

# **Co-Conspirators and Community Care: Toward Theorizing a post-COVID-19 Academy**

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we argue COVID-19 presents an opportunity for a large-scale, critical turn for faculty support. Specifically we theorize that justice rather than interest convergence is the most effective pathway to changing institutional culture, and community care is the radical transdisciplinary perspective needed to eradicate racism and other forms of subordination in the academy. Much of our theorizing is steeped in the transformative and emancipatory approaches currently engaged by faculty with subordinated identities that have reamined on the fringe. We argue that the work and community building of faculty with subordinated identities present desirable possibility models for a more just professoriate.

**Keywords:** transformative teaching; critical race theory; community care

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## Introduction

The 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has presented higher educational leaders an opportunity to course-correct from the pre-COVID-19 status quo. Pre-COVID-19 university trends, in what Kezar et al. (2019) called the “gig academy”, were geared toward individualization, entrepreneurialism, and efficiency. Kezar et al. (2019) argued, “It is reasonable to conclude that these trends reflect a desire to concentrate power rather than strengthen educational missions” (p. 24).

The compounding effects of these trends and structural discrimination can be seen in how student evaluations are leveraged for faculty contract renewal, annual review, and promotion and tenure processes. Prior research has revealed that student evaluations reflect bias associated with gender, race, and perceived political association (Kezar et al., 2019). When student evaluations are deeply embedded in annual review and promotion and tenure processes, faculty “have strong incentives to placate students, dilute assignments, avoid sensitive topics, and inflate grades” (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 31). The problem is that biased evaluation of faculty teaching, by students or administration, discourage transformative and emancipatory teaching practices. Transformative and emancipatory teaching practices have been shown to bolster student learning (Weimer, 2013). Additionally, pre-COVID-19 trends of individualization, entrepreneurialism, and efficiency disproportionately marginalized faculty with subordinated identities through isolation, competition, and exploitation. Yet, those very faculty are more likely to take up transformative and emancipatory paradigms in their teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017; Silver et al., 1998; Scott et al., 2003; Yao & Boss, 2019), in the face of greater repercussions, while their colleagues with dominant identities are rewarded and recognized for the work (Gannon, 2020).

A potential silver lining to COVID-19 may be that it has forced many institutional leaders to give more concerted attention to access, equity, and, in some cases, justice. In the rush to pivot instruction in response to COVID-19, many universities have encouraged faculty to transform their pedagogy to be more responsive to students’ needs and circumstances. In some cases, institutional leaders have increased support to faculty by doing away with student evaluations, extending time toward tenure, and

offering creative leave or time-flex options (Lederman, 2020; Weissman, 2020). Additionally, there have been increased expressions of commitment to racial justice by some institutional leaders. As positive as some of these responses may be, they have also increased faculty skepticism about the sincerity and sustainability of these efforts (Flaherty, 2020b; Shanahan, 2020). The immediacy of decision making has also exacerbated faculty concerns over upper-level administrations' increasing disregard for shared governance (Flaherty, 2020a).

This paper has two primary purposes: (1) to raise consciousness about how the negative impacts of institutional culture have been exacerbated by COVID-19 for faculty with subordinated identities, particularly Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC); and (2) to center faculty with subordinated identities' knowledge, experiences, and pedagogical approaches to engage theorizing about how to make a post-COVID-19 cultural shift. We argue COVID-19 presents an opportunity for a large-scale, critical turn for faculty support, informed by the work and experiences of faculty with subordinated identities, toward justice and community. We do so by presenting a counternarrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018) to pre-COVID-19 and ongoing cultures within the professoriate. We present our counternarrative in the form of a composite, first-person scholarly personal narrative (SPN; Nash, 2019), and follow the SPN with a discussion and theorizing on how reimagined structures of faculty support can sustain transformative and emancipatory teaching and learning paradigms. We are intentional about forefronting the leadership and perspectives of faculty with subordinated identities toward this aim. We center faculty with subordinated identities in recognition of their historically differentiated experiences in the academy and the exacerbation of those experiences related to COVID-19. Our counternarrative and resultant discussion highlight the need for co-conspirators in the place of faux-allyship and the importance of community care.

