

Centering Queer and Trans Ethnic Studies Pedagogical Strategy: Case Studies on Teaching at PWIs in Liberal and Conservative States

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Abstract

This article situates a queer trans Chicanx educator's experiences across two predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in politically divergent states: Minnesota and Utah. I argue that the work of Ethnic Studies must be guided by queer and trans feminist pedagogical strategies to expand an intersectional analysis as an avenue from which to challenge anti-trans narratives across the U.S., and transphobia within Ethnic Studies. I highlight the ways queer and trans ethnic studies strategies at two PWIs (a) create and reimagine healing learning spaces centered on anti-colonial embodiments and (b) challenge censorship through critical pedagogical activities rupturing silence as a form of relational solidarity. Through reflective case studies examining course objectives, assignments, discussions, and pedagogical reflections, I position an embodied pedagogical strategy in Ethnic Studies courses at PWIs as an aspect of feminist, queer, and trans Ethnic Studies scholars navigating higher education during heightened racism. Ethnic Studies courses must contribute to dismantling heteropatriarchy, prioritizing queer and trans joy, and embracing anti-colonial and abolitionist politics as we engage with White students and colleagues.

Key words: Chicanx educator, queer and trans ethnic studies, Minnesota, Utah

Introduction

As of December 29, 2025, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) was tracking 616 Anti-LGBTQ bills in the U.S. Anti-LGBTQ+ bills range from banning transgender girls and women from sports, to criminalizing drag performances, policing what restrooms people use, and prohibiting gender-affirming care for minors. These are political manifestations of racial homophobia and transphobia with material impacts on queer, trans, and gender expansive folks, especially Black transgender women who face high rates of gender-based hate crimes (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2024). Within this context, Ethnic Studies must be committed to disrupting the silences in the face of eugenic White supremacist attacks on queer and trans communities—attacks also on our students.

As the targeting of Ethnic Studies continues to escalate across the U.S., discussions must interrogate who is subject to surveillance, appropriate responses to attacks, and how to

continuously show up for targeted students that rely on Ethnic Studies for academic and personal prosperity. While Ethnic Studies scholars of color continue to navigate racist political attacks, there is a need to critically examine our engagement of White students and colleagues in anti-racist work, and concurrently, interrogate racial cisgender heteronormativity within the fields of Ethnic Studies. This article situates the experiences of a queer trans Chicanx educator at two predominantly White institutions (PWIs) in politically divergent states: Minnesota and Utah. I highlight the ways queer and trans Ethnic Studies at two PWIs (a) creates and reimagines healing learning spaces centered on anti-colonial embodiments and (b) challenges censorship through critical pedagogical strategies rupturing silence as form of relational solidarity. The work of Ethnic Studies pedagogy must be guided by queer and trans feminist epistemologies to expand a racial gender analysis challenging transphobic narratives across the U.S., which directly impacts the discipline.

In what follows, I trace challenges and triumphs from teaching in (a) a blue democratic state that complicates the narrative of White liberal allyship, and (b) a conservative religious state with anti-trans and anti-DEI bills impacting queer and trans Ethnic Studies. The reflective case studies examine course assignments, discussions, and communication with university administrators to demonstrate queer and trans Ethnic Studies strategies to navigate PWIs and disrupt cis-heteronormativity during the second Trump administration.

An Embodied Queer and Trans Pedagogy

To disrupt cis-heteronormativity in the classroom, I ground critical anti-colonial feminist pedagogical strategies from my own experiences as a first-generation queer trans Chicanx educator to prioritize social justice frameworks that build from student experiences as avenues to understand and address social inequities. This pedagogical strategy is part of a long line of intergenerational femtors who engage in anti-colonial, healing, spirit-restoring work while interrogating their own privileges outwardly as they navigate the contradictions and trenches of academia (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Lopez et al., 2024; Tijerina Revilla et al., 2021). Echoing Chicana feminist and critical race theorist Corina Benavides Lopez's (2016) strategy to teach from the corazón/heart, and muxerista scholar Anita Tijerina Revilla's concept of spirit protector and restorer, I position queer and trans Ethnic Studies as healing pedagogical strategies to connect with students and mutually heal from oppressive and alienating U.S. educational experiences.

