

# The personal narrative as academic storytelling: a Chicano's search for presence and voice in academe

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Personal narratives are powerful tools that can be used to introduce competing mindsets into the academic discourse. They are especially powerful if they challenge a master narrative that seeks to portray the weak or powerless, such as Chicanos, in negative images or social contexts. This paper uses personal narrative to examine how Chicanos perceived the 1970s as a period of change in academe, one that would increase their presence and voice. The personal narrative also examines how academe is structured and organized to constrain the Chicano's search for presence and voice.

*Several years ago I was lecturing in an introductory class on ethnic inequality. The lecture was focused on the exploitation of Mexican American migrant workers and Mexican immigrant laborers by agribusiness interests in California. As I was speaking, out of the corner of my eye I saw an Anglo student raise her hand.*

*'Do you have a question or comment?'*

*'More of a comment than a question. My father's family has owned a dairy farm in Chino since the 1940s. The workers on the farm are all wetbacks. I think that they are lucky to have jobs. I don't think my family is exploiting them.'*

*'Why do you refer to the workers as wetbacks?'*

*'Because they are from Mexico. They are here illegally and they're uneducated.'*

*'So, you don't have a high opinion of them?'*

*'No. They're just workers doing dirty work.'*

*'Now, even though I'm a Chicano, I am of Mexican origin. In your eyes, would you consider me a wetback?'*

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*'I've always regarded all Mexicans as wetbacks. I don't make a distinction between Chicanos and Mexicans.'*

*'So, in your eyes, I'm a wetback.'*

*'Yes.'*

*I would like to believe that I have traveled far from my life stream as a migrant farm worker. I would like to believe that. But, I wonder, what am I in my students' eyes?*

If you grow up in a migrant farm worker family you're always on the move. You're always going somewhere in search of work but not staying long enough in the places you find work in to establish a presence, the opportunity to say 'I'm here.' Working against one's desire to establish presence are the places themselves because they are not eager to have farm workers establish presence in the community. Places become revolving social spaces in which the migrant's presence is limited only to one's labor, not a desire to alter one's quality of life. I thus remember growing up with a sense of always going somewhere, of never really getting anywhere, and of not belonging someplace. In his autobiographical novel, *Y No Se Lo Trago La Tierra/And The Earth Did Not Part* (1978), Tomas Rivera describes the migrant experience as one consumed with arriving and arriving but of never really arriving, 'Maybe I should say when we don't arrive because that's the plain truth. We never really arrive anywhere' (p. 114). There were no mileposts I could look at to see how far I had traveled on my migratory path. I have carried in my mind and heart my migrant farm worker life as I've tried to navigate my presence in academe. I've reached the realization that I can't say that my migrant life is behind me because I still haven't arrived in academe; in so many ways, the academic community is a revolving social space that only allows me to *pass through* (Aguirre, 1995).

If we agree that a person has agency in life, especially the kind that is self-reflexive, then a person is able to tell stories about how he/she understands the world around him/her. Each story increases the awareness of others regarding human experience and the desire to establish a connection with the social fabric. I thus have a story to tell, or if you prefer, a personal narrative, of a Chicano life in the academy. There is a purpose in telling the story. One, the story illustrates how academic life robs Chicano faculty of voice and presence. Two, it argues that robbing Chicano faculty of voice and presence marginalizes them in an institution that is supposed to be governed by principles of participatory democracy. I regard my personal narrative as a tool for helping others, Chicanos and non-Chicanos, shape and order their life experience into a manageable enterprise.

### **My Personal Narrative**

*In my sociological work I have constructed an alter ego, Professor Adrian Dia, to assist me in telling academic stories. I have borrowed the idea from Derrick Bell's conversations with Geneva and Richard Delgado's narratives with Rodrigo. Not long ago I wrote a critical race theory story involving Professor Dia about how affirmative action is practiced in academe (Aguirre, 2000). While I received a lot of positive responses from readers, several readers expressed some ambivalence*

to the story. For instance, after giving a presentation at one of the sister campuses in the university system, a faculty member in the audience approached me.

