

**“You Need People Who Support You”: Counterspaces for  
Women of Color Community College Faculty**

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**Abstract**

Research demonstrates that Women of Color faculty experience multiple systems of oppression in the academy. However, much of the literature surrounding the topic of Women of Color faculty is situated within university environments. A paucity of research sheds light on the experiences of Women of Color faculty within the community college setting. In this investigation, I explored how Women of Color community college faculty members found and engaged in counterspaces to help them navigate academia. This research study illuminates the testimonios of 10 Women of Color community college faculty across the United States. The findings of this study offer implications for researchers and community college administrators to carefully consider the experiences of Women of Color faculty within these institutional types.

*Keywords:* community colleges, faculty, Women of color, counterspaces

## Introduction

Within the United States, approximately 1,044 community colleges enroll over 11 million students (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2021). These educational institutions are well known to serve large populations of Students of Color, low-income students, and first-generation college students (Ma & Baum, 2016; Malcom-Piqueux, 2018). Unfortunately, community college faculty do not reflect the populations of students they serve. For example, community colleges employ White faculty at disproportionately high rates (Finklestein et al., 2016). Approximately 75% of community college instructional faculty are White, 7% are Black or African American, 6% are Latinx, 4% are Asian, and less than one percent are American Indian or Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, and Multiracial (AACC, 2016). Given the small proportion of Faculty of Color at community colleges, research on community colleges should center their experiences.

Extant literature examining faculty member experiences demonstrates that faculty members with marginalized identities experience discrimination within a four-year institutional context (Arnold et al., 2016; Dade et al., 2015; Terosky et al., 2014). For example, women faculty members are more likely to be assigned to more service-related roles and assignments within their department or college (Terosky et al., 2014). Additionally, Faculty of Color members are exposed to chilly racial climates and may be encouraged to join diversity and inclusion committees, types of service that are not as highly valued as research and teaching concerning the tenure track process (Arnold et al., 2016; Dade et al., 2015). Women of Color faculty members experience *both* gendered and racialized systems of oppression simultaneously. Research indicates that Women of Color faculty members face an exacerbation of challenges within the workplace such as a lack of mentorship, inequitable salaries, biased promotion to tenure, poor course evaluations, and student contestations in the classroom environment (Dade et al., 2015; Ortega-Liston & Rodriguez Soto, 2014).

The current published scholarship on Women of Color faculty members centers the experiences of Women of Color tenure-track faculty members within four-year institutions. There is a gap in the literature that seeks to understand the explicit experiences of Women of Color community college faculty members. The community college is a system of higher education that is typically not given as much attention when compared to highly selective research institutions. In addition, Twombly and Townsend (2008) found that faculty members at four-year institutions hold a general sense of arrogance and elite status over faculty at community colleges, thus, reflecting the exclusivity that exists within the field of higher education. Therefore, the experiences of Women of Color faculty members at a four-year institution cannot translate to a community college environment because of the elitism that community colleges experience (Doran & Lucht, 2021; Twombly & Townsend, 2008). Because community colleges serve such diverse groups of students, the field of higher education must explore the experiences of community college Faculty of Color. Understanding the experiences of community college Faculty of Color, and Women of Color specifically, can help academia engage in broader conversations related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## **Purpose**

This paper is part of a larger dissertation project that explored the intersectional experiences of Women of Color community college faculty. This study focused on how Women of Color community college faculty found and engaged in counterspaces to help them navigate academia. The research question that centered this study was: How do Women of Color community college faculty members locate or cultivate counterspaces within and outside of the academy?

## **Literature Review**

To situate the current study, this literature review is organized into two sections. The first section offers an overview of scholarship that centers Women of Color faculty experiences. The second section explores what is known about Women of Color community college faculty.

### **Women of Color Faculty Experiences within University Environments**

Scholarship demonstrates that women faculty experience patriarchal challenges as they are socialized into the academy. For example, women on the promotion and tenure track are more likely to be confused with the clarity of their roles and overutilized for service demands (Kelly & McCann, 2014). Additionally, women faculty are historically undervalued and unrecognized and are more often assigned to functions deemed to be more domestic within academia, such as service-related or administrative tasks that are not as valued as research and teaching in relation to the tenure and promotion process (Terosky et al., 2014). Women are also known to receive less access and lower quality mentoring within their departments and institutions, making them feel excluded within academic environments that are traditionally known as patriarchal approaches to leadership and evaluation (Terosky et al., 2014).

