

The Subversive Act of Being an Academic of Color: Redefining Knowledge to Change (the) US

Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez

Place is inextricable from networks
of social power—Janet Fiskio

Negotiating identity has become more complex in this era of globalization than ever before. Clear demarcations between identity markers, languages, ethnicities, and nations no longer accurately represent the world in which we reside.¹ However, labels continue to validate or discredit those of us that are considered inferior or unworthy of citizenship by others that historically have held positions of power and privilege. Presently, the global community has an incredible opportunity to become a more inclusive space for all of us—and not just in economic terms. To achieve such inclusivity, first we must come to terms with our collective heritage, one of labeling and constructing social hierarchies that exclude much more than they include. As cultural norms dictate what is considered acceptable, worthy, and ideal in all areas of life, academics of color in the United States of America have historically received less credit for the knowledge they produce in the academy than their whiter (and/or male) counterparts. For an outside reader with no background knowledge about “token hires” or the pejorative treatment so common towards women of color in the academy, it may not be evident that the intellectual rigor that forms the backbone of academic scholarship, many times is deemed “unacceptable” when the authors are ethnically “other.” All too often the academic community refuses to value the contributions of feminists of color. Rather, their work is regarded as if it were inferior by their fellow colleagues who most likely are not labeled as “token hires” by the institution known as the university.²

To refute these claims of inferiority, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga called academics of color to action in their ground breaking publication *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). Since then feminists of color have answered by writing about themselves and their experiences to recover their identities and to assert their rightful place in the “ivory” tower.

Having been relegated to the sidelines during the Civil Rights Era and by white feminism as women of color, it was time for Latinas, African Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans to articulate their own subjectivities. As a result, academics of color shifted from being objects to thinking subjects, which in the words of Gloria Anzaldúa: “means being concerned about the ways knowledges are invented. It means continually challenging institutionalized discourses. It means being suspicious of the dominant culture’s interpretation of ‘our’ experiences, of the way they ‘read’ us” (Haciendo xxv). After *Bridge*, the expectation to write became the directive among academics of color, who began to write to self-define and self-represent. Their work continues to support Moraga’s “theory in the flesh,” which underscores the import of everyday life rather than mere abstractions.³ By speaking truth to power, that is by calling racism, racism and sexism, sexism, this essay shows how Latinas and African Americans fight back by publishing their experiences of abuse while simultaneously subverting the dominant culture’s power to label them as inferior. Examples from *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia* (2012) are examined to demonstrate how common mistreatment is for academics of color, and second, how these academics reject oppression (and its manifestation in the university) through writing *herstories* to represent a politics of inclusion and solidarity. In explicit terms, this essay contributes to the current body of knowledge that highlights the status quo of our universities by exposing the racist and sexist treatment that is commonplace in the United States. The objective, which is subversive, is to change not only whom the university chooses as faculty members in the future, but also to shine a condemning light onto the broader society which has inculcated the institutionalized prejudice that is exemplified in this essay.⁴

I point out that globalization forces us to reconsider knowledge and to open the academy towards incorporating a much broader definition of the term than the existing one based on hierarchical exclusivity.⁵ Since history has marginalized colonized women’s voices, the historian Emma Pérez has called for a “decolonial imaginary.” Akin to Anzaldúa and Moraga’s call, Pérez asserted in 1999 that women of color need to imagine new ways of countering the dominant, patriarchal, white, unilateral version of history that has and continues to colonize us. The authors of *This Bridge We Call Home* (2002) have responded by breaking away from tradition and explaining that “[t]heory had become an essentialized category that inferred elite European male thinking” (349). Indeed, it was evident that the “[a]cademe devalues personal experience as a way of knowing while emphasizing the knowledge of ‘high’ theory as the only ‘real’ route toward making sense of the world” (Cervenak 349). To counter this unilateral thinking, Latinas and other academics of color decided that not only would they write about their own individual experiences, but that through their writing they would create solidarity amongst themselves. Rita Sánchez mentions that at the heart of Latina writing is the creation of such solidarity. She asserts:

Writing, breaking the silence, becomes a monumental and collective act because it signifies overcoming, freeing oneself from the confines and conditions of history. The collective act may not even be expressed in the words themselves, but is manifest in the act of writing down these words. Writing is the tool which allows the Chicana to implement action, critical thought, change. (67)

Through the act of breaking the silence, academics of color empower each other and simultaneously build bridges of solidarity. This empowering of each other emphasizes that writing gives back the voice to the “colonized” who were once voiceless. By writing and publishing works like *Presumed Incompetent*, women share stories that extend beyond the individual. They create agency by subverting the masculine tradition and writing what could be called “herstories,” rather than *histories*.⁶ This in part, is one step on the necessary path to unlearning the colonized mindset.⁷ For structural reasons, the article is subdivided into the following sections: Academia, Colonialism and Knowledge, Practices of Exclusion in the Academy, Negotiating the Classroom as an Academic of Color, Subverting Binary Thought, and Conclusions.

