislative bill authorizing the construction of this institution indicated it should be located at a site accessible to the “socioeconomically underprivileged populations of the inner city” (p. 277) which were – and still are – majority Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x. Despite this pledge, the campus was built in 1969 at the city’s outer suburban fringe, closer to the city’s relatively affluent white populations. It would take another lawsuit filed by MALDEF3 in 1987 to demonstrate that this particular suburban campus had yet to meet the needs of the city’s and region’s Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x population. As a result, a satellite campus was finally built in the city’s urban core in 1997, amidst a predominately Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x neighborhood. This second site was where Esperanza’s office was located.

“There are 120,000 college students enrolled throughout the city in six universities and five community college campuses and all but one of the privates has at least 50 percent of its student body identifying as Hispanic. We have this huge population of Latina/o/x students in higher education and they arrive to our campuses not only not knowing their own histories but also having under-resourced opportunities to take classes about their histories, identities, and experiences.”

Esperanza made a mental note to share this conversation with Malaquías that night on their after-dinner walk with their dog, Chavo. Looking at her calendar, she was reminded they planned to meet with Ixchel the following morning and wondered how her transition might be going.

Los tres

On her way to meet with Esperanza and Malaquías for a research meeting, Ixchel wipes the small droplets of sweat from her eyebrows that developed on her walk from the parking lot to campus. While both the humidity and the anxiety about what happened with her student, Eduardo, during last week’s office hours bothers her, she looks forward to sharing with Esperanza and Malaquías to gain their insight.

As Ixchel walks into their reserved meeting room, Malaquías looks up and says, “Right on time!” in a loud voice as he looks up from his laptop. Esperanza also looks up and smiles warmly.

Esperanza closes her laptop and leans slightly forward, asking “How are you?” “Eh, there have been better days,” Ixchel responds with a slight chuckle, less out of nervousness or anxiety and more out of the sheer ridiculousness that is white supremacy. “There is something that happened during my office hours last week that I would like to share with you both. It concerns one of my students, Eduardo.”
Both Malaquías and Esperanza furrow their eyebrows. As he brings a cup of coffee up to his mouth, Malaquías asks first, “what happened?”

“Well, to add context to this story, Eduardo is a visibly dark-skinned Latino. This detail is actually quite relevant,” Ixchel says and then pauses for a drink of her water bottle. “Two weeks ago, he actually walked out of my class for reasons that weren’t very clear to me. I have consistently noticed that Eduardo is fidgety in class. He makes faces, sighs loudly, and displays body language that conveys to me his clear annoyance with the topics that we discuss in class, all of which are related to research, but particularly topics that challenge traditional Western ways of thinking about research. That means that we discuss issues tied to race, racism, and other forms of oppression. At the same time that he is annoyed, he has become increasingly vocal in displaying his opposition. He identifies as a conservative and repeatedly says in class that he doesn’t like ‘liberal professors who don’t teach all sides.’ I’m okay with being challenged in the classroom because, of course, that is part of the point – for us to engage in critical dialogues and challenge each other, even when it feels uncomfortable. However, the pattern that I have noticed with him is that he challenges me with no substantive evidence. . . In fact, I am very confident that he is not reading the materials at all because he can’t articulate what the main points of the readings are.” Ixchel takes a pause.

“Yeah, that’s definitely happened before,” Esperanza replies, as she sets down her tea. “In my case, there have been male students and, notably, male students of color, that are clearly uncomfortable with me as the professor. As the book Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia points out, women of color faculty are consistently questioned for their knowledge of course material, their handling of classroom discussions, and their overall capability to serve as competent individuals in their respective fields in relation to their male counterparts” (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Nie-mann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012).

“Was there a particular thing that he said to you when you met with him during office hours in terms of why he doesn’t like the course material?” Malaquías asks.

“Yes and no. Yes, as in it’s clear that he doesn’t like the course and no as in his evidence supporting specifically what he doesn’t like about it outside of it being ‘liberal’ is nonexistent. For example, I did mention to him the discussion that we had in class regarding the Tuskegee Syphilis Study,4 and he told me that they also withheld treatment from white men before they did that with Black men. However, when I asked him to expand on that, he didn’t actually have concrete evidence,” Ixchel concludes. “Thus far, any time I mention racism as leading to particular outcomes, such as health disparities [(Flores, Gaxiola Ser-rano, & Solorzano, 2019)], he’s very insistent that it’s not racism – it’s mindset. In other words, he advances the ‘use your bootstraps’ mentality.”

