

Conceptualizing academic *putería* at the 2022 NACCS conference: A critical reflection on the WAPs, DAPs, and flops.

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The purpose of this paper is to engage in a critical reflection of our experiences as two of three co-presenters on a panel presentation introducing the concept of academic *putería* through personal narrative, delivered in virtual form at the 2022 NACCS conference. With the help of the audio/video recorded session, the authors offer an abridged transcript of the preceding, giving prominence to the transformative impressions, feelings, emotions, and ideas that formulated the radically queer and provocative notion of academic *putería*. Contrary to our expectations, collaborating with cisgender, heterosexual Chicanas and Latinas in the academy is easier said than done. In what has become a habit for the authors, we conclude with an exercise in critical self-reflection as a means of examining our own role in failed collaborations, our susceptibility to the academic seduction of belonging, and the many strengths and vulnerabilities that we embody as queer, first-generation, and neurodivergent students from historically excluded communities. This article, therefore, represents our desire to shift beyond anti-erotic, DAP (dry as pussy) collegial relations towards more equitable and pleasurable WAP (wet ass pussy) connections with future collaborators. But first, we offer a brief overview of a few key terms that are commonly engaged in our repertoire of linguistic *putasos*.

Fundamental Key Terms

We coined the phrase, academic *putería* to symbolize gendered labor exploitation and the lack of agency over our bodies and intellectual property in the academy. In this way, *putería*, a Spanish word that translates to acts of prostitution, or whoring, characterized the shady and not-so-empowering side of working in higher education. We later expanded on the idea of academic *putería* as a phrase that represents both the shady *and* the empowering side of the

everyday work experiences of QTBIPOC students, staff, and faculty. Academic *putería* is derived from the labors of the mind, body, and spirit which are commodified and mined for their wealth. From this perspective, we regard academic *putería* as a means of survival within an individualistic, merit-based, capitalistic, neoliberal institution.

Formed by the first letters of the words, wet ass pussy, WAP is an acronym made popular by rappers Cardi B and Megan thee Stallion in a song released in 2020 titled, “WAP.” In the academic sense, we conceptualize WAP as referring to all pleasurable teaching and learning experiences and energies that arouse and excite the mind, body, and spirit. Pleasure activist, adrienne maree brown (2019) states that one of her pleasure principles is “checking for [their] orgasmic yes!” (p. 15). WAP is the full-bodied orgasmic yes that we experience with body sovereignty and the ability to dictate how our intellect and bodies are used for labor.

To identify our academic experiences more accurately as either erotic or anti-erotic, we began using the acronym DAP as the antithesis to WAP experiences. DAP, or dry ass pussy, hence, refers to safe scholarship that maintains the status quo, academic caste systems, and disempowering pedagogical practices. Finally, yet importantly, a flop refers to an unsuccessful academic circumstance or situation. We often use the word “flop” to characterize instances where we attempted to make an honest effort to bring about a WAP outcome, but polarities in *conocimientos* ultimately yielded a DAP experience. In the section below, we offer an abridged transcript of the original panel presentation on academic *putería* as prime examples of WAP, DAP, and flop collaborative experiences.

Academic *Putería*: The abridged transcripts

The Impetus for Conceptualizing Academic *Putería*

Olga: ...because of this isolation, [we] find each other in similar struggles. And we create spaces to be more conducive and more productive and collaborative. Sometimes these spaces... are the institutions themselves. But sometimes we must work from our homes or wherever we can; sometimes we have to even be mobile. What we have all in common here is our passion to teach and to gain

critical consciousness, but also to spark that in others. So, for academic *putería*—which can sound very, disruptive and messy—it is.