*'That was a real good presentation, Adalberto.'*

*'Thank you.'*

*'I've read your article in Sociological Perspectives. It was interesting, but disturbing.'*

*'Why is it disturbing?'*

*'Well, for one thing, you're a member of a very elite group, academics. By criticizing other members of the group, you're sort of turning your back on those people that gave you an opportunity to enter academe. Someone could say that you're biting the hand that feeds you.'*

*'I guess we see things differently. I'm not criticizing as much as I am instructing academics of how a practice they take for granted, affirmative action, can have unintended benefits for majority [Anglo] academics.'*

*'But that's where I see the problem. You argue that the majority practices affirmative action in order to benefit from it instead of helping minorities.'*

*'Don't get me wrong. Minorities have reaped some benefits from affirmative action but they have been small compared to the benefits gained by the majority. For example, once a minority person is hired to fill a faculty position, majority academics assume that they have done their affirmative action duty. Among minority academics that is regarded as the 'one-universe rule' crafted by majority academics—we already have a minority faculty member, why do we need another one? In contrast, majority academics continue to hire themselves without anyone asking when enough is enough. In my view, majority academics use the privilege of being able to hire themselves as a vehicle for establishing their dominance over minority academics. Ironically, majority faculty can hire themselves anytime they desire. So, affirmative action assists majority academics in having more degrees of freedom in hiring themselves than minority faculty have of increasing their numbers in academe.'*

*'I can see your point. But then many of the faculty hires that are members of the majority are often done in the name of "academic excellence." For instance, we just hired someone in global studies because we believe that she will bring academic excellence to the department. We identified her as a candidate and recruited her aggressively to join the campus.'*

*'You see, I consider that affirmative action for the majority. You identify a person and devise criteria to justify hiring them. Why isn't the same done for minority faculty? Why aren't they regarded as faculty that can bring academic excellence to a department or campus?'*

*'That is a good point. I've got to go. Though I liked the article, I still have questions about the story's validity and applicability.'*

A caveat is in order before going any further with my personal narrative. Because sociology is a cautious, and as a result conservative, discipline, I must shield my personal narrative from possible attack, especially from questions regarding the legitimacy of personal narratives in sociological work. First, the use of narrative inquiry in the social sciences has been taking place for quite awhile now. According to Bruner (1986), narrative inquiry has been used by social scientists since the early 1970s. Personal narratives have assumed various forms in social science research—case histories, personal interviews and content analysis (Richardson, 1990; Maines, 1993; Ewick & Silbey, 1995; Van Maanen, 1988). Regarding the nature of *narrative inquiry*,

Alvermann (2000) notes that it consists of a 'variety of research practices, ranging from those that tell a story of how individuals understand their actions through oral and written accounts of historical episodes to those that explore certain methodological aspects of storytelling' (p. 2). The use of narrative inquiry enables researchers and writers to show that social reality is a layered phenomenon that requires subjectivity based on personal experiences and intuitiveness as interpretive guides for its study (for examples, see: Van Maanen, 1988; Delgado, 1989; Richardson, 1990, 1997; Bell, 1999). My personal narrative is thus nested in an established research strategy in sociology and one that buffers personal narratives from criticism that they are not conducive to sociological practice.

Second, the *subjectivity* of the personal narrative has caused some critics to argue that it is suspect because it does not fit conventional methods that could be used to evaluate its validity and general applicability. According to the critics, the personal narrative is suspect because the storyteller is perceived as a potential source of bias and distortion (for examples, see: Baron, 1998; Delgado, 1993; Cizek, 1995; Maines, 1993; Ewick & Silbey, 1995). The subjectivity I employ to interpret my lived experience, coupled with the intuitive understanding I have about who and where I am, allows me to construct a personal narrative that captures a lived, and living, experience; an experience that garners kernels of truthfulness when others can identify a part or whole of their own lived experience in the narrative. In this sense, the degree of inter-subjective identification between the storyteller and another person's narrative, or lived experience, indicates a degree of validity; that is, it makes sense to others. The personal narrative is *personal* because it gives character to sociological work. Consequently, it is the *character* of the personal narrative that makes it valuable as a method for understanding everyday life because it gives substance to the story and identity to the storyteller. For example, personal narratives are valuable tools in sociological practice that can help us see how sociology has matured and influenced other fields in the social sciences (for examples, see: Denzin, 1997; Madan, 1999; Glass, 2001; Wilkinson, 2001). In short, the personal narrative gives me an identity in sociological work and gives meaning to my observations.

