

NI DE AQUÍ, NI DE ALLÁ

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In this autobiographical essay, I explore how my four socially marginalizing subject positions have complicated social integration in my professional life. I use the term distancers to identify these modes of being and doing. To date, my distancers of gender, race, and sexual orientation have been publicly known. Now I make public my fourth distancer, that of disability. I discuss all four distancers in the context of social oppression and set forth the means by which I navigated the academic terrain toward a career in the professorate. The immediate goal of this essay is to lend voice to the marginalizing circumstances lived by those of us with multiple distancers who forge a career in the academy. Faculty with multiple distancers are acutely vulnerable because of our dispersal among predominantly mainstream institutions (PMIs). This article is offered as a proposal to promote radical transformation within the academy by formulating what can be done at the macro/institutional level by staff and at the micro/personal level by faculty with multiple distancers to gain meaningful inclusivity for such faculty at PMIs. [Key words: higher education, multiple social identities, the academy, disability, gender and sexuality, race, social oppression]

Not without a secret kept have I navigated the institution of higher education into a faculty position in teacher education at a university in the Northwestern United States. That I am Chicana is apparent. A lesbian, not so apparent, but I am publicly out. When added to my being a lesbian woman of color, a secret identifier distances me fourfold from mainstream culture—that is, from membership in social groups traditionally invested with power and privilege in the United States. Today, I am a member of the academy historically described in the United States as a white, middle-class, male-dominated conclave, whose procedures for retention and tenure reinforce dominant social-group membership by resisting support for the needs of faculty from underrepresented groups (Turner and Myers 2000). The academy thus functions as the reflection of mainstream culture—and promotes the

stereotypes and prejudices toward underrepresented social groups that are prevalent in the mainstream (Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado 1995). Having outfitted myself with the necessary degrees to pursue a career on the academic playing field, I am nevertheless aware that the assessment of my professional performance by those in power may be affected by the personal identifiers, both visible and secret, that place me among the underrepresented social groups in the academy (González 1998).

Self-identified from the outset as thrice distanced from mainstream academia, I have warily guarded the secret of my fourth marginalizing identity, which I believe to be potentially the most perilous for my chosen career. What a conundrum to ruminate: secrets kept versus secrets disclosed. The stakes are often dispiriting. In divulging my fourth social identity, that of a person with a learning disability (LD), I agree with Deena J. González when she acknowledges that she is “not entirely convinced that revealing secrets or describing them is a good strategy or even necessary,” yet, like her, I also “feel that if we are to change the institutions of higher learning in this society, spaces need to exist for new dialogues” (1998, 46). I may have trepidations about disclosure, but I know silence will not change the experiences I have had in academia.

In this essay, I employ autobiography to explore the ways in which my four *distancers* have complicated social integration in my professional life. I do so to recount most frankly the skills utilized in navigating the educational system and the insights derived through seeing the needs of underrepresented students in higher education, all of which have substantially marked the pedagogy and teaching methods that I practice in my own classrooms. Speaking my voice via the public forum of this essay is a way to let others know that there are people like me in the academy, people with multiple distancers. In slanting the ensuing discussion towards issues of LD, this essay attempts to locate

the daunting effects of my fourth, until now silent, distancer to more public prominence and, in the process, challenge thinking about academic space. The field of disability studies, which encompasses LD, can only be fully enriched by the voices of those personally affected, particularly those who are raced and gendered. Speaking out may encourage the same in others who travel similar paths. By joining voices, I hope that a clamor about inclusiveness reaches the ears of colleagues and administrators in higher education (Chávez 1998; González 1998; González 1995; Trujillo 1998).

A disclaimer is relevant here to deflect a potential misunderstanding. Living with multiple distancers does not mean that I experience a greater degree of marginalization than do people who live with a single distancer. However, it does mean that the bombardment of incidents in which I feel socially inadequate arrives from a variety of directions. For me, breaking the silence regarding LD frees the totality of my being, uniting my inner self with who I am in society. With this newfound wholeness, I can direct energy toward breaking down the effects of stereotypes and prejudices in the academy on behalf of those experiencing marginalizing distancers, whatever their configuration.

Identifiers in the Context of Power and Privilege

Social group memberships are multidimensional, signified by such categories as race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, age, class, and/or any social identity that does not receive the same access to power as others do. In particular situations, any of us may participate in a social milieu aligned with the dominant culture. At other times, any of us may identify with underrepresented social groups, navigating the rapids at the edges of the mainstream flow (Collins 1993). We dance in and out of dominant and subordinate constructs, depending on the social context at hand. Our social

identities are composites of characteristics that mark status, rank, power, and value in society (Newman 2007). An individual's multiple social identities are shaped early, refined continually, and tested in society time and again. At testing times, we measure the heft of our own identifiers against those of the mainstream culture.