Considering intersectionality within the academy, Women of Color faculty members simultaneously experience multiple systems of oppression. For example, Women of Color faculty may experience a lack of mentorship, inequitable salaries, and disparate promotion to tenure because of their minoritized identities as Women of Color (Dade et al., 2015; Ortega-Liston & Rodriguez Soto, 2014). Scholarship illustrates several broad themes relating to the experiences of Women of Color faculty that include: a lack of representation, high service-related expectations, and being challenged or questioned by colleagues and students. Women of Color who obtain a faculty position within colleges and universities experience multiple marginality and additional pressure to perform when being the first or the only one in a department, school, and institution (Turner, 2002; Turner et al., 2008). Relatedly, the lack of racial and gendered representation on college campuses adds additional labor Women of Color put forth to engage in a multitude of diversity committees and support marginalized students on campus. Higher education leaders are eager to boast about the diversity on their campuses (Gonzales et al., 2013). However, college and university administrators tokenize the Women of Color faculty to exploit their existence within the organization for its benefit. This results in extraordinary requests for service and the conceptualization that they can and should represent their entire race or ethnicity (Gonzales et al., 2013; Turner, 2002). Engaging in

service-related activities may also hinder Women of Color faculty and their promotion and tenure process because institutions undervalue service in relation to institutional advancement (Domingo et al., 2020; Murakami & Núñez, 2014; Ortega-Liston & Rodriguez Soto, 2014). The inequities Women of Color faculty members experience may even result in stress related to discrimination, in turn, impacting their research productivity or forcing them to choose to leave the academy entirely (Dade et al., 2015; Eagan & Garvey, 2015).

### **Women of Color Faculty Experiences within Community College Environments**

There is a paucity of research on the experiences of Women of Color faculty within the community college sector compared to Women of Color faculty within four-year institutions. Research demonstrates that community colleges are more likely to hire faculty who are women or People of Color when compared to four-year institutions (Gahn & Twombly, 2001). However, Opps and Poplin Gosetti (2002) found that the proportion of full-time women faculty increased within the community college over time, yet it was not uniform across racial and ethnic groups. White women faculty experienced the largest increase in proportional representation, followed by little to no increases for Black, Latinx, Asian American, and American Indian women faculty (Opps & Poplin Gosetti, 2002). HaMai (2014) explored the experiences of Women of Color community college faculty in Southern California and found that they experienced chilly climates and cultures due to multiple forms of marginalization. Though these Women of Color faculty experienced hostile environments, HaMai (2014) found that they were “overwhelmingly satisfied in their faculty work. Their commitment to serving underrepresented students and sense of responsibility to the community at large mediated the chilliness” (p. 2). Because Women of Color faculty are a minority within the community college system, scholars must contribute to this area of scholarship to further understand and explore their experiences within this institutional type across varying regions of the United States.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework that informed this study is counterspaces. Hostile campus racial climates have been demonstrated to negatively influence People of Color psychologically, socially, and academically (Solórzano et al., 2000). In response to hostile campus racial climates, Solórzano et al. (2000) coined the term counterspaces as they found them to be a positive environment for Students of Color. Counterspaces are locations or groups in which People of Color can challenge deficit perspectives and create positive relationships with one another (Solórzano et al., 2000). Counterspaces can also be defined as spaces that “build a sense of community” (Yosso & López, 2010, p. 84).

Case and Hunter (2012) proposed counterspaces as a conceptual framework to analyze how counterspaces “challenge deficit-oriented societal narratives concerning marginalized individuals’ identities” (p. 257). Through this conceptual framework, Case and Hunter (2012) suggested that challenging deficit-oriented societal narratives occur through three processes: narrative identity work, acts of resistance, and direct relational transactions. Narrative identity work refers to the process in which marginalized individuals give meaning to themselves and others through narratives, thus, contesting societal representations and bringing healing and

restoration to their lives (Case & Hunter, 2012). Additionally, Case and Hunter (2012) argue that counterspaces serve as sites that can provide opportunities for individuals to engage in self-enhancing behaviors like offering social critique or engaging in acts of resistance. Lastly, direct relational transactions refer to processes with direct and routine transactions between members of a counterspace such as engaging in communication and offering social support in response to systems of oppression (Case & Hunter, 2012). Members of a counterspace offer empathy, social support, and community amongst each other, reducing feelings of isolation and exclusion.

