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## Counter-storytelling Archetypes: A School Counseling Intervention for Chicana Girls



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## Abstract

Through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT) composite counter-storytelling, this manuscript explores the academic, social, and mental health issues faced by adolescent Chicanas, and the impact of internalized and institutionalized racism and sexism on their development. Four Mexican archetypal female characters—La Llorona, La Virgen, La Malinche, and La Adelita—representing the majoritarian narrative inform a school counseling intervention grounded in literature on anti-racist and emancipatory school counseling, narrative therapy, and cuento therapy. The counter-story focuses on the transformative impact of the group counseling experience and the potential for increased self-awareness and capacity for meaningful connection, resistance, and self-determination for Chicana adolescents.

**Keywords:** counter-storytelling, Critical Race Theory, adolescent girls, school counseling

With rates of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and suicidality that are higher than their White counterparts, adolescent Chicanas are a vulnerable population (Cruz et al., 2021; Sanchez et al., 2019). In school, these young women navigate typical challenges, while also holding multiple layers of marginalized cultural identity (e.g., gender and race) (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a). This intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2019) means that Chicanas carry a compounded cultural complexity that can interfere with healthy, normative development.

This essay utilizes Critical Race Theory (CRT) composite counter-storytelling (Gonzalez, 2024; Pizarro et al., 2018; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b; Yosso, 2006) to explore the perspectives of Chicana youth and to present a counter-story about Chicana identity, voice, and resistance (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Specifically, this paper profiles one Chicana school counselor who develops a group counseling intervention for four Chicana adolescents. The construction of composite characters was informed by a theoretical synthesis grounded in CRT (Taylor et al., 2009)—a framework established more than four decades ago that has been misrepresented and maligned by political conservatives in recent years. In addition, relevant research in school counseling, education, and Chicana adolescents was systematically reviewed as part of the composite character development process. Issues of race, class, and gender

were considered and deliberately embedded into the narrative descriptions of the composites. The characters were also intentionally linked to popular Mexican stories about women (Arrizón, 1998; Paz, 2008; Reséndez Fuentes, 1995). Representing the majoritarian narrative, these archetypal female characters provided the springboard for counter-storytelling within the context of the intervention.

Issues that commonly arise in the literature, and that are woven into the narratives for the characters in this paper, include academic struggles, behavioral problems, anxiety, self-esteem, experiences of racism and microaggressions, and parental involvement (e.g., Balanga et al., 2013; Jeynes, 2003; Ramirez et al., 2009; Sue et al., 2007; Yosso, 2006). As such, the composite characters evolved out of a combination of theoretical synthesis, and the literature and empirical research reviewed. Through the development of the counterstory, the adolescent girls presented in this paper gain powerful insight about themselves, cultivate their own agency and voice, and, together with their school counselor, discover what Milena Ribero and Arellano (2019) describe as *comadrisimo*, a community of reciprocal support.

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### **La Consejera: Ms. Cora Vasquez (“The One Who Tends the Sheep”)**

Ms. Vasquez (“Ms. V”) is the only credentialed school counselor at Cardinal Middle School (CMS), where she has worked for five years. She has 600 students on her caseload, a ratio that exceeds the national recommendation of 250:1 (ASCA, n.d.). Ms. V works hard to meet the academic, career, and social emotional needs of her students (ASCA, 2021a). It is important to Ms. V to be a culturally sustaining, anti-racist school counselor (Holcomb-McCoy, 2021), and she aims to create an environment where all identities and experiences are recognized and honored. Before coming to CMS, Ms. V’s first job was at a high school where she worked with a veteran counselor who was a White woman. Ms. V witnessed firsthand some negative stereotypical messages but felt intimidated about speaking out. She sought consultation from a former professor, saying “I don’t want to just carry out a stereotype.” Ms. V began reading about CRT, micro-aggressions, institutionalized racism and sexism, and integrating that material with her prior training in multicultural counseling competencies (ASCA, 2021b; Sue et al., 2007). When Ms. V started her job at CMS, she decided to work through a culturally sustaining, emancipatory lens on behalf of her students, to challenge the oppressive system, and to consciously incorporate an awareness of power, culture, and identity into her work as a school counselor (Love, 2019).

