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Journal of Hispanic Higher Education 2007; 6; 222
DOI: 10.1177/1538192707302535

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http://jhh.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/6/3/222

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Community Commitment and Activist Scholarship

Chicana/o Professors and the Practice of Consciousness

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Abstract: In this study, we explored 12 Chicana/o Professors of Education’s sense making about their role in the academy in terms of community commitments, activist scholarship, and practices of consciousness. Consciously exercising their agency, for these Chicana/o professors was not only in reaction to White dominance in the academy, but also in proactive, enduring ways through day-to-day practices. Practices of consciousness sought to subvert and challenge the White-stream norms and practices of higher education.

Resumen: En este estudio exploramos como doce profesores Chicana/os de educación entienden su papel en la academia en cuanto a su compromiso con la comunidad, su erudición activista, y su práctica de concientización. Estos profesores Chicana/os ejercitan concientemente su agencia; no solo como reacción al dominio Blanco en la academia, sino además a través de sus prácticas diarias de una manera pro-activa y continua. Sus prácticas de concientización buscan revolucionar y desafiar las normas de dominio Blanco y las prácticas de educación superior.

Keywords: chicana/o professors, community commitment, activist scholarship, consciousness

Authors’ Note: This research was funded in alternate years by the National Rising Scholars Award Program of The National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good at the University of Michigan, The School of Education at the University of Colorado at Boulder, and the Chicana/o Studies Program at the University of California at Davis. We owe gratitude to Kenneth González for offering feedback on an earlier draft of this article and to two anonymous reviewers. A draft of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association 2007. Please address all correspondence to Luis Urrieta, Jr., 1 University Station D5700, Austin, TX 78712; e-mail: urrieta@mail.utexas.edu or Lina R. Méndez Benavídez, 1 Shields Ave, School of Education, Davis, CA 95616; e-mail benavidez@post.harvard.edu.
Introduction

Chicana/o identity is said to be tied to a specific form of social awareness, of what Chicanas/os call Chicana/o consciousness (García, 1982; Anzaldúa, 1987). This article explores how Chicana/o identity is tied to the practices or pedagogy of consciousness for Chicana/o professors. We analyzed how 12 Chicana/o professors of education made sense of their practices (pedagogy) of consciousness in the academy in terms of community commitment and activist scholarship. Important in this study is the social-cultural, historical, individual, and collective context from which this understanding of self as Chicana/o emerges in relation to the hegemony of White dominance (supremacy) in the United States. Urrieta and Reidel (2006) define White supremacy as the official and unofficial practices, including racism, principles, morals, norms, values, history, and overall culture that privileges White individuals in U.S. society.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are community commitments embedded into the ideology and practice of Chicana/o academics in education?
2. How do Chicana/o scholars view their intellectual work in relation to the social and political hegemony of the Euro-American academy?

The agency in practice of these Chicana/o professors of education in this article is defined as Chicana/o consciousness. Chicana/o consciousness in practice involves not only active awareness of one’s agency in moment-to-moment interactions in the struggle for social justice, but also the responsibility to seize those moments to act in the world. In this article, we will provide an overview of the close relationship between Chicana/o identity and consciousness to how the Chicana/o professors in this study describe their work as activist pedagogy for the public good.

Background

Chicana/o Identity and the Practice of Consciousness

Chicana/o identity officially emerged in the 1960s. This new understanding of the self as “Chicana/o” claimed legitimacy as a “U.S. citizen” group with equal rights. Yet, Chicana/o was also product of the oppressive structures of historical colonial institutions such as White-stream schooling (Urrieta, 2004). This new identity actively denounced a long history of educational practices embedded in the federal educational system that denied equal access and treatment to children of Mexican descent.

