

## Article

# Conchas, Coloring Books, and Oxnard: Using Critical Race Counterstorytelling as a Framework to Create a Social Justice Coloring Book

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**Abstract:** I am from Oxnard, California, a predominantly Latinx city that is stereotyped as “too hood”, “too ghetto”, or “crime-infested” because of its low-income Brown people. Such negative narratives are so commonplace that they become believable, but we can challenge these oppressive narratives using critical race counterstorytelling. There are multiple ways to tell a story, and I pride myself in producing counterstories that are accessible and enjoyable to mi gente. So, to encourage stay-at-home practices and empower my own community during the COVID-19 pandemic, I created a social justice coloring book with the help of artistic friends and local Oxnard Latinx artists. In collaboration with Chingon Bakery, a local panaderia in Oxnard, we delivered over 500 FREE conchas and coloring books to the Oxnard community during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this creative piece, I explain why counterstorytelling, as a framework, served as the foundation for this coloring book and I include several examples of the coloring pages. Additionally, I discuss how and why this coloring book has proven to be a tool for cultural empowerment in my community. Ultimately, I argue that artistic representations of counterstories are necessary in the struggle to challenge and dismantle systems of oppression.

**Keywords:** counterstory; critical race theory; critical race methodology; ethnic studies; social justice coloring book; cultural empowerment; political art; Chicana/o/x studies



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## 1. Why Storytelling?

I am from Oxnard, California, a predominantly Latinx city that is readily stereotyped and often deemed “too hood”, “too ghetto”, or “crime infested” because of its low-income Brown people. Such narratives are so commonplace that they become believable, and unfortunately, the same Latinx people who are negatively impacted by such stories internalize them and spew these oppressive stories to others. For a long time, I believed and internalized these negative portrayals of my own comunidad y gente, and I began to distance myself from my cultura because I was ashamed. Fortunately, my perspective about mi gente, comunidad, y cultura changed drastically, and for the better, when I was introduced to critical race counterstorytelling, which is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are seldom told (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). These counterstories directly expose, critically analyze, and challenge the majoritarian stories of racial privilege and aim to challenge dominant, oppressive stories in order to further the struggle for racial reform (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, p. 32). Counterstorytelling provided me with the framework to tell my side of the story without allowing for white supremacy to blame mi gente for our circumstances and life outcomes, which were created by systems of oppression, like anti-Blackness, ableism, xenophobia, patriarchy, capitalism, racism, classism, and so on.

Through stories, I have made it my mission to disseminate research and create community-informed projects that anyone and everyone can engage with, regardless of their educational background, schooling, or training. Specifically, 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. This is a research method that has allowed me to communicate with my community and target audience in ways that I always intended.

The reason why I write stories as research is because, as a first-generation Xicano university student, reading traditionally written research articles was discouraging, intimidating, and made me feel like I did not know anything. Traditionally written research articles are oftentimes filled with academic jargon that is inaccessible to my community and other Communities of Color that 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) counterstorytelling. So, in the tradition of CRT counterstorytelling, I write my research findings through stories, literally.

Counterstories make knowledge accessible. I tell counterstories because I want my community to be able to engage with my scholarly work and to urge people to challenge themselves intellectually and philosophically, especially as it pertains to what they have been told about how society operates. Accessibility to knowledge can change lives, literally. It did for me. I tell counterstories 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 capitalism, white supremacy, colorism, toxic masculinity, anti-Blackness, homophobia, and ableism, negatively impact my daily life, I challenged myself to become a better person and to disrupt those problematic ideologies and practices. Our counterstories can serve as valuable lessons for our communities on how to navigate and make sense of such an oppressive society, while also reminding us that we should always be open to challenge our own problematic worldviews.