Writing, sharing and publishing these experiences as part of being a productive academic citizen, subverts the patriarchal/racist paradigm as it inverts the shaming process. Shame and bewilderment are removed from the academics of color and placed upon the shoulders of the white, male academics. By writing and publishing such misdeeds, articles such as this one explicitly expose the prejudice, racism, classism and sexism that are ingrained into our universities. This article serves to contribute to the twenty-first century goal for the expansion of human rights; all voices, especially those that have been marginalized, must be included equally and allowed to partake, participate, and create knowledge in our universities.

Academia, Colonialism and Knowledge

One site where society may be shaped and transformed—positively or negatively—is the university. The university exists as a space of knowledge—yet historically this knowledge has been constructed and legitimated by few individuals into narrow silo-like disciplines that do not reflect our global diversity, or the interrelationships that exist amongst fields of study. To better represent the twenty-first century, the knowledge housed within our universities must be restructured to be significantly more inclusive—specifically through dismantling the inequalities suffered by people of color, women, and those labeled as disabled or deviants by society. Knowledge, like power, has functioned to maintain the status quo; however, as academics of the current era we must work to remove this imperialist notion. Cultural and literary texts, such as *Presumed Incompetent* (2012) and *Telling to Live* (2001) illustrate that being a woman of color in the academy is similar to being “colonized.” Indeed, during the colonial era, “[t]he imperial powers attempted to refuse the Other a voice of its own, tried to deny it a language with which to define its own position” (WGS 77). Once again, in the United States, we can point to the role that history has purported that education exists for white men, and those of the upper class. For many institutions in our nation, it has been less than one hundred years since they opened their doors to include the “weaker sex.”⁸ When we add both class and color distinctions to the already determined “weaker” gender, one already knows that the powerful institutions will take even longer to dismantle the labels that point to weaker by three degrees: female, lower social class, and ethnically or culturally determined to be not-white.

By drawing a parallel between the colonizer and the colonized through the use of language as in the above quote, metaphorically we can also assume such boundaries exist

between those within the academy and those outside or attempting to enter. Furthermore, this relationship demonstrates the import of understanding academic discourse, which historically has marginalized those who cannot speak at such an elevated degree. Clearly, colonialism allowed for the privileging of the masculine, white point of view, while the university, along with other institutions, historically has reinforced this unfair advantage. We must point out that many other viewpoints exist (and have always existed) and should be included in our universities, yet the difficulty during the present age of postcolonialism lies in the centuries-old normalization of white, male, and heterosexual privilege, which must be dismantled. To use David Sibley's term, these "geographies of exclusion" are the literal mappings of power relations.⁹ As indicated by this essay's epigraph, Janet Fiskio would agree, as she asserts that "place is inextricable from networks of social power" (312).

Throughout history, our universities have existed to create and defend exclusive social locations. While present day universities allow for the education of women of all colors (although not in every society), racialized and gendered hierarchies have been normalized for centuries; white equates to purity, color to unclean, male to strong and female to weak. This binary thinking extends to the social and geographical landscapes with the city being equal to civilization, Nature to wilderness, male to rational, and female to emotional. Always, there is a hierarchy involved in the binary; one is superior to the other. That which is "othered" is considered and normalized to be inferior. In the words of the feminist Luce Irigaray, "that which is labeled as "'she' is indefinitely other..." (262). In discussing knowledge creation, the superior voice has historically been masculine, white and upper class. We continue to live the ramifications of such stratifications across society as a consequence of binary thought patterns continuing to be cultivated in our universities where ideas, not dollars, are the valuable currency.

New ideas threaten established knowledge. They raise questions about central, social values because thoughts have the power to destabilize and overturn social hierarchies. New knowledges are considered dangerous as they challenge the white, heterosexual, male domination of the western knowledge industry (Sibley 116). It is feared by the establishment that knowledge will lose its sanctity and become tainted as the dominant groups in the academy lose their unilateral authority. The control of knowledge upholds the nineteenth-century concept of ideal citizenship, underscoring the existence of a moral dimension that must be upheld to maintain stability and homogeneity, two pillars of strength for a nation.¹⁰ "Excluded knowledge is a narrative concerning groups and individuals who have been relegated to the margins of society because the values they represent undermine the moral consensus" and furthermore "...social knowledge is contoured as a moral order, a constructed truth given legitimation by the state. In order to protect officially sanctioned knowledge, the dissemination of ideas has to be policed" (Sibley 132-33).¹¹ Indeed accepting what is considered knowledge and allowing it to be taught in schools and universities has created great debate in the last few decades in the USA. Specifically, one can point to the reactionary stance certain states took in response to the inclusion of works written by authors of color into the curriculum. It is not surprising to note that the voting members of a school board are more apt to ban a book "of color" when they themselves are on the whiter end of the spectrum—both color-wise and culturally.¹²