### **Dolores: “Full of Sorrows”**

Dolores is a 13-year-old seventh grade girl who maintains a 2.7 grade point average and plays clarinet in the orchestra. Known as “Lo” to her friends and family, she lives with her mother, Celia, and her younger brother, Sammy. Lo does not have any contact with her biological father because he abandoned Celia while she was still pregnant with Lo. Over the years, Celia has had several serious boyfriends, one of whom was Sammy’s father. Although the couple split, they remain friendly, and Sammy has regular contact with his dad.

When Lo was in fifth grade, her mother had an accident at work and injured her back. Celia needed surgery and was prescribed Oxycontin to manage the pain. Lo began taking on additional responsibilities at home as a way of helping her mom. It has been two years since the surgery, and even though she does not show any signs of pain, Celia is still taking Oxycontin. Lo worries that her mother is addicted to pills. Lo and her mother have always had a challenging relationship because Lo thinks that Celia favors Sammy over her, but now they barely speak.

At school, teachers have noticed Lo’s increased anxiety. She has always experienced more fears and worries than her peers and struggled to sustain meaningful relationships. Her friends sometimes forget to include her in their plans or take advantage of her (e.g., copying

her homework and asking for money at lunch). Desperate to have friends, Lo puts up with the lack of consideration and poor treatment. In the past couple of weeks, Ms. V has noticed Lo transition from being in the mix with her friends at lunchtime to reading or doing homework instead. When Ms. V caught up with Lo and asked her about the recent change, Lo responded, “Wow, nobody else even noticed. It’s like life just goes on without me. I could disappear and no one would even notice.”

### **Beatriz: “Blessed”**

Beatriz is a 13-year-old seventh grader whose standardized test scores were below proficient in both English and Math at the end of elementary school, resulting in additional academic supports and special education inclusion services. Although Beatriz was born in the United States, her parents are undocumented Mexican nationals. Because of their status, Beatriz’s parents find it hard to get steady employment and often work in restaurants during the week and clean houses or do landscaping on the weekends to make ends meet. It is not unusual for Beatriz to accompany her parents on these weekend jobs. Over the years, her parents have taught her how to perform all of the tasks that they do—from cleaning floors to planting flowers.

Beatriz enjoys art and recently learned

how to use a graphic design program in her computer class. She decided to make business cards and flyers for her parents’ housecleaning and landscaping businesses as a class assignment in the hopes that her parents might make more money in these jobs. Beatriz is teased and bullied about her clothing and her looks. Sometimes people make snide comments about her parents getting deported. Her family cannot afford to buy name brand labels, and Beatriz often wears her cousin’s hand-me-downs. Beatriz really wants to fit in and look more like the other girls. She says,

**“The other girls have smooth hair that always looks good and can wear skinny jeans and tank tops without looking fat and slutty. I hate these stupid curves!”**

In an effort to help her fit in, Beatriz’s mom dyed Beatriz’s hair at home this week. Unfortunately, the product turned Beatriz’s hair a bright copper color. Beatriz’s mom told her that they would have to wait a few days before they could dye her hair back, but in the meantime, she could wear a hat to school. She was humiliated in class when her teacher forced her to remove the baseball cap that covered her hair. Ms. V found Beatriz sobbing in a stairwell after school.

**Citlali: “Little Star”**

Citlali is a 12-year-old seventh grade girl who transferred to CMS when her family moved. At her last school, Citlali maintained a 3.6 grade point average. Citlali is the youngest of four children and lives with two older siblings and her mother and father. Her oldest brother, Junior, is a freshman at UC San Diego. During early childhood, Citlali participated in the Head Start program. Her mother, Emilia, is a dental assistant. Her father, Arturo, is a bricklayer for a masonry company. Citlali has always done well in school and thinks that she might like to go to college someday like her oldest brother.

