

Returning to Our Ways of Knowing—Radical Healing in Higher Education

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

Growing up in an immigrant family, I was often told that education—particularly higher education—was the pathway to success and well-being in our new country. This narrative is familiar among immigrant communities and Communities of Color in the United States, who face structural discrimination and systemic violence yet are often told that education is impartial and the great equalizer for social mobility (Winkle-Wagner & Nelson, 2009). It wasn't until graduate school that I began to recognize how this dominant narrative systematically cloaked the myth of meritocracy (Liu, 2011), White supremacy (Harper et al., 2009), academic capitalism (Münch, 2014), and racial capitalism (Leong, 2013; Robinson, 2020) in higher education and their harmful impacts on minoritized students. Specifically, Students of Color (Koo, 2021), students with disabilities (Eisenman et al., 2020), transgender and gender-expansive students (Goldberg et al., 2019), queer-spectrum students (Garvey et al., 2018), first-generation students (Museus & Chang, 2021), and linguistically diverse students (Lopez, 2022) frequently report experiencing hostile campus climates that undermine their well-being and hinder their ability to thrive. These disparities in student outcomes are often compounded by deficit ideologies and bootstrap individualism, which frame minoritized students as the problem rather than addressing the systemic failings within the infrastructure of higher education itself.

Moreover, these idealized images of higher education continue to erase the violence and harm that colleges and universities have long perpetuated against marginalized communities, particularly enslaved Africans and Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2013; Wilder, 2013), for economic and social gain. Rooted in settler-colonial logics and White supremacy ideology, higher education often prioritizes profit,



productivity, and individualism over collective learning, humanity, and well-being (Patel, 2021).

RETURNING TO OUR WAYS OF KNOWING— RADICAL HEALING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Considering the ways higher education is both a site of and a perpetuator of violence and harm, this special issue of the *Journal of Trauma Studies in Education* highlights scholarship that promotes much-needed healing in higher education. However, we cannot look to higher education—a settler-colonial, capitalistic, White supremacist, and carceral entity—to facilitate healing. Instead, we who are *in* but not *of* higher education (Moten & Harney, 2004; Patel, 2021) must collectively return to, reclaim, and remember what we already know—what our ancestors, elders, and communities have always known (T. Jones Jolivet, personal communication, February 20, 2024)—and create our own concepts of well-being and healing.

This return to our ways of knowing and being requires us to resist traditional colonial, Eurocentric, and individualistic healing paradigms (Guthrie, 1998; Millner et al., 2021; Mills, 2017) that are often endorsed on college campuses (e.g., psychotherapy). Hence, this special issue invites those of us who teach, research, study, and work *in*, but not *of*, higher education to re/embody our lineage of healing wisdom (Poon Ghaffari, 2024) and theories in the flesh (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015). I invite each of us to be healing co-conspirators and embark together through the mosaic of healing wisdom that is interwoven throughout this special issue on radical healing in higher education. In the following section, I will introduce the concept of radical healing (Ginwright, 2015; French et al., 2020), followed by an overview of each article included in this special issue.

RADICAL HEALING

Ginwright (2015) defines *radical healing* as “a process that builds the capacity of people to act upon their environment in ways that contribute to well-being for the common good” (p. 8). Traditional approaches to healing often adopt an individualistic and psychological lens, focusing on managing and mitigating the symptoms of trauma (Eisenberg et al., 2016; Polanco-Roman et al., 2016; Martin et al., 2013; Reyes et al., 2019). Such approaches are often utilized in higher education and are rooted in colonial and Western frameworks that enact neocolonial harm to Communities of Color and ignore the systemic and interconnected nature of trauma (Guthrie, 1998; Millner et al., 2021; Mills, 2017). In contrast to traditional healing approaches, radical healing represents a transformative and liberatory process that recognizes healing as political. Radical healing’s explicit political focus argues that well-being and healing are collective experiences and thereby systematic change is necessary to address social and collective trauma (Ginwright, 2015). When we recognize harm and violence in higher education as collective experiences that are shaped by systems of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and ableism, we shift policies and practices from focusing on individual-level characteristics to analyzing and addressing the environmental factors “causing the harm in the first place” (Ginwright, 2015, p. 7).