Finally, some criticize the personal narrative for taking a side. Critics view the personal narrative as the product of inquiry that is not subject to neutral and objective measures of description and explanation; it is perceived as the product of a storyteller that has decided to take a side in telling a story (Bochner, 2001). The critics are working under the assumption that sociologists do not choose sides in their practice. However, sociologists take sides, just like most other persons in everyday life (see: Becker, 1967; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). The topic one chooses to study, the statistical procedures one utilizes for making inferences, and the language one adopts with which to cloak observations are products of choice. The choice one makes is dependent on the side one takes to interpret the phenomenon under study. Ironically, many of the stories told by sociologists as they practice their craft often result in a battlefield of competing interpretations regarding neutrality and objectivity (for example, see: Winter, 2000). Not surprisingly, I have taken a side in my personal narrative. I have chosen to narrate my lived experience as a Chicano professor in

academe. My personal narrative takes a side in order to show the reader that there are competing perceptions of social life that can instruct us regarding the rich texture of a diverse life experience.

### **A stranger in academe**

*I started noticing a few years back that Anglo students tend to ignore me if my teaching assistants, who are usually Anglo, are in my office with me. For example, an Anglo student will enter my office to ask a question about my class or something else. (My door is always open so that students can just walk in.) If a teaching assistant happens to be in my office with me, the student will ask them the question instead of me.*

*'Hi! I have a question about your class.'*

*'You want to ask Dr Aguirre the question. I'm only a teaching assistant in the class.'*

*'Do you still have open seats in the class?'*

*'Yes, just bring your add/drop form to the next class meeting.'*

*On the way out, the student says to the TA, 'I guess I should talk to you about the class since you'll be teaching it.'*

*'No, Dr Aguirre will be teaching the class. I'll assist him with discussion sections and grading of tests. But he's the one you need to talk to.'*

*'So, he's the one really teaching the class?'*

*'Yes.'*

*I can sense the student's reluctance in accepting me as their instructor as they walk out of my office. It's an amusing sociological experiment, but a heartbreaking one for someone seeking presence and identity.*

Perhaps I was caught up with the time and the spirit of the 1960s generation that found its way into college in the 1970s. I entered the 1970s as a college student and, more importantly, as a Chicano college student. For many of us, the presence of a handful of other Chicano students on a college campus implied that we had finally found the open door into academe. While it appeared that Chicano college students were enrolling in increasing numbers during the 1970s, the enrollment increase was insignificant relative to the growth of the Chicano population in the United States (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993). Though we shied away from talking about a White conspiracy to keep Chicanos out of academe, we did observe that while Chicanos were getting into academe very few were graduating in numbers necessary to maintain an inter-generational presence of Chicanos in academe. It became clear that, in order for us to maintain our presence, we would need to enter the academic discourse in order to tell our stories.

But in order for us to get to the point where we tell our own stories, we had to listen to the stories told about us in the academic discourse. For example, I remember sitting in an introductory cultural anthropology class one day when the professor focused his lecture on ritual and tradition in Mexican American communities. My

interest in the lecture was heightened when the professor began to show slides of Mexican American communities in South Texas. My interest was heightened because I had grown up in South Texas and because I recognized many of the places he was lecturing about. I suddenly realized that we, Mexican Americans, had been studied and analyzed to see what we were all about; or to borrow Heinlein's (1961) term, we were studied as *strangers in a strange land*. The professor constructed a portrait of Mexican Americans as a people prone to value ritual, to seek immediate gratification rather than delay it, to be present-oriented instead of future-oriented, and as unwilling to change to meet the demands of a host society. In short, the portrait was layered with the image of a dysfunctional Mexican American culture that constrained Mexican Americans to exist as strangers in US society. How, then, could Chicanos counter these stories about them in the academic discourse?

Chicano scholars began to question during the 1970s the portrayal of Chicanos in the academic discourse (Romano, 1968, 1970; Montiel, 1970; Vaca, 1970a, b). Octavio Paz (1973) compiled some of the groundbreaking articles by Chicanos that challenged the treatment of Chicanos in history, literature and the social sciences in one volume. In a popular call for establishing a Chicano presence in the academic discourse, Rendón (1971) argued that: 'By admitting to being Chicano, to being this new person, we lose nothing, we gain a great deal. Any Mexican American afraid to join with the Chicano cause can only be afraid for himself and afraid of the gringo.... We can no longer be the Anglos' "Pancho'" (p. 14). In order for Chicanos to have agency in the academic discourse Brischetto and Arciniega (1973) called for an *examination of the examiners*. That is, Chicanos should study the examiners, who were usually Anglo scholars, to uncover biases or faulty assumptions in their portrayal of Chicanos in the academic discourse. As a result, a body of Chicano scholarship started to take shape in the 1970s that argued against the portrayal of Mexican American culture as dysfunctional (Aguirre, 1999). Chicano scholarship sought to impregnate the academic discourse with the phenomenological experiences of Chicanos in US society. It appeared to Chicanos then that the 1970s offered hope that Chicanos could control their destiny in the academic discourse.