So, what I want to say about this is [that] it's really about labor. It's about the work that we do and just how much we feel like we're not enough when we do a lot more. And we're just the invisible labor that makes everything move. So, the working definition we have here is “intellectual labor” envisioned as a provocative means of self-promotion, self-interest, and self-preservation within an individualistic, neoliberal, multicultural academic society, which is not a *just* society. Multiculturalism is at the heart of neoliberal institutions so although there's representation at HSI's, such as the one where we work, it doesn't mean that we have real change. It's more like assimilation and integration, Academic *putería* is conceptualized as a method of pedagogy derived from lived experiences and strategies of survival in academic spaces. Having learned from some hard lessons, we don't want others to go through this. And so, it's through sharing our stories that we find strength in them, and we strategize better *movidas* in the academy.

Unveiling the Conceptual Framework

Tess: So, this is our conceptual framework for academic *putería*, and the reason why I put this framework onto the image of a flower is because I wanted to stay within that rhythm of not putting things necessarily within a specific pecking order or hierarchy.



Figure 1. (Pantoja Perez, et al., 2022)

Each one of these theories and pieces that we're drawing from are critically important. So, I couldn't say that one had more influence over the other. Each one came with its own distinct knowledge and gift. But primarily in bold. To the top left, we have Black and Chicana feminist theory. So, if you had to wrap everything up in a nutshell and get to the heart of what we're drawing from and building on – it is clearly Black and Chicana Feminist theory. Thus, we have Gloria Anzaldúa's work represented here: soul work, image work, and *nepantla*—living between worlds and revising notions of reality—decolonizing reality.

We bring this theory to the reality of exploitation of the labor that is commonly produced by women of color or women from marginalized communities. This is something that is not new. It's well researched. And so, in order to be able to understand the problem, we needed to be able to break it down. In attempting to do this we realized that we had to confront the reality of it—where we labor, how our bodies are used, how this is not new. And then by drawing from Anzaldúan theory, we can and must engage in an exercise of reimagining: this is one reality, here's what another reality could look like.

It's also relative to soul work and image work as well, because this academic *putería*, like so much of our writing, creative works, and teaching, is derived directly from the body. There's no way that I can implement any of this or carry any of it out without my body, without my mind, without my spirit. It's *all* embodied. How does it relate to the soul and the image? You have one way of understanding yourself as a badass Chingona scholar. But there's also that professional image. There's a public image as well. So, it's not just one reality that we have to be conscious of. It's multiple realities. And then there's the reality that we'd like to reimagine and rewrite for ourselves as well. *And* we have the Coyolxauqui imperative (Anzaldúa 2005). So, it's also shadow work—confronting ugly truths that, maybe, we're not necessarily aware of. And there's this idea of the fragmented self. When we think about it from Anzaldúa's perspective, she says, that the goal in reimagining is not to bring ourselves back together in original form, but to transform into something new. With, of course, elements and components of the former self, but something new, something more improved, and we could argue, more powerful than before.

And then with Anzaldúa's concept of *nos/otras* – a hybrid consciousness—we know we're living in between these realities of being highly sexualized fetishized bodies. We are also living in between this world of white-collar professions, from blue-collar families and maybe living with blue-collar ideals in our day-to-day affairs, and then also the personal and the professional as well. What does it mean to be a professional but to also be a Chicana, and to also be queer? And what does it mean in the personal realm to be Chicana and to be queer? What is in-between?

That's where we're sitting right now.

We've got the feminist politics of bell hooks and Audre Lorde. And one of the primary things that we're arguing is that this teaching, these writings, these works of art that we produce are all very *sexually* charged and not necessarily in a pornographic way. As Audre Lorde explained, that when we teach, learn, and create we do so with the intention of bringing about joy, euphoria, and pleasure—that is erotic (1984). And that's what we're trying to bring back and re-center; bring sexy back, but not in a Justin Timberlake, white man way. Bring the erotic back. Bring the pleasure back, bring the euphoria back—the joy that emerges from the process of transforming straight-up trash experiences into treasures.

But we also must combat the realities of the institution. And that brings us back to Lorde's essay "Uses of the erotic: The erotic as power." We believe that power exists in our histories and within our narratives. And we believe that they have the capacity to make us and others feel pleasure, euphoria, and joy, to teach, to empower, and to heal.