## **Our Theorizing Counterspace**

Counterstorytelling, the act of those who are subordinated within dominant cultures telling the stories of their experiences to raise consciousness about oppression, is a core approach within critical race

theory (CRT; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Despite the word theory in its name, CRT is not a theory but a movement of “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationships among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3). Cabrera (2019) has also described CRT as a “theorizing counterspace for scholars of color to challenge and transform racial oppression” (p. 209). Within educational contexts, there are five central tenets of CRT: (1) intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination; (2) challenge to dominant ideology; (3) commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) a transdisciplinary perspective (Yosso, 2005). Taken together, scholars use CRT in educational contexts to: showcase how racism and other oppressions are embedded and manifest in higher education, center subordinated ideologies and ways of being, and disrupt systems of power and domination. Operating in a CRT counterspace involves, among other things, exposing and challenging deficit-orientations that ignore the epistemic injustices people with subordinated identities experience in educational institutions. CRT scholars promote justice by rejecting liberalism’s incremental approach to racial inequality and orientation driven by interest convergence, which is the tendency to address inequity only when it benefits the dominant group. CRT scholars use counterstorytelling as the primary vehicle of centering the experiential knowledge of people in subordinated groups. Counterstorytelling affirms that people in subordinated groups are best situated to describe how oppression operates in their lives.

Relatedly, CRT’s focus on race and racism with other forms of subordination and challenging dominant ideology make it particularly suitable for countering the current structures of support offered in the professoriate, that center dominant ways of being and knowing. We use the educational tenets of CRT in different ways throughout this paper, beginning with the tenet of centering experiential knowledge through the presentation of a counternarrative. Brayboy (2005), writing about CRT among Indigenous scholars, argued that “stories and other media, are roadmaps for our communities and reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities” (p. 427). He offered the above argument as a way of describing the role of narratives in theorizing the world. In agreement with Brayboy’s (2005) argument, we

engage the remaining tenets of CRT in the discussion that follows our counternarrative.

In the following section, we present a counternarrative in the form of a scholarly personal narrative (SPN; Nash, 2019). SPN involves an integration between personal stories and pre-existing knowledge. When grounded in traditions of critical inquiry, SPN serves as a method to center experiential knowledge and challenge dominant ideologies. We, the authors, used our own experiences to compose the counternarrative in the next section. We are three Black women faculty members who work at different universities within the United States. Our standpoint as persons who embody politicized race and gender identities offers one of many counternarratives of present-day realities in the professoriate.

Nash (2019) suggested that SPN writers start with a series of “evocative questions,” such as “What gives your life meaning? What gets you up in the morning, day after day, year after year, decade after decade?” (p. 59). He wrote, “these types of simple evocative questions, asked in order to extract a particular point of view about life from the would-be writer, are potentially infinite in number” (Nash, 2019, p. 59). When we saw the call for this special issue, we responded because we knew the perspectives of faculty with subordinated identities, and BIPOC specifically, remain at the margins of scholarly literature. However, we, like so many, were still trying make meaning of COVID-19 and its impact on us and our work. Following Nash’s (2019) suggestion, we began with evocative questions. In late August 2020, we journaled our responses to six questions that were a mixture of personal and professional inquiries. Once we had written our individual journals, we read each other’s responses. It was through that reading that we were able to extract the point of view that aligned with the call for this special issue. To wit, the SPN we present in the next section comprises our responses to the following three questions:

1. How has the current state of affairs shifted (if at all) what is important to you in your life at this time? What pivotal lessons have you learned during this time?
2. How have present realities shaped your thoughts and approaches to teaching and learning?