It is unfruitful to attempt to quantify the distance that our identifiers place between our perceived reality and that of the norms defined by dominant culture. However, we know that there is a norm in any situation, and we intuit our own stance in relation to it. We know empirically that there exists a palpable imbalance among groups in society. As Audre Lorde reminds us,

somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a mythical norm, which each one of us within our hearts knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as White, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within society. (2001, 589)

No matter how irrelevant it is to measure our distance from what we term *the norm*, we nevertheless recognize that, since there is a norm, there is also a place on the fringe where those of us not described by the norm reside.

In juxtaposing Lorde's sense of power imbalances among groups in society with descriptions of an individual's multiple distancing identifiers, a tendency to arrange the distancers into a hierarchy arises. Yet, in my experience, distancers cannot be arranged into ascending or descending sequence. They cannot be fixed because they are not static. As I move from group to group, my distancers slip into differing degrees of prominence. In a roomful of males,

femaleness separates me from social integration. As a Chicana faculty member in a PMI, several distancers jockey constantly for preeminence. In my role as an academician, dealing silently with LD commands center-stage attention all day, every day. Integrating the facets of one's social identities is a constant project. Notably, this process is vastly different from the essentialist view that there is a concrete truth to one's identity (Newman 2007; Trujillo 1998). My experience is akin to the constructionist perspective that "what we 'know' to be real and essential is always a product of the culture and historical period in which we live" (Newman, 36). Debra Connors validates this perspective in asserting that "our societal position has been shaped by history and is inextricably woven into the fabric of American culture" (1985, 93).

The contextualization of my multiple identifiers is aptly described in *Borderlands/La Frontera* by Gloria Anzaldúa in her assertion that "living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one's shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an 'alien element'" (1987, Preface). I understand viscerally her sense of life lived on the borders and in the margins. Yet, significantly, life's potential in those alternative places not only breeds constraints but also offers up prospects as well. In such borders and margins, Guillermo Gómez-Peña locates what he calls the hybrid nature of culture. He proposes that the person who "understands and practices hybridity in this way can be at the same time an insider and an outsider, an expert in border crossings, a temporary member of multiple communities, a citizen of two or more nations" (2002, 753). Perhaps when such border crossings reach critical mass, the border's edges will have softened, the term *society* will include us all, and what we now call *mainstream culture* will become a construct of the past.

Scholarship and LD

Barbara DiBernard stresses that all aspects of one's identity are "factors in how [one] experiences the world" (1996, 138). Lest it be thought otherwise, I do appreciate those identifiers that place me among the privileged in our country. I was nurtured by middle-class parents who seeded in me an ever-growing love of learning and challenging ideas. Moreover, I appear able-bodied, despite being a person with LD. I am also numbered among the relatively small percentage of U.S. adults who have college degrees (15 percent) and the even smaller percentage with doctorates (1 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau 2004). I currently work at a university where I have classroom autonomy, academic freedom, and the luxury to publish on topics that are connected to my self-interests.

Early in my schooling, however, I began to feel pressures related to race and gender. My primary and secondary education took place in the culturally biased setting of a predominantly white, private, Christian school. In my high school, busing and integration of the "underprivileged" (which translated into "students of color") were the only features of then fledgling considerations of cultural diversity. None of my teachers had formal training in working with students of nonmainstream cultural heritage. There were no Latina/o teachers serving as role models and mentors. Positive representations of multicultural diversity were absent from my textbooks. As a young girl/woman, I was restricted by religious doctrine regarding the appropriate role of females in society. Throughout my early schooling, I was a committed achiever who had internalized the mainstream ideal of academic excellence and was persistent and angry enough to capture high grades. However, with my LD undiagnosed, I failed to apprehend why I had to study longer and harder than other students, obtain tutors to help me through several subjects, and endure teachers' accusations of cheating when I submitted well-written papers. I harbored and internalized feelings of self-doubt and difference.

Later, having earned bachelor's and master's degrees, my activism regarding sexism, racism, and homophobia steered me toward a doctoral program with an emphasis in social justice. I enrolled as a doctoral candidate in social-justice education at a Northeastern land-grant university. The faculty and content in social-justice courses challenged, sorted out, answered, and reified beliefs about my world and my three openly acknowledged distancers. In those classes, however, I quickly perceived that revealing a learning limitation would be a deterrent in pursuing a doctoral degree. When I found myself struggling with the complicated synthesis and analysis required to meet the demanding rigor of this educational experience, resulting anxieties directed me to seek answers through the diagnostic testing of learning skills. Because no student was anticipated to need such services at the graduate level, the university could not provide testing for me. I paid out-of-pocket costs for private testing that resulted in the diagnosis of LD. Further testing was sponsored by a vocational rehabilitation program. However, this resource could not help assess accommodations suited to my particular needs because its services were dedicated to working with people who had little formal educational training. It was incredibly ironic that while LD is considered when conceptualizing the needs of undergraduate students, a graduate program in education and social justice was not at all prepared to address the possibility of scholars with LD.