The ideology behind the Chicana/o movimientos of the 1960s was not monolithic, yet a general ideology often referred to as Chicanismo emerged. According to
Acuña (2000), anger and reaction to an unjust system, whether macro or micro, was generally being acted out. There was a call for *Chicanismo* that took on different meanings for different people. *Chicanismo* generally meant to have “pride of identity, and self-determination” (p. 357-358). Self-determination included a strong sense of “community commitment” (Delgado Bernal, 2001) that was later attributed to having a *Chicana/o*, or *mestiza/o* consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987; Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Activism usually revolved around community-based organizations, efforts that sought to “better” the conditions of the *barrio* (neighborhood). Gutiérrez (2001) alluded to community in terms of *raza*, and of the brotherhood of *carnales*. “*Chicanismo* meant identifying with *la raza* (the race or people), and collectively promoting the interests of *carnales* (brothers) with whom they [*Chicanas/os*] shared a common language, culture, and religion” (Gutiérrez, 2001, p. 214). García (1998) similarly wrote about *Chicanismo* as a philosophy surrounded by historical symbols and active attempts to fight against racism through activism. *Chicanismo* is thus the broad ideology behind the identity politics of the self-proclaimed *Chicana/o*.

Participants in these politics (practices) were often perceived as activists, or members of a new social movement called the *Chicana/o* Movement. Having a *Chicana/o* consciousness often meant engaging in activism of various sorts, with the aim of creating a “better world”—another interpretation of the public good. In the 1960s, *Chicana/o* activism took on more physical acts of protest (García, 1998) and was associated with other 1960s protest movements (Maciel & Ortiz, 1996). Thus a new and unique perspective, drawn from a Mexican American past, emerged with the rise of *Chicanismo*.

**Institutionalization and Chicana/o Professors**

With the implementation of *Chicana/o* studies programs and of MEChAs (*Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán*) on different university campuses, feelings of distance emerged from the original grassroots organizing of earlier times. A different form of participation or “professional activism” (Padilla, 2003) arose.

The number of *Latina/o* university faculty members is not promising, yet, it is growing. For example, in the fall of 1999, there were 16,498 *Latina/o* professors. Four years later in the fall of 2003 there were 20,079 (“Number of full-time faculty members,” 2002; “Number of full-time faculty members,” 2006). Although these numbers do not reflect the proportion of the *Latina/o* population, there is a growing number of *Chicanas/os* penetrating into institutions formerly closed.

Not all *Chicanos/as* see institutionalization or professional activism as good, but rather as costly compromises. Scholars like Acuña (2000) have called the 1980s and 1990s the “*Hispanic*” generations, full of negotiations and compromises. The notion of the institutional “sell-out” is often conjured up as the ultimate compromise in these negotiations for institutional recognition and power (Urrieta, 2005). Such accusations are not deterministic or dichotomous as many have made them seem.
However, the experiences of Chicana/o, Latina/o educators in higher education highlight some of the contradictions.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

**Social Theory and Agency**

Social and cultural reproduction theories proposed relatively closed reproductive processes (Morrow & Torres, 1995). Individual agency was relatively absent within the structures of social and cultural systems. Culture itself was conceptualized as a static collective body of knowledge and norms, passed down from generation to generation (Levinson, Foley, & Holland, 1996).

Resistance theories later challenged the idea that participants did not have the agency to respond to the structures and institutions (Morrow & Torres, 1995) of White-stream society. White-stream indoctrination is not exclusively the domain of White individuals in U.S society, but of any person actively promoting White dominance as “standard.” In Chicana/o scholarship, Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal (2001) examined Chicana/o agency in education as a form of “transformational resistance” using a Critical Race and Latino Critical Race (Latcrit) theoretical framework. Transformational resistance, however, was articulated within the constraints of resistance theoretical frameworks that often disable and delimit the potential of agency (Holland & Lave, 2001), and action as reactive rather than action as proactive.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) highlighted the importance of improvisations of cultural forms as a manifestation of agency. When improvisation is seen as agency, there is the potential for a local or full-scale new social movement as “improvisation can become the basis for a reformed subjectivity” (p. 18) and has the potential for collective action. Chicana/o consciousness in practice has this potential.