Despite the call by Chicanos for an examination of the academic discourse, the 1970s did not mature as a decade of change for Chicanos in higher education. Paradoxically, the entry of Chicanos into higher education institutions in the 1970s only served to reinforce their relative degree of powerlessness in US society. Chicano faculty and students in higher education became peripheral participants and, consequently, invisible within institutions of higher education. We remained strangers in a strange land. As Arce (1978) observed regarding the presence of Chicano students and faculty in academe during the 1970s: 'The most prominent feature of the Chicano experience with higher education is its peripheralness relative to the overall academic enterprise. Whether one refers to Chicano institutions or Chicano programs or Chicano personnel or students' (p. 86). In a certain sense we, as Chicanos, became neglected guests in academe; we were invited to enter academe but ignored once we accepted the invitation. In the end, the peripheral position of

Chicano students and faculty in higher education constrained them from challenging the portrayal of Chicanos in the academic discourse.

Though more than two decades separate me from my college experiences in the 1970s I still find myself going back as a way of understanding where I am now. One of the questions graduate students often ask me, for example, is if it is possible to challenge the academic discourse without being part of the master narrative in the discourse. The question challenges me both personally and intellectually. It is a personal challenge because I like to believe that I have managed to steer away from promoting the ideas in a master narrative that portrays Chicanos as dysfunctional in US society. It chills my soul because I must admit that, to a certain degree, in order to attack the master narrative, one must give substance to the ideas in the master narrative. That is, one must give the master narrative meaning in order to challenge it. I must admit that I must objectify my being in order to argue that its subjective features have been ignored by the master narrative. I must also admit that I can only argue for the subjective value of my being, or Chicano-ness, in the academic discourse if I accept the portrayal of my being in the academic discourse. Does my struggle to argue for subjectivity increase my chances of becoming a stranger unto myself in the academic discourse?

The question challenges me intellectually because I like to believe that my scholarship has introduced a competing mindset into the academic discourse. The belief that one's scholarship will influence the academic discourse is symptomatic of practicing one's craft in academe. That is, every academic wants to believe that his/her work is valuable and meaningful to others. In my case, I have used my scholarship to question the master narrative in the academic discourse. I have been motivated by the belief that my efforts will open the eyes of others to a social reality they may have ignored or simply misinterpreted. But I find myself wondering if other academics, especially Anglo academics, consider my scholarship worth consideration in the academic discourse. I suspect that my scholarship is often ignored by Anglo academics and, as a result, is missing in the academic discourse. My suspicion is reinforced by Delgado's (1984, 1992) general observation that minority scholars are ignored by Anglo academics in the study of civil rights law—an area of law where minority scholars have the greatest likelihood of informing the academic discourse on racial discrimination and prejudice from a personal perspective. If I am silenced in the academic discourse, how can I give hope to minority students who seek to have voice in the academic discourse?

### **The academic discourse**

*I was coming out of an academic senate meeting when a faculty member in my college caught up with me. He was a member of the senate committee that had just decided to disestablish the Chicano Studies Program on campus.*

*'Hey! Beto, let's walk back together. You know that was a pretty impressive argument you gave the committee for keeping the Chicano Studies Program.'*

*'It appears it wasn't impressive enough. The committee voted to disestablish the program.'*

*'The committee did have a difficult time reaching a decision. In the end, we decided that the campus should be promoting comparative studies on race and ethnicity instead of focusing on single ethnic or racial groups.'*

*'I can understand the committee's reasoning, but it appears that the committee missed the program's emphasis on comparative study. You can't really understand the Chicano experience without comparing Chicanos with other racial and ethnic groups in the United States.'*

*'Well, we did consider it, but we didn't think the program was strong. We couldn't place it within the academic arena.'*

*'When the program submitted its response to the committee it provided the committee with an extramural review of the program and its comparison with other Chicano Studies programs. The extramural review report concluded that the Chicano Studies Program on campus was in the top three nationally. Wouldn't that ranking give the committee an idea of where it ranked in the academic arena?'*

*'It did give us a chance to see how it ranked nationally relative to other Chicano Studies programs. But the committee was more interested in seeing how it fared relative to social or behavioral science programs in say Big Ten schools or the Ivy League.'*

*'So, the committee assumed that Chicano Studies programs weren't stand-alone academic units?'*