When Citlali started at CMS, she took a dance unit as part of her physical education class. She caught on to the choreography quickly and was asked to try out for cheerleading. She felt flattered, as she never imagined herself as being “one of the cool girls.” At her last school, she was always seen as “a smart kid” and never felt like she could get good grades and be popular at the same time. Once she joined the cheerleading squad, Citlali found herself being invited to hang out with people after school and on the weekends. Usually, Citlali and her friends just go to Julia’s (the cheer team captain) house and play video games or practice their cheer routines. Julia’s parents work and are not usually home until evening. Julia’s grandmother lives with the family

but tends to stay in her room and does not interact with the girls. On a few occasions, the girls have taken alcohol from the liquor cabinet. Recently, Julia stole some money from her grandmother’s room and bought some weed from a kid at school for the girls to try.

At school, teachers are confused by Citlali’s behavior. Ms. V overheard two teachers in the lunchroom talking about how Citlali seems to “play dumb” in class and is regularly off task, never being able to answer questions when called upon, but turning in thorough homework. When Ms. V caught up with Citlali and asked her about how the transition to CMS was going for her, Citlali started to cry and said,

**“My parents would be so disappointed in me if they knew what was really going on. It’s like I do these things and I don’t even know who I am anymore. And, like, if my friends really knew me, like how I really am, I’m afraid that they wouldn’t want me to hang out with them anymore.”**

### **Alejandra: “Defender of the People”**

Alejandra is a 14-year-old seventh grader who prefers the nickname “Alex.” She lives with her aunt and two younger cousins. Alex’s parents died in a car accident when she was in the second grade. In school, Alex earns C’s and B’s in her classes and excels on the soccer field. She has played soccer since she was a young child. She remembers playing soccer with her dad and feels connected to him through soccer.

When she was in the sixth grade, Alex’s uncle died of lung cancer related to exposure to carcinogens in his work environment. He had been a father figure to her since her parents died, and she felt devastated by the loss. Alex went with her aunt and sat with her uncle every time he had chemotherapy. In spending so much time at the hospital, she noticed how many other families were there, going through the same kind of experience. She saw how the nurses always tried to make people feel comfortable and have a positive attitude; even when things seemed bleak, they always tried to be inspiring.

During that time, Alex began meeting with Ms. V to talk about her uncle’s illness, which also led to discussions about her parents’ deaths. In her meetings with Ms. V, Alex would say, “It’s just so unfair, and I wish there was something I could do. I mean, I know I can’t change it, but I just wish I could help make it feel less bad.” Alex thinks that maybe she’d like to

be a nurse someday, and Ms. V tells her about a hospital volunteer program. This year, she was able to begin the program, and she really loves volunteering one day after school and on Saturdays. Recently, Alex’s aunt’s work schedule changed, and she is unable to pick Alex up at the hospital after her volunteer shift, so Alex rides the bus home. The bus ride takes about 30 minutes and has been extremely unpleasant because there are often inappropriate, aggressive men on the bus who leer at her and make sexual remarks. Alex does not want to stop volunteering, but she does not know how to handle the situation, and she is often scared. Alex trusts Ms. V and decides to confide in her about what has been going on.

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### **Intervention**

Each of the four students is invited to join a counseling group by Ms. V. The group process follows Corey’s (2023) four stages (i.e., initial, transition, working, and termination) and functions as a collective, consciousness raising experience that purposefully combines the principles of CRT counter-storytelling (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002a, 2002b; Yosso, 2006), narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), and cuento therapy (Ramirez et al., 2009; Villalba et al., 2010). This intentional tejido of approaches is particularly effective with adolescents because school-based group counseling is an efficient intervention that promotes peer connection and normalizes

experience, while the specific integration of three theoretical perspectives (i.e., CRT counter-storytelling, narrative therapy, cuento therapy) encourages the development of authentic voice in marginalized populations through a culturally sustaining framework. Participation in this group includes being supported in identifying an impeding archetype, engaging with the cuento, and counterstorying the narrative.