All at once, while taking on this new way of seeing myself—that is, as a person with LD—I was stymied by internal and external demands of what I needed to do to understand the circumstances and accommodate the challenges of this fourth distancer. DiBernard states the obvious in acknowledging that “it’s clear that the experience of disability will be very different depending on what kind of disability a person lives with” (1996, 134). Even within the category of LD, assistance that supports one’s efforts is defined by the specific manifestations of LD. There is no method nor attempt to accommodate disabilities as a

whole; there is no simple strategy or one-size-fits-all approach for determining aid for someone with LD. As I struggled to cope with new medications and adjustments/identity issues regarding LD, I felt trapped in a Catch-22 interaction with my educational system. When I looked to my university faculty and administration for guidance, they countered by requesting that I define my needs and develop a plan of accommodation. By countering with this response, the university addressed a nonmainstream query in a familiar manner of the privileged majority, that is, by expecting an answer from the person who is marginalized. Simply put, I was asked for answers that I did not have.

In searching out the campus Disability Services Office, I was fortunate to find an empathetic, instructive ally in its director. She was an anchoring touchstone for the rest of my time in the doctoral program. Even so, understanding the limitations that characterized my LD and translating that understanding into my academic milieu over the next few years in the doctoral program were not smoothly nor speedily accomplished. No more professionally relevant example of academic necessity existed than the looming awareness that dissertations were commonly written by the “doughnut” method, that is, by holding all the relevant information inside one’s head at once and then synthesizing it into new meaning (the doughnut hole). How would I manage to navigate this requirement as a person with LD? It quickly became clear to me that, to the extent that my doctoral colleagues could devote their academic energies to their dissertation material, my energy was split between subject material and the need to define and work with certain accommodations necessary to accomplish my dissertation. This split demanded more time and effort and added another layer of difficulty to an already arduous project.

To tackle a project of dissertational scope, I called upon problem-solving skills long since embedded thanks to my young-adult experience in competitive

sports. As an athlete, I was accustomed to varying my strategy to fit an unfolding situation. Nimble and well coordinated, I was, more often than not, successful in the sporting arena in matching strategies to abilities for the win. Moreover, whenever I have experienced prejudice or discrimination as a result of my distancers, my pattern has been to regroup and move forward. To accomplish this, I have tapped inner reserves of strength, resilience, and survival. In addition, I have practiced the decolonizing strategy addressed by Emma Pérez (1998), that is, the shedding of negative messages from the dominant culture in the cause of reclaiming a history for one's underrepresented group. Rather than "face persistent, lonely fragmentation," Pérez advocates seeking safe, decolonized spaces in which to own her voice as she breaks the silences of her identity (88). In all, importing strategies learned in sports competition, plumbing inner resources, and shedding learned stereotypes and prejudices shored up my ability to pursue what otherwise would have been an amorphous, murky, perhaps unsolvable challenge for me. Thus armed, I navigated the doctoral program requirements, including the preparation of a dissertation.

Not unexpectedly, the subject of my dissertation centered directly on teaching students with the kinds of distancers that I have. It dealt with faculty experiences and practices with diverse populations. In the course of researching my topic, I interviewed some faculty who self-identified as members of underrepresented social groups. From these interviews, I learned most ardently about overcoming my own self-doubts. I discovered that the faculty members defined and sought assistance for their professional needs with positive determination. From my interviewees, I imbibed a proactive perspective that aided in dealing with my immediate needs and also prepared me well for teaching in higher education.

In addition, working with an editor on my dissertation enabled me to utilize an alternate innate strength to my advantage. Through the process of talking

out research findings and literary referents with an editor, I was able to produce a coherent synthesis of my research data and the literature in my field. In the end, I taught myself how to think my doctoral subject through one section at a time. Together with my editor, I learned how to manage each section and then stitch them together so that the sum of the parts formed a unified, progressive whole with an articulated thesis, the doughnut hole at the center. These are the means by which this denizen of the borderlands negotiated Anzaldúa's alien element, achieving my educational goals with my recognizable self intact. By the time I received a doctoral degree with social-justice emphasis in 2002, I had taught university courses on social diversity in education; trained faculty and staff on motivation, self-esteem, diversity in the workplace, and cross-cultural communication; consulted with community organizations on training programs related to multicultural issues and team development; and, with several of my doctoral colleagues, edited a college textbook on diversity and social justice.

New Challenges, Familiar Hurdles

With a commitment to facilitating multicultural competence in the classroom and workplace, I trekked westward in the summer of 2002 and, suffused with optimism, signed in to my new faculty position at the University of Wyoming (UW). Among forty-six faculty members in UW's Department of Educational Studies, I would be one of two self-identified Latinas/os. I was eager to participate in faculty life and make a difference, despite the marginality attached to my multiple distancers. I took to heart Anzaldúa's (1987) description of the borderlands as a place of striving, imbued with a richness that empowers. I likened this borderlands to transitional zones steeped in activity and change, a dynamic place with a greater chance for conflict, enrichment, liberation, and problem solving. A cutting-edge location that can foster transformation—that was my sense of the wealth and wisdom of the border. If there were any

professional position for me where application of this interpretation of the borderlands could best be challenged, it would be among the more than six hundred faculty members, two-thirds male, of this Northwestern PMI, where my hiring raised the number of self-identified Latinas/os to six.