Since analyses of gender and sexuality are tenets of Chicana/x feminisms, I organically shifted into queer and trans Ethnic Studies, specifically, Chicanx/Latinx critical feminist pedagogical strategies. The shift offered queer, trans, and nonbinary epistemes as "alternative ways of reading, thinking, and sensing through decolonial methods, trans decolonial theories, and exploring different ways of being within gender coloniality" (Salas-SantaCruz, 2023, p. 80). In cycles of unlearning and learning as part of healing, queer and trans Ethnic Studies pedagogical strategies (a) position racialized gendered lived experiences to shape our politics, and (b) support our students' consciousness within a neoliberal university (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Salas-SantaCruz, 2023). Chicana/x/Latina/x feminist, queer, and trans intergenerational knowledges honoring our embodied experiences often defy boundaries with ripple effects to those around us, as trans Chicanx educator Jack Caraves (2020) intimately outlined. A queer and trans Ethnic Studies positionality is shaped by our lived experiences as educators, intergenerational solidarity that blurs

ranks and spans geographies, and healing, all part of a pedagogical strategy to navigate PWIs in higher education during heightened racism and transphobia.

Queer and trans Ethnic Studies is a comparative and relational area of study within the discipline focused on the cultural and political production of gender as part of systems of power. More specifically, it's defined by its attention to the expansive conceptualizations of racialized gender "to understand refusals and resistances to specific modern identity categories" (Salas-Santa Cruz, 2022, pp. 691–692). As a queer trans Chicanx scholar part of a lineage of *joteria* educators in Ethnic Studies, I, too, "see my responsibility as offering students the tools to be critical of gender binaries and sexual dichotomies" (Caraves, 2020, p. 121) as part of a broader critical analysis of oppressive structures. Additionally, my trans experience shapes my pedagogical strategies as a transmasculine educator; as such, it is my responsibility to address transmisogyny in classroom dynamics as part of a queer and trans Ethnic Studies disruption to hetero/homonormativity (Alexander, 2019). The alluded privilege to masculinity as a queer trans person does not negate the institutional gendered harm and violence embedded in academia. As such, to be actively participating in the cycle of learning, unlearning, learning, unlearning, is a task shaped with empathy and care by queer and trans Ethnic Studies educators of color. The strategy is continuous, in which we *unlearn* the harmful ways of relating from racialized cis-heteropatriarchy in order *learn* how our privileges can be employed for solidarity, all of which constitute a cycle of healing: both as part of the process and an outcome of the process.

Unlearning to Learn Is to Heal

There is an emotional discomfort that comes with unlearning, or troubling previously learned oppressive ideas and behaviors. (Alexander, 2019, p. 7)

To heal in Ethnic Studies spaces at PWIs means that we unlearn and trouble racial heteronormativity with students in ways that both care about the emotional processes while refusing to coddle White innocence. This is the care work in queer and trans Ethnic Studies that, while essential to the unlearning of racist heteropatriarchy, is overlooked and expected service from women and femmes. Specifically in academia, women of color are more concentrated in care work than White women, most notably for their labor of delivering "empathy or the formation of an emotional tie with" students (Conrad et al., 2014, p. 12). For Latina/x feminists Mónica Torreiro-Casal and Natalia Deeb-Sossa (2024), to reclaim care is:

an act of social justice, particularly in the work we do in the context of academia. We experience the explicit patriarchal violent environment where care is delegated to ethnic studies departments and their faculty or staff who are often women of color. The result of this alienation of caregivers serves a function to the others who do not carry the burden. (p. 152)

To care for ourselves as educators and for our students is a political act not prioritized in academia, but rather taken for granted. For trans Ethnic Studies scholars, it requires a type of vulnerability and disruption (Caraves, 2020) to White, cis-heteronormative patriarchal systems normalized by the university.

To teach Ethnic Studies with care and persistence at R1 PWIs is to disrupt the competitive characteristics of higher education that value individualism and elitism, both tenets of a “successful” neoliberal college education. As such, to prioritize healing from racist heteronormative timelines means to return to what Black Latinx abolitionist scholar Qui Alexander (2019) posited: “what does it mean to queer one’s teaching? And, what does that queering actually look like in a classroom?” (p. 6). Simply put, as pedagogical strategy it means recognizing the necessity for “increased flexibility and openness” (Pennell, 2022, p. 541) about our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs beyond ableist expectations of productivity from ourselves and students. An embodied queer and trans Ethnic Studies scholar pedagogical strategy shapes the following case study examples for navigating PWIs in a liberal and conservative state.