To think about Chicana/o professors’ strategic roles in the academy as a practice of their identity, or as informed, orchestrated action (Holland, 2003), it is necessary to revisit the concept of agency. Inden (1990, p. 23) defined human agency as follows:

> ... the realized capacity of people to act upon their world and not only to know about or give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view.

Chicana/o consciousness in practice is this “realized” awareness of knowing of one’s ability and responsibility to act critically in the world, knowing well that there are structural and inherent contradictions to limit this social practice.
Chicana/o professors’ practices in the academy in this study are under this self-awareness or conscious understanding of agency, culturally produced in formal educational institutions and working within them to produce new and trans/formative cultural forms.

Method

Twelve Chicana/o faculty members at different universities in the Southwest were interviewed (N = 12), 6 women and 6 men. The faculty members interviewed had tenure-track appointments in public universities, six had experience working in Tier 1 research universities and six were affiliated with teaching institutions. This sample included four full professors, four associate professors, and four assistant professors, with each of these rankings being gender equal.

The participants in this study were treated as consultants, or as “experts” (Hinson, 2000). Autobiographical narratives were privileged as the epistemological foundation (Reed-Danahay, 1997), but observations were also conducted and documents collected for limited forms of discourse analysis (Freeman, 1996). To participate, consultants had to strongly self-identify as Chicana/o and be employed as tenure track faculty in schools and, or colleges of education in accredited universities in the United States.

Professors were contacted using a purposeful sampling method (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) using personal contacts and professional organizations. An in-depth, semistructured (Davies, 2001) interview was conducted with each professor as well as 5 hrs of observations at their host institution. Two documents were requested from each professor: an example of personal writing such as a journal entry or poetry and a formal writing sample such as curriculum vitae, syllabus, or professional statement.

The data were analyzed using an inductive analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interview transcripts were actively used to triangulate observation and document data and to substantiate and/or refute claims (Davies, 2001). After themes were identified and data sorted into domains (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), representative examples from the interviews were cited to support each of the emergent themes.

Pseudonyms are used for all people and institutions. In the following section we will discuss briefly the overall findings of our research.

Overall Findings

In agreement with previous literature, the Chicana/o professors expressed feeling isolated and alienated at their institutions (Reyes & Ríos, 2005; Solórzano, 1998). The degree of isolation for some was greater than for others because of the setting and number of supportive colleagues directly available to network with. The isolation
of Chicana/o professors, however, was not a deterrent in their active attempts to present to all of their students a more critical and multiperspective curriculum (evidenced through course syllabi) as well as by their use of instructional pedagogies to raise their critical consciousness. Mentorship was especially important when working with graduate students where pseudofamilial metaphors were used to refer to these relationships.

All professors expressed a strong and equal commitment to both their teaching and research in areas that support and present alternative epistemologies and perspectives. This commitment involved raising awareness about social justice education, equity issues, resource allocation, and critical analysis of policy and language issues, immigration, race/ethnicity, and affirmative action. Several professors were doing this by incorporating these issues in their course syllabi; others however, were teaching small seminars they were not getting paid for, or receiving university credit for teaching. Professors doing research expressed a “political twist” to their research agendas as well as a controversial element to their “debunking of myths” in White-stream research previously used to stereotype minority communities.

All of the professors, in particular, saw themselves as a resource to Chicana/o students on their respective campuses (undergraduate and graduate) as well as to Chicana/o students nationally that often sought their assistance. Their commitment to “opening doors” was taken very seriously as well as mentoring students in the graduate school socialization process. Opening doors often involved maintaining Chicana/o networks across different university contexts, locally and nationally, that enabled for the flow of students through what some called “pipelines.” This was done with the goal of increasing Chicana/o student representation at all levels of the educational system.

Part of professors’ community commitments also involved the creation of trans/formative spaces for Chicana/o, Latina/o students and their allies (of other races/ethnic groups). Research and teaching were thus seen as very important in creating these spaces, as well as securing funding sources that would enable them to have these spaces and fund students through their graduate and undergraduate programs, while also doing community-related research.