Navigating the borders toward gaining the acceptance and validation automatically accorded persons in mainstream society is trickiest in the convergence of identity and daily life. Life-affecting decisions must be made. Whether to keep secret or to disclose one's relatively invisible distancers easily becomes a mind-boggling exercise whose outcome has indeterminable impact upon one's personal and professional future. Would I find navigating my new institutional system less hazardous if I publicly identified solely as a Chicana? Would my professional career be irreparably disadvantaged by revealing one or both of my fairly invisible distancers of lesbianism and disability?

The homophobic killing of Matthew Shepard in 1998 occurred in this western mountain community when he was a student at my new PMI. The horror of his death both vivified the depth of homophobia in the community and gave rise to a community effort to change this reality. I took up residence in this environment with some unease about personal safety should I opt for disclosure as a lesbian. That the cost was high in the faculty community for gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered (GLBT) persons who openly acknowledged their sexual orientation was validated at the first and only event I attended for faculty gays and lesbians. At this informal gathering to welcome incoming GLBT faculty, I was the only identified person of color. I spoke with many attendees about connecting with other out GLBT faculty of color. They could not name other faculty who were both queer and persons of color, though such faculty were rumored to exist. They opined that the costs of being so far from

the norm were too high for anyone to risk the dual revelations of being GLBT and a person of color in that environment.

Homophobia within the heterosexual majority results in prejudice that inexcusably disparages queer faculty, who then bear the onus of being branded as different. William W. T. Pugh (1998) writes of the anguish and vulnerability felt by out GLBT academics who have spent long years ascending to the threshold of academic tenure. At that intensely vulnerable career stage, such faculty members are dependent for career advancement on colleagues who have largely not engaged in self-awareness of their own homophobia and how it drives their professional assessments. Verta Taylor and Nicole Raeburn, as quoted in Pugh (1998, 101), hit the mark with their perception that “identity politics is a form of high-risk activism.” Dawn Atkins and Cathy Marston’s (1999) research predicted the risks of discrimination, social rejection, and physical violence both for those who come out as GLBT and after eventual disclosure for those who have elected to pass, a sadly apt Scylla-and-Charybdis predicament (see also Anhalt 2006). Risks of similar outcomes are attached, as well, to revealing LD, since, as Atkins and Marston assert, “being queer or being disabled are not interchangeable or separable for those who experience them” (1999, 4).

Self-reflection resulted in a clear resolve to remain out of the closet regarding my lesbianism in this Northwestern setting. Doubts surfaced regarding finding and connecting with others with a similar sexual orientation. Deena J. González, speaking specifically to the path traveled by Chicana and Chicana-lesbian aspirants to faculty parity, offered evidence to my uncertainty, positing that

each of [our] divergences marks a special place along the road of accommodation within academic environments as Chicanas have

sought to craft an identity built on the contrary historical principle of sameness and on the contemporary (uneasy) recognition of differences. (1998, 47)

González refers here to Chicana feminists who “explain some of the causes as structural or institutional, others as attitudinal and historical” but, in any case, acknowledge that the place of Chicanas in the academy “is not improving radically or rapidly” (47). González’s prediction for the future is shaded with pessimism. I concur with her assessment that “our contradictions are really... not as alarming or unusual as institutions might have us believe, but they are likely to worsen before they improve” (47). Clearly, my search for collegiality had not landed me in a professional community with sensibilities that abrogate feelings of self-doubt in persons with the distancers of female gender, nonmainstream racial or ethnic heritage, and lesbian sexual orientation, not to mention the fourth distancer, disability.

That Willful Fourth Distancer

Though cautious and determined about outing my sexual orientation in my new community, I decided against revealing myself as a person with LD. Why such rectitude over revealing my status as a lesbian, yet reluctance to acknowledge publicly my other invisible distancer? Societal pressure makes it hard enough to succeed as a Chicana lesbian. I felt that disclosing LD would target me as even more of an outsider among the PMI faculty in my new university and set me farther apart from those with whom I sought rapport and discourse. For reasons made clear in the following paragraphs, I preferred to pass as learning abled and contend with the consequences.

Distancers such as sexism and heterosexism are rooted in social injustice, and any negative ramifications erupt from that base. However, our society judges

disability from a biological orientation, which carries with it an irreparable connotation of damage and need. Even racism, which extends from a biological determination, is an oppression understood in terms of social injustice (Fine and Asch 2000). Not so with disability. Nirmala Erevelles emphasizes that the socially prejudiced situation of persons with disabilities “has evinced little political interest among the general public or even critical theorists of education” (2000, 29). She further pronounces disability a “pathological abnormality that has then been used to support the exclusionary, segregationist, and exploitative practices of an ableist society” (2002, 8). This relative silence by educational scholars underscores the socioeconomic separateness of disability in our ableist society, especially relative to those closely investigated distancers of sex, gender, and race.