## **Methods**

Testimonios are personal narratives that emerged within Latin American liberation movements as a method to create knowledge and politicized understandings of identity and community (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016; Latina Feminist Group, 2001). One form of employing testimonios as a methodological approach includes participants, or testimonialistas, and an interlocutor, who acts as an ally and learns from the stories and narratives of testimonialistas (Delgado Bernal et al., 2016). Through this approach, the testimonialista is recognized as the expert of knowledge related to their community's experiences, thus, challenging the traditional academic notions of researchers as the sole producers of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2009). I utilized testimonios as the methodological approach for this study to shed light on inequities and systems of oppression related to Women of Color community college faculty and offer recommendations for transformation and liberation.

### **Researcher Positionality: Assemblage of Locations**

Because every individual has unique experiences and journeys, researchers must self-reflect on their social locations, histories, and trajectories that shape what they know and how they know (Patel, 2016). In this section, I adopt Patel's (2016) assemblage of locations to explore my own set of personal and professional coordinates to provide

both you and the reader an idea of whose eyes you might catch a look through now and then, and also to manifest a stance of all knowledge, and therefore research, as ontological and situated as coming from somewhere(s) and someone(s). (p. 5)

I identify as a bisexual Woman of Color, specifically Mexipina (Mexican and Filipina), who is a second-year tenure-track faculty member learning how to navigate academia. Previously, I worked at a few California Community Colleges supporting current or former foster youth and first-year community college students. In addition, I aspired to become a community college counseling faculty member before pursuing a doctoral degree. My personal and professional experiences have informed the way I engaged in this study and with testimonialistas who shared their testimonios with me. These experiences influenced how I critically thought about the ways systems of oppression manifest within community college environments and how Women of Color community college faculty engaged in counterspaces.

## Data Collection and Analysis

I borrowed from Pérez Huber's (2009) three-phase process with testimonios to guide me through the data collection and analysis process. The three-phase process includes preliminary, collaborative, and final data analysis stages in which data collection and analysis happen simultaneously. According to Pérez Huber (2009), preliminary data collection and analysis must occur first. Therefore, the first part of data collection for this study was recruiting participants to engage in a one-on-one interview using a semi-structured interview protocol. To select testimonialistas for this study, I used purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling is a technique "to intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 149). I then interviewed 10 testimonialistas during this part of the data collection. Each interview was conducted virtually through Zoom. The length of interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 66 minutes. The interview centered on building rapport with the testimonialistas and exploring their deeper intersectional experiences as a Woman of Color community college faculty member.

After interviews were completed with each testimonialista, I asked them to send a one to two-page reflection. This reflection was to include their experiences sharing their narratives with me. They were also asked to share additional information about their experiences that they did not yet share or wanted to expand on. I received written reflections from 8 of the 10 testimonialistas who were interviewed. Once I received the reflections, I delved into the data to begin the preliminary data analysis process (Pérez Huber, 2009). Through this process, I identified thematic categories using an online qualitative software, Dedoose. I then utilized these categories to develop an interview protocol to be used in the second stage, the focus group.

Next, I invited testimonialistas to participate in a focus group and engage in the collaborative data analysis phase (Pérez Huber, 2009). Of the 8 women who submitted a written reflection, 6 women participated in a focus group. Due to varied schedules, I conducted two focus groups, rather than one, with three women in each setting using a semi-structured interview protocol. Focus group interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom. The first focus group interview lasted 54 minutes, and the second lasted 66 minutes. Within the focus group, I offered an approach for establishing trustworthiness through member-checking the themes I identified from the preliminary analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During this time, women had the opportunity to let me know whether the initial themes related or differed from their experiences. In addition, the focus group allowed me and the testimonialistas to build community with one another. Testimonialistas received a \$20 gift card incentive for participating in the study following the focus group.

Lastly, I transitioned into the final data analysis phase, "combining the findings of the preliminary and collaborative phases to engage a knowledge production process that incorporated participants into the analytic process" (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 648). The one-on-one interviews, written reflection, and focus group dialogue are the three qualitative sources of

data that were used for my dissertation study. Like Pérez Huber (2009), I classified analytic codes to draw connections to the theoretical framework and make sense of testimonialista experiences. Through the final data analysis, I identified themes that I present below.