The public “voice” was of great importance to activist Chicana/o professors not only at academic conferences, but also by talking to a variety of different groups, including community organizations, even when not getting “official” university credit for their service. Many were actively involved in writing for local newspapers, radio, and television to present a more critical perspective on issues affecting the community. All felt that their connections to K-12 education, and K-12 teachers and community educators, were important and in many cases helped to keep them grounded, honest, and humble in their professional and personal lives. With the hope of influencing the direction of academic and policy conversations, many also engaged audiences as keynote speakers and “experts” even when the label made them feel uneasy.
In the following section we will discuss the themes of (a) community commitment, (b) activist scholarship, and (c) the practice (forms of agency) of consciousness. These themes were particularly salient for all of the professors interviewed. Representative quotes are used to illustrate the concepts.

**Comunidad/Community Commitment**

Antonio, Astin, and Cress (2000) analyzed about 60,000 faculty surveys collected from the Education Research Institute at UCLA in regards to community service in higher education by faculty. Their data provided information for White faculty and faculty of color as a dichotomous variable. The authors found that faculty of color spend more hours per week in community service, as well as teaching and advising students compared to White faculty.

Faculty members’ personal values determined their level of community service and not the culture of the institution (Antonio, Astin, & Cress, 2000). Whether it was with *Latina/o* communities outside of the university or with student communities within it, community commitment was central to the work of *Chicana/o* professors in education. Adriana said,

> I am incredibly grateful and I feel this very strong sense of responsibility that I need to turn that into opportunities for other people. And because I have a particular connection to the *Chicano* community, it allows me to do that there.

Not only was this an important component of professors’ research, teaching, and service agendas, but most, like Adriana, expressed a sense of responsibility to work on *Chicana/o, Latina/o* issues in education that until recently were generally devalued by the institution. Andi also stated,

> The reason lots of us get into this business [education] is because we have this felt need, we have a community in crisis, we see it and we wanna get in there and do something. It’s not something that you wait to get tenure for and then you do it. . . . It is fundamental to why we got into the academy. It is . . . fundamental to our work. It’s not . . . we don’t have the luxury [to wait for tenure to begin to work on *Chicana/o, Latina/o* issues]. . . . I can’t do it after tenure. We don’t have that luxury.

Andi’s statements, similar to Adriana’s, are representative of other professor’s motivations for entering the field of education in the first place. Like Andi and Adriana, other professors interviewed expressed their commitment to raise awareness about the issues affecting the larger *Latina/o* community, even if they had to pay an institutional price—tenure and, or promotion—for this commitment.

Part of the motivation to enter the field of education was not just to work for the physical benefit of the *Latina/o* community, but also to raise the consciousness in *all* of the students they taught. Miguel, for example, stated,
My goal as an educator is to make people think critically about the reality that they live in. Because I am convinced that if they do that, they will want a different world than the one we are in. . . . I see that, that practice in a classroom as activism. It is the space in which I am politically working toward . . . a better world, it is a more humane world and that’s where I do it.

As Miguel stated, commitment to community for these Chicana/o professors was not exclusively about the Chicana/o community per se, although there were strong commitments expressed, but also a commitment to the greater good—one could say—the public good of all people. It was commonly understood by the participants that when inequality and discrimination exist in a society, it does not just affect the oppressed, but everyone in that society in negative ways.

Although the field of education is one that especially draws the interests of Chicana/o, Latina/o students, the Chicana/o faculty in this study, were not unconditionally committed to “brown” students simply because they identified as Chicana/o or Latina/o. Felipe expressed this well:

I’m not interested in just having brown faces with White middle class dreams. I’m not interested in working with students who just wanna get a nice cushy job and make a whole lot of money. I’m interested in working with students who come from communities where they had to overcome a lot of barriers to even get to college. Poor working families who’ve been able to overcome that and to help them to go to college so that they can then go back and help those kinds of Mexican communities, Chicano communities, and not necessarily just prepare middle class “Highspanics.”