Minnesota: “My First Teacher Of Color Was In College”

As of fall 2025, the Minnesota public research university demographic where I taught consists of 53.2% White students and about 32.2% BIPOC students (University of Minnesota Institutional Data and Research, 2026). Similarly, White professors make up 63.1%, while 21.5% of faculty are BIPOC (University of Minnesota Institutional Data and Research 2026).³⁶ At the time, I was completing a Feminist Studies PhD in the blue democratic state of Minnesota (MN) and teaching complicated narratives of White liberal allyship through my students’ evasion of racial analysis. I was receiving pedagogical training and mentorship prefaced by racial and class tensions that Chicanas and other BIPOC scholars navigated at the Midwestern university.

As graduate instructor for “Chicana Studies: La Chicana in Contemporary Society,” a required course for the degree, I facilitated the examination of scholarly, activist, and creative work of Chicanas through an interdisciplinary approach. During the unit “Chicanas and Education,” we began discussing why Latinas make up less than 1% of PhDs earned in the U.S. with far fewer in the professorate. We followed the patterns of the school-to-prison pipeline, and most importantly, I asked my students to reflect on their own experiences in the U.S. education systems. An advanced undergraduate Chicana shared her White-centered educational trajectories with the class, stating “my first teacher of color was in college.” I vocalized my disappointment in the racial disparities among educators in MN and asked students to think about why this is the case, as well as how that shapes educational experiences of students of color in our space. I foregrounded the student’s life experiences and realities as a form of knowledge-making and critical consciousness as representative of Chicana/x feminist and muxerista pedagogical strategies of resistance to epistemological erasure (Tijerina Revilla, 2004). In terms of context, we were all living through the first Trump administration so there was a sense of political urgency “to engage in a decolonizing process and address educational [and social] inequities within Chicana/o communities” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 516) in ways that also empowered students. Other Chicanas participated in the class discussion, and most White students listened attentively as part of their unlearning of racial hierarchies in the class that I rooted in vulnerability and care.

White students were uncomfortable with the realities of their Chicana/x peers with some empathizing and others frustrated they had not been affirmed as an ally. As stated in my end-of-semester student evaluations, one student felt my class was an “echo chamber.” Discussions might

³⁶ 5.2% listed as an unknown racial/ethnic identity and 10.2% with “nonresident” designation that may include BIPOC Identity but due to the way data is gathered, this is up for interpretation.

resemble an echo-chamber for a student who cannot fully comprehend the political, cultural, and spiritual implications of the Chicana feminist onto-epistemologies that allow Chicanas/Latinas to “discuss their personal experiences at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality while connecting to wider societal issues” (Tijerina Revilla, 2004, p. 91)—such critical discourse is often lacking in alienating and discriminatory PWIs. The student evaluation was a devaluing of queer and trans Chicanx knowledge our class centered, alluding to “epistemic exclusion” that involves the “delegitimization of diverse and nontraditional research methodologies frequently employed by minoritized Scholars” (Dua et al., 2024, p. 1). Would this student have felt the same way if a light-skinned/White cisgender Chicana had taught this class?

While cisgender and queer Chicana feminists have advocated for and created spaces for their voices and scholarship on issues of race, gender, class, and sexuality “as major areas of emphasis in the current struggle for Chicana/o studies and ethnic studies” (Arce & Montaña, 2022, p. 124), transphobia continues to permeate the disciplines. This isn’t an attack on Chicanx and Ethnic Studies more broadly. On the contrary, it is a call to solidarity from a queer trans Chicanx educator who is often the only trans person of color in the room at PWIs. Embodied queer and trans Ethnic Studies pedagogy ruptures the assumptions of which bodies can teach gender and “women’s studies, not only in academia but also in that specific discipline” (Caraves, 2020, p. 119). This disruption is a form of “epistemic disobedience” modeled by trans Ethnic Studies scholars who embody the “de-linking from Eurocentric trans knowledge into decolonial options to understand trans* embodiments and trans* configurations” (Salas-Santa Cruz, 2022, p. 691).