Practices of Exclusion

Bias towards particular material as well as towards a certain type of student is ubiquitous in our schools and universities, especially for certain programs or majors. Need we be reminded of Harvard University's President Larry Summers' comment about women and mathematics?¹³ Despondently, we can conclude that since an Ivy League President feels so comfortable speaking such nonsense in a public forum, we can be certain that there are many others that hold the same appalling opinion. Prejudice against women and women of color permeate the university as they are subjected to gender, social class and ethnic discrimination. In addition, these students suffer due to their professors' (and administrators') sexist and racist ideologies about their origins and also about who should be allowed to enter the space of the academy.¹⁴ Undoubtedly, reasons abound as to why assumptions like Summers' exist. For example, one reason being that by "[r]estricting entry by employing ostensibly academic criteria is a way in which elites retain their power" (Sibley 116). Moreover, space in the real world has boundaries as do academic disciplines. These boundaries exist because the powerful have "a distaste for mixing expressed in the virtues of pure spaces and pure knowledge" (Sibley 116). Those with power view their social location as an exclusive club; therefore, as the gatekeepers of knowledge, they see themselves much in the same way they see race, gender or social class—as an identity marker that distinguishes and isolates one group from another.

Purity of knowledge combined with the preconceived notion of Social Darwinism ("the whiter, the better") permits those in power to assume a level of superiority and with "science" in their corner, mistreat women of color since they deem women inept from the first day they enter the university. *Telling to Live*, published in 2001, was one of the first cultural studies texts to underscore the lived experiences of Latina feminists who share their "herstories" to highlight the abuse that was commonplace during their graduate school years. Each author mentions that she was subjected to co-optation, humiliation and out right physical abuse. They suffered not only physically, but emotionally, psychologically and intellectually simply because they were considered "unworthy" for being Latinas. Celia Álvarez points out that graduate school proved to be a battle for selfhood: "I constantly had to fight off their stereotypical conceptions of my cultural and academic identity" (181). Comparably, for an anonymous Latina "it became clear that the troublemakers were students of color and/or feminists and that we were sanctioned for speaking our minds" (219). Clearly, for being in the minority, and daring to enter graduate school, these Latinas were treated horribly. Aurora Levins Morales realized quickly that in graduate school language served a unique function, it was a tool of exclusion and humiliation:

A frequent response to those who resist exclusive language is that they are intellectually lazy. Like other forms of gate keeping, the whole point is that we, and not the gatekeepers, are responsible for getting ourselves in. We must stop what we are doing, forget what we came for, and devote our energies to techniques of breaking and entering. We are required to do this just to win the right to join the argument. If we are uninterested, we are assumed to be incompetent. (LFG 31)

The metaphor of a robber breaking and entering to steal something of value, knowledge, which according to the gatekeepers, does not pertain to Latinas, comes to mind after reading the above citation. Levins Morales suggests that achieving academic success for Latinas corresponds to the activities of a burglar. From the perspective of those in power, this representation is accurate. Entering graduate school is deliberately an arduous process, and once admitted, there is no guarantee one will graduate or be successful. The exclusivity extends further when we emphasize the role in which academic discourse in many instances falsely legitimizes elitism by expelling those who dare to trespass. In "Ethnicity, Ideology and Academia" Rosaura Sánchez underscores that the concept of boundaries is contradictory since "one can be within but at a subordinate level, to the point where those within feel as if they were outside" (296). The University should not exist merely to protect the spaces of the elites, yet in the illustrations above and those that follow it is evident that the old boy's network continues to disparage all types of women.

In my own personal experience, after recently being hired for a tenure-track position, the Provost (a white male) asked me when I planned on having children! First of all, my initial reaction was of total shock as this type of question is illegal to ask of a subordinate. This was my future hanging in the balance (as this man would have the decisive vote on my tenure down the line) and I could only surmise what he must have been thinking. Perhaps, due to my age and the fact that I have a uterus, he simply assumed that I automatically would use it! I took a chance and held my ground explicitly stating that whether or not my uterus would potentially be occupied, not to mention when, was none of his business. He stood dumbfounded and I walked away. Most certainly, the Provost did not ask my male colleagues the same question. One day at lunch, I happened to be sitting with the Human Resources Director and I let her know what had happened. She asked me directly if she could document the event in the Provost's file. Of course, I agreed as I did not want his inappropriate behavior to affect other (female) colleagues. Unbeknownst to me at the time, this was a very fortuitous act. The year I applied for tenure, I was told informally by a colleague that the Provost would vote against me. After a thorough investigation on my part, I uncovered his unwarranted plans to deny my tenure. Consequently, I went straight to Human Resources (the same Director as previously) and also to the Office of Mission to report my suspected concerns. After a nerve wracking wait, I did receive tenure. A year later, the Provost was fired due to numerous sexist and racist complaints against him.