Community commitment therefore related to addressing the pressing issues affecting and afflicting the broader Chicana/o, Latina/o community outside and within the university. However, it was not just about an undisputed ethnic/cultural alliance as expressed by Felipe, but also an ideological commitment to, and for social justice—the pursuit of a better world, a more humane world that included everyone living in it.

**Activist Scholarship**

The literature on intellectualism highlights that interpretations of intellectualism and the role and responsibilities of intellectuals in society vary (Gramsci, 1971; Said, 1994; West, 1999). The Chicana/o professors in this study did not see their scholarship simply as an expected practice of their career, but as form of activism, or activist scholarship. Felipe stated this well:

I would consider an activist agenda [in research] doing the kind of work that’s gonna shake things up. They’re not doing the safe kind of research, they’re doing research and producing the kind of knowledge that’s gonna be very controversial, that’s gonna have some resistance. Uh, that’s gonna have strong critique against it. But I think that’s one
way of determining of whether your work is making a difference or not. If it causes some resistance then you know you must be having something that’s threatening change, ‘cause people don’t like change. So it’s a good measure.

Activist scholarship is not unsound or unrigorous research, but rather scholarship about issues undervalued or misunderstood in the White-stream academy and by White-stream researchers. Because activist scholarship challenges previously misunderstood or misgугarded research, it is often perceived by the White-stream, like Felipe said, as “controversial” and also “causes some resistance.”

When asked what activist scholarship meant to her, Karina stated the following:

I think anything you write as a faculty of color if it’s about your community, is an activist piece. I think it’s inherently about the ontological understanding and the epistemological positionality that you put forth, and I think that everything you choose that is representative of your community is deliberate. It has political purpose and it has political potential, and as a result, I think that, that is probably your most significant contribution, is to weigh what it is that you’re saying in writing so when I want to write Chicana/o that was a deliberate decision on my part, when I want to put Spanish in, that’s deliberate, when I write about migrants, when I write about immigrants, when I write about second-language acquisition, all of those are politically empowered and politically laced terms, notions, ideals. So everything that I do in the couching, in the structuring, whatever positionality, positioning that I put out is important and I have to weigh that. Um, and I would say that to any scholar if they were White, Black, American Indian if they’re women if they are men, every choice you make ought to be about something that you’re passionate about.

Karina was very clear on what activist scholarship meant to her. Writing about her community and the importance of having words like “Chicana/o” and Spanish words published in a journal were important to her activist commitments. In that sense, scholarship, like teaching was seen as a highly political and not neutral practice.

Activist scholarship is often associated with the tradition of social criticism by the White-stream. Social criticism poses difficult, but necessary questions that encourage intellectual debate fundamental to furthering the cause of democracy. Although the voices of intellectual dissent are necessary to the goals of deliberation, dialogue, and democracy, the activist scholarship of the Chicanas/os interviewed, was generally not social criticism.

Chicana/o activist scholarship is the active and valuable knowledge production, through empirical research, that validates the epistemologies of those outside the White-stream in U.S. society. Adriana stated,

Our role is to codify and give credibility to certain kinds of knowledge and then to codify and give credibility to people who have that knowledge. And of course it’s a huge tension (laughs) because there are people within the academy who believe that there’s one kind of knowledge. And that kind of knowledge of course is privileged in this
setting. And I think our job, people like me, people like you Luis is I think to always call it into question.

Giving credibility to “certain kinds of knowledge” and the people that possess that knowledge is fundamental to the scholarship of Chicana/o professors. The production of knowledge for these Chicana/o professors is not knowledge for knowledge’s sake, but an active agenda to reverse the wrongs and erasure that result from a long history of White dominance and White-stream intellectual indoctrination.