3. Who are the major players connected to those areas you wrote about above? What have been their roles?

## A COVID-19 Counternarrative

In this section, we present our SPN as a composite first-person narrative (Wertz et al., 2011). Within the narrative we begin the process of universalizing—connecting our narrative to a larger conversation—by pointing to texts that have shaped us and our thinking. However, we use the discussion section to further situate the narrative in a broader literature. Though the narrative is presented as a singular story, it is not meant to be essentialized, rather as Wertz et al. (2011) described, we present a composite first-person narrative,

so that the reader can relate personally to the themes; [it] is a story that readers can imagine in a personal way; attempts to contribute to new understanding about the phenomenon; and is not exhaustive, but allows the topic to be seen more clearly. It aims to illuminate, to allow the reader to have an increased sense of contact with the phenomenon without fully possessing it. (pp. 2-3)

Relatedly, cognitive scientists have found that readers improve their understanding of others through reading narratives (Oatley, 2016). We believe composite first-person narrative is a useful approach for achieving the purpose of counterstorytelling: to tell the stories of subordinated experiences to raise consciousness about oppression. The narrative below was formed by converging our journal entries. Once the narrative was formed, we re-read it and drew connections between the narrative and texts that have shaped us. What follows is a counternarrative, told in first-person. The narrative chronicles the shifting, meaning making, and sustaining elements of navigating COVID-19 in the academy.

### Shifting

When I would fret about pulling back from overcommitment in my work, I would reflect on words my mother shared with me, “if something happened to you today, they would have your job posted tomorrow.” I always considered her advice to be hyperbolic, little did I know, that

advice was a bellwether for institutional responses to COVID-19. In the past, I used her words to try to be more conscious of my priorities: not sacrificing my health, well-being, or family for work, but I had not always been successful; so much of my identity is tied to my work, that even when I suspected the institutional commitment was not there, I still gave too much of myself. The current state of affairs has caused a shift in me. More blatantly than ever, institutions of higher education, mine included, have made it clear that faculty are valued only as much as they can satisfy the bottom line. As a Black faculty member, the clear marginalization and messages of not mattering related to COVID-19 are exacerbated by lackluster institutional responses and initiatives in response to a renewed spotlight on anti-Black racism.

At the beginning of COVID-19, particularly when quarantine went into effect, I was worried but hopeful that I and my loved ones could remain safe. It was stressful to pivot mid-semester and to work from home. But I also found this surprising shift in my life during the first month of quarantine; for the first time in my adult life the salience of my Blackness and womanness was usurped by my other identities (parent, partner, friend). For a brief period of time, I experienced what it was to live fully in those identities, shielded from the gendered racism I experienced “out in the world.” Then, the data became increasingly clear that Black and Brown communities were more severely impacted by COVID-19 than White communities (Kim & Bostwick, 2020), and the salience of race came catapulting back into my frame. The salience of my Blackness was intensified by reports of the murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and others.

## **Meaning Making**

I have been reminded just how strong Black women have to be, and not always because we choose to be. I, like many other Black women before me, have felt the pull to put on the brave face and be strong for the sake of others. Because one of my go-to coping mechanisms is to throw myself into work, the context of teaching and learning was where the tendency to be strong manifested itself. However, I progressively realized that no matter how much I love the work, I cannot look to it to sustain my life, literally or figuratively. Talks of furlough, budget cuts,

and eradications of departments made me—and continue to make me—feel vulnerable as a faculty member without tenure. Many people have lost their jobs, so employment security is an ever-pressing concern. By mid-summer, it was certain that many institutions were going to press forward with in-person instruction in the fall despite the rising COVID-19 numbers and lack of a vaccine. Both covert and overt messages were shared with the faculty that we were to be teaching on-campus, regardless of our life situations, fears, or concerns. It became increasingly clear to me that university leaders cared very little, if at all, about the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 in Black and Brown communities. Many institutions, mine included, failed to recognize Black faculty members' heightened fears as acceptable for honoring requests to teach remotely. Additionally, I was disheartened by the administrators' abysmal responses to anti-Black violence in the broader U.S. society and its manifestations on campus. Maya Angelou (OWN, 2014) said, "when someone shows you who they are, believe them." So, I have to believe my university administrators and administrators of other universities when they show us that we are neither cared for nor important to the institution unless we are generating or sustaining revenue for them. I have also been blatantly reminded that I am easily replaced, as evidenced by the requirement that I and colleagues identify someone who will replace us in the event we get sick or die from COVID-19.