A few examples that stress the common mistreatment of African American women that attempt to enter fields that are dominated by men are represented and analyzed by Dr. Cerise L. Glenn in "Stepping In and Stepping Out" from *Presumed Incompetent*. Dr. Glenn introduces a graduate student named Natasha who mentions, in regards to her studies, that she constantly feels disparaged because she is told that "black women are less intelligent, that we don't have any place, particularly in my field [political science]" (137). Moreover, another student, Denise, decided to change her career goals after several negative experiences, she explains: "All of my professors were men, white men...I often felt dismissed...and because of that I had to work harder to make myself be seen because I didn't want to be ignored" (137). And finally, Dr. Glenn discusses Angel, who changed her major from biology to psychology, as a consequence of feeling invisible. Her experience screams prejudice. Angel expounds:

I even had a professor—I walked into an organic chemistry class—he was just lookin’ at me like you must be in the wrong place kind of thing. I was like, no, I’m not in the wrong place. Or I’d gone into a classroom, particularly my science classes, where I really had very weird experiences. And I knew that it was attributed to my race, in particular. It was, you know—professors have come in and have asked if I was there to change the light bulb on the projector, and I’m just like, why would you think that? I’m a student in the class. (137)

These examples emphasize how out of place it seems to the white, male professor that an African American woman would actually be in the room to study a “hard” science. I find this anecdote when the professor assumes that Angel has entered the classroom to change a light bulb particularly revealing of the extreme privilege held by the professor’s social location. Furthermore, the fact that he seems oblivious to the possibility that she is a student further reiterates the imbedded prejudice that his life experiences—and hers—corroborate. The fact that all three students were so poorly treated that they each changed their career paths illustrates how rampant “geographies of exclusion” are across our universities and our society.

In being excluded from participation based on gender and race, one can draw a parallel between the historical role of knowledge that has been maintained by white men in our universities, and the commonality of the not-so-successful attempts to broaden who is allowed into the university. The latter, ultimately, will determine our future knowledge creators. Indeed, racial, gender and social class divisions must be dismantled for inclusivity to occur. As evident in the illustrations by Dr. Glenn, we could point out that in the past:

The very definition of ‘the scientific mind’ is coterminous with rationality, masculinity and power. The scientist as model for subject of knowledge is therefore defined in a set of hierarchical relations to others: the non-scientist. Feminists have criticized scientific discourse as an account of the world that *systematically devalues every category that is ‘other’* than the male, Western, bourgeois self: women, children other races, foreign cultures, lower classes, handicapped people and nature. (*emphasis added*: Braidotti et al 31)

Evidently, the fact that these women of color were not considered by their professors as “adequate” to study the physical sciences points to deep prejudice, yet the far reaching consequences underscore that this strategy allows white men to maintain the status quo, that is to say, their position at the top of the knowledge food chain. Moreover, it is clear that “science as part of the hegemonic culture is instrumental in maintaining power and domination by men. Objectivity and universality may be seen not just as characteristics of science but as masculine values in that they contribute to the domination of women. ‘Universal truths’ may be masculine values in a coded form” (Keller158). Must I point out that what has been considered universal, objective, white, bourgeois and masculine are not norms for all of us! Cultural values equate these “objective,” “male” values as scientific and superior to traits and behaviors considered “feminine.” Knowledge that is “pure” and “separate” from practical knowledge is deemed superior. Subjects such as social work, nursing or teaching that involve working with people are relegated to the “female” realm,

with deleterious effects, one of which is that remuneration significantly reflects this “feminine” aspect with low salaries when compared to traditionally “masculine” careers. Also, in the areas of knowledge construction, these fields suffer from “a devaluation of knowledge on the grounds that [they are] not ‘scientific’” (Sibley179). In fact, not only does gender affect how “scientific” one’s work is considered, but also an author that is labeled with an ethnicity that is perceived as non-white can detrimentally affect the reception of his/her scholarship.¹⁵

These presumptions inform our social, political and economic lives. Since the 1950s, women historically were expected to remain in “their proper place,” that is to say, in the home. When women began to earn wages in the private realm, they earned—and still do today—considerably less for the exact same job that their male counterparts earned. Due to being relegated to the “home” space, boundaries were enacted that maintained and enforced appropriate behaviors for women. These spaces can be called “maps of meaning” (WGS113). Home is for reproduction, the factory for production. As mentioned previously, the city also became gendered as it became a masculine space for work outside the home. All one needs to do is look at the lack of curves on a city building to conclude that most architecture represents a masculine or phallic identity. Beyond the shape of buildings, industrial capitalism embodies the tenets of what we could term “capitalist patriarchy” (WGS113).