Not only do we not hear about disability, but we also prefer not to see it. Erevelles (2002) explains this selective blindness as a self-serving mechanism by which able-bodied persons preserve their own illusion of normalcy. My own experience, particularly in my educational endeavors, confirms this preference for selective blindness both in acknowledging and in dealing with a person who presents with a disability. Moreover, the disabled person in this country has traditionally been viewed as someone who must return to normalcy in order to gain equitable social acceptance (Fine and Asch 2000). Until normalcy is regained, if ever, those who are disabled contend with placement in alternative schooling in our country’s educational system, thereby ensuring that the future earnings of those disabled who work will hover in the lowest realm of the economy (Erevelles 2000, 2002).

Laura Rauscher and Mary McClintock (1997) speak not only to the economic oppression discussed above but also to the civic oppression that historically devolves upon persons with disabilities. For example, it is common for able-bodied persons to perceive those who are not able-bodied as if their

disabilities constitute the whole of their identity (Fine and Asch 2000). I do not see myself as a person defined by LD and reject the totality of this perception. I shall not fold up my aspirations and succumb to the "helplessness, dependence, and passivity" said to define persons with disabilities (Fine and Asch 2000, 335). In fact, activists with disabilities "reject the notion that being disabled is an inherently negative experience, or in any way descriptive of something broken or abnormal" (Rauscher and McClintock 1997, 200). I concur with this stance. To me, the essence of the issues surrounding ability/disability is that we, as a society, must arrive at a juncture where people are accepted as equals no matter how different, where accommodations to inclusivity are deeply ingrained in a just society.

What, then, are the consequences demanded by my disability? Although I have a strong sense of self as a woman, Chicana, and lesbian, that fourth divergence from what is considered the norm remains an unwieldy aspect of my identity. Because of LD, my authorship is accomplished in nontraditional ways. I am able to volunteer for and execute only those faculty writing projects that allow the time span needed to get my accommodations in place. My consequent hesitancy and inaction over accepting projects in faculty meetings have cost me dearly when my silence was perhaps perceived variously by colleagues as a lack of commitment, a desire to exclude myself from the group, or an avoidance of tasks, not to mention potentially suggesting incompetence. I have thus hazarded the career-dissembling ramifications of being inaccurately gauged by other faculty regarding writing projects at a PMI where my disability, whether revealed or not, would inevitably result in my toes being held to the fire of the university's publish-or-perish dictum as I tread uphill toward tenure review. Notwithstanding the dilemma of teaching in a Chicana lesbian diaspora, the complexities of this unwieldy fourth distancer of disability, alone, could stagger one who would unravel them.

Fear—that faculty would learn of my LD and question my right to a place at the academic table—accompanied me to work daily. I felt like an imposter. The cost of silence around having LD escalated with each incident. A measure of my finite store of energy and time had to be diverted to vigilant calibration of actions and thoughts in order to protect the silenced distancer. Having now spent several years in my academic position, bracing into the risk-fraught headwind of nondisclosure, I can verify that not revealing LD has both increased self-doubt and restricted me from establishing a community of supportive allies. I could not create or engage with a social or political constituency for LD the way I had among lesbians and women of color. Moreover, because I tried adapting to an ability model that I could not own, my fourth distancer caused a loss of authenticity. I have discovered that, whatever limitations the institution was imposing, I, myself, was choosing to impress limitations on my accomplishments rather than publicly acknowledge all of my distancers.

In truth, the consequences of silence have been as distressing to my personal and professional life as I can expect the consequences of revealing LD to be. Perhaps opting to pass as able-bodied met in me a futile hope that public concealment of LD would make it privately go away. But this is not an option. That I have LD is my reality. After two years as a faculty member at UW, I finally gathered the courage to divulge my fourth distancer to my department chair, college dean, academic affairs vice president, and the university's disability support services in order to pursue needed funding to accommodate my disability. Because of a prevailing culture of fear of disability in the academy, I requested confidentiality to the extent that these few administrators and faculty could grant it. At last, I have arrived at an understanding that a person cannot be true to herself, or truly herself, if she cannot talk about her entire self.