*'For the most part. But keep in mind that the specialized nature of Chicano Studies convinced the committee that it was not strong enough to survive as an academic unit.'*

*'So, Bob, I guess the next program the committee will seek to disestablish is the Greek and Latin history program that does not have any majors enrolled in it?'*

*'You and I know that that would be a real battle.'*

How are Chicanos excluded from the discourse in academe? How are Chicanos silenced in the academic culture? Implicit in the effort to answer the preceding questions is the argument that Chicanos can challenge the discourse in academe only if they understand how the academic culture silences them. By *silence* I mean that Chicanos are deprived of *voice* by institutional processes and exclusionary practices in academe. Chicanos are silenced in their efforts to be critical observers of the academic culture by telling their stories about life in academe. Chicanos are thus prevented from introducing a competing social reality into an academic discourse that excludes them. (For examples of how Chicano scholars perceive the academic discourse as exclusionary and marginalizing, see: Mirande, 1988; Padilla & Montiel, 1998; Rendón, 1992; Romero, 1997.)

Aside from institutional practices and processes, there is a range of practices on an interpersonal and communicative level that are often used by the majority to silence Chicanos. For example, Tatcho Mindiola (1995) provides an account of how after introducing the university president at a luncheon with state legislators, the president said, 'Thank you, Taco' (p. 39). While Mindiola admits that he has had to get used to people mispronouncing his name, it hides the practice of mispronouncing his name as a means of silencing his presence by not recognizing him. Padilla (2001) provides an example of another practice that silences Chicanos by taking away from Chicanos the basis for identity, of belonging with other Chicanos. Padilla (2001) notes that she derived the title for her article 'from a conversation in which a college classmate was

delivering a harangue, blaming the evils of the world on undocumented Mexican immigrants. I interrupted, alerting him that I was Mexican American. He hesitated momentarily, said 'But you're not a dirty Mexican,' and continued his vitriolic diatribe' (p. 59). One is thus silenced by a practice that denies one the ability to establish presence.

In order to discuss how academe silences Chicanos, one must examine how faculty in academe acquire *presence* and *voice* in the academic discourse. To this end, I examine the following themes: *legitimacy*, *segmentation*, *silence* (for an in-depth discussion of these themes, see Tierney & Bensimon, 1996). Each theme is a feature in the institutional fabric of academe that determines participation in the academic culture for Chicano faculty. Each theme is contextualized as a story of Chicano faculty in academe. Taken together, the themes are an interpretive structure that facilitates an understanding of how academe silences Chicano faculty. More importantly, the themes allow one to observe how Chicano faculty interpret the *social reality* they experience in academe. The value of the themes for Chicanos in academe is nested in the potential to import interpretive experience into the academic discourse: 'Heeding new voices can stir our imaginations, and let us begin to see life through the eyes of the outsider. Not only can it broaden our point of view; bringing to light the abuses and petty and major tyrannies that minority communities suffer can enable us to see and correct systemic injustices that might otherwise remain invisible' (Delgado, 1990, p. 109).

### Legitimacy

Three measures are used in academe to determine the faculty's access to the academic discourse: teaching, research and service. Of the three, research is paramount. Research allows the faculty to participate in discussion with each other, shape the direction of the academic culture, and build networks that promote one's presence and voice in the academic discourse. Research is also the principal determinant of mobility within academe. One must not assume that *teaching* and *service* do not have a part in determining access to the academic discourse. Teaching and service, however, lie in the shadow of research. They only appear when they are needed to defend a weak research record.

The call by Chicano academics in the 1970s to question the academic discourse on Chicanos required that Chicano academics become part of the research enterprise. The strategy used by Chicanos was to question research with research. The strategy, however, posed a serious threat to academe. Academe responded to the production of *research on Chicanos by Chicano academics* by declaring the research to be subjective and biased. That is, it was not a legitimate enterprise for Chicano academics to study themselves and their community. As Reyes and Halcon (1991) have noted: 'whites who undertake research on minorities are infinitely more likely to be admired and rewarded for the focus of their scholarship than are minorities who study the same populations. 'White-on-white' research is accorded legitimacy, while brown-on-brown research is questioned and challenged' (p. 176). How, then, can Chicanos

challenge the academic discourse if they are constrained from studying themselves and their community?