I have always viewed myself as a "tempered radical" but I am leaning more into the 'radical' side as I develop courses that promote learning and development for students (and myself) around issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Meyerson and Scully (1995) described "tempered radicals" as "individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations, and are also committed to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization" (p. 1). As a Black woman in academia, this has always felt like an apt descriptor for the tension I lived in between my commitments to my university and to social justice. The tempered aspect, involved pushing the needle slowly, yet, steadily toward change. These days, however, I have more seriously examined how my approach to teaching is emancipatory or supports liberation. I have scrutinized everything, including the readings I choose for the course, the ways students engage in meaning-making processes and the learning products students offer to me, the way I issue grades and if I

should continue to do so, and the ways I attend to trauma and harm in learning. I am more cognizant of students' bandwidth and mental capacities, thus more flexible with each course's structures, expectations, and outcomes. Yet, I have also experienced the juxtaposition of being the instructor who has and is expected to extend(ed) grace, empathy, flexibility, and compassion to students and the instructor who was denied this from the same students. I had a group of students anonymously report to the Department Chair that I was not communicative to students and favored Black students. The whole nation is shouting "Black Lives Matter" and illuminating the ways Black people are historically, institutionally, and systemically disenfranchised and marginalized; yet, this is their complaint on me, a BLACK WOMAN. I refuse to lighten or minimize concepts such as equity, inclusion, or anti-Blackness, just because students are uncomfortable or lack understanding.

I am not new to opposition in the classroom or through anonymous evaluations of my teaching. I have always considered it worth enduring because I knew my very presence was transgressive to the status quo. Like many scholars that have come before me (i.e., Boss et al., 2019; Croom, 2017; Davis et al., 2020; Harley, 2008; hooks, 1994, Porter, 2019), I knew being transgressive and teaching to transgress is the only way to disrupt systems that have excluded faculty with minoritized identities, especially BIPOC faculty, from the academy. Also, I knew that my embodiment of Blackness and femininity impacts students' reactions and perceptions of my teaching. While altering my pedagogical approaches could have resulted in more positive student evaluations, I feel compelled to double-down on emancipatory teaching practices. As a Black woman, I have a standpoint of multiple consciousnesses connected to my intersectional identities. These consciousnesses make plain the comorbidity of COVID-19 and anti-Black racism, in the form of spirit murder—the eroding away of the spirits of Black students and educators due to racism and other systemic injustices (Love, 2019). Recently, I have found myself battling the thoughts: "what a terrible time to be teaching EDI/social justice focused classes" and 'never have classes like this been more necessary.' However, it has been difficult for me to have the radical hope necessary for transformative teaching (Gannon, 2020) while carrying the weight of the world on my shoulders. I find myself drained from cultural taxation—taking on the labor of representing and

serving the needs of racially minoritized students, faculty, and staff—(Padilla, 1994) and in need of someone else to take up this labor; yet, I am fearful that, if I do not continue this work, no one else will or I will be replaced. I need help.