The university has contributed to maintaining men in their positions of power and adversely kept women relegated to the home space or to careers of “less importance.” The “pure” fields of knowledge in the universities have historically been fulfilled by white men and outside the university those careers that society deems “masculine” and “white collar” earn the highest wages. Furthermore, if a career path has historically been fulfilled by more women than men, the median salary will reflect that. In the examples of Natasha, Denise, and Angel clearly the conclusion that can be reached is that due to their race and gender, they are pushed out of their chosen academic paths and forced to choose a “less scientific” career. Perhaps unbeknownst to them, the careers that are in the social sciences, which are also called the “soft” sciences as opposed to the “hard” sciences for obvious gendered reasons, will pay considerably less over their lifetimes. The barriers, therefore, as to who gains access, first, to a university degree and second, to the “masculine” fields, illustrates a long-standing separation pointing to much less financial gain for those who are not male, not white.

Negotiating the Classroom as an Academic of Color

Social injustice extends across every social location. In “Urban and Regional Political Economy” Edward Soja asserts that the sites of struggle are vast and “include not just the sites of (class) exploitation but also of (racial) domination and (patriarchal) subjection, all places and spaces where difference and otherness translates into inequalities of power and knowledge, privilege and wellbeing” (73). Clearly by being from lower socioeconomic backgrounds in addition to being women, the young students interested in studying the physical sciences were exposed to such exploitation, domination and subjection based on external visual cues to which their professors responded, ultimately causing the women to

exit. Soja continues to mention that sites of oppression extend beyond what we typically consider to include:

[T]he visual representation of culture, written texts and the university classroom, maps and the profession of cartography, Disneyland and Leisure World, the Amazon rainforest and the Macdonalds hamburger, television and the Internet, asylums and prisons, shopping centres and car-boot sales.[...].What unites all these sites is a shared consciousness of the power and control embedded in the spatiality of human life, how all forms of oppression and degradation are at least partially sustained by and through the production of specific geographies or what Lefebvre called the production of fully lived space. (73)

The French theoretician, Henri Lefebvre, attests to the power that exists in every space we enter throughout our entire lives. He asserts that spaces actually tell us what to do, what is allowed or prohibited, and who is allowed into certain types of spaces, what can be done there, and we do not consciously realize how much power spaces have over how we move through space or if we move at all. Of course, Lefebvre's study *The Production of Space* (1991) not only refers to physical spaces but also to abstract spaces. Soja's quote points to the significance of how abstract and physical spaces collude to allow or bar entry into the university to those considered inferior by the "ones in charge."

As resistance literature, *Presumed Incompetent* highlights the power dynamics within the academy, specifically the marginalization that academics of color encounter throughout their careers—from graduate school through tenure and promotion. The authors contest their "asymmetrical relationship to power" by exposing unjust treatment and as well as theorizing the socially constructed binaries—specifically gender, class and ethnicity—within existing prevalent ideologies (Pérez-Torres 162). Brenda J. Allen writes that the individual authors featured in *Presumed Incompetent* write in order "to reveal the ubiquitous power of numerous dominant ideologies in US society, including white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, classism, ethnocentrism, and rationality" (18). In point of illustration, I would like to underscore how these ideologies affect one Latina academic through analyzing Carmen R. Lugo-Lugo's chapter "A Prostitute, A Servant, and a Customer-Service Representative: A Latina in Academia."

Professor Lugo-Lugo's essay revolves around an exchange she has with a white, male student in her ethnic studies course one day. In sum, he asks her to cancel class because he does not feel like being there and since his father pays her salary it is only fair that she does what he says. In this oral exchange of one minute prior to class, the professor points out the power dynamics that reflect much broader societal realities and injustices. Such an exchange would never happen if the professor was male and/or white however, due to his social location the student felt that he had the right to make demands. The binary markers of male/female and white/Latina underscore the privilege that the superior markers purport to their owner. Another student, during the discussion that took place that day in class—Dr. Lugo-Lugo did change the topic to focus on white privilege—"challenged her classmates to 'just think of the kind of nerve that it takes' for any student not only to think that he owns his teacher but to feel free and secure enough to tell her in front of forty-nine classmates

that he, in fact, does” (41). At least, there is one other student in the course that understands the inherent superiority of the white, male student as misplaced arrogance, self-importance and condescension.

However, the exchange lends itself to a critique of our society, and our universities as they exist today. Dr. Lugo-Lugo blames the media and popular culture for a unilateral representation of Latinas as sexy and nothing more. To illustrate this point, she refers to how a Google search for the term “Latina” will return pornographic sites in the top ten results. Furthermore, when one compares the two academy award winning actresses Angelina Jolie and Penelope Cruz, although both are considered quite “sexy,” only Ms. Jolie receives attention beyond her physique. Ms. Cruz exists merely as an “exotic beauty” (48). Therefore, as a Latina professor, Dr. Lugo-Lugo understands that her students do not expect her to be intelligent, and as such, her course and the learning of the material are considered by some to be unnecessary (44).