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### Initial

One by one, the four girls enter the room, their emotions ranging from lonely and sheepish to carefree and calm. Ms. V invites the girls to take a seat, and the first group session begins. Although Ms. V had previously met with each girl individually to screen them for potential group participation and to review informed consent and the limits to confidentiality, she revisits the process with the group as a whole. “Ok, but how does this work?” asks Citlali. “Like, if I, like, how do I know that people aren’t gonna just tell everyone what I said in here?” “And, so it begins,” thinks Ms. V. She takes a deep breath and responds, “you feel uncertain about whether or not you can trust others in this space.” “Well, I mean, yeah. I don’t really know y’all like that. I can’t just say everything that I’m thinking and then have people betray me,” Citlali counters.

### Transition

After a few sessions, the group members grew in their comfort with each other. Through tears, Beatriz says quietly,

**“I’m just so tired of being embarrassed. I’m self-conscious of my clothes, my shoes, hair, skin, accent. If I’m really bein being Mexican.”**

After a brief pause, and with strength in her voice, she asks, “For what?! Because some racist assholes have taught me to hate who I am?!” “You’re not the only one Beatriz.” Alex discloses. “I feel like that too sometimes about being a girl. I wonder what it would be like to be a boy—to not have to be constantly looking over my shoulder when I’m walking down the street; to not have to deal with all of the inappropriate comments that I hear from guys; to not have to worry, feel scared, or hide because I think that there is always a threat lurking; to be able to just be in my body and feel safe.”

Just as Alex is finishing her statement, Ms. V hears a sigh coming from Lo. She turns in time to catch Lo rolling her

statement, Ms. V hears a sigh coming from Lo. She turns in time to catch Lo rolling her eyes. Without hesitation, Ms. V says, “Lo, I noticed you rolling your eyes as Alex was talking. If that eye roll had words, what would it say?” Instantly flushed, Lo puts her heels onto the edge of her chair and draws her knees to her chest. Hugging her shins and looking down, she is undoubtedly embarrassed that her unconscious gesture has gone noticed. “Well, you gonna answer her?,” Citlali demands. Before Citlali can push further, Alex interrupts, “Leave her alone Lali, can’t you see she’s too chingona for this? I guess we’re just too boring for her, or at least what I have to say, opening up about how I really feel, is too chillona for her. Isn’t that right, Lo?”

After Alex’s challenge, the entire group is quiet for a few moments. Recognizing the potential power in silence, Ms. V refrains from filling the void and waits, doing a quick assessment of group members: Alex’s voice sounds strong, but there’s hurt in her eyes; Citlali appears serious, her gaze shifting from Alex to Lo; Lo hasn’t moved from the fetal position, and is now crying; Beatriz seems deep in thought with a furrowed brow. Just as Ms. V is about to speak, Beatriz takes a deep breath. Extending her arms, she touches her right hand to Lo’s shoulder and her left hand to Alex’s knee. Gently exhaling, she offers, “ya.”

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### Working

The next couple of weeks progressed with a type of awkward tension, as group members tried bravery, authenticity, and/or vulnerability, testing how and if others would handle it. In time, wounds were repaired. Lo apologized to Alex and explained that her reaction was not about what Alex was saying, but about her own feelings of disillusionment about being a girl in the U.S. Lo expressed that she grew up with people saying that “girls can do and be anything” and that “girls are equal to boys,” but that “what people say and what they do don’t ever match.” Lo revealed the effects of patriarchy and misogyny in her family system, explaining, “Boys and men have always and will always treat girls and women like crap. That’s not new in our culture. But, what really pisses me off is when girls turn on girls, when mothers turn on their daughters. I mean, I expect that my mom is gonna treat my brother better than she treats me. That’s the way it has always been. She treats her boyfriends better, too. Even though my dad was the one who bailed before I was born, he is free of any blame. It’s like, he will always be ‘the one who got away’ and I am the one she’s stuck with. The fact that I was born a girl means I am destined to be unhappy, like I am stuck, you know. And, Alex, honestly, I don’t think it would matter if we had been born boys because we wouldn’t be us as boys. We would be what they make all boys—rough and reckless, but still cherished and powerful.”