The ability to challenge the academic discourse requires that Chicano academics be capable of altering the direction and substance of the discourse. Since research is the vehicle for introducing competing interpretations into the academic discourse, Chicano academics must give *voice* to their research in the academic discourse. However, if Chicano research is portrayed as illegitimate in academe, then competing Chicano interpretations are silenced in the academic discourse. It becomes apparent that Chicano academics are not participants in the context of participatory democracy that legitimizes presence in the academic discourse. As a result, the participation of Chicano academics in the academic discourse is nested in exclusionary practices that portray them as illegitimate participants.

Knowledge is power in academe, and academe is structured to accommodate struggles over knowledge between scholars. However, one can only participate in the struggle over knowledge if one is a legitimate participant in the academic discourse. That is, one must have *voice* and *presence*. If research is the basis for legitimacy in the academic discourse, then Chicanos do not have legitimacy in the discourse. The most one can say is that the participation of Chicano academics in the academic discourse is typified as a struggle to find legitimacy in academe; their struggle over legitimacy prevents Chicanos from struggling with other academics over knowledge. One can also cautiously say that because Chicano academics are marginalized in the academic discourse, their search for legitimacy has the risk of enhancing their marginal position in the academic discourse. One can argue that academe created Chicano Studies programs, for example, as an institutional practice to marginalize Chicano academics in the academic culture. The marginalization is noticeable if one examines the degree of separation between Chicano Studies programs and mainstream academic disciplines. That is, Chicano Studies programs are often identified as units that seek distance from the mainstream activity of the academy, and are supported in the organizational culture because they are perceived as a non-threatening context for Chicano scholarship. Ironically, the marginalization of Chicano Studies programs in the academic culture confers legitimacy on Chicano academics if they stay in their own place and apart from mainstream activity in the academic culture.

### **Segmentation**

In the 1970s, academe responded to the entry of Chicano students and faculty by creating organizational niches for them and their interests. It is not surprising that academe used organizational structure to segment Chicanos within the academic culture. For example, Chicano students and faculty demanded the establishment of Chicano studies classes and Chicano Studies centers. Academe was all too willing, in most cases, to facilitate the demands from Chicanos because they reinforced the peripheral position of Chicanos in the academic culture. The observation was often made by white faculty that Chicanos were demanding not to be part of academe. Consequently, the establishment of Chicano Studies centers and Chicano Studies

classes was not a bridge for Chicanos with the academic culture. Chicano concerns in academe were portrayed as particularistic in an institutional environment that stresses anonymity and universality. Chicanos thus became victims of their own demands within the academic culture.

Academe's ability to alter its organizational structure in response to Chicano demands was a smokescreen for its ability to remove parts of its organizational structure. Academe's ability to alter its organizational structure in response to Chicano demands was perceived by Chicanos as a step towards changing the academic culture. Academe's timely response to Chicano demands should have been perceived by Chicanos as a sign that organizational structure can be a temporary solution, and not necessarily a permanent one. The lesson not learned by Chicanos was that academe is a rational, goal-seeking organization with the capability of utilizing practices and processes to adapt rather than to change. Academe's response to Chicanos was an adaptive one; it had no interest in providing Chicanos with the institutional tools for changing its culture and environment.

Several years ago on my campus, the academic senate voted to disestablish the Chicano Studies Program (CSP). The academic senate did not vote to *integrate*, but rather to *disestablish* the CSP in the academic culture. Consolidating Chicano Studies within the university's departmental units was not considered as an option to disestablishment. The term *disestablish* is also a deceptive institutional practice because it softens the 'terminating' effects of the academic senate's decision, and hides the use and application of power. At the time, the CSP consisted of five tenured faculty members with joint appointments, course ratings that placed the CSP in the top five academic departments on campus, and an established high profile in the area of Chicano Studies. From an organizational perspective, the CSP was an active and productive unit on campus. So, why disestablish it?

The academic senate argued that while the CSP was a strong research and teaching unit on campus, it was not *comparative* in its academic study. The CSP's focus was perceived by the academic senate as too particularistic. The academic senate portrayed the CSP as a *narrow* area of study. The CSP's success on campus was used by the academic senate to argue that it had focused too much of its time and resources on Chicano research. Interestingly, academe encourages academic departments to utilize their resources in a competitive manner, especially research and teaching, to develop themselves into *centers of excellence*. Centers of excellence are premised on the assumption that particularistic study is the best strategy for defining an area of academic study and research that can, in turn, attract extramural research funding and research faculty. Such an effort, however, requires that academic units focus on specific goals. Why, then, would such an effort work for history, psychology or some other academic department but not the CSP? One answer may be that the CSP's success was regarded as a threat by other academic departments on campus. That is, a threat to weak academic departments that did not want to compete with a strong CSP for campus resources.