Unfortunately, I have received little help from my colleagues. The past few months, I have witnessed the investment some of my White colleagues and administrators have engaged to show up, be better for, and support of our Students of Color, presenting their work in “We are a community of colleagues; let’s do better together” rhetoric. Yet they fail to show the same investment in me and other faculty with subordinated identities. I want them to speak up on behalf of equity, anti-Blackness, and marginalization and oppression when I am not in the room, when other White colleagues need to hear it, and when they are at the decision-making table. Harden and Harden-Moore (2019) wrote, “White people claim to support the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion; few, however, are courageous enough to put their own jobs on their line by speaking out against prejudice and discrimination in the workplace” (para. 6). This rings true to me. I have experienced too many empty claims of allyship involving colleagues coming to my office or emailing me after a meeting to privately share support. It has caused me to reflect on Desnoyers-Colas’ (2019) writing in which she, using the title of a famous James Brown song, characterized this faux allyship as “talking loud and saying nothing.” I also join Feminista Jones in her assertion, “I am not interested in white allies. What we need are co-conspirators” (Hackman, 2015, para. 6).

## Sustaining

Early in my career, I recognized how important it is to ‘find my people’—senior mentors, sponsors, an accountability group, a writing group, a peer/co-mentoring group—people who will not only push me to be the best me but also serve as a soft landing spot when I needed support. During these current pandemics, I have been vigilant about making space to practice self-care, proactively and consistently. I have relied on old strategies and adopted new strategies to manage and protect my own emotional, physical, and spiritual energy as an act of self-preservation. However, my community has also been hurting; not just me. We have collectively and individually experienced a legacy of

oppression, trauma, and grief. I have been humbled by the check-ins with family and friends. The conversations and the holding space that my community has offered have been invaluable. They have shown me I am not alone in this.

Additionally, I have found much solace in social media communities, like Black Twitter, which has helped me stay connected to the fullness of Blackness in a world that attempts to dehumanize Black people. These online spaces help to expand my peer networks and provide respite through jokes and celebration of Blackness (i.e., #Blackjoy, #Blackfriendship, #Blacksuccess) or solidarity (#BLM, #Justicefor<name>). So much of the labor Black women take up and the pain we endure is invisible, even though our bodies render us hypervisible in the world. The hypervisibility side of this paradox has offered me pockets of joy in the past few months, such as when several Black women mayors were highlighted for leading their cities and other Black women were acknowledged as the critical thinkers and necessary voices on respective issues, when Black women scholars and artists took over social media platforms (i.e., Instagram's #SharetheMicNow campaign), and when Kamala Harris accepted her vice presidential nomination at the 2020 Democratic National Convention. In brief moments, Black women were visible, Black women were worthy. Albeit brief, those were critical moments. Now, more than it has been for a long time, it is necessary for the world to see us. More importantly, it is necessary for me to see myself in them.

## **Discussion and Implications**

Nash (2019) opined, “to write is to demonstrate with a degree of certainty that we truly matter” (p. 22), and Brayboy (2005) argued the narratives in CRT are “reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities” (p. 427). We began with the fourth tenet of CRT in education, centering experiential knowledge, because it provided a helpful starting place to examine the borderland of the unknown (post-COVID-19 academia) and the known (the exacerbated experiences of marginalization for faculty with subordinated identities due to COVID-19). In the academy, as in the world, faculty with subordinated identities are bombarded with messages that they do not matter. Our

counternarrative was an important demonstration of mattering from a particular point of view, but it is also connected to other subordinated faculty communities. Consequently, we use the remaining tenets of CRT in this discussion and implication section to connect our narrative to a larger body of literature on the experiences of faculty with subordinated identities, and their pedagogical practices, to theorize how post-COVID-19 institutional culture might shift toward justice and affirmation of these faculty groups. We begin with tenet one and discuss the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination in the academy for as navigated by various groups of faculty with subordinated identities.

Next, we theorize tenets two and three—challenge to dominant ideology and commitment to social justice—through a discussion on the need to move from colleagues to co-conspirators and the implications of this shift. Lastly, we theorize the fifth and final tenet—a transdisciplinary perspective—through a discussion on community care and the implications of such a shift.