## Termination

Each group member offers the following reflection during the termination session. Lo: “I chose La Llorona as my archetype. I’ve always thought that my mom was like La Llorona, left by a man, burdened by her children, and living in deep sadness. I guess that made me one of La Llorona’s kids, drowned in the river. But, I understand it differently now. My mom is not La Llorona, I am. I am the one who drowned my self-confidence, joy, and hopes in the river by letting others define me and my value. I have been living my life feeling like I am stuck on the shores of this stupid river, living with sadness and anxiety and wallowing in self-pity, because I am looking for someone who will love me. But, that was wrong. I have to be willing to get into the river and to find what I’ve lost to feel whole. I guess my counterstory is an affirmation, something I can say to myself as a reminder of what is true: *Forgiveness - I let go of hurt through forgiveness. Love - I give myself the gift of love. Discovery - I am open to discovering what the river holds.*”

Beatriz: “I feel like an important part of my story is my struggle with what it means to me to be Brown and to be a girl. I think about the messages coming at me from social media and my family and friends and culture and religion and this country we live in, and I just feel fed up. I feel tired of it and I’m sick of how much it has affected me over

the years. You all know I feel more comfortable with art and design than words, but I thought that I should try something out of my comfort zone because we are all trying to be brave here. I asked Citlali to read it for me to make sure that I was using the big words right, but I wrote it. I chose La Virgen as my archetype because, like La Virgen, I want people to recognize that I am a Chicana who has many talents. I wrote my counterstory as a letter, like a letter for when you are absent from school.”

*To Whom It May Concern:*

*Beatriz will not be showing up today in the way that you expect her to. She experienced too much of your racism and hatred toward women and has come down with a terrible case of gaslighting. She will not be available to babysit your kids, or scrub your bathroom, or mow your lawn. For the “Karens,” she will not gas you up and tell you how amazing you are, even though you make racist comments about her parents. For the cochinos, Beatriz will also be unable to satisfy your nasty fantasies. She will not be wearing a bikini and shaking her butt for your social media posts. Other than to block you, she will not be responding to your requests for pics. Please excuse her from all racial trauma and patriarchy.*

*In the immediate future and for however long it takes, Beatriz will be recovering from the effects of internalized racism.*

*Sincerely, me*

Citlali: “For me, it is La Malinche. I chose this story because it is really complicated, and honestly, because I liked the challenge. It isn’t just black and white. It isn’t easy and straightforward. In the story of La Malinche, I feel like two sides are already represented. The one view is where she is seen as a horrible person who sold out her country. The other perspective is that she was a fool who was played by Cortés and the Spanish. But, what I realized is that those perspectives only highlight the black and white. She either has to be a bad bitch or a basic bitch. She is victim or violator. But, let’s face it, there is no way she could have had the power to do any of that back in the day when we still struggle with our power today. Instead of continuing to define her through the eyes of those who traumatized her, I tried to imagine another possibility. I’m not totally sure how the story ends, but maybe that’s because it doesn’t have an ending yet. I wrote my counterstory as a poem.”



*Survivor: Una Historia Complicada*  
*They told us the story of La Malinche*  
*Una traidora con el poder de una esclava*  
*There was no question that she was smart,*  
*No sólo para una chica*  
*She could learn new things faster than anyone,*  
*Nuevas palabras bailando en la lengua*  
*But in a world where your value is measured in*  
*servitude*  
*Su mente valía menos que su trabajo*  
*You become property*  
*Se esperaba tu cooperación.*  
*You learn to fit in, to do what is expected, to*  
*say "yes," to stop asking questions*  
*Para silenciar sus miedos, su dolor, su duelo, su*  
*soledad*  
*Because when you are powerless, you do as*  
*you are told*  
*Te pierdes para sobrevivir*  
*But, you need to be found in order to go on*  
*living*  
*Despierta su mente curiosa*  
*What would she say if she knew the stories*  
*that they told about her,*  
*¿Y en qué idioma lo diría?*  
*They told us they story of La Malinche*  
*Pero ella nos ruega que escuchemos su cuento*  
*Let's listen and learn*  
*Ella vive en la verdad si la escuchamos.*