Voicing Academic *Putería* Through Narrative

Olga: The breakdown of our personal stories and the methodology of how we break down our stories is erotic play. It's just fun. We don't mean to just sit here and theorize, but we do after we share our stories, we say things like, you know what's funny? And then it's not actually funny, right? It's painfully funny in the most literal sense. And then we make art out of it through our stories. And one of the things that we do in this place is we make GIFS. And so, these GIFS that you're going to see throughout the presentation are original content. This is our medicine.

It is what makes us laugh at night, when we're texting each other or communicating throughout the day. Smile now, cry later: a token chicana/x, love-hate story. It still makes me laugh. This in and of itself is that third space where we can center our bodies, center our emotions, and find language to talk about this experience. And it is— I wouldn't say anti-academic, but it is pushing back against the norm of what is commonly accepted as academic. This is how our bodies talk and touch through language.

Tess: So, we're talking about academic *putería*, the theories and concepts that we're drawing from and how it's derived from the body. I also want to paint a picture of how this really plays out. And so, one of the things that I was thinking about was: how many folks are unaware or aware of the fact that they're engaging in academic *putería*? Whether you realize it or not, *you are*. It doesn't matter if you're at an HSI or not, or if you are attending a university or a community college, or if you're faculty, staff, or a student, the fact of the matter is that you are.

Once we realized that this thing, *putería* is a thing, and it's very common, it's nothing new, we're just naming it as part of the meaning-making process, we began making memes and GIFs to help us make sense of the things that we didn't have a language for. And so that's where we started, making memes and GIFs. Laughing about it. And what we thought was curious about it is that, while they are memes and GIFs, there's a larger story behind them. Everyone has their own shady academic *putería* story and everyone has an empowering story of being on their academic *putería* grind.

Yet there's also a *pica* associated with referring to ourselves as any variant of the word *puta*, or whore. Hence, using the word *putería* carries negative connotations. It's something that is regarded as a loaded word. So, I also think that we use humor to help us take a little of the edge off it and, on a personal basis, I'm not afraid of the word.

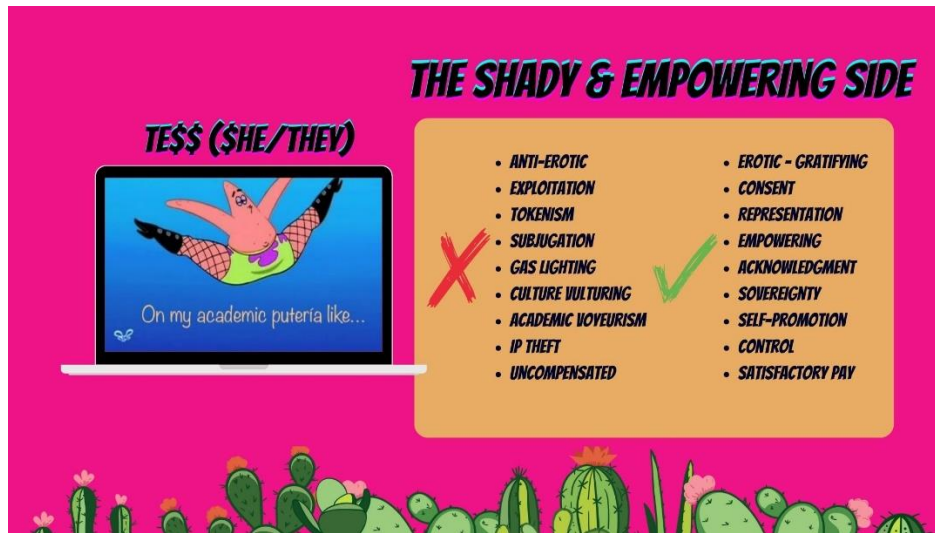


Figure 3. (Pantoja Perez, et al., 2022)