Queer and trans Ethnic Studies pedagogies are embodied strategies rooted in lived experiences, vulnerability, flexibility, and continuous cycles of healing through unlearning and learning processes that are unapologetic in its direct disruption to cis-heteronormativity. One example is to facilitate creative assignments that challenge the individualist curriculum of the university through vulnerable storytelling aimed at mutually healing from harmful U.S. educational experiences. Alternatives to traditional essay formats offer theoretical and methodological creativity, positioning student-centered knowledge as the nexus from which to interrogate racial, class, gender, and immigration status privileges in the U.S. The Chicana student who reflected on their predominantly White K-12 experience had centered her family’s immigration journey using family photographs, poetry, and autoethnography to contribute to our collective final class zine. The pedagogical strategy to facilitate the co-creation of a zine in a Chicanx Studies class at a Midwest PWI created an embodied “form of knowledge production due to its counterhegemonic history and attention to accessibility in regard to creation” (Thomas & Nuñez-Janes, 2025, p. 141), and it also showed students “that they can theorize from their own pain and lived experiences” (Caraves, 2020, p. 118). Culminating with a group-based class zine is an anti-colonial outcome of Chicana/x Studies disrupting traditional academic ways to consider who is a producer of knowledge within metrics of a colonial assimilationist education project: the American education system (Arce & Montaña, 2022; Delgado Bernal & Alemán, 2017).

A pedagogical strategy that is rooted in an anti-oppressive praxis that transcends Whiteness and coloniality is deeply relational because it “aims to develop new *conocimientos*, or understandings, that allow for strengthening relationships of solidarity across difference” (Cahuas, 2022, p. 1517). Part of developing relationality and new *conocimiento* is sitting with discomforts of not being the center of discussion if students are racially privileged. This is not a pass for White students to remain silent; rather, it means paying attention to solidarity their peers ask for. Student excitement

towards creating a project other than an essay varies, as do the outcomes. The challenge as an educator is the resistance by White students to position a reflective analysis of their own racialized gender experiences that are in conversation to BIPOC students rather than in opposition. The unlearning and learning of colonial education values is part of a queer and trans pedagogy in Ethnic Studies knowledge processes to negating deficit misconceptions of communities we learn from by centering ancestral knowledges (Mendoza Knecht & Mendoza Aviña, 2023). Queer and trans feminist attempts to disrupt binaries across our lives also reflect racialized gendered class dynamics across Chicanx Studies.

So, what do these pedagogical insights from teaching Chicanx Studies at a midwestern PWI tell us about healing? Healing in Ethnic Studies is a strategy of unlearning “hegemonic cultural, social, and political narratives” which is a messy process (Thomas & Nuñez-Janes, 2025, p. 147). Queer, trans, and non-binary Chicanx and Latinx scholars remind us that the harm we internalize and reproduce requires accountability. The socialized ways of being and thinking in academia often “force us to internalize these systems of harm and violence; and at times perpetuate these same ways onto each other” (Orozco et al., 2023, p. 1371). Queer and trans Ethnic Studies pedagogical strategies have an anti-colonial responsibility to position ourselves at the intersection of vectors of power to strategize against cis-heteronormativity and hierarchical oppression, as well as disrupt illusionary power afforded by the university. The expansion of gender and sexuality analyses that decenter Whiteness are part of an unapologetic unlearning of racial hierarchies in academia.

Utah: “Why Did You Come To Utah Knowing How Conservative It Is?”

In 2024, Utah passed H.B. 261 Equal Opportunity Initiatives, an anti-DEI legislation prohibiting “an institution of higher education, the public education system, and a governmental employer from taking certain actions and engaging in discriminatory practices” (H.B. 261). Disguised as “protection” for “all” Utahns, this harmful fast-tracked legislation passed with unanimous support from the state’s predominant Republican lawmakers (Tanner, 2024), rolling back decades of institutional advocacy for marginalized students and communities attempting to “hide racist intent, thereby insulating White supremacy in historical narrative, policy discourse, legislation, and institutional practices and procedures” (Gómez Bennett & Cammarota, 2025, p. 1123).