## 2. Majoritarian Stories/Master Narratives/Stock Stories

There are so many damaging, misleading stories that exist about Communities of Color, which ultimately demonize us and make us out to be criminal and ill-intended. These stories are what scholars call majoritarian stories, master narratives, or stock stories. Majoritarian stories distort and silence the experiences of People of Color and rely heavily on stereotypes that covertly and overtly link People of Color, Women of Color, and poverty with “bad”, while emphasizing that white, middle- to upper-class people embody all that is “good” (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, p. 29). These oppressive stories are not only pervasive and persuasive, but they are also taken as common knowledge and the only truth. Undeniably, these majoritarian stories privilege people with dominant ideologies like being a man in a sexist society; being white in a racist, white supremacist society; being abled bodied in an ableist society; and so on. These majoritarian stories are everywhere, and if you are not critical, you begin to believe them, and much worse, spew them on to others. It is very important to note that People of Color and other marginalized individuals believe, internalize, and even tell majoritarian stories (Irizarry and Raible 2014; Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Majoritarian stories are rarely questioned or challenged because people do not see them as stories but as “natural” parts of everyday life (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, p. 28). Some majoritarian stories are more obvious and easily identifiable, like “poor Brown and Black people are lazy”, while other majoritarian stories are more subtle and difficult to dissect, like “hard work pays off”, which is grounded in the myth of meritocracy. In sum, there are always two sides to each story, and the uncritical, oppressive side is the foundation for the majoritarian story.

### 3. Counterstories/Counterstorytelling

For every majoritarian story that perpetuates false notions about marginalized people and communities, there is always a counterstory. If I had to define counterstory, I would say that a counterstory is the other side of the story, but with a critical lens. A counterstory sheds light on and directly challenges dominant and often told majoritarian stories that are grounded in stereotypes and perpetuate systems of oppression, like capitalism, sexism, white supremacy, ableism, racism, anti-Blackness, and so on. A counterstory critically analyzes the systems that prevent individuals from succeeding or being themselves. Specifically, storytelling, as a research method, is very important because it disrupts harshly misleading, oppressive stories, narratives, conventions, and understandings of People of Color that were established by empowered groups long ago (Delgado 1993). Educational scholars Drs. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) focus carefully on the usefulness of counterstorytelling in debunking myths about Communities of Color, which they define as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are seldom told (p. 32). They argue that counterstorytelling exposes, analyzes, and challenges the majoritarian stories of racial privilege with the potential to further the struggle for racial reform. Counterstories are created using various sources of data like books, peer-reviewed research articles, reports, personal experiences, artifacts, observations, and so on that have been compiled, examined, and analyzed.

What I appreciate the most about counterstorytelling is that it allows me to provide my own interpretation and evidence of an instance or misconception. For example, through a story, I can tell you about all of the hard-working poor Brown people who are not rewarded for their hard work because of their different identities, like citizenship status, skin color, gender, or even accent, ultimately debunking majoritarian stories like “poor people are lazy” and “hard work pays off”. Counterstorytelling allows me to provide a simplified explanation for how systems of oppression impact the lives of marginalized people and community. It also allows me to challenge what it means to produce knowledge and what research looks like and gives me a tool to produce research that engages both academic and non-academic audiences. Counterstorytelling has proven to be powerful and useful research method for me and it is a shame that we must continue to justify the methodological choice of telling our stories (Martinez 2020). It is important for me to engage audiences beyond the “ivory tower” because I believe that access to knowledge and information can be transformational, and everyone, especially those who have been historically and intentionally excluded from academic spaces, should have an opportunity to engage with information and stories that could potentially liberate them.

### 4. Conchas y Coloring Books

Over five years ago, I intentionally wrote an accessible, teen/young adult book titled, *21 Miles of Scenic Beauty... and then Oxnard: Counterstories and Testimonies* (2017), which is about social justice. Grounded in the tradition of critical race counterstorytelling, I put together a collection of relatable short stories informed by research and personal experiences that bring to light various injustices in my community, such as institutionalized racism, inequitable schooling practices, gentrification, and segregation. So, rather than adhering to the stereotypical reputation of my community being ‘bad’ because of its Brown people, I suggest that it is filled with beautiful Brown people who must overcome numerous systemic barriers. To inform my community about these injustices, I present my book frequently in my community in and out of P-20 school settings and I have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from youth, college students, and community members. Although my written short stories are very accessible because they are extremely relatable, easy to read, filled with jokes, and simplify complex concepts like environmental racism or the prison-industrial complex, I remembered that stories, like counterstories, come in all shapes and forms—films, poetry, theater, dance, drawings, books, oral stories, and more. There are multiple ways to tell a story, and I pride myself in conceptualizing and producing counterstories that are accessible and enjoyable to mi gente.

