

**"Let Knowledge Serve the City"
*Restrictions Apply**

Martín Alberto Gonzalez



Photo courtesy of Author

I am currently a professor at a university whose motto is “Let Knowledge Serve the City.” In fact, the university library has a fund specifically designated to pay for article processing publication charges for professors who want to publish open access scholarship (meaning available to readers at no cost). Ironically, my recent request for financial support to make my counterstory published as an open access article in a top-tier journal was denied because the university already pays a subscription fee to the journal that accepted my work. “It’s like double dipping,” a university librarian explained to me, unsolicitedly. To put it simply, we, as university affiliated personnel, get access to such journals through the university library database. But not everyone does. In other words, the *city* doesn’t. My family and friends do not have access. The Youth of Color and Communities of Color who I write my stories for do not have access. The same People of Color who have historically and systematically been excluded from higher education do not have access. This rejection reminded me of one my biggest critiques of academia—the *inaccessibility* of scholarly work. Such rejection was unsurprising because higher education is designed to not give access to knowledge to communities like my own.

I pride myself in producing research that is *accessible* to my city Oxnard, California—a predominantly low-income city filled with beautiful Brown people—and communities alike. What I mean by *accessible* is that my research, for the most part, is relatively easy to read, understand, comprehend, engage with, and more importantly, obtain. I do this by writing stories as research. Storytelling is my research method. For example, I interview Latinx students about their educational experiences dealing with racism, white supremacy, and other systems of oppression, and then I write stories using their responses. I write the stories like how I would speak to my family and friends I grew up with. So, best believe they are filled with jokes, music lyrics, food references, Spanish, y mucho mas. To keep it real, my stories be hittin’.

The reason why I write stories as research is because as a first-generation Xicano university student, I was required to read traditionally written research articles in my classes. These research articles were dense and inaccessible to me. I was unable to understand them and relate to them. Reading them was discouraging, intimidating, and made me feel as if I don’t know anything. Traditionally written research articles are oftentimes filled with academic jargon that is *inaccessible* to my community, and other Communities of Color who have been historically excluded from higher education. To be honest, no vale la pena to spend an excessive amount of time to write a very lengthy paper that would not be read by my family and community, not necessarily because they cannot read, but because traditionally written research articles are structured and written in a way that is uninviting to those who are not in academia. Fortunately, when I was a doctoral student, I came across and became a student of

critical race theory (CRT) counter-storytelling.¹ So, in the tradition of CRT counter-storytelling, I write my research findings through stories, literally.

When I decided to dedicate myself to the difficult and readily contested task of doing stories as research, I made a promise to myself to try my best to also make my stories easy to obtain physically. I purposefully self-published a book in English and Spanish with stories of social (in)justices to show up to local parks and community events to give away FREE copies of my books to kids and community members without any publisher telling me I can't do that. Every time kids ask me how many books I have sold, I tell them I am prouder of how many books I have given away. When a couple teachers in Oxnard deemed my young adult book as "not school-aged appropriate" because of its emphasis on social justice, I wrote and published a bilingual children's book that talks about the importance of retaining our cultura at a young age. I literally spent over 20 hours in a



Oxnard kid receiving a free signed copy of my children's book during a community book giveaway event in 2020. Photo courtesy of Author.

studio with friends who played voice actors to record my audiobook and uploaded it on YouTube, so that folks can listen to it for FREE. In numerous instances, I have commissioned local Oxnard artists to create illustrations out of my stories of social justice and printed those illustrations as posters and coloring books to give out to the community for FREE to ensure my community has visual representations of my stories. All this to say, I genuinely try my best to make sure scholarship is *accessible*, across multiple aspects. For me, writing stories is not enough. I must tell stories in different formats to reach broader audiences.

I have recently encountered the unfortunate truth my mentors warned me about when I was a doctoral student. The process of publishing stories as research in academic journals is extremely difficult and frustrating. As an early career faculty member, I have received feedback from “peers” via the peer-review publication process questioning the validity and credibility of my stories as research. Feedback such as, “it’s imperative that the author insert some academic jargon,” “I think for our audience, a traditional [format] is the more appropriate route,” or “I am not sure if the author is utilizing a writing genre that the journal recognizes or accepts” are commonplace critiques about my work. I have learned to respond and address such remarks during my revisions. Despite these denigrating comments, I have stayed true to myself and have been persistent and intentional about where I submit my stories for publication. Such an approach to publishing has been worthwhile and my work has been appreciated and published by numerous academic peer-reviewed journals (*Association of Mexican American Educators*, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, *Writers: Craft & Context*, and *Journal of Latinos and Education*).

Obviously, this piece encourages broader conversations about the exclusion of knowledge via expensive, unnecessary journal subscriptions and uninviting styles of writing. I wrote this piece to challenge academic scholars to strive for *accessibility* in their scholarly work. What are the limitations of writing solely to an academic audience? For researchers who are researching historically marginalized and excluded People, Students, and Communities of Color, what does it mean to publish scholarship that is *inaccessible* to those whom you are writing about? How can “Knowledge Serve the City,” if the city literally doesn’t have access to the knowledge available in the university library database? I hope this piece is a call to action for universities to encourage, support, reward, and institutionalize resources for scholars who are committed to doing publicly engaged scholarship and want their work to be obtainable by and *accessible* for non-academic communities.



Oxnard youth holding their signed copies of my book they received for free during a book fair in 2019. Photo courtesy of Author.

Accessibility to knowledge can change lives, literally. It did for me. I write and tell stories because I am hopeful that my stories can change the lives of others, too, especially la gente de Oxnard. Once I gained the knowledge of how systems of oppression like white supremacy, colorism, toxic masculinity, anti-Blackness, homophobia, ableism, and capitalism negatively impact my daily life, I challenged myself to become a better person and to disrupt those ideologies and practices. That was only possible through the CRT counterstories I read that were assigned to me as research articles in courses I took with Faculty of Color who are committed to challenging the idea that only some styles of writing "count" as research. Don't ever get it twisted: Our experiences produce knowledge, and our stories are research.

Notes

1. For more information about critical race theory (CRT) counter-storytelling, see Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso, "Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research" *Qualitative Inquiry* 8 No. 1 (2002): 23–44.