### Race, Racism, and Other Forms of Subordination in Faculty Life

Pre-COVID-19, many faculty with subordinated identities had to navigate campuses that devalued their ways of knowing and being on campus. Other important works have documented the pre-COVID-19 hidden labor and resultant experiences of compassion fatigue and racial battle fatigue—a collection of “social psychological stress responses (e.g., frustration, anger, exhaustion, physical avoidance, psychological or emotional withdrawal, escapism, acceptance of racist attributions)” of faculty with subordinated identities (Smith et al., 2007, p. 552). During COVID-19, in conjunction with heightened racial animus (i.e., anti-Black racism, erasure of Indigenous experiences, ongoing hostility toward native-born and immigrant Latinx people, and anti-Asian rhetoric and violence), these orientations toward labor and fatigue have been heightened.

Due to the lack of institutional support for compassion fatigue and racial battle fatigue, faculty with subordinated identities have had to look to smaller coalitions for respite and rejuvenation. Nicolazzo and Carter (2019) argued the act of leaning into community is a form of practicing resilience in hostile environments. So much of the work of subordinated faculty members, across race and other intersectional identities, is

community-oriented and collaborative. The communal experiences shared in our counternarrative are reflected within the greater scholarly conversation on the coalition building of faculty with subordinated identities. Within that literature are models for building community with others who (seek to) understand nuanced experiences and contexts as faculty, such as creating and sustaining faculty learning communities, critical friendships, and reflective practices for one's teaching (i.e., Cox & Richlin, 2004; Gregory & Burbage, 2017). However, there are few models that challenge deeper issues of individualism, competition, and deficit-frameworks for assessing achievement through centering counternarratives, and strategies to disrupt structural oppression and inequality (i.e., Davis et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2018; Porter et al., 2018; Porter et al., 2020). In their public scholarship piece, Porter et al. (2018) described the process of creating an academic life group for sustaining and thriving in the academy. They discussed the power of community care in not having to rely on self-care in trying times but having confidence that you can also lean on others to sustain you and vice versa. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2018) wrote about the power of disrupting faculty narratives of individualism and competition. Both highlighted models to showcase the transgressive nature of community care and support in faculty life.

Outside of, and at times as a result of, coalition building, faculty with subordinated identities have developed transgressive pedagogical models and practices. Such models and pedagogies include, but are not limited to: critical culturally sustaining/revitalizing pedagogy and indigenous education sovereignty (Boss, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017), community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), universal design for learning (Silver et al., 1998; Scott et al., 2003), learner-centered teaching (Weimer, 2013), and ungrading (Giles et al., 2004; Strommel, 2020; Tannock, 2017). Despite the existence of these models, culturally relevant and accessible teaching approaches that promote student autonomy continue to be pedagogies on the fringe. In the face of the neoliberalization of the academy, the work of the aforementioned scholars is a testament to their practices of resiliency (Kezar et al., 2019; Nicolazzo & Carter, 2019). Yet, the sustained strain faculty experience from navigating racism and other subordinations will lead to a number of negative health and professional outcomes for

faculty with subordinated identities. Drawing on their resilience practices, we theorize that a post-COVID-19 academy committed to challenging dominate narratives and social justice involves faculty with dominant identities acting as co-conspirators and necessitates a commitment to community care.

## Co-Conspirators

We theorize that justice rather than interest convergence is the most effective pathway to changing institutional culture. Through interest convergence, institutional leaders, are only compelled to act when issues impacting subordinated groups have spillover effects to the dominant group (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018). Whereas leaders who are committed to justice are proactive about rooting out oppression and improving conditions for subordinated groups. Interest convergence centers dominant ideologies, whereas justice honors a plurality of ideologies. In our counternarrative, we discussed the need for co-conspirators instead of allies. Much of allyship fails to recognize the ways faculty with subordinated identities, particularly those of us whose subordinated identities are visible, put their bodies on the line in their work (Yao & Boss, 2019). A growing body of literature by people with subordinated identities are replete with stories of allies who fail to meaningfully fight injustice alongside or on behalf of those they profess to support. The failure of allies can be both egregious and insidious. While egregious failures might have obvious harmful effects, they are also more easily addressed. However, insidious failures are difficult to address and more likely to sustain harmful practices. One such example is offered in Gannon's (2020) book, *Radical Hope: A Teaching Manifesto*. Throughout much of his book, Gannon argued for radical, inclusive, student-centered teaching, often citing the work of scholars with subordinated identities. He offered the following advice about responding to criticism of inclusive pedagogy,