In anticipation of the bill going into effect July 1, 2024, the University of Utah closed the LGBT Resource Center, the Center for Equity and Student Belonging, the Black Cultural Center, and the Women’s Resource Center.³⁷ This regressive legislation is not unique to Utah, but actually part of a national pattern across the U.S. heightened after the 2020 uprisings when legislators reacted to “protests by advancing bills that restricted how gender and race could be discussed in schools” (Ortiz & Ramirez, 2025, p. 175). Shuttering diverse cultural spaces on campus is an attack on QTBIPOC students, faculty and staff, and a green light for others on campus to minimize the experiences of the 27% of BIPOC students enrolled at the public research university I taught at (University Analytics and Institutional Reporting, 2026). Additionally, in response to the targeting of DEI, administrators suggested to faculty in my unit to state in our courses: “per legal advice from administration and for legal purposes, these are my own views, opinions, and scholarly

³⁷ The American Indian Resource Center was renamed the Center for Native Excellence and Tribal Engagement.

interpretations.” This disclaimer was shared during a fall faculty retreat to comply with Republican legislators’ censoring of critical and diverse education across Utah’s academic institutions.

In fall 2024, I taught the undergraduate special topics class, *Feminist Cannabis Studies: Queer/Trans* Activism and Racialized Histories*. The course objectives set out to evaluate our understandings and assumptions around cannabis from interdisciplinary feminist Ethnic Studies frameworks to examine historical and contemporary U.S. cannabis prohibition and legalization movements, among other topics. Storytelling was the main pedagogical strategy to learn about feminist cannabis embodiments and foster creative critical thinking in a state determined to stifle critical connections. As we progressed in the semester, group projects and small group discussions were normalized as a pedagogical strategy for engaging White queer, trans, and gender expansive students being targeted in a conservative state without embedding epistemic harm toward BIPOC students in the class. The microcosm in our class was guided by queer and trans Ethnic Studies training in which discussions on racial and gendered were at the forefront of our analysis about cannabis, while also facilitating students’ understandings of each other’s experiences to collectively “question unequal relations of political” power within an “education system that reproduces inequality” (Arce & Montaño, 2022, pp. 129–130), as was evident in Utah.

In November 2024, I was contacted by two conservative watchdog organizations “curious” about our course leaning objectives and how I “believe the course benefits students.”³⁸ Without my response, they wrote an article restating publicly available information including course description and misgendering me. I wondered: how was my class identified and selected for inquiry? Did someone at the university alert them? Was it the student who wouldn’t take notes, glared at me intensely, and stopped attending class after our discussion on Palestine? A Utah Republican legislator read the article and contacted the university asking why a class titled “Feminist Cannabis Studies” was being taught. This triggered my anxiety, stress, and fear of being attacked by vindictive far-right MAGA supporters in Utah. After this inquiry, the decision was made: I could no longer teach my special topics class. A White cisgender woman in charge of marketing for my unit confidently suggested not to disclose to my students what was going on. I refused.

A queer and trans Ethnic Studies strategy refuses the silence expected from faculty to shield the university from accountability and scandal. This was a learning moment for my students and I on the experiences of queer trans educators of color teaching in conservative states about “controversial” topics. I positioned our course within broader political attacks on gender and Ethnic Studies through a lens of institutional violence. In this case, students witnessed their professor:

being vulnerable, being human, our shared stories created a new dynamic in the classroom. My ability to be vulnerable with my students led them to be empathetic: It made students feel seen in their struggle to be themselves, led them to bond with me as their instructor, and broke down hierarchical structures within the classroom that can limit what students take away from the learning experience. (Caraves, 2020, p. 117)

To be vulnerable about institutional violence with students shifted the dynamic of our class into an unlearning and learning experience. One White student asked me, “why did you come to Utah

³⁸ Email communication November 20, 2024.

knowing how conservative it is?” Her peers were shocked that she asked the question many were thinking. I confidently responded: “Places like Utah need people like me, queer and trans BIPOC educators, even when we’re not completely welcomed. Plus, I needed a job.” We broke down the hierarchical structures through collective discussions where students and I voiced our frustrations and fears, allowing us to outline the racist underpinning of anti-DEI and transphobic bills.