The idea that an ethnic studies course is deemed unnecessary by many of her students (and their parents), in addition to the fact that the professor is devalued based on her gender and ethnicity, demonstrates that our societal mores must be re-evaluated, along with our definition of knowledge, as well as whom we consider appropriate gatekeepers of said knowledge. A student displaying his masculinity and whiteness as markers of privilege speaks to his professor, Dr. Lugo-Lugo, as if he were the colonizer and she the colonized. Obviously, understanding the historical relationship underscored here by her student, the professor understands why he is conditioned to speak to her in such a disparaging way. Society, that is, history, has demonstrated to him that his professor—for her ethnicity and gender—inhabits the “wrong” side of more than one binary category, placing him on the “right” side.

Furthermore, as Dr. Lugo-Lugo affirms, many students feel that since we have elected an African-American President in 2008 and 2012, we are living in a post-racial society. Moreover, they also share the view that their courses at university should conform to and reflect their fleeting desires, as if they were consuming food or shopping at the mall. The consumerist mindset underscores what students expect from their classes: Entertainment. This performance aspect to teaching also concerns Dr. Lugo-Lugo as she compares what the students see as sharing the same building/space: Starbucks and the Classroom.

The fight for mental-space brings about another issue for today’s knowledge producers. How do we encourage deep introspection and critical thinking about important subjects that impact all people on the planet when a student is focused on the next sale at Forever 21 or GameStop? In her essay, the author discusses such difficulties facing the corporatization of our universities. She writes “students begin to treat their professors and other university workers as clerks or cashiers at a department store, who are there to serve and satisfy their every need” (46).

As knowledge becomes envisioned as a commodity by new generations of students, the relationship between who holds the power in the classroom has shifted enormously. The professor, not necessarily viewed as the figure he once was, has lost his place on the

pedestal within society. However, it must be stated, for male professors, it is much less likely that they will suffer such open abuse as women of color experience simply due to white, male privilege. When color becomes part of the equation, as well as gender, women academics must negotiate carefully, as they do not hold the exact position that their male counterparts do, and they certainly are not considered members of the dominant culture in society or in the university. However, this last point—entering the dominant culture—has become the goal, not to acquiesce to the status quo, but rather to transform it to be more inclusive. In summation, Dr. Glenn’s essay describes the issue at hand. The author asserts:

I am a Latina telling my mostly white students that racism, discrimination, and inequality still exist and affect all our lives (theirs included), both in ways that can be measured and ones that cannot. I also tell them that they are implicated in those things; that they must do something about them, and their comforts come at the expense of others. And of course, they do not want to hear that. Especially not from me. (45)

Reaching the students, having them understand that their consumerism impacts others’ lives, and potentially negatively, does allow for the beginning of a process that can be labeled subversive. Having succeeded thus far—gaining entry into graduate school, achieving a position and tenure—permits academics of color the opportunity to reach the future citizens of our nation and potentially shape their thoughts towards a more inclusive mindset.

Subverting Binary Thought

One particular Latina feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa, has written extensively throughout her life on how important and necessary inclusivity is in transforming our universities and our society. She affirms that in creating new knowledges we must first begin to dismantle our own prejudices. Anzaldúa writes: “Self-education requires that we open all of our senses, not just our minds, and allow ourselves to be changed by the books and perspectives of other people. It requires that we unleash our passion for social justice” (Reader 240). As an academic of color, Anzaldúa asks us to reimagine our society by opening our minds and senses to erase boundaries and set ourselves free from restrictions. She urges us to discard our binary thought patterns and adopt a mindset—a spirituality—that infuses us with passion for social change. We must not reinforce pre-existing notions, or allow others to cage us into narrow spaces, instead Anzaldúa suggests that we embrace an ever developing, adopting, changing mode of thought while we expand our actions and hearts through rejecting the past and move towards a “spirituality that not only transforms our perceptions of ‘ordinary’ life and our relationships with others, but also invites encounters with other realities, other worlds” (Reader 229).