Ginwright (2015) outlines several elements of radical healing, including culture, agency, relationships, meaning, and achievement. Culture is “a way of being, knowing, and relating to one another that is both shaped by historical and contemporary social and economic forces” (Ginwright, 2015, p. 132). Within the radical healing framework, culture serves as an anchor to our identities, which are shaped by intersecting systems of oppression and shape how individuals navigate healing. Communities of Color can foster radical healing when they connect to “rich indigenous cultural practice and rituals to heal and to organize” (Ginwright, 2015, p. 132). Agency recognizes the power of each individual and the collective to create personal and systemic change. By empowering communities who have experienced harm to view their skills, resources, and experiences as strengths, they transform their problems into possibilities (Ginwright, 2015). Relationships are “the capacity to create, sustain, and grow healthy connections with others” (Ginwright, 2015, p. 25), which can foster a sense of connection to a broader lineage of strength and resistance. Meaning helps to connect personal struggles with political interpretations, fostering one’s sense of purpose and role in social justice advancement (Ginwright, 2015). There are multiple ways to cultivate meaning to support radical healing, including cultivating one’s critical consciousness through self-exploration, journaling, reflection, and discussions with others. Achievement highlights life’s possibilities and the ability to achieve individual and collective dreams and goals (Ginwright, 2015). Focusing on possibility is predicated on acknowledging the realities of oppression while also not being defined by violence.

Expanding on Ginwright’s (2009, 2015) work on radical healing, French and colleagues (2020) proposed a psychological framework of radical healing for People of Color and Indigenous Individuals (POCI) that is anchored in (a) critical consciousness, (b) radical hope, (c) strength and resistance, (d) cultural authenticity and self-knowledge, and (e) collectivism. Rooted in these anchors, French et al. (2020) define radical healing as “being able to sit in a dialectic and exist in both spaces of resisting oppression and moving toward freedom...the act of being in that dialectic is, in and of itself, a process of healing.” (p. 24). For those of us who are *in*, but not *of*, higher education (Moten & Harney, 2004), we often find ourselves navigating this dialectical space—both acknowledging and actively resisting oppression while imagining possibilities for healing and liberation. Although traversing this liminal space in higher education can be physically and psychologically taxing, there can also be healing that fosters individual and collective well-being, which this special issue aims to illuminate.

SPECIAL ISSUE ON RADICAL HEALING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The six articles in this special issue on “Radical Healing in Higher Education” highlight how minoritized communities engage in their ways of knowing to heal in the midst of navigating trauma in and/or perpetuated by higher education. Of these six articles, four articles explore the ways minoritized survivors reclaim POCI epistemologies to heal through campus sexual and relationship violence. The remaining two articles radically resist oppressive higher education environments to reimagine a liberatory future within higher education and beyond. Each article

explores critical aspects of healing—whether through culturally situated practices, spirituality, community-building, imagination, or resistance to dominant structures—emphasizing the political nature of healing and the necessity of addressing trauma not only at the individual level but also through communal and systemic change. Together, these contributions illuminate the transformative potential of radical healing for those navigating higher education and the responsibility for campus professionals to create healing opportunities for marginalized communities.

Reclaiming POCI epistemologies for Healing Sexual and Relationship Violence

Thomas, Poon Ghaffari, Karunaratne, and Aguilar Marquez illuminate the ancestral and cultural healing wisdom that is embedded in POCI epistemologies and how minoritized student survivors apply such wisdom to heal from sexual and relationship violence. In “Shades of Brown: I am Because We Are,” Thomas centers Black ciswomen’s healing after sexual assault, challenging the dominant race-evasive, individualized approaches in higher education. Drawing from Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Black Feminist Thought, Thomas’ study highlights how healing for Black cis women survivors is both individual and communal, rooted in culturally specific practices like community support and body compassion. In “Exploring Radical Healing Among Asian/American College Women Survivors of Sexual and Relationship Violence,” Poon Ghaffari designed a de/colonial and culturally situated study to center the ways Asian/American women survivors of sexual and relationship violence draw on their ways of being, feeling, and doing to heal. Research collaborators highlight how they re/embodied food as a holistic healing practice, connections with other Asian/American women, and ancestral and cultural healing lineages.