## **Findings**

Co-creating or engaging in counterspaces proved to be powerful for Women of Color community college faculty members. Women of Color faculty engaged in counterspaces within and outside of their campus environments that braided the three domains of counterspaces (narrative identity work, acts of resistance, and direct relational transactions) together (Case & Hunter, 2012). Overall, counterspaces acted as a form of protection or shield to ease and minimize the oppressive experiences of testimonialistas.

### **Contesting Societal (Mis)Representations and Constructing Identity**

Testimonialistas spoke to the ways in which they gave meaning to themselves and others despite societal (mis)representations. To go into detail, Belen, a Mexican woman and tenured Counseling faculty, spoke about how imperative it was to be in a counterspace with another Woman of Color faculty member as she transitioned into the community college environment. Within her new role coordinating a special program, she was assigned to work closely with this faculty member to support students within that program. She said,

My work partner was instrumental in the community that I have because she was at this college for three or four years [when I started]. She helped guide me through a lot of things. I love her because we're a good balance. My work partner is my counterspace on so many levels. She's my safe space where I can truly feel like I can be myself with her and she's helped me grow in different ways. We're very different, but we're so similar too, which is beautiful. I can rely on her at any time and she's always checking in. I'm checking in on her, too. That has helped me a lot. It's always quality over quantity. Be mindful of who you surround yourself with because that says a lot about you but also challenges you. Choose people that challenge you in a really healthy way and help you grow because it's important.

When Belen started her career at this college, she found community with her work partner who had extensive knowledge of the college. The support she received from her helped her transition into a new work environment and become confident in her professional abilities. Unfortunately, when building community and a counterspace with another Woman of Color faculty member within this institution, Belen shared the comments other colleagues made about them.

Sometimes people misinterpret her voice and fearlessness to speak up for students, so they'll tell me, "Oh, don't hang out with that kid because it's going to look bad on you." I'm fine with that, I don't care. She's been amazing. I don't know that my experience would be the same without my fellow Woman of Color

faculty member. Even younger than I am, that part doesn't matter because her experience is amazing.

Peers were warning Belen to stay away from her colleague, a Woman of Color, due to her history of speaking up, which was perceived to be negative. This exhibits the suspicions peers held against another Woman of Color who advocated for herself within their institution. Belen decided to ignore these comments because of the positive influence this faculty has had within her experience at the college. Instead, Belen engaged in narrative identity work to contest societal (mis)representations of Women of Color speaking up and maintained a counterspace with her colleague.

Additionally, Malaya, a Filipina and tenured English professor, described how influential it was to have peer support who shared cultural values with her on her campus. Because there is a large representation of Filipino American students on her campus, she emphasized the importance of Filipino educators being connected and creating a counterspace with one another.

The other Filipino educators I work with...are very much connected. Those are my go-to folks. And now, there are more Filipino folks in administration. We got all the Filipinos together. We went to [a restaurant] one afternoon and we just had a big meeting. There were professors and counselors. We filled up one big table. We know that we're there, and we know who students are. We know that our students need to see us because they need to see that there's more to life than becoming a nurse, a doctor, joining the Navy, and that you can go into education.

The Filipino educators within her institution made a conscious effort to be in a counterspace with one another for themselves and the students that they serve. By showcasing their communal efforts, they aspired to create their meaning of the myriad of professions Filipino students can pursue and challenge dominant assumptions of Filipino career paths.

In addition to engaging in counterspaces with colleagues on campus, Malaya described how she cultivated a counterspace outside of her campus and with other Filipino American educators across the state.

I ended up meeting other community college instructors, and ironically, the community college that I went to. Now we're going on two years [of meeting over Zoom], and we were actually able to build a coalition of Filipino community college educators throughout the state. We all met on Zoom. We're still connected and trying to figure out how to create a statewide learning community for Filipino students. We're trying to talk to legislation. We even presented at a conference. You knew who the Filipino educators were by the screaming, 'Oh my god! I haven't seen you in so long.' I have a strong network now. We got to a conference, then afterward, go to a bar and debrief what happened with all of our aunties.