Alex: “I know we’ve gone back and forth about this, but I still believe women have to be at the center of the revolution. People will say women aren’t tough enough, or that we aren’t capable of making important decisions, but that just tells me that they aren’t paying attention. Women lead with wisdom, empathy, strength, and courage. Women are inspiring. And, while women are caring and compassionate and are capable of showing emotions, women are savage when they need to be. Look at the *soldaderas*, like La Adelita. She was a soldier, a medic, and a rebel. She didn’t wait for someone else to save her or to rescue her, she fought for herself to defend what she believed in. I thought about my journey in this group—what I put into, but also what I learned about you all. My La Adelita counterstory is a playlist.”

### *Las Rebeldes Playlist*

*If I Were a Boy (Beyonce)*

*What Was I Made For? (Billie Eilish)*

*Just a Girl (No Doubt)*

*The Man (Taylor Swift)*

*GIRL (Maren Morris)*

*Redesigning Women (The Highwomen)*

*Brave (Sara Bareilles)*

*Roar (Katy Perry)*

*Fight Song (Rachel Platten)*

*Rainbow (Kacey Musgraves)*

*Creo En Mi (Natalia Jiménez)*

## Discussion

This counterstory examines female archetypes from Mexican history, literature, and culture that reinscribe themes of patriarchy, misogyny, racism, and colonialism. Table 1 reviews the profile for each of the composite characters—highlighting salient themes associated with their archetype and counterstory, as well as their presenting issue in counseling. By engaging with and disrupting these narratives through the voices of the four composite characters and centering an anti-racist school counseling intervention, we can more deeply understand the potential impact that internalized forms of oppression have on the development of healthy attachment, body image, self-concept, and coping strategies. Beyond cultivating critical consciousness and authentic voice, the transformative potential in counter-storytelling can be witnessed on an individual-level—for Lo, there will be a recognition of her own importance in the world; Beatriz will embrace her identity as a young woman and as a Chicana; Citlali’s intellect will be valued by both herself and those around her; and Alex will realize her ability to push through challenges bravely.

**Table 1***Thematic Profile of Group Members*

Group Members	Mexicana Archetype	Internalized Majoritarian Narrative	Counterstory Motif	School Counseling Issue
Dolores “Lo”	La Llorona	“I am destined to be unhappy and alone.”	Self-worth	Intrapersonal & Interpersonal Growth
Beatriz	La Virgen	“Everything would be perfect if I was White.”	Identity & Pride	Body Image
Citlali	La Malinche	“You can be smart or popular, but not both.”	Critical Consciousness	Self-concept
Alejandra “Alex”	La Adelita	“I’m afraid and powerless as a girl.”	Bravery & Feminism	Resilience

The group as a collective represents a network of care and *comadrismo* that will continue to support and sustain the girls as they move through adolescence. These four will undoubtedly be impacted by their relationship with Ms. V as their school counselor *comadre* and the internal representation of her that they will continue to hold long after middle school. *Comadrismo* may also manifest in various ways between the girls: friendship may result from the trust built in the group counseling experience, mentoring may be demonstrated by tutoring each other in school, advocacy may be emergent when standing up for each other against peer victimization or other forms of harassment. Regardless of how they stay in each

other’s lives, their vulnerability in a group and the depth of their experience together means that they will always be connected, even if only in memory. Their connection is reminiscent of a quilting circle, a community of individuals who come together on a consistent basis to make a quilt that will be gifted. Each person may have a particular role—cutting, planchar, piecing, sewing—but all are needed to move the project from a stack of fat quarters to individual blocks, to a complete quilt top, to each quilter taking a turn at hand stitching the binding. Quilting circles also add laughter, a little *chisme*, companionship, and love into every project. Like a quilting circle, the four girls worked through individual tasks to create one cohesive

story, a treasured heirloom that belongs to all of them, connects them, and forever binds them together as comadres.

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