Feminists and academics of color, like Dr. Lugo-Lugo and Dr. Glenn, write to achieve visibility within academia, but also to transform us and our nation. Clearly, these academics have taken to heart and to the classroom several of Anzaldúa’s tenets: “Transformation does not happen unless we explore what threatens us as teachers and students; what we sweep under our desks; what we silence; what we’re angry about; what causes us anxiety; what

brings us into open conflict and disagreement; and what cultural prescriptions and cultural teachings we're rebelling against" (*Reader* 241). By looking deeply into our own lives, we can begin to implement social change. We must explore in order to learn as much as we can about the supposed "other." We should begin by "nurtur[ing] the ability to wear someone else's skin" (*Reader* 230). Furthermore, Anzaldúa confirms: "Even though it may be the hardest thing we'll ever do, we have to come together, work with each other, learn about each other, listen to each other, value each other. We stand before the abyss between our worlds, psyching ourselves to leap. We have to use every means to transform ourselves and our society" (*Reader* 294). Although it may seem arduous, the solution must be to remove the perceived distance between "us and them" by erasing fictitious borders that close us off from each other. If Anzaldúa were alive today, I believe she would ask her white male colleagues to listen and learn from their colleagues of color. Through active listening, it is possible to break down barriers and let go of preconceived notions that are based on false tenets.

Conclusions

Through resistance literature, works such as *Presumed Incompetent*, permit academics of color to inscribe themselves into history (herstory too!) while reminding scholars of their presence. Such texts are absolutely necessary because of mainstream academy's marginalization of scholarship produced by academics of color, although this continues to improve, albeit very slowly. Politically, the authors from *Presumed Incompetent* engage in a dialogue that moves away from binary limitations to a more inclusive space. The visible celebration of heterogeneity on every campus in our nation is the goal. In an effort to define themselves, these authors are simultaneously "decolonizing literary space" (Arredondo 114). This work adds and speaks to the abundance of recent writings within feminism. It promotes the decentering of Western European privilege, and dislocates the rampant and at times hidden prejudice that lives and breeds in our universities. It is fundamentally inclusive and counter-hegemonic, further broadening the boundaries that limit history, learning and self-expression.

Academics of color, like Glenn and Lugo-Lugo, are engaging in and critiquing the knowledge taught in our universities with benefits that are far reaching. With the breakdown of traditional disciplines and the creation of new ones, there is a knowledge-revolution in the making. As forces for humanization and for change, not only are Lugo-Lugo, Glenn, the Latina Feminist Group, and other academics of color challenging the status quo, they are inscribing themselves into history. By allowing new knowledges to permeate our universities, that is, by supporting and celebrating men and women of color in graduate schools and on the tenure-track, we can aid in their success towards ultimately redefining our universities and eventually, our nation. Consequently, all ethnic groups will gain a much larger role in contributing to the knowledge we teach, which in turn will serve every citizen who is a part of the twenty-first century USA.

Teaching in today's universities becomes a subversive act for many academics of color, in that they consciously choose to reject the status quo by including counter-hegemonic points of view, thereby redefining knowledge and inviting encounters between

every member of society in the interest of changing not only our education system but also the ideologies that inform policy and the curriculum. Soja supports these efforts as he suggests: "Making theoretical and practical sense of lived spaces requires a multiplicity of knowledge formation, a kind of nomadic practice that builds few permanent structures or inviolable 'schools' of knowing" (74). In letting go of the old, discipline specific silos of knowledge, and allowing for constant updating in our classrooms and across our universities there exists an opportunity to become an inclusive nation that privileges all sources of knowledge equally. "In the end, we have nothing to lose but the constraints of our history" (Soja 75). I would add that we have a great deal to gain by being more inclusive of "knowledges of color" in our universities and our society.

Notes

¹ Identity markers have always existed, mainly to exclude, rather than include. I do not wish to assume that the Anglo population has always been in the majority because that is simply not the case. However, with such diverse diaspora populations in the USA at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Anglo-Saxon terms that once defined the nation certainly do not apply.

² Silvia Spitta informs us that: "The increasing preoccupation with issues of transculturation today may result not only from migratory patterns of displacement and the resurgence of new "identities" that challenge old concepts of identity, but also from the breaking down of the former isolation of the disciplines from one another. The increased interdisciplinary dialogue allows us to read and decipher both colonial and postcolonial texts that posit new types of subjectivities." (25)

³ This article contributes to inclusive feminism, building on the works of many, including but not limited to: Arredondo, Hurtado, Lourde, Moraga, Anzaldúa, hooks, Cantú, Oboler, Castillo, García, Facio, Lara, Saldívar-Hull, Guy-Sheftall, White, and the Nigerian Ngozi Adichie.

⁴ At this juncture, I would like to invite the reader to contact me personally, if after reading this essay, you would like to contribute to a book project (you may choose to be anonymous when we go to press) that I will be editing in the next few years. Please email ksanchez@georgian.edu.

⁵ See Michel Foucault's *Power/Knowledge* for an in-depth presentation of the relationship between these two concepts and how they manifest in society.

⁶ I would like to point out that ethnic and gender alienation, although common place, has become the subject of investigation for academics in recent decades. The reasons are clear. Those who vote on an academic's future in the academy have been those most likely to hold the views that this author writes against in the hopes of eradicating them. In other terms, it may be noticeable that *Presumed Innocent* and *Telling to Live* do not have sole authors. Rather, many individuals have banded together for, yes, protection and solidarity. Sadly,

racism, classism and sexism continue to plague all of us and our existence in the academy can be, at times, untenable due to fear of being fired or denied tenure.