The intended Zoom meetings to build community with one another led to a counterspace and coalition of Filipino community college educators throughout the state wanting to develop a learning community for Filipino students. As a Filipina woman, Malaya is dedicated to serving the Filipino community. Through this counterspace, Malaya found a community with folks who created their own space and meaning for what academic support can look like in the future for Filipino students in her state.

### **Engaging in Acts of Resistance in the Academy**

Moreover, testimonialistas discussed how counterspaces offered them the opportunity to engage in acts of resistance against oppression within the academy. For example, ProfFeb77, a Black woman and tenured Sociology professor, wrote about how her Black mentors helped her throughout the challenges she experienced through her inequitable tenure-review process.

Through the support system and sage advice from my African American mentors, I began to fight back. Fighting back was something I had never done for myself; however, I fought tooth and nail for others. They helped me see the light and potential I had within me. I used their words against them. I caught them up in their own lies of deception and I used that sage advice to learn my union contract better than my 'so called panel of peers.' I told myself I would NEVER allow another to put me down, take away my dreams, or defame my character.

Through the power of mentorship in counterspaces, ProfFeb77 felt validated when experiencing a hostile work environment. This mentorship offered her the chance to challenge her prejudiced tenure-review evaluation process. ProfFeb77 also found mentorship unexpectedly from faculty who observed the oppression she was experiencing. She said,

Find your family. Whether it's in your department or another department, find your family. You'd be amazed at the allies you find. And I found White allies, too. They found me rather. They're the ones that helped me navigate the contract. One [faculty]...who is a White man...he's the one who helped me so much. He's like "this point in your contract, you see where you can choose a second peer?" He said, "And they don't have to be in this school. They don't even have to be in our district." Of course, they don't tell you that, so, my department chair put herself as my peer. I never put her. Her name was never listed, but somehow, she got on there. I didn't even know that all these things were even possible, yet he offered that information to me. That was an ally I never knew existed.

ProfFeb77 found an ally who explained the hidden curriculum and fine print within her contract. Through this knowledge, ProfFeb77 was able to understand the ways in which she can be responsible for a part of her tenure process, demonstrating acts of resistance within the academy. In addition to mentors who already experienced the tenure process and offered words of advice, ProfFeb77 found an academic home within the committees she was a part of.

You'd be amazed at where you can find allies. Find committees. There's a [DEI] committee I belong to. That was my safe haven. The people there gave loving support and arms when I had to cry. They were there. They spoke out when and where they could.

Being in a counterspace with these folks allowed ProfFeb77 to receive emotional support and space to critique her experiences when she needed it. Overall, the connections she made with people who shared similar values aided in her persistence throughout the tenure process.

Similarly, Nicole, a Multiracial Pinay and Chicana tenure-track Counseling faculty also discussed how helpful it is to be in a counterspace with like-minded colleagues regarding engaging in acts of resistance and organizing within the college. When she encountered challenges with administrators, she reached out to her peers in her counterspace to organize and find ways to engage in collaborative efforts.

In order to organize, you have to have allies. You need people who support you. And I think a lot of the ways in which I've navigated it is having a supportive community. I'm grateful to have some really great colleagues who are supportive. A lot of the times, it could be as easy as being like, "Well they said this and eff that." But it could also be like, "Hey, how can we collaborate? I know that you stand for this." I even reach out to other people like, 'Hey, I heard you're doing this. How can I support you?' ...My work has mainly been like, how do I build relationships with people, so that way, we could do work together, or we could support each other to navigate the craziness of it?

Nicole has built a counterspace with others on campus, which has proven to be helpful when advocating for students' rights or equitable policies. Through community and counterspaces, Nicole and her peers come together to vent about challenges, conceptualize plans, and engage in acts of resistance to move forward to better support students.

### **Community Building and Social Support with Peers**

Lastly, testimonialistas considered how counterspaces allowed them to build community with their peers to help them survive the academy. For instance, Sass, a Latina woman and a tenured Sociology faculty member, explained how being surrounded by Faculty of Color in her search committee helped her ultimately accept her position within the community college. She said,

I decided to say yes to this community college because the search committee...it was a lot of Folks of Color. Now that I know them [and the demographics of faculty here], they did that on purpose. They secured themselves on that search committee to try to get more Faculty of Color. I feel at home here. I feel like I have my dream job. I am surrounded by Professors of Color and strong allies.