Counterstorytelling is used as a form scholarly discourse that not only relies on writing. In the past, I have been able to use the counterstory as a framework to inform and tell counterstories in various formats and styles. There are so many ways to tell a counterstory. It can be oral, as the audiobook I produced and recorded. It can be visual. I have commissioned local Oxnard artists and close friends to create illustrations of my counterstories so that I can put them on posters, hats, buttons, stickers, shirts, coloring books, and other creative mediums. Counterstories are not just limited to academic settings but are appreciated by non-academic audiences. Artist-professor Luis Genaro Garcia (2015) inspires us to use art as counterstories because through artistic counterstories we can challenge misconceptions grounded in stereotypes and lies about Communities of Color while also recognizing the socio-political reality of our experiences navigating an oppressive society.

To encourage stay-at-home practices and empower my own community during the COVID-19 pandemic, I partnered with ¡Viva Oxnard! (@VivaOxnard), a social media community-based project dedicated to challenging deficit narratives told about Oxnard, to create a social justice coloring book with the help of artistic friends and local Oxnard Latinx artists (see Figure 1). The following people contributed to this project in different, yet equally important capacities: Isaac Bizarro, Ilien “La Buffy” Tolteca, Griselda de los Reyes, Natalie Alejandra Delgado, Sophia Kardaras Wegman, Kim Guerra, and Leo Martinez. In collaboration with Chingon Bakery, a local panaderia in Oxnard, we gave out over 500 FREE conchas and coloring books to the Oxnard community during the height of the pandemic (see Figures 2 and 3).

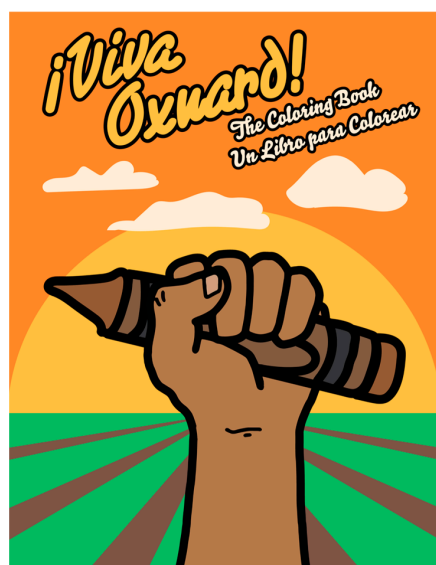


Figure 1. Front cover of the ¡Viva Oxnard! The coloring book | Un Libro para colorear.



Figure 2. Chingon Bakery flyer, ¡Viva Oxnard! coloring book, and concha.





**Figure 3.** Packaged conchas and coloring books, ready to be delivered.

The conchas and coloring books were either delivered by Hugo “Juice” Alaniz (owner of Chingon Bakery) in the “Concha Mobile” (see Figure 4) early in the morning around 4 am, delivered personally by Jessica Ramirez and me in the middle of the day in Jessica’s 2001 Honda Civic, dropped off at childcare centers and affordable housing units for farmworkers, or they were given out at various food distribution “pop ups” around the city of Oxnard.



**Figure 4.** Instagram post of the Chingon Bakery’s “Concha Mobile” loaded ready to deliver conchas and coloring books.

Throughout the delivery of conchas and coloring books, we received all kinds of love from the Oxnard community. Conchas, and pan dulce in general, are such an integral part of our Mexican cultura. In addition, these beloved Mexican breads were coupled with a social justice coloring book that reminded the community of the beauty of our gente, and our struggle.