Both Esperanza and Malaquías sigh as Ixchel finishes talking. All three of them sit silently for a few seconds, hearing only the low hum of the air conditioner and the occasional whizzing by of cars from the main street.
“It’s unfortunate to have had that experience in an HSI, in a predominantly Brown city. I wish I could say that it was unique to you, but our time back in Texas has reminded us that *raza* reinscribes whiteness, too,” Esperanza said. She relayed how off-putting it was to have a classroom with a majority of Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x students who have been disconnected from their own identity and histories.

“I have been trying to make sense of this over these past few weeks and I have reminded myself of how this disengagement is deliberate. It functions as a tool for reproducing a white Eurocentricity, even in a majority Brown city,” Esperanza added. “It helps me focus my frustration not at my students, but rather at the insidious machinations of whiteness and colonialism that uphold oppressive conditions in this state.”

“Precisely,” interjected Malaquías. “The history of whiteness in Texas is indeed perverse – most notably, the segregation of Brown people based on racist practices and furthermore punishing them in schools and society for speaking Spanish and having Spanish surnames [(Stolen Education, 2013)]. I’ve had people say to me on various occasions that their parents did not speak Spanish to them – even if their parents were fluent – because they feared what would happen to their children, how they would be excluded.”

“A number of my students have never been taught the segregationist history of Texas.” Malaquías continued, “This is really no different than how history is taught more generally [(Loewen, 2018)], but it has a particular feel in Texas given the demographics of the state, its proximity to the border, and the current political climate that continues to denigrate migrants and their families” (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2016).

“However, despite knowing this social/political history,” Esperanza interjected, “I realize that I had an idealized image of what it would be like to live and work in a predominantly Brown space after surviving in the white space of academia for so long – where whiteness is almost always perpetuated by white folks – that I was taken aback when Brown folks manifest it inside my classroom, in my department, and at this HSI.”

“I think you are voicing something that I have been wrestling with since moving here,” Ixchel said, then took a breath. “I was genuinely excited to live and work here and I have been feeling – I don’t think disappointed is the right word – but, like, my expectations were not being met. Certainly, I have been feeling unsettled – especially after the experience with Eduardo,” Ixchel replied with a sigh.

“I am sure it was not only confusing, but also quite hurtful,” Esperanza said gently.

“Yes – I would say it was,” Ixchel responded. “There is something uniquely painful about the type of wound these iterations of whiteness cause when perpetrated by the hand of a fellow community member. Even worse, Eduardo ended up reporting me and the contents of my class directly to the Dean, articulating that I offered only biased perspectives. I am sure that if I was a white man, Eduardo would have taken up no issues with my class.”
While Esperanza snaps a lid off a small plastic container filled with red and green grapes and offers them to both Malaquías and Ixchel, she says, “I know these regular pláticas allow us to deshogan ourselves [(Flores Carmona, Hamzeh, Bejarano, Hernández Sánchez, & El Ashmawi, 2018)] and that they function as a means of ridding ourselves of the toxicity we absorb as we move through academia – and so I hope now that you have shared and we have listened there is some affirmation and relief you feel,” she said, directing her gaze to Ixchel as she reached for some grapes, “But it is also making me realize the need to theorize the affective consequences of white racial oppression by Brown folks as a byproduct of internalized racism and internalized colonization that Ixchel is articulating.”

Malaquías leaned back in his chair, lacing his fingers behind his head. He shut his eyes, momentarily. After a few seconds, he opened them and leaned forward, now resting his forearms on his thighs. “I do believe you have a point, Esperanza,” he began. “There is a good amount of scholarship from various disciplines and fields – communication, sociology, education, cultural studies – that examine the ways whites benefit and uphold whiteness. Scholars of color have been doing this work for years and now with the many white scholars who have taken up this work, this discourse has reached the mainstream.” He paused, took a sip of his coffee, and continued. “There is also substantial research about how People of Color are adversely affected by white supremacy and racism, but I am hard-pressed to find significant work that speaks to the ways People of Color uphold whiteness and/or colonial logics and what it is like for People of Color who are working to dismantle those ideologies to uncover resistance from that front.”

“Ixchel,” Esperanza jumped in, “how do you feel about us collaborating on doing what Malaquías is suggesting?”

Ixchel sat pensively for a few minutes, and then began nodding. “I know where we can start. Let’s look to Critical Race Theory’s counterstory methodology. I think it can help us document what we just expressed here.”