The Struggle for Integration

The struggle investigated here applies to integration, both within the self and as a member of the academy. As a person with multiple distancers, I find myself spread among different social identity groups that are not necessarily tolerant of one another. This reality adds yet another layer of conflict to a tension-laden existence. What can be done to integrate such an experience? What can be done to deal with multiple distancers? In higher education, faculty of color find that fighting the singular distancer of race is hard on their well-being (Heggins 2004). At PMIs, racist aggressions—from macro- to microaggressions—create an environment of escalated wariness and weariness every day. William Smith, Tara Yosso, and Daniel Solórzano describe the toll extracted by accumulated racial stress and use the term *racial battle fatigue* to define “the stress of unavoidable front-line racial battles in historically white spaces [that] leads to people of color feeling mentally, emotionally, and physically drained” (2006, 301). If this type of affront to well-being is acknowledged concerning faculty singly distanced by race, what, then, is the affront to the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of faculty with multiple distancers? In a situation such as my own, with four distancers, is the stress on a faculty member quadrupled? I corroborate the exhausting, dispiriting effects of being a faculty member in an institution in which one is outside the norm in multiple ways. What, then, do faculty with multiple distancers at PMIs need from our institutions, and what must we do to take care of ourselves as we strive to succeed in the academy?

For the PMI: Proposed Solutions and Interventions

Administrators and faculty at PMIs can smooth the path for hiring and retaining faculty with multiple distancers by acting upon the following suggestions.

Create an institutional culture of multicultural competence. To begin, multicultural competence is a dynamic model of intercultural behavior, a model that reflects the interdependence of cultures within our diverse society, a model that calls upon individuals to be responsible for building intercultural cohesion. Faculty members with multiple distancers have the strongest opportunity to thrive in colleges and universities that demonstrate multicultural competence. Toward achieving the goal of multicultural competence, administrators and faculty at the departmental, college, and institutional levels of PMIs should meet, discuss, and consolidate a stance on hiring faculty from underrepresented social groups, ideally in advance of recruiting them. Deciding to accept faculty with multiple distancers is a necessary step. Even more important is to determine policy on hiring faculty with the disability of LD, a lesser-understood distancer to accommodate than others in academia.

Where a commitment to recruit and retain diverse faculty follows, it becomes crucial that what is written in mission statements and the like matches what is practiced on campus. Understanding the implicit and explicit cultures at all levels of an educational institution is key to making the real comply with the ideal in terms of creating a welcoming, satisfying environment in which faculty with distancers are valued (Moody 2004). Marginalized faculty at a PMI that ostensibly encourages diversity cannot achieve to their potential when they come head to head with a covert culture that is disapproving of diversity. The PMI itself is to be held responsible for creating and advocating multicultural competence at every level and, in doing so, trades in an outmoded, exclusive culture for one that is inclusive and supportive of marginalized faculty, including faculty with multiple distancers.

Develop a clear and cogent system for supporting faculty with multiple distancers. In translating multicultural competence into concrete practice, clearly articulated accommodations to the needs of faculty with multiple distancers must be in place. Writing on women and other faculty from underrepresented groups, JoAnn Moody states that “easing the transition into the professoriate is a critically important process” (2004, 47). To ease this transition, PMI administrators are called upon to provide to incoming faculty with multiple distancers substantive details—rather than overviews—of faculty expectations, course information, and institutional procedures (Moody 2004). Connections forged between academic departments and campus disability support services would encourage early investigation of needed accommodations and lessen the sense of differentness for these incoming faculty. Knowing what services are available at a PMI from the first day on campus—or even prior to stepping on campus—would allow the faculty member with multiple distancers to circumvent time spent feeling isolated. The stress-reducing advantage of having an ally in the office of disability services advocating on behalf of these faculty members would be invaluable. Perhaps a letter substantiating the accommodations needed by faculty with multiple distancers sent by campus disability services to department heads—as is done for students with disabilities—could help both the PMI and these faculty members to comprehend where on the common playing ground each stands and how to proceed in order for such faculty to succeed in their professional endeavors. In addition, multiculturally competent PMIs would support off-campus attendance for all interested faculty at workshops, conferences, and the like regarding social-justice education (Stanley 2006b). The desired outcome is to have faculty members bring their learning back to their campus environments and there broaden the understanding and acceptance of faculty with multiple distancers.

Just as the concept of social-group equality looms large for administrators and faculty in higher education, the concept of *social-group equity* is essential at the PMI embracing multicultural competence. Transformation at the PMI requires a rejection of the misperception of a homogeneous faculty or a norm by which all are measured. Faculty members with multiple distancers are unique individuals; one may require accommodations that another may not (Stanley 2006a, 2006b). With a roster of options clearly stated in writing, administrators and incoming faculty with multiple distancers together could negotiate a career plan that accesses the accommodations needed in each instance. Among its arsenal of accommodations, the PMI would consider providing such equitable practices as creating flexible time lines to tenure; awarding research semesters for pre-tenure faculty, who are thereby released from teaching in order to launch or sustain their scholarly pursuits; seeing that marginalized faculty are not overloaded with intracollege committee/development work; acknowledging in their tenure and promotion paperwork the inherently higher workload shouldered by such faculty; and equipping such faculty with the institutional resources needed to succeed (Moody 2004; Stanley 2006a, 2006b; Turner and Myers 2000). Additionally, equitable treatment of marginalized faculty members demands that disrespectful and abusive treatment from students be “made public” (Stanley 2006a, 726). Furthermore, conflict prevention follows when administrators at PMIs make clear to their mainstream faculty why certain institutional resources are needed by and given to faculty with multiple distancers (Stanley 2006b).