The Practice of Consciousness

The practice of Chicana/o consciousness involves not only active awareness of each individual’s agency to challenge White dominance in moment-to-moment interactions in the struggle for social justice, but also the responsibility to seize those moments to act in the world. All of the Chicana/o professors interviewed were aware of their agency and sought out “moments” in which they could exert this agency in proactive, pro-action, and practical rather than reactive and reductive ways. Rosa, for example, stated,

This year I took a stance, I went to the chair of my department and said I, I don’t, I will not be in this committee and he says, yes you will. And I’m not, I cannot, I refuse to be in such a hostile environment, and he says you are the only one that can mediate that environment. I’m like, you are punishing me. You’re telling me I have a skill and you punish me for the skill. It is like, it has been so painful and drains me of so much energy to work with particular people, so then it was like, okay who do you want for the committee. I said fine, if I have some choice into, into who is in the committee you want me to chair, then maybe I can reconsider it. But it wasn’t that easy. I want these two people and he says these two have to be in it, which are, it’s conflict it will never be consensus, ever!

Rosa’s experience illustrates that for some Chicana/o professors, academic service is not only a tool for domination, but could also be a tool for liberation—to make a difference—in proactive ways. Agency, as understood in Rosa’s statement, is also not about mass revolution, that is not what pro-action means here, but about change “on a day-to-day, moment-to-moment practical basis.”

Although for some people education can be seen as the very site of White-stream indoctrination, the field of education for the participants was seen as a place for emancipation. Camila stated,

What keeps me going is that I’ve created a tiny place [in education] where I think we’re still trying to do transformative work. And I hate the bureaucracy of it, but it is so gratifying to see students go through significant ideological, intellectual transformations in my classes. That’s all part of my activism because I can’t separate teaching, from
research, from my politics, from my work in communities, they are always mutually informing. My work in communities is especially important because it keeps me humble and grounded, especially around teachers because if you don’t get it and are trying to BS them, they’ll tell you! I also enjoy mentoring students because I know how important that was for me. To this day I don’t make major decisions without consulting with a more senior Chicano scholar for advice.

Because the field of education was already seen as a potential place to bring about change, the Chicana/o professors in this study, like Camila, used their positions to practice their consciousness in several ways through teaching, researching, and working in communities.

Mentoring students was particularly salient and will be discussed further. Although mentoring students is part of academic culture in graduate school, the ways that Chicana/o professors spoke about their responsibility to mentor and specifically about their mentoring relationships was significant. For women faculty of color especially networking and mentoring were key components of individual and group success and progress (Turner, 2002).

The practice of consciousness through mentoring relationships for Chicana/o professors evoked familial and kinship ties that were captured well by Andrés:

Once you’re in a position where you can help others, then you ought to do it. You have to do it. That’s just the responsibility you have. And mainly because there may not be that support for those individuals elsewhere. It’s the old you know padrino, madrina syndrome. When you baptize someone, you have a responsibility. The devil is not supposed to take that person (laughs). Should anything happen to the parents, you’re supposed to do it. When you marry someone, you’re the padrino in some sense, you have responsibility. You know to help them, nurture them, support them, not just, it’s not just an honorific relationship it’s a responsible relationship.

Andrés specifically uses the metaphor of Catholic sacramental sponsorship to make his point about mentoring. In this cultural-religious context, the mentoring relationship has a more familial and also sacred commitment to have a “responsible relationship” and part of that relationship is to nurture and support, and most importantly protect the ahijada/o (mentee/student) from harm (the devil). Other scholars find that service and mentoring of others in the broader community are inseparable from their professional role (Reyes & Ríos, 2005).

**Discussion**

**The Practice of Chicana/o Consciousness**

The Chicana/o consciousness in practice of these professors was about finding and expressing an alternative voice. Exercising agency consciously for Chicana/o...
professors was not only in reaction to White dominance in the academy, but also in proactive, enduring ways through their day-to-day, moment-to-moment practices to subvert and challenge the White-stream norms and practices of higher education. Chicana/o consciousness was thus formed on the basis of cultural, collective, religious, and community memory (Delgado Bernal, 2001), but was negotiated and manifested in seized moments of opportunity for change in institutions for higher education, where improvisation, whether planned or unplanned, was key when opportunities arose.