In “What Indigenous Futurity Can Teach Us about Healing Sexual Violence for Minoritized Students in Higher Education,” Aguilar Marquez applies the concept of Indigenous Futurity to the healing of Minoritized survivors of campus sexual violence. Using Indigenous Research Methods, this article highlights how Minoritized campus survivors make meaning of their past and future as rooted in and guided by their connection to their identities, ancestors, descendants, and holistic futures. Aguilar Marquez’s article offers transformative implications for institutional responses to sexual violence that consider the importance of geographies for healing. In “The Role of Spirituality in Healing from Sexual and Relationship Violence in Higher Education,” Karunaratne and Aguilar Marquez examine the role of spirituality in healing for student survivors of sexual and relationship violence. Through case studies, they explore how spirituality, in its expansive forms, provides a foundation for transformative healing and offer practical applications for campus professionals to support the spiritual development of student survivors, especially Survivors of Color. Together, these four studies resist colonial knowledge and practices as the only legitimate sources of knowing (French et al., 2020; Ginwright, 2015). These studies underscore the need for culturally resonant, community-centered approaches that challenge Western-centric models of healing that often pervade higher education and prevent equitable access to healing and support.

Resisting and Reimagining Higher Education

The two remaining articles of this special issue focus on resisting systems of domination in campus environments while reimagining higher education and beyond. In “We All We Got: Black Queer Womxn’s Experiences at Religiously Affiliated Institutions,” Taiwo and Dantzler focus on the experiences of Black queer womxn at religiously affiliated institutions, exploring how they engage in healing while resisting intersectional violence from racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia in religious environments. Using the methodology of surrender and Sista Circle methodology, their study reveals how creating expansive forms of spirituality, acknowledging realities of religious trauma, and deeply connecting with other Black queer womxn can foster healing through community-building and self-discovery.

This special issue ends with a look towards the future of higher education through Takla’s article, “Becoming CRITICAL CREATIVES,” which offers a critical examination of the ways institutional leaders can radically (re)imagine liberatory, abolitionist, decolonizing, and queering futures within higher education and beyond. Using a bricolage, critical arts-based methodology, this article emphasizes the role of trauma-informed healing and multidimensional well-being as integral to sustaining radical imagination and critical creativity praxis and the importance of such imagination and praxis to simultaneously fuel healing.

Together, all six articles in this special issue underscore the importance of decolonizing higher education’s approaches to trauma and healing, advocating for practices that honor cultural knowledge, community, and the holistic well-being of students, staff, and faculty. This special issue offers a collective urging for higher education to both acknowledge the violence and harm it perpetuates and to honor healing as a transformative, collective, and liberatory experience that is fueled by those who are *in*, but not *of*, higher education.

INVITATION TO HEALING CO-CONSPIRATORS

This special issue highlights the urgent need for higher education healing co-conspirators to actively engage in the work of radical healing. The authors of this special issue invite healing co-conspirators to move beyond traditional, individualistic, and colonial frameworks and embrace collective approaches that prioritize indigenous and cultural ways of knowing, relationality, and systemic transformation. As researchers, this means challenging dominant healing paradigms, amplifying the voices of minoritized communities, and embracing onto-epistemologies that honor diverse ways of knowing and being. For practitioners, it requires creating spaces that foster belonging, community, agency, and meaning-making by acknowledging and dismantling the oppressive structures in and beyond higher education that perpetuate harm.

As readers review the beautiful offerings in this special issue, I invite you to reflect on your own spaces in higher education. Whether you navigate roles of teaching, research, leadership, advising, advocacy, programming, counseling, or others, I invite you to reimagine or remember your role to be one that nurtures radical healing. When reflecting on this special issue, perhaps ask yourself: Where can I and

those around me develop or use our collective agency to transform our programs, services, policies, and environments to better support healing for all students, staff, and faculty in higher education?

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