On the one hand, the academic senate's decision to disestablish the CSP reflected the institution's concern that the CSP's success as an academic unit would increase

its ability to compete for campus resources. Since the academic senate comprises faculty members who act to protect their academic turf and mediate struggles over knowledge, they function as gatekeepers in the allocation of campus resources. Scheff (1995) compares academic gate-keeping to membership in a street gang—they employ similar processes for determining who gets ahead. As a collective entity, the academic senate has the power to legitimize academic areas of study. The academic senate's decision to disestablish the CSP can thus be seen as an attempt to protect the interests of other academic departments on campus; especially, academic departments that would not be able to compete with a successful CSP.

On the other hand, the academic senate's decision to disestablish the CSP reflects its power to de-legitimize actors in the academic culture. Had the academic senate decided not to disestablish the CSP, it would have served as a signal to the campus community that the CSP was a legitimate competitor in the struggle over knowledge and resources. That is, the retention of the CSP would have served as a basis for requesting resources with which to expand the research and teaching mission of the CSP. The CSP might even have gone as far as requesting the most sought after prize in academe, office space. In an ironic twist, the business program on campus had already included in their five-year plan the space occupied by the CSP.

The disestablishment of the CSP shows how academe can remove elements from its organizational structure. It also shows that the removal of those elements is facilitated when the affected actors are portrayed as peripheral participants in the academic culture. Despite being members of the academic senate, Chicano faculty were not equal participants with other faculty in the process to disestablish the CSP. Chicano faculty were not given *presence* and *voice* in a process portrayed by the academic senate as the outcome of participatory democracy. In its actualization, the process silenced Chicano faculty and made them invisible in the academic culture.

### **Silence**

The peripheral position of Chicano faculty in academe and its power to de-legitimize Chicano issues silences Chicanos. Chicanos are robbed of *voice* in academe. Without voice in academe Chicano academics cannot tell stories that challenge the dominant social reality in the academic culture. Chicanos must be able to tell their own stories in academe in order to give substance to their presence in the academic culture. The ability to tell stories enables Chicano academics to structure narratives that educate others in the academic culture regarding their oppression, exclusion and marginality. In this sense, the personal narratives of Chicano faculty are transformative vehicles for eliminating institutional practices that harm their presence and participation in the academic discourse.

One social force that has robbed Chicano academics of voice in academe is affirmative action. In academe, affirmative action has been utilized as a device that creates expectations for Chicano academics that are not based on their experiences. Chicano academics, for example, are used by academe as role models; that is, as persons who have met academe's definition of success. However, according to Delgado (1991) the

problem with the role model concept is that, 'It requires that some of us lie and that others of us be exploited and overworked. The theory is, however, highly functional for its inventors. It encourages us to cultivate non-threatening behavior in our own people' (p. 1230). To be a role model, then, requires that Chicano academics be non-threatening in academe, compliant with institutional rules and supporters of the institutional culture. As such, academe utilizes Chicano academic role models to mirror the successes of the academic culture, rather than how Chicano academics are successful in challenging the academic culture.

Second, by arguing that affirmative action is a vehicle that increases the presence of Chicano faculty in academe, Chicano faculty support academe's interest in limiting their presence. In this regard, 'affirmative action serves as a homeostatic device, assuring that only a small number of women and people of color are hired or promoted' (Delgado, 1991, p. 1224). By supporting affirmative action, Chicano faculty rob themselves of voice because it limits their number as participants in the academic culture. Affirmative action gives voice only to those already in academe in order to construct a false consciousness that more Chicanos will follow them into academe. This concern becomes crucial if one considers that Chicano academics had no role in creating the framework for affirmative action. As a result, support of affirmative action by Chicano academics legitimizes a selective mechanism in academe that excludes them from active participation in the academic culture and ends up tainting them as undeserving participants in the academic discourse.

Affirmative action thus robs Chicano academics of presence and voice. It robs them of *presence* by placing them in roles whose expectations are dictated by academe and which marginalize them in the academic culture. Consequently, Chicano academics are not *authentic* because they are not able to actualize their social reality in the academic culture. Affirmative action robs Chicano academics of *voice* by making them gatekeepers of academe's interests. By supporting affirmative action, Chicano academics constrain, rather than enhance, their academic presence. As a result, academic presence becomes an oppressive mechanism in the academic culture for Chicano faculty. In this sense, Chicano academics have mistakenly assumed that affirmative action looks out for their best interests.