### 5. Coloring Pages as Counterstories

The first *Viva Oxnard!* social justice coloring book had a total of 36 pages (6 of which were activity sheets). Below, I will include several examples of the coloring pages, and discuss how and why this coloring book has proven to be a tool for cultural empowerment in my community. Additionally, I will provide a brief explanation of the majoritarian story that inspired the design and provide a brief explanation of the counterstory. To be honest, there is no logic or formula as to which designs I chose to include as samples. I

simply included four coloring pages without any preference, but I made sure to include the “Brown is Beautiful” coloring page because it is one of the most popular designs.

Figure 5 Majoritarian Story Explanation: Gil Scott-Heron (1971) poetically recited, “The revolution will not be televised”, to allude to how mainstream media will not cover social injustices honestly and it will certainly not show you the truth about what is really going on in the world. Evidently, mainstream media and news outlets misrepresent and misinterpret the lived realities of historically marginalized and disenfranchised Communities of Color. Along these lines, more times than not, news outlets will take criminal activity and blow it out of proportion, ultimately making it seem like crime is always at an all-time high in Communities of Color when, in reality, it exists, but not in the overabundance reported (Moore et al. 2024). Mainstream media provides its audience one-sided narratives that rarely allow for People of Color to be protagonists or live humanely with dignity. For Oxnard, the story is no different. Oxnard has a bad reputation of being filled with gang-related crime, and some outsiders (and Oxnard residents) buy into everything they see in the media and take it as the only truth about my beautiful city filled beautiful Brown people.



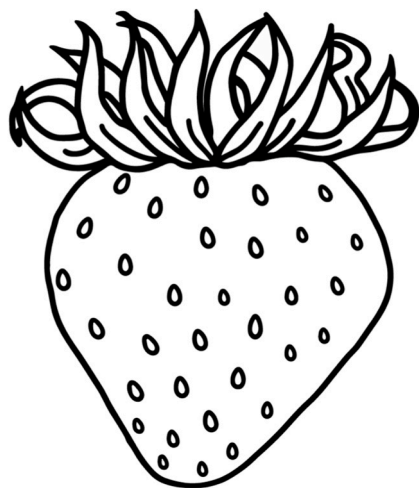
Figure 5. Boxnard challenging mainstream media.

Figure 5 Counterstory Explanation: It is important that we always consume what we see in the media through a critical perspective, and that we do not allow for the negativity to swallow us whole. As Malcolm X famously said, “If you’re not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing” (Al Jazeera News 2022). The media has the power to convert you into a believer of its lies, especially if those lies are told by people who look like you. Not all representation is good representation, and we can intentionally seek media that empowers us and challenges the stereotypes and negative assumptions people have of us. Since boxing is well known in Oxnard, aka “Boxnard”, I have written about how boxing can teach us to fight back negativity we see in the media with positivity (Gonzalez 2017, 2024). Specifically, I used counterpunches in boxing as a metaphor for counterstories in life. Figuratively speaking, when we hear negative stories about us, we can punch back. We can disrupt this often-told negative narrative about Oxnard through counterstories. Similar to counterpunches in boxing, counterstories serve as way to debunk, annihilate, or “knock

out” misrepresentations of Communities of Color. Hence, the boxing glove punching and breaking the TV that says, “Oxnard Bad News”.

Figure 6 Majoritarian Story Explanation: White supremacy teaches us that being Brown is bad. That having brown skin is a sin. That listening to corridos is pathetic. That we should be embarrassed to wear huaraches. That dressing like a “chola/o/x” is troublesome. That the name María should be Mary, Jaime should be Jimmy, Eduardo should be Eddie, and Arturo should be Art. That we must never speak Spanglish and we must attend English-only schools to fix our “broken” English. That we should be ashamed to speak Spanish in public while speaking to our mamás. That we should be humiliated that our parents cannot make our back-to-school nights because they are at work or want rest because they are tired from work. That the “Edgar” haircut must be banned from schools. White supremacy has such a powerful influence on us that it does not allow us to see the beauty in our lived realities, cultura, and our darker skin. White supremacy hates us, because it ain’t us.

# BROWN IS



# BEAUTIFUL

Figure 6. Brown is Beautiful with Oxnard fresa.