The representation of Faculty of Color on her campus and their participation in search committees to recruit Faculty of Color demonstrated their commitment to increasing the racial

representation on their campus. Sass began her faculty career right before the COVID-19 pandemic and was still learning about her college's environment. Therefore, she was unable to connect with her peers on campus. The shift to online instruction was isolating, however, a group of Faculty of Color reached out to her to build community and a counterspace with one another virtually. She shared,

Finding my community...I was only two quarters in before the pandemic hit. I wasn't really able to connect with faculty in the beginning. I'm glad that in the pandemic [a group of Faculty of Color] reached out to me to join their group chat. That was helpful or else it would've been way more isolating and probably wouldn't have felt how I feel or how I feel now of having a sense of community. They have protected me from dealing with a lot of the other White folks and dealing with microaggressions. They're like "Watch out for this person" or if something happens, they're intervening.

When Sass experienced challenges with her tenure process, the counterspace cultivated with other Faculty of Color offered social support and space to offer social critiques of whiteness and interlocking systems of oppression. This counterspace allowed her to persist in her career. Even after she obtained tenure, she continues to be in community with this group outside of their professional lives. Sass wrote in her reflection,

I am so happy with my decision and so proud to have earned tenure in December 2021. I could not have done this without my support system. We've learned about each other's personal lives. We have a group chat. We talked about students and other issues. I have turned to them everything I had issues with conservative students. I have gotten a lot of pushback from White students who do not like learning about injustices in the world...We also discuss documentaries and assignments for classes. We bounce ideas off each other for many classes. It is truly a joint effort.

The counterspace Sass cultivated with other Faculty of Color on campus transcended into her personal life as well. Being able to find peers to process concerns and discuss each other's personal lives was valuable for Sass, ultimately reducing feelings of isolation and exclusion for her. In these spaces, she found an avenue to discuss her experiences with the overlapping systems of oppression that manifested within her role as a faculty member.

Furthermore, when thinking about Women of Color faculty starting their professions within the community college environment, Nicole offered advice and recommended,

Find community. Find mentors who are there to support you in all of your identities and then in all of the intentional work that you do. I think that's the biggest thing is finding the people who are there to truly support you and mentor you, whether that be formally or informally. Prioritize community and relationships. You just never know who you're going to meet. I met with one [counselor] who was in town for a conference in San Diego, but he worked

elsewhere. I now work with him and another girl that was at that lunch too. She's an English instructor, a Filipino English instructor at my campus. It's crazy because I was like, "Hey, we all work together now." And we've been at conferences together. We have our get-togethers when we're at different spaces together. I think you never know who you're going to meet and who you might work with in the future. So, focus on relationships and community.

Nicole stressed how important it is to build intentional and genuine relationships and counterspaces with others to support each other's visions and goals. In Nicole's case, the relationships built over time across institutions were instrumental in finding a future position or already knowing individuals within the institution where she was hired. Overall, testimonialistas reported how influential it was to be in community with others and engage in counterspaces as they navigated systems of oppression within the community college environment.

### **Discussion**

In this study, Women of Color community college faculty engaged in counterspaces that were forms of support through social networks or formal and informal communities (Case & Hunter, 2012). Counterspaces acted as a shield or tool to minimize and ease the experiences of testimonialistas. To go into detail, testimonialistas shared the importance of counterspaces to connect with peers within their college campuses or across the state, build community, and combat feelings of isolation (King & Pringle, 2018; Núñez, 2011; Ong et al., 2018; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). These counterspaces served as sites of protection as testimonialistas experienced interlocking systems of oppression in the academy. Engaging in counterspaces allowed testimonialistas to contest societal (mis)representations, give meaning to their identities, engage in acts of resistance to persist in the academy, and build community and social support with peers. These three domains of counterspaces allowed testimonialistas to survive and thrive in the academy.

