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Alejandro Covarrubias

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“This session brings together the voices of several Chicanos who participated in a focus group and semi-structured interviews about their experiences in academia into a single voice that speaks from a Chicano standpoint.”

I began this work with the understanding that the power relations that exist in the society at large are reflected in institutions of higher education. A similar intersectionality of race, class and gender structures of domination witnessed in disenfranchised communities of color can be found in academia. How Chicanos experienced these relations of power within academia became of particular significance to me as I attempted to understand my own experience as a graduate student of color, a Chicano, with instances of racial microaggressions that were always gendered and classed. This session will present the voices of several young Chicano scholars who have served as respondents about their experiences with race, language and issues of social justice in a predominantly White university on the west coast.

I have chosen to employ the practice of story-telling, or counter storytelling, to begin to give voice to "Racism's victims" as an act of transformational resistance to dominant discourses about race. Critical Race theory's reliance on the standpoint of "People of Color" asserts that the experiential knowledge gained from this standpoint must be recognized and valued as they can provide us with a more complete understanding of the effects of racism and the possibilities for empowerment.

In the traditions of other critical race scholars, I will share the dialogue between the main character, a young Chicano, with various other characters, including White professors and "Professors of Color" as well as with White students and "Students of Color." These conversations reflect my respondents' experiences with various issues, including race and racism, "language of theory" vs. "language of practice," defining social justice, their experience with gender, and their resistance to hegemony. I employ five principles of Critical Race Theory: 1. The centrality of race and racism in American institutions and culture; 2. The challenges to dominant ideologies and discourses; 3. The centrality and significance of experiential knowledge; 4. The explicit commitment to social justice; and 5. A challenge to the ahistoricism of traditional scholarship - to understand the experiences with and responses of the main character with regards to these issues.

The recognition that education plays a contradictory role, with its ability to empower and potential for oppression, leads me to the final portion of this session. It deals with how this young Chicano has developed the navigational strategies to maneuver through the process of doctoral candidacy in light of the various obstacles and experiences with classed and gendered racial microaggressions. How these strategies of transformational resistance have served to empower this student, while in a contradictory way have served to compromise his political commitments, will serve as a catalyst for a discussion about

whether "choosing one's battles" truly involves choice. The discussion will also speak to the risk involved in "standing one's ground."

PRESENTER:

Alejandro Covarrubias is a doctoral student at the University of California, Los Angeles, in the Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. His area of specialization is in Race and Ethnic Studies in Education. He has an interest in exploring the role of Agencies of Transformational Resistance within the social-political space created by the Intersection of race, class, and gender structures of domination, particularly in historically impoverished Chicana/o communities. He is also interested in how Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Race Theory can help him conceptualize the Intersection and understand the resistance that occurs in response to the Intersection. As the son of immigrant Mexican parents, he was born and raised within the Intersection and is committed to transforming the power relations that maintain it.