**Conclusion**

One purpose of this chapter was to illustrate how the theoretical, methodological, and analytical tools offered by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) provide a way to discuss and make sense of all forms of racism, whiteness, and white supremacy. In particular, we established how the interlinked theoretical tools of CRT and its counterstorytelling method can result in narratives and counterstories that function as embodied theories. In effect, we posit that critical methods and theories, such as CRT, produce insights about the world that traditional empirical research alone cannot produce because these traditions teach that valid research should be separate and disconnected from the researcher (Smith, 2012). As previously stated, we align ourselves with women of color feminists who have long written that the body is a site of theory creation – an approach devalued and ignored by
traditional empirical research methods. Without acknowledging how the body lives and creates theory, we erase the stories, lives, and narratives of people on the margins.

A second objective was to deconstruct the articulation of whiteness by individuals and institutions that are Latina/o/x identified or centered. Brayboy and Chin (2019) write that “research begins with experience and commitment to justice, which necessarily means combating, subverting, or examining relationships of power. This starts with white supremacy and colonization” (p. 51). Thus, as Critical Race theorists, our approach to research will always examine relationships of power that uphold and reproduce white supremacy in its myriad forms, including the ways that it is imagined and approximated within our own Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x communities. We understand these forms of internalized racism as being connected to the way that communities of color are systematically taught to devalue themselves (Matias, 2016). Counterstories traditionally provide a format for which to convert the lived realities of People of Color into narratives that can be used to understand the intricacies of white supremacy and whiteness in different contexts. The counterstory offered here initiated a conversation that has yet to be addressed via this methodology – the co-option of white supremacist logics and discourse by Latinas/os/xs and Chicanas/os/xs and the challenges Chicana and Chicano scholars face in disrupting that enactment.

The counterstory constructed in this chapter, thus, provides valuable and concrete insights into the ways that white supremacy is reproduced within Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x communities. Not only does our counterstory highlight the specifics of whiteness reproduction at the individual level, such as when Eduardo, a dark-skinned Republican Latino, embodies meritocracy, but it also demonstrates how it operates at the macro levels, such as how public schooling maintains a docile Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x workforce – that is, how a Eurocentric curriculum taught in predominantly Brown schools by Brown teachers and administrators in a bilingual and bicultural city still ensures that Latina/o/x are denied access to their own histories in ways that would substantially empower them. This was evidenced when the majority of Esperanza’s students illustrated no clear indication of their own histories. The removal and detachment from cultural and ethnic identity in schools for communities of color has a clear history, not only nationally, but specifically in Texas. As noted in the counterstory, we do not place blame on Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x communities in Texas for being stripped of their identity, but rather we understand the colonial logics and underpinnings of that separation as tied to the material realities endured by these families over generations – punishment in school, school segregation, underfunded schools, the Texas Rangers (a white vigilante group) harassing Chicana/o/x communities, and even lynchings of Mexicans across the state. Plainly, our communities have been whipped into whiteness.

Other examples of how ideologies of white supremacy are maintained by Latinas/os/xs and Chicanas/os/xs with decision-making power include
Malaquías’s experience in the meeting for superintendents. Although there were a select few Latinas and Latinos in the room, they obliged their token status by not challenging the status quo, ignoring the needs of Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x youth in the state. The university’s spotty history of serving the Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x students of its city and region – including the current lack of investment and resources in building pipelines to recruit students from the predominantly Latino/a/x and Chicana/o/x schools located in the same neighborhood as the campus – further indicates the superiority and hegemony of whiteness even among one of the state’s largest Hispanic-Serving Institutions.

A CRT counterstory method in this chapter allowed us to theorize the instances of internalized whiteness by Brown folks that we have experienced in Texas. Specifically, it provided us a methodological solution to discuss these complex issues in narrative format, thus making counterstories an effective research method and pedagogical tool. Our aim in analyzing how Brown folks reinscribe whiteness serves to not only document how context and place factor into manifestations of whiteness (in our case Texas with its particular history), but furthermore is intended to continue to challenge whiteness within Latina/o/x and Chicana/o/x communities, particularly given their increasing population growth. As Critical Race scholars we argue that the seductiveness of whiteness remains highly intact, even when living in contexts that are predominantly of color.

Notes

1 45 refers to the 45th president of the United States.
2 In 1969, there were nationwide walkouts in both K-12 and higher education regarding the substandard education People of Color were receiving at the time. Though the focal points for these walkouts tend to be Los Angeles and San Francisco, CA, there were also a number of walkouts that occurred in San Antonio.
3 Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund.
4 The Tuskegee Syphilis Study is a notorious research experiment that spanned over the course of about 30 years. For this particular study, 600 Black men (the majority of whom were diagnosed with syphilis) were recruited with the promise of receiving treatment for their ailments. The true purpose of the experiment was to watch what happened when the men with syphilis did not receive treatment. However, these Black men were falsely led to believe they were in fact receiving treatment when they actually were not (for more info see Brown, 2017).

References

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