Censorship As “Alternative Wording”

In 2025, Utah passed H.B. 257 Sex-Based Designations for Privacy, Anti-Bullying, and Women’s Opportunities and H.B. 269 Privacy Protections in Sex-designated Areas, both aimed at barring transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people from “accessing privacy spaces and other facilities in public schools and government owned or controlled spaces” (ACLU, 2025) including in student dormitories at public universities and colleges that align with their gender identity (MenLove, 2025). Teaching in a conservative state controlled by the Mormon Church means that my existence as a queer trans person of color is targeted and censored, a racist transphobic strategy aimed at cloaking the narratives that stray from Utah’s White supremacist “historical mythology” (Gómez Bennett & Cammarota, 2025, p. 1131). Queer and trans Ethnic Studies pedagogical strategies for challenging anti-DEI censorship in Utah through critical consciousness-raising activities with White queer and trans students were essential to upholding the social justice values of the discipline.

Per my contract, I was scheduled to give a spring semester research talk titled “Remembering and Reimagining: Disability-Centered Cannabis Education as Feminist Epistemology.” The submitted description outlined how the research presentation delineated the following:

intricacies of feminist cannabis knowledges and cultural perceptions while also challenging sexist, homophobic, and racist cannabis structures by community members, advocacy workers, and cannabis researchers. Rooted in Chicana feminist epistemologies and qualitative mixed methods. . . . I position queer cannabis histories of disability-centered care and activism in California to remember and reimagine a cannabis education that is holistic and anti-capitalist.

The marketing staff member had “some concerns about the title and description, particularly as this wording will be used broadly to promote the event to a wide range of audiences.”

Asking if I was “comfortable proposing alternative wording?”³⁹ the staff requested that I change the title and content of my research talk to appease the state’s larger Republican audience. After receiving a vague indirect response to my initial question on what specifically was being flagged, the Dean, a Native woman, sent me the following email:

First, if you want the public to attend, I find the title inaccessible in general. I had to read it several times to understand what the presentation will cover, so I think many members of the community outside of campus will struggle with the meaning. Second, as we saw last semester, some members of our community have very strong reactions to things related to feminist cannabis. If the event is a public event, it will be open to everyone which means

³⁹ Email from February 12, 2025

that we will not be able to control who attends or what they say during the presentation/after the presentation. We can ask the police/public safety to remove folks if their behavior impedes the ability to continue with the event. It seems like a revised title would help avoid this result.⁴⁰

The statement overlooks issues of censorship, institutional racism, and carcerality relevant to Ethnic Studies. Here, the limitation of identity politics is glaring, as shown in this Native person's concern with coddling White conservative people's feelings instead of challenging the second Trump administration's affronts to research integrity and so-called freedom of speech. Second, "some members of our community" are racist, transphobic bigots, and are not the focus audience of the research talk I had intended to give. Third, we can never fully control "who attends or what they say" at any event, especially one by a trans Ethnic Studies scholar conducting research on cannabis in a conservative religious state. Control, as is referenced in the email, is a reach for illusionary power doing the work of the neoliberal university. Last, "police/public safety" representatives almost always escalate a situation, and as a Chicanx abolitionist, the carceral state is part of the critiques I offer in my cannabis research. It would go against my values and even be contradictory to have cops at an event on cannabis.

I was angry at the situation, and through the writing of Audre Lorde, I recognized my anger as "a response to racist attitudes and to the actions and presumptions that arise out of those attitudes" (2020, p. 115). The anger manifested as heightened anxiety, insomnia, and waves of frustration, among other things, that are not new for marginalized academics doing critical work. This was an embodied response composed of physiological and psychological symptoms, or what Black scholars call racial battle fatigue (cited in Tijerina Revilla, 2021). The "detrimental, irreparable spiritual damage" that makes us question our worth, dignity, and value are an attempt to spirit murder, what Muxerista scholars call one of "most dangerous weapons of white supremacy" (Tijerina Revilla, 2021, p. 38). Over the years, I had witnessed the burden of conforming to academia's racialized and gendered hierarchies among women and queer faculty of color, whose bodies, minds, and spirits were consequently breaking down. I tapped into my femtors, who were among my spirit protectors and restorers team aimed at breaking cycles of harm. They constitute a healing ecology offering "strength to reject and survive attempted spirit murder and/or restore our wounded spirits, especially in the face of repeated attacks and woundings both inside and outside of institutions of education" (Tijerina Revilla, 2021, p. 39). After a call with my femtor, the consejos were (a) to pick my battles—"this one isn't your battle" because to be in academia means we are in a marathon not a sprint, (b) go outside for a walk, and (c) tap into the cultural and spiritual medicinal practices I was raised with. I processed and decided to reschedule the talk rather than change it to shield the feelings of conservatives at the university. This was a missed opportunity for the Dean to challenge racialized gender hierarchies and holding accountable the university "for how racist policies perpetuate notions of White superiority and the inferiority of BIPOC" (Gómez Bennett & Cammarota, 2025, p. 1135).