### Concluding remarks

*I use personal narratives as an instructional tool in my classes. I have found that they allow students to understand some of the sociological principles presented to them in their classes as self-explanatory facts. For example, students often ask, 'Why study inequality?' I tell students that I also asked that question when I was an undergraduate. I then explain to them how I came to understand the need to study inequality. My explanation goes something like this.*

*I was sitting in an undergraduate seminar on social inequality during my third year as an undergraduate student. The seminar was being conducted by a scholar with a distinguished reputation in the study of social inequality. During one particular lecture, he made a point of discussing the eating habits of the poor. According to him, the poor do not have temporal features in their eating habits. Poor people, for instance, are just as likely to eat pancakes for dinner or lunch as they are*

*to eat them for breakfast. So, poor people could eat dinner foods for breakfast or breakfast foods for dinner.*

*I tell students that I sat up straight in my chair. I realized he was talking about me. I had grown up in a family where we often ate pancakes for breakfast, eggs for dinner, or fried chicken for breakfast. Based on my eating habits I was poor! Now, this was particularly unsettling for me because I did not perceive myself as poor. Granted, I had grown up as a migrant farm worker, but we always had food, a bed and a roof over our heads. So, how could I be poor?*

*In my efforts to understand whether I was poor I came to identify some of the processes that make persons unequal in society. I tell students that one studies inequality in order to understand one's relative position of inequality in society and the contributing social forces that keep one unequal. One studies inequality to understand one's self and others in society. In particular, it is important to understand that inequality is a process of social structure; one we are relatively unable to alter significantly.*

*I think I learn more about myself as I explain to students the need to study inequality. Over the years I have come to focus more on the degree of inequality I experience in academe due to my Chicano identity. Yes, everyone in academe falls victim to structures of inequality, even white academics, but minority scholars tend to experience more intrusive and longer lasting conditions of inequality in academe.*

Some things, especially those rooted in reality, are difficult to speak or write about. The difficulty is enhanced when those things are integral to one's subjective and intuitive state of being. I really believed that the 1970s would be a renaissance for Chicanos in academe. I especially believed that the entry of Chicano students and faculty was a sign that academe was becoming more open and democratic for Chicanos. The time was pregnant with hope. Chicano students and faculty were on a journey to establish their presence and voice in the academic culture. However, more than two decades later, I still hear Chicano students and faculty in academe talk about the future as an opportunity for establishing presence and voice in the academic culture. They continue their journey in search of a place for themselves in the academic culture.

Even after Chicanos entered academe they realized that they had to work hard, perhaps even harder than others, to legitimize their presence. Chicano faculty decided to alter the academic culture by doing research with Chicanos instead of on Chicanos. Chicano faculty regarded their research strategy as the best one for challenging the portrayal of Chicanos in the academic discourse. Chicano faculty assumed that their entry into academe placed them on an equal footing, or at least on the same playing field, with other faculty. However, Chicano faculty realized that academe would not shield them from the abuses they suffered in US society. In short, Chicano faculty realized that they would experience the same victimization in the academic culture that they suffered in the social world outside academe. Ralph Guzmán used to say that the irony for Chicano academics was that PhD after their names stood for 'pobre hijo desgraciado.'

Chicano students and Chicano faculty demanded that academe establish Chicano Studies centers. The establishment of Chicano Studies centers was perceived by Chicano faculty as an overt means for acquiring voice in the academy. However, I

have come to believe that academe created Chicano Studies centers in order to enhance the victimization of Chicanos. The establishment of the centers made Chicanos highly visible on campus; one knew where to find them. Chicanos became trapped in the academic culture. Chicanos wound up talking about themselves with each other, instead of using their collective voice to insert themselves into the academic discourse.

Along came affirmative action. It was seductive for Chicanos. It convinced Chicanos that they could actualize themselves in the academic culture if they committed themselves to it. As a result, Chicano academics perceived affirmative action as a means of legitimizing their presence in the academic culture. It is not surprising that some Chicano academics became role models for affirmative action. However, affirmative action seduced Chicano academics into accepting a social reality that was not of their own creation; a social reality that protected academe by preventing Chicano academics from challenging the academic discourse. So, why defend affirmative action? Perhaps this is the only discourse Chicano academics can participate in within the academic culture, a discourse that reinforces their oppression by preventing Chicanos from liberating themselves in the academic culture. It is also a discourse that separates Chicanos from their selves and their social reality.

### Notes on contributor

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