It does no good to defend a[n inclusive] pedagogical outlook by fruitlessly diverting emotional and intellectual energy away from its practice. Some hills are not worth dying on. In my experience, the most effective way to address the critics of inclusive pedagogy is with competence and results. (p. 67, emphasis added)

Gannon, the director of the center for excellence in teaching and learning at his university and a self-proclaimed White man, inadvertently illustrated the tendency for academic leaders with dominant identities to fail, or more nefariously, dismiss, the differentiated experiences of faculty with subordinated identities. Faculty with subordinated identities do not often get the benefit of not defending their work and letting that work stand on its own merit, or as Gannon puts it, “to address critics...with competence and results” (p. 67).

Allyship often reinforces the double bind of hypervisibility and invisibility—sticking out due to their subordinated identities yet navigating a space that delegitimizes their ways of being and knowing (Boss & Bravo, 2020; Joseph & Hirschfield, 2011; Mowatt et al., 2013; Settles et al., 2019). Institutional leaders, colleagues, and students call on faculty with subordinated identities to take up the labor of representing their identity groups, supporting students with shared subordinated identities, and serving on committees as the voice of diversity. Yet, subordinated faculty members’ personal experiences, struggles, and needs are often unseen, ignored, or unmet (Boss et al., 2019; Cleveland, 2004; Desnoyers-Colas, 2019; Joseph & Hirschfield, 2011).

With COVID-19, many faculty with dominant identities have experienced, some for the first time, the dismissal and disposability faculty with subordinated identities have experienced in the academy for over a century (Slater, 1998). There has been an uptick in organizing and pushback on institutional leaders with demands for those leaders to recognize the humanity of faculty (Gonzales & Griffin, 2020; Pettit, 2020). These have been important and necessary points to be raised in the face of demands that faculty continue business as usual under conditions that are physically and psychologically harmful to them. They were equally valid points when faculty within subordinated identity groups raised them pre-COVID-19. These faculty have started to recognize that the frustration, fear, and skepticism they are currently encountering are experiences their colleagues with subordinated identities faced pre-COVID-19. The conditions are ripe for policies built on interest convergence.

Yet, we theorize that policies built on interest convergence will be superficial, at best, or ineffective at worst. Faculty who have power through their positions as leaders and through their dominant identities must become co-conspirators if they want to enact enduring cultural change. Co-conspirators do not rely on interest convergence to inspire action. Rather, they partner with their colleagues with subordinated identities toward collective action against oppression and in service to justice. One of the best starting actions for leaders and colleagues who desire to be co-conspirators involves educating themselves about subordinated groups' experiences, ways of knowing, and values.

Research has shown that those in dominant groups are less likely to have close relationships with people in differing identity groups. This lack of meaningful connection to communities of difference stifles empathy and understanding. Rather than asking faculty with subordinated identities to educate them, leaders and colleagues should avail themselves of the growing literature base written by faculty with subordinated identities that document their experiences and ways of knowing. Additional co-conspiratorial acts may include, but are not limited to: committing to their own personal anti-racist practices; speaking out and standing up against oppressive others and policies in meetings, on committees, and in their classrooms; eradicating policies that have disproportionate negative impacts on colleagues with subordinated identities, such as student evaluations; championing their colleagues' work (teaching, research, and service); and centering the experiences and practices of colleagues with subordinated identities by including and acting upon their input, as common practice. Paradoxically, Gannon (2020), writing about the role of faculty in privileged positions, argued, "I believe it's an obligation for those of us with secure platforms and positions to absorb the risk and deflect it from others" (p. 21). Such acts, when genuine, can be powerful for accelerating the psychological freedom faculty with subordinated identities have already been working toward for themselves in service to transformative and emancipatory teaching. Co-conspiracy leads to divestment from policies and practices that would incentivize "placat[ing] students, dilut[ing] assignments, avoid[ing] sensitive topics, and inflat[ing] grades" (Kezar et al., 2019, p. 31).