Provide mentorship. The mentoring process at a PMI establishes perhaps the most career-enabling pairing that an incoming faculty member with multiple distancers can anticipate. Ideally, the mentor-protégé relationship for these newcomers paves a pathway to networking and collegiality and provides a locus of encouragement and validation for their sometimes undervalued scholarship

(Stanley and Lincoln 2005; Turner and Myers 2000). In terms of multicultural competence, mentoring presents in both vertical and horizontal directions. A vertical feature is scaffolded mentoring, which accommodates incoming marginalized faculty's differing needs in different years leading up to tenure. A horizontal trait might be, for example, assigning more than one mentor to a new faculty member with multiple distancers. Optimally, several mentors assigned to those with multiple distancers would be selected among tenured faculty members representing same- and cross-cultural race, gender, and disciplinary locations (Carli 1998; Moody 2004; Stanley and Lincoln 2005). In addition, PMIs must address the mentoring needs of incoming faculty with multiple distancers on an individual basis to determine whether two, three, or more actively engaged mentors will be beneficial in each instance.

Engage in recruitment and retention. When faculty across disciplines were asked to name obstacles to recruitment of faculty from underrepresented social groups, the primary problem was lack of qualified candidates, according to the Midwestern Higher Education Commission's (MHEC) 1995 *Minority Faculty Development Project: Final Report*. That faculty jobs are undersubscribed for academically accomplished job seekers from marginalized social groups is especially good news for upcoming faculty with multiple distancers. One means for PMIs to attract qualified faculty with multiple distancers and to level the strain of entry into the academy is by way of cluster hires. A cluster hire is the recruitment of several faculty members from underrepresented social groups at the same time into a college or department. Cluster hires go far in allaying the isolation experienced by marginalized faculty hired singly and provide particularly crucial support in a PMI department currently without other such faculty (Stanley 2006b; Stanley and Lincoln 2005; Turner and Myers 2000).

The multiculturally competent PMI works at providing a faculty culture in which retention has the same import as recruitment (Anderson and Dédé 2004). To attract marginalized faculty, PMIs need to sponsor social justice education opportunities and promote abundant dialogue, not only on race and gender, but on all distancers, including LD. Open and prolific dialogue underpins a culture conducive, as well, to retention of faculty with multiple distancers. Equity of treatment also encourages an environment in which such faculty wish to remain. For success in both recruitment and retention, PMIs do well to offer incentives to a prospective faculty member with multiple distancers. A practical incentive could be providing start-up funds, such as a President's Advisory Council for Minority and Women's Affairs grant for summer research. Other incentives could be assurance that the faculty member would enter the department as part of a cluster hire and evidence that the PMI welcomes faculty with multiple distancers and supports their needs year in and year out.

For the Individual: Coping Strategies and Practical Solutions

The struggle for integration at PMIs begins with a faculty member with multiple distancers. S/he must take an active role, first, in easing her/his own transition into the academy and, second, in advancing the level of multicultural competence within the culture of the institution. The foremost attribute such faculty members as myself can bring to bear is *belief in ourselves*, as Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and other Latina lesbian feminists urge us to do (Anzaldúa 1987; Moraga 1983; see also Latina Feminist Group 2001). Belief in ourselves must encompass awareness that we are in the right place and possess the intelligence and skills to do this work. This belief must come with the dictum: be true to oneself; do not abandon "beliefs or identity just to fit in or assimilate" (Stanley 2006a, 729). The enabling message is for faculty with multiple distancers to remain strong in our sense of who we are and not allow

the prejudices, stereotypes, and misconceptions against any underrepresented social group to taint us mentally, physically, or emotionally or invade our sense of self and worth.

Next, as faculty with multiple distancers, we must *advocate for ourselves*. We must listen, observe, ask questions, learn the overt/covert culture at every institutional level, identify departmental power brokers, request multiple and cross-race mentoring, secure in writing any promised commitments, and become familiar with on-campus faculty services (Moody 2004; Stanley 2006a, 2006b; Stanley and Lincoln 2005). In addition, we must seek to understand the institutions' unwritten beliefs and values regarding faculty with multiple distancers, especially as those beliefs and values impact promotion and tenure (Moody 2004; Stanley 2006a, 2006b). Advocacy includes developing communities of allies both on and off campus, which enlarges the breadth of the support system that is foundational to success.