⁷ It has just recently come to my attention that summer 2015 hosts the first “Decolonizing the Mind” Summer School in the Netherlands. Please see: www.decolonizingthemind.org.

⁸ Many universities in the US opened their doors to women in 1969, including Georgetown, Princeton, Johns Hopkins and Yale. Columbia acquiesced in 1983, while the military institutions would not open until a lawsuit was at hand. The Citadel changed its policy in 1993 and the Virginia Military Institute in 1997.

⁹ Sibley defines geographies of exclusion as the resulting social and spatial exclusions that occur in a society which neglects scholarship “by women and black writers” [...] “suggesting that both the practices which result in the exclusion of minorities and those which result in the exclusion of knowledge have important implications for theory and method in human geography” (n/p). Although Sibley is an academic in the UK, this concept of geographies of exclusion can be applied to many universities across the West, and perhaps other cultures as well.

¹⁰ It is beyond the scope of this article to problematize the nation. However, please see Doris Sommer’s *Foundational Fictions* (1993) where she outlines the relationship between literature and the Nation-State in the early days of Latin American independence as well as Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez’s *Identity in Latin American and Latina Literature: The Struggle to Self-Define In a Global Era Where Space, Capitalism, and Power Rule* (2014).

¹¹ It is more than a coincidence that the prevalent ideology when most of Europe’s colonies fought to gain their independence was positivism. The ideals of being whiter and wealthier and that those traits would somehow lead to further progress in society simply did not make coherent sense in the colonies. Indeed, the postcolonial era points to the long-term suffering of non-white and non-wealthy countries that were colonized not only physically, but mentally, by positivism and its morphed cousin, Social Darwinism.

¹² During 2011-12 school year, the state of Arizona banned several books from being taught in the public schools. Consequently, in protest, a group called the Libro Traficantes traveled from Houston to Arizona to smuggle the books into the state. Several authors gave book readings at various stops along the journey, including Sandra Cisneros, Dagoberto Gilb, Helena María Viramontes, Stephanie Griest Elizondo, Manuel Muñoz, Denise Chavez, and Luis Urrea. Please visit: <http://www.librotraficante.com/>

I also want to thank my colleague Claire Massey who spoke on this topic at the Austrian Association for American Studies in Graz November 2014.

¹³ During a speech given during his time as Harvard President in January 2005, Larry Summers stipulated that one reason why there are significantly less women than men in math and science careers is due to “innate differences” between the male and female genders. This comment by a University President sparked a national debate.

¹⁴ See Kathryn Quinn-Sanchez' "Living Theory, Theorizing Lives, Creating Solidarity," *Chicana/Latina Studies: The Journal of Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social* 5, no. 2 (2006): 118-129 where she discusses several examples of how graduate school advisers mistreat Latina students.

¹⁵ The anthropologist Ruth Behar has written about how being hired by her University as Jewish precluded the institution's consideration that she also was Latina (she is from Cuba). The institution stated that she could not be Latina and Jewish simultaneously. On another point, Behar expresses fear for scholarship that is "too soft" or "too hard". Once again it is interesting to note that the terms could be interchanged with "too feminine" or "too masculine." She explains her perspective in *Chicana Feminisms*, she writes: "But I worry: As genre outlaws, does our writing become so unclassifiable that it gets lost in the cracks of all those forms we are meshing together? Does its *ni aquí ni allá* quality render it too amorphous to make a mark in the very fields of anthropology, criticism, and fiction writing that we wish both to be accepted by and, at the same time, transform? Will our writing be "too soft" for the academy and "too hard" for our readers outside, most especially for members of our own Latino communities?" (Arredondo 111).

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Suggested Citation

Quinn-Sánchez, Kathryn. "The Subversive Act of Being an Academic of Color: Redefining Knowledge to Change (the) US." *Trespassing Journal: an online journal of trespassing art, science, and philosophy* 5 (Fall 2015). Web. ISSN: 2147-2734

Kathryn Quinn-Sánchez is Professor at Georgian Court University in Lakewood, New Jersey. She serves as co-editor of the online, peer-reviewed, scholarly, and creative e-journal Label Me Latina, at labelmelatina.com. In addition to publishing several articles in the field of literary criticism, she has authored two books: *A Literary and Political History of Post-*

Revolutionary Mexico: Redefining "The Ideal" (2006) as well as Identity in Latin American and Latina Literature: The Struggle to Self-Define in a Global Era Where Space, Capitalism, and Power Rule (2014). Also, she has edited Negotiating Latinidades, Understanding Identities within Space (2015).