## Community (Care)

Co-conspiratorial work is one part of a more important need for community in the academy. As other scholars have argued, individualism over community is the peril of the modern university (Kezar et al., 2019). Kezar et al. (2019) maintained that neoliberalism and academic capitalism are the catalysts for rampant individualism. Rampant individualism results in a fractured faculty that is prone to competition, deficit-frameworks for assessing achievement, and lack of an understanding of structural oppression and inequality. Rampant individualism also has severe impacts on teaching and learning, as the lives and well-being of faculty have direct impacts on student learning. Kezar et al. (2019) identified the following learning outcome impacts of the fracturing of faculty community: less control of curricular decisions, reticence to engage ‘controversial’ research, dampening of students’ aspirations, reduced support for marginalized students, diminished faculty-student interaction, and negative impacts on successful outcomes. Gonzales and Rincones (2011) argued institutional cultures that discourage collaborative inquiry negatively impact BIPOC faculty. They argue that these faculty will often engage parallel research agendas, one to engage interdisciplinary research and another to satisfy faculty evaluation criteria, out of fear that their interdisciplinary work will not count.

Consequently, we theorize community care is the radical transdisciplinary perspective needed to eradicate racism and other forms of subordination in the academy. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks (1994) described the power of community to inter/transdisciplinary teaching. An increased orientation toward community in the academy has the power to “ruptur[e] disciplinary boundaries, decentre authority, and rewrit[e] institutional and discursive borderlands” (hooks, 1994, p. 129). Outside of the power shifts that are occurring in isolated circles within campuses, COVID-19 has precipitated larger orientations of community-based border crossing. We contend that we need to sustain the movement of this shift and push it further, and we should look to faculty with subordinated identities, who were already engaged in critical community care work (Gonzales & Rincones, 2011), to lead the larger cultural shift. Thus, as a secondary

effect, we theorize that when faculty are well-supported and unencumbered by worries of racism and other forms of subordination and competition, they are better able to actualize “education as the practice of freedom” (hooks, 1994). Such a cultural shift would increase engagement in the transgressive, transdisciplinary teaching and learning necessary to for higher education to actualize its promise of equipping students to address the problems of an increasingly complex world.

## Conclusion

We offered our counternarrative and extended it with scholarship that centered faculty with subordinated identities toward theorizing a more just and humanizing post-COVID-19 professoriate. We argued that the presence and work of faculty with subordinated identities are transgressive. Leveraging the experiences and approaches of those faculty groups, we theorized that when colleagues and leaders become co-conspirators we accelerate the work of institutional change. Juliet Hooker described the work of co-conspirators as “distributing the burden of citizenship” so that the burden does not fall solely on those with subordinated identities (personal communication, October 7, 2020). We can change the dominant narrative of the academy from one steeped in individualism, entrepreneurialism, and structural discrimination to one that advances community and justice. We already have models for this, but they currently only exist in pockets of community rather than woven into the fabric of the university. Given the eroding promises of shared governance (Flaherty, 2020a; Kezar et al., 2019), we need models of faculty community that are transgressive. When faculty are under constant duress of navigating inequality regimes in the academy, they have less psychological energy and academic freedom, to devote to transformative and emancipatory pedagogies. Leaders and colleagues should commit to not letting the opportunity for a reset, presented by COVID-19, go unrealized.

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