In this graphic, beginning on the left-hand side, we have the shady and the empowering side of academic *putería*. When we're talking about the shady side—it's anti-erotic. There's going to be times where we're out here doing academic labor, trying to produce, and we're going to have a lot of vibe killer moments. That's what it is for me when your vibe is being killed and it sucks the joy out of something that should have been exciting and a source of pride. And we also have the shady side of academic *putería* that involves exploitation. Take for instance student pay, as a work-study, a graduate assistant, as a research assistant, or as a TA. Again, these are not new. These are things that have been already talked about and circulated in the academic community. We've also got tokenism, and that can be tokenism of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, language. Yes. It doesn't feel good to be that person. And it's also tied into bridge work that you do not necessarily consent to, as well as being that one token person representing whatever form of diversity that the institution requires. Tokenism places responsibility onto your shoulders without your consent, contributing to your subjugation. It intersects with institutional practices that keep you hungry, making sure that you keep coming back to the same toxic situations because you depend on it in order to survive. You need the funding. You need the opportunity. You need that line on the CV. You need this exposure. You need to finish your education.

We have a culture of gaslighting that goes on and that works hand in hand with gatekeeping. We have culture vulture-ing in the academy. And we also have academic voyeurism, where folks who lack a particular *conocimiento* and/or embodied experience, and work outside of your field of expertise, will sit and watch *how* you do and *what* you do, so that they can later peck away at the controversial shell and take off with whatever sexiness they can later profit from. Lurking. And it falls in line with exploitation, and intellectual property theft as well. But I need you to understand, if you don't already know, that this can happen within your circles and within the broader institution itself. So be aware of that.

Uncompensated labor is also nothing new. It is widely discussed in academic circles—the invisible labor that goes unappreciated, especially when you're trying to make those marks for your reviews. It's not something that the institution values and rewards, as evidenced by the fact that there's no money associated with that labor. It's expected because you're the token.

In contrast to all of the above, academic *putería* is erotic, it's gratifying. Like, man... I came out and did the damn thing! And this has got representation. It's very raw, straight from the mind, body, and spirit. I don't feel like, okay, my brain did this, but the rest of me just was on vacation because it was too stressful for any other part of me to come to the table for this work. It's consensual. Your work is acknowledged. And instead of culture vultures, you have sovereignty. You have agency. You have a say so over your own work and over your body, over your time and self-promotion, as opposed to academic voyeurism or being pimped out by the institution. You're able to promote yourself and feel that it is safe to hype yourself.

Notions of WAP, DAP, and Flop Academic *Putería* Experiences

Olga: Although there's a hyper representation of Latinx and Chicano/a/xs folks at HSIs, there's still repressiveness. I'm talking about sexuality, and there's still this uneasiness regarding feminism, or politics, or just emotions in general. You're supposed to be seen as tough in the academy. When you express that something feels exploitative or a little too much, you get gas lit. That has been my entire experience up until now.

Being pushed out of a violent, heteronormative program because that was very *dry* pushed me through to what Anzaldúa termed a Coatlicue state. Moving out of that state through reflection gave rise to the theories we are talking about today: “WAP” represented in our memes as a dysphemism to a wet ass pussy-type of educational experience. Cardi B raps about the WAP. And you don't have that in the academy, not when you're a scholar like me unless you're deciding to be interdisciplinary. But that should be a choice.

This is from the body. I cannot tell you more about how real this experience is for me. I love that we can look and do this reflection and look at the *pica* and talk about these hard topics and dialogues. And in this place of academic isolation, I've had to do a lot of bridge work and take risks, and branch out and meet people and other scholars, different scholars. Queer collaborations, do not necessarily have to have a queer embodied Chicana feminist politic, but must be queer in their approach towards consciousness-raising with inclusivity and a queer sense of home.

And so, our theory and method is also learning from our differences. Teaching from the margins has taught me how to facilitate difficult conversations or work through these tensions. I teach the intro classes, the classes that our star professors don't want, such as intro to women's studies, and intro to LGBTQ studies courses. I love it. It's healing. I love to be part of that process of giving students language that will empower them to help them also engage in their own journey to self-discovery. The Texas K-12 system involves a very dry, colorblind, binary curriculum. And so, when many students come into my class, they've never had Mexican American studies, they never had LGBTQ studies, they've never even had access to comprehensive sex ed.