Scholarship on counterspaces has focused on the experiences of students across K-12, undergraduate education, and graduate education (King & Pringle, 2018; Masta, 2021; Núñez, 2011; Santa-Ramirez, 2022). Martínez-Carrillo (2019) has explicitly explored counterspaces as a mechanism for Women of Color faculty to manage racial battle fatigue. However, this scholarship focused on the context of four-year institutions. This study builds on scholarship focused on counterspaces by including Women of Color faculty and community college contexts. When testimonialistas engaged in counterspaces, they were more likely to feel positive in showing their authentic selves and demonstrated higher levels of self-efficacy within their roles (Santa-Ramirez, 2022). When Women of Color community college faculty found counterspaces, they felt protected and demonstrated high levels of motivation to continue serving students whom they share social identities with.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study has implications for practice related to the community college setting. This study illuminates the myriad of ways in which systems of oppression manifested within Women of

Color community college faculty lives. Counterspaces acted as a form of protection and resistance against these compounding systems of oppression. Testimonialistas in this study offered recommendations for community college leaders to implement mentorship programs for faculty members with marginalized identities. For example, Chelsea, a tenure-track Counseling faculty, expressed how beneficial it would be to have a mentorship program on her campus to co-create a counterspace. She said,

Mentorship programs or safe spaces where we can speak about things. Especially with things happening recently. One shocking thing to me is that during conversations about Roe v. Wade, there were other universities asking colleagues, 'How are you feeling?' I never had that at my community college. We need a safe space. When we don't have a safe space for ourselves, how are we supposed to create a safe space for our students? A mentorship program would be helpful.

Similarly, Malaya spoke about how helpful peer mentoring can act as a counterspace for Women of Color if implemented well within community colleges. She shared,

I'm a big proponent of mentoring. Use resources. Get Women of Color together and say, 'Hey, we've got these folks who want and need mentoring.' That will help you find your folks because sometimes they can't find you. We need help putting ourselves out there. So having that established, even if it's informal. We can go over to the canteen, grab some drinks, and say, 'Hey, let's talk about what's going on. We can talk about systemic oppression. We could talk about the books we need in the library next week.'

Implementing a mentorship program within community college systems can help connect Women of Color faculty members across departments and disciplines to help create counterspaces for them. These connections and relationships can help Women of Color feel welcomed and supported on campus both personally and professionally.

### **Implications for Research**

Exploring the experiences of community college faculty members is a necessary area of research. Due to the paucity of research surrounding Women of Color community college faculty members, this study offers insight and guidance for future research. Community college researchers may express aspirations to examine community college faculty experiences by centering participant populations, disciplines, faculty types, or institutional types. This research study explores the experiences of Women of Color more broadly. However, researchers may want to explore the experiences of specific racial or ethnic backgrounds of women faculty. For instance, what are the experiences of Latina community college faculty members and how does culture help shape these experiences? Rather than using intersectionality, Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) or Chicana Feminist epistemologies can be appropriate.

In addition, scholars can choose to examine specific disciplines in future research. Many of the testimonialistas I engaged in community with for this study were English, communications, sociology, and counseling faculty. There was a lack of Women of Color faculty in STEM disciplines within this study. Future research can center discipline-specific experiences to investigate the differences in faculty experiences within STEM. To be specific, researchers can seek to answer: What are the differences between the Women of Color faculty in STEM and social sciences or humanity disciplines?

Lastly, it is imperative to note that institutional types can influence the experiences of Faculty of Color. Within this study, I did not examine whether the community colleges testimonialistas were employed at were Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs), or Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs). Similar to exploring specific racial or ethnic backgrounds, it would be beneficial for scholars to study Faculty of Color experiences within each institutional type. The experiences of Black community college faculty within HBCUs may differ from the experiences of Black community college faculty within PWIs. Therefore, researchers can examine these similarities and differences across institutional types and designations.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it contributes to literature on Women of Color faculty, community college environments, and counterspaces. Current literature examining faculty experiences demonstrates that Women of Color experience multiple forms of discrimination within a four-year institutional context. This study expands on the scholarship of Women of Color faculty members by explicitly focusing on community college environments. Although there are 1,044 community colleges serving a large number of racially minoritized students, community colleges employ White faculty at disproportionately high rates (AACC, 2021; Finklestein et al., 2016). Because community colleges serve such diverse groups of students, it is imperative for the field of higher education to understand the experiences of community college faculty and the experiences of the individuals cultivating a classroom environment with students. This study centers the experiences of Women of Color faculty within the community college environment. Moreover, this study contributes to the scholarship on counterspaces to depict how counterspaces act as forms of protection against systems of oppression within academia. In this study, counterspaces acted as a shield or tool to minimize and ease the experiences of testimonialistas.

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