Overall, the practice of consciousness by these Chicana/o professors was seen as strategic and opportunistic in a positive sense. By being strategic and opportunistic, they were aware of their agency and their positions of power to bring about change. They all felt they were contributing to the cause of social justice in one way or another. Adriana, with a radiant smile and enthusiastic tone of voice, said,

I just get enormous, just enormous gratification out of doing what I do. I mean I just, I can’t tell you how happy I am that things have worked out the way they have because one of those major sources of grat . . . There’s two sources of that gratification. And one is . . . this network of Chicano scholars that it is such a really wonderful part of my life. And the other is the other is being able to work with students . . . I mean I get to choose who I’m going to work with and I choose to work with people who think similarly to me and who will make a difference, you know?

Adriana expressed the gratification she enjoyed in doing the work she did as a professor with the purpose of making a difference. The sources of this gratification included the network of Chicana/o scholars she worked with and the mentoring relationship she had with students who think like her and are committed to making a difference—the public good. Elogio, a professor and administrator, similarly responded with enthusiasm:

I’ve been fortunate. I’ve been in positions where I can make policies, where I can make decisions, everything from this position, to other positions, to department chair, to even faculty member where I could make decisions about students. . . . I’ve been fortunate to be in those positions where you can do that. You can make gains, ‘cause you can.

Elogio, like Adriana, and the other professors in this study, were proud and confident about their accomplishments and contributions to a greater good—one could argue, the public good. Elogio’s consciousness in practice was especially important because of his position and awareness of his agency and ability to make positive, more democratic changes.

Faculty women of color speak about feeling torn between family, community, and career (Turner, 2002). Even though some of our consultants struggled to find balance between their research agendas, families, and community commitment, it is important to remember that it came at a cost. As Rendón (1992) stated “We will change
the academy, even as the academy changes us. And more and more of us will experience academic success with few, if any regrets” (p. 63). Most of the regrets voiced by our participants were the inability to spend more time with family and being divided by the institution with regard to the value placed on research and community commitment.

Implications for the White-Stream Public Good

The practices of Chicana/o consciousness, for those committed to dismantling White dominance and the White-stream norms of higher educational institutions, can contribute to further developing a common understanding of higher education for the public good. That common understanding should be geared toward creating engaged citizens committed to the goals of social justice that include equality, equity, and democratic engagement. As a point of departure toward that goal, however, it is important to understand with clarity that we live in a White-dominated and patriarchal society from which our notions of White-stream as the mainstream emerge.

From community commitments, it is important to understand that there has to be an active institutional commitment to diversity, like that of the Chicana/o professors in this study, that goes beyond mission statements and actually involves the active pursuit and commitment to communities of color and other underrepresented groups in higher education. This study also highlights that all scholarship is political and that the activist scholarship of the Chicana/o professors studied is no different in rigor or in political inclination than any other type of scholarship. The difference is that White-stream scholarship is perceived as neutral, objective, and of quality because of its normalized status. Finally, the practices of consciousness are important—voice, networking with those committed to social justice, teaching as a tool for raising consciousness, and mentoring, especially students of color, involves a responsible, respectful, and not just an honorific relationship.

Conclusion

The practices of Chicana/o consciousness have important insights to offer our broader conceptions of higher education for the public good in terms of the social responsibility all faculty members have in their positions of power. Faculty members committed to the public good should model a different way of being a citizen with actions, not just with concepts, and should especially focus their energies to serve the public interest. U.S. society is changing rapidly demographically and otherwise. Dismantling White dominance and White-stream practices as the mainstream in higher education is timely and in the public interest if the goals of democracy are to prevail in a diverse United States—it’s for the public good.


References


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