To this day, we (myself and chair of unit) don't know how everything unfolded and have access to only pieces of the general issue. While she did advocate for my class and subsequent discussion on delivering my research talk, she was navigating the ethical issues of Gender and Ethnic Studies units being targeted by the Republican legislature. This example of censorship is an institutional

⁴⁰ Email from February 23, 2025

mechanism of state-sponsored racism and transphobia representing the far Right's nationwide, multiyear campaign attacks on higher education "to limit what students can learn and what faculty can teach" (Barker & Turpin, 2023, p. 4). Teaching queer and trans Ethnic Studies at a Utah PWI trained me to develop pedagogical strategies against student hostility and academic censorship in the face of racist zealots attacking tenets of Ethnic Studies (Arce & Montaña, 2022). The pedagogical strategies employed here were the refusal to remain silent, an intergenerational mentorship spanning geographies as part of Chicana/x and Latina/x feministas/muxeristas healing practices, and an unapologetic conviction to expose institutional harm shaped by conservative politics in the U.S.

Conclusion

The reflective case studies on Minnesota and Utah demonstrate how queer and trans Ethnic Studies pedagogical strategies at PWIs must embed flexibility and unapologetic honesty because it is part of necessary unlearning/learning healing practices. Queer and trans feminist Ethnic Studies exposes and interrupts pervasive coloniality and structural inequities at the university level through a racialized gender lens. The classroom is a space to encourage students to disrupt vectors of power impacting their everyday lives in both liberal and conservative states. While not comprehensive, these case studies demonstrate how the "contemporary American academy is part of an institutional and social backlash against the inroads made by student movements" that gave us gender and Ethnic Studies, or as Roderick Ferguson (2017) described, "inroads that challenged the systems of power that sought to constrain the lives and possibilities of the marginalized" (p. 14). The academy's response to recent student encampments in support of Palestinian survival amid a genocide should continue to shape our pedagogical strategies. From having a student in Utah show up to class incognito because they were under investigation for their involvement in the student encampments to having a senior Chicana Studies scholar in Minnesota advocating to be neutral in how we discuss Palestine and Israel, queer and trans Ethnic Studies must remain unapologetic in the face of oppression—neither neutral nor silent.

An analysis of censorship, healing, and solidarity at PWIs in two politically divergent, states are positioned within a thread of reflections on the ecologies of power and resistance that are, now more than ever, necessary. Ethnic Studies scholars remind us that "teaching is the most political activity in which you could possibly engage" (cited in Ortiz & Ramirez, 2025, p. 186). While exhausting at times, guiding white students' understanding on how communities of color "have been a major force in safeguarding and expanding democracy in the United States" (Arce & Montaña, 2022, p. 130), it's rewarding to witness multiscale connections being made. It is part of the spiritual healing that feminista, muxerista, queer, and trans Ethnic Studies scholars continue to bridge across academic spaces adamant in their attempt to wound us.

As pedagogical strategy in queer and trans Ethnic Studies at PWIs, moreover, in the face of institutional violence, healing was and continues to be embodied by "my presence in the classroom, my body, my voice, and my identity," all of which are the "additional tools in my pedagogical toolbelt as I teach and learn alongside my students" (Caraves, 2020, p. 121). In order to disrupt and heal from the cycles of harm that subtly permeate our spaces, we need to give ourselves permission to "engage the wounds we carry, individually and collectively as queer Latinx/a/o people" (Orozco et al., 2023, p. 1371). Healing doesn't come with a guidebook; rather, it comes with a set of traumas that educators often hide deep in themselves, and consequently, they reveal

them in their teaching, unknowingly causing harm. Queer and trans Ethnic Studies pedagogical strategies offer us avenues to mitigate harm and heal ourselves collectively—a rejection to the elitist individualistic neoliberal academy.

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