Radical Accountability and Vulnerability

Olga: In my classes we talk about the body, and all these things are relational and help us make better bonds not only inside the classroom, but with each other. Similar to having those difficult conversations at home with family and friends, when you have that intimacy and language, you can also have accountability. That's my love language. If I must lovingly snatch your wig, it's out of love. It's not out of violence. It's like, I don't want you to go out to the streets and have someone else check you. That would be violent.

Tess: Better me than someone else.

Olga: And I expect the same. We don't need to respond by lashing out. But when it's my turn and there's something that I'm not aware of or I'm not conscious of, bring me to consciousness.

Tess: Part of critical awareness is being open and vulnerable with each other, but also holding each other accountable and getting that wig occasionally snatched. When it needs to be snatched, it needs to happen. Because, again, it's better that it happens, and it comes from me with love than someone from down the street. But when we're problematic, we need to be called out on being problematic. It's better for the entire community that we self-police. I still want to be happy to be here. Just because we are in a place of privilege or just because we elected to come into these programs and were accepted based on *merit*, it doesn't mean that we should expect to be treated and received negatively. It doesn't mean that this is how it always has to be. What it does mean is that we can push back in some cases, in some spaces, in some instances, and demand more equity. And not like a little pat on the head. Equity in cash money, or at least something to put on my CV! No more unpaid labor!

Olga: I want to believe that you *could* get wet about being made to feel like teaching and learning are a big deal. The attitude is that we shouldn't get all worked up and/or wet about it. But we should—we should care! And we should be able to do research and create scholarly work in collaboration with each other and love it! We can love on it, because everything that I'm going to do here is out of love.

Tess: It's going to be *fire*!

Olga: It's going to bring me joy. But it's also going to bring whomever reads and gets the intimacy of my language to feel that love and *cariño*. And so that is my utopic envisioning, or my romance of the academy, and the seduction that I could have all this and the WAP chequesote.

Discussion

We conclude this portion of our analysis by critically reflecting on our own role in failed collaborations such as the one that we embarked on at the 2022

NACCS virtual conference. As developers of academic *putería* as a research topic, the authors processed the outcome of their collaboration in similar and distinct ways. Much to our shock, our third collaborator interpreted their role in presenting alongside two queer, Chicana/x dissertating scholars as a positive experience. In contrast, Olga's journal entry written shortly after the conference reflected a significantly different interpretation of their experience.

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...From this experience I have learned that when people tell you who they are BELIEVE them! She [the third collaborator] had one assignment, which was to do one presentation slide and follow the flow of the presentation but instead she tried to deviate our flow with dry-ass academic language. The assignment was to ground their *putería* experience in personal narrative, not deflect with scholarship. This is absolutely another day of toxic and disempowering *putería*. The bright side to all this is that my academic *comadre* and I had a lot of fun engaging in the erotic play and fleshing this shit out. You can just sense all the love that we have for the work that we do together.

Tess, on the other hand, took a more visual approach towards processing their feelings by logging into her Pinterest account to create a new pinboard titled, *Academic Tóxicas* and filled it with carefully curated images of clowns, trash bags, and other foolish things that closely aligned with the ridiculousness that they have encountered and overheard in academic spaces.



Figure 4. (Pantoja Perez, 2022)

Though the authors funneled their rage into different creative mediums, we both came to terms with our susceptibility to the academic seduction of belonging. In acknowledging our vulnerabilities, we implicate ourselves as accomplices in our own oppression. We sought out in others what we felt that we lacked in experience, credibility, and influence. Only after admitting to the problem, were we able to view ourselves as powerful and capable of standing on our own two feet as creators whose individual and collaborative work holds credence. As such, we move away from the DAP insecurities that lend themselves to seduction towards consensual and pleasurable WAP connections with future collaborators.

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