Faculty with multiple distancers need to be openly and strongly involved in advocacy regarding social-group distancers. Pragmatically speaking, a disclaimer is in order here. Until writing this article, I had been unable to commit to publicly identifying myself as a person with LD. I understand personally and deeply that the path to disclosing a relatively hidden distancer is tenuous and that the individual must weigh the benefits and costs involved in disclosure. Breaking the silence regarding my fourth distancer is, therefore, not accompanied by any proselytizing inclination to urge others to reveal hidden distancers. We can choose, without censure, to advocate for ourselves in the arenas where we feel safe and supported (Pérez 1998). The question remains: What are academicians to do when they cannot disclose a silent distancer? If a distancer such as LD is not revealed, how can the individual and institution nevertheless help one another?

Notwithstanding the above questions, whose answers remain nebulous, advocating for oneself logically leads to the last prerogative at the individual level discussed here, that of *educating others*. Faculty with multiple distancers often have access to numerous forums in which to educate mainstream members of the academy. Committees in higher education vying to claim marginalized faculty as members can expect in them a different perspective, enlightened on the complexities of diversity, one inclusive of multicultural competence. Educating others concerning diversity is invaluable. In today's academic venue and in the world at large, "diversity is everyone's responsibility" (Stanley 2006a, 730). Faculty with multiple distancers must be aware of the dangers of taking on too many opportunities. In any arena, we must look at the issue of safety and the risk of spreading ourselves too thinly to perform effectively our other academic responsibilities. Likewise, there is the pitfall of tokenism, wherein a marginalized faculty member's beliefs and values are mistakenly taken as representative of an entire underrepresented social group (González 1998; López 2006; Moody 2004; Pérez 1998; Stanley 2006a; Turner and Myers 2000). Faculty members with multiple distancers need to prioritize, strategize, and parse out the different paths to tenure that being a person with disabilities activates, and learn to apportion time and energy in ways that will maximize their ability to succeed in the academy (Stanley 2006b).

Because one faculty member with multiple distancers cannot educate everyone, it is important to select a community of people to educate. It is important to find people who have the potential to become allies, who recognize the struggles that devolve from distancers, and who will educate others. As the expression in education pedagogy states: each one, teach one. This phrase signifies that as each of us educates those around us, and they will then educate others, and the circle of multicultural competence will grow outward endlessly. It is hoped that the struggle for integration among faculty with multiple

distancers who follow the current academic generation will readily access a more understanding, accepting, and accommodating culture in PMIs. Along the way, during our modulated clamor to spread multicultural competence, we must be alert to the demarcating line between educating others and suffering the fate of becoming sacrificial lambs within the profession.

Conclusion

In my view, it is the collaborative responsibility of the faculty, students, administrators, and staff employed at a PMI, together with each academic with multiple distancers, to define accommodations needed to provide an equitable, liberating playing field on which to discharge the teaching, scholarship, and service duties of an academic. Situated on such a playing field, faculty members with multiple distancers could devote their attention to the professional goal, not only of succeeding, but of thriving in the academy. To this collaboration, ideally, the PMI would bring multicultural competence, an acceptance of faculty with multiple distancers as whole individuals whose work is valued and who need assistance to create work that is valued, and an appropriate support system for such faculty based on individual need. To this collaboration, ideally, the faculty member with multiple distancers would bring inner strengths, direction for accommodations, and a proactive perspective.

My life has been a journey to unlock the puzzle within me. In this personal narrative and critical essay, I have opened the door to the four distancers that situate me within the borders of mainstream culture. My social identity is compartmentalized enough without enduring the rippling silence of LD issues. It is enticing to think sometimes about choosing a more restrictive path of achievement, which would be the less bumpy road, rather than taking on the burdens of pressing toward my professional goals in higher education.

But I choose to go forward with the understanding that I am doing the best that I can with the abilities I possess. As an educator, I savor the processes of thinking, challenging, and synthesizing information and applying the results in new ways. For sustenance, I trust in and rely on my proven reserves of strength, resilience, and survival. I have opted to use the exhilaration and empowerment of the borderlands to transcend its inherent unease.

I am best able to navigate the borderland by knowing myself. Knowing my own soul is prerequisite to understanding the souls of my students. bell hooks reminds us that “to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin” (1994, 13). Teaching in a manner that reflects these ideas is central to providing transformational learning opportunities for diverse students. I know that I have affected students deeply when they share with me how they have learned to see the world from new and multiple points of view.

One of my goals is to train students to become educators who will foster teaching and learning in an inclusive environment that enables all students and scholars to succeed. I strive to bring a wholeness of self to membership in the academy and to intellectual exchanges with colleagues. As a queer Chicana and a woman with LD, I am doing my work to transcend limiting social constructs. I now request that those in higher education partner in this process because it cannot be accomplished alone by those with distancers . Such work demands collective action. Support at every institutional level in higher education is imperative in order for those with multiple distancers to attain integral membership in the academy. I ask others within the academy to recognize the impact of multiple distancers on those treading the paths to tenure and promotion. I ask them to acknowledge the impact, such as that

reported here, and the ways those with multiple distancers are jeopardized. I ask them to engage actively in the truth of others and to integrate this informed perspective into their work in academia.

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