Figure 6 Counterstory Explanation: Brown is beautiful. Some Brown people have never heard this phrase in their lives, much less seen it in a coloring book. This coloring page serves a reminder for mi gente to be unapologetically Brown. To exist as Brown as they want to be con todo y acento. To not allow for white supremacy to dictate how we should live our lives and or have a say in any of our standards. Not beauty. Not language. No dress codes. Not musical taste. Nothing. Not today, white supremacy! Once you realize that Brown is beautiful, then your worldview as a Brown person will change drastically, for the better. If you truly believe that Brown is beautiful, then there is nothing anyone can tell you that will bring you down about your cultura, your beautiful brown skin, who you are, and where you come from. Brown is beautiful is a calling card to be prideful of more than your skin color, but also the many beautiful things about your cultura and histories. Brown is beautiful is synonymous with being a sinvergüenza, meaning you have no shame in your game. You do not care about what others have to say about you, your cultura, your comunidad, or your barrio because you know your worth. Stay true to yourself, and do not change yourself for others, especially for those who have internalized and spew white supremacist views about your Brownness. The fresa, which reads “Oxnard” in the stem, is

important because Oxnard is known for its strawberries. So, the fresa is symbolic of all the hard-working gente in Oxnard. In and out of the fields, our gente are hard-working and we need to be treated with dignity and respect.

Figure 7 Majoritarian Story Explanation: Oxnard is one of very few, if not the only, city I can think of in California that is a beach town yet still predominantly Brown. It is made up of over 70% Latinxs, mostly Mexican. What people fail to admit or recognize is that Oxnard is the city next to Malibu. We share the same ocean. The Pacific Coast Highway (aka the PCH) runs through both cities. As you enter Malibu, you will come across a sign that states, “Malibu. . .21 Miles of Scenic Beauty”. Rumor has it that after the “21 Miles”, the beauty “ends” because you enter “ghetto” Oxnard. In fact, there is a map of stereotypes of southern California that deems Oxnard as the city where “tourists who drove too far on PCH and weren’t expecting a scary neighborhood”. That is the majoritarian narrative of Oxnard, that we are scary people because we are Brown. That just because a few of us get influenced by the numerous social and economic forces growing up in poverty and begin to gang bang, then we are all cholas/os/xs and up to no good. This explains why very few tourists and visitors dare to continue northbound past Malibu into south Oxnard. This coloring page resembles the “21 Miles of Scenic Beauty” sign yet adds an important detail that is never talked about in a positive light, which is the 15 miles of beautiful Brown people that live in Oxnard.

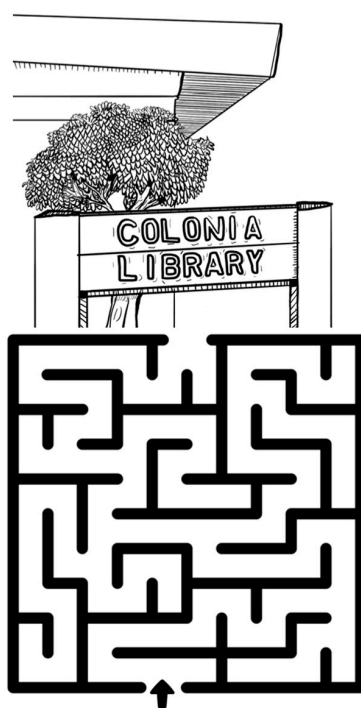


Figure 7. Oxnard: 15 Miles of Beautiful Brown People.

Figure 7 Counterstory Explanation: Since the early 2000s, but really for as long as I can remember, the Oxnard Police Department, fueled by City of Oxnard council members, supported and implemented gang injunctions, which were designed to reduce gang-related crime and violence by restricting certain behaviors and movements of people suspected of being members of the city’s two largest street gangs: the Colonia Chiques and Southside Chiques. Basically, we were being hyper-policed and hyper-criminalized. Until recently, in 2021, these gang injunctions were dissolved because many courts across the state ruled them as unconstitutional because they wrongfully labeled Brown people as gang members and deprived them of their civil liberties without due process (Diskin 2021). A few years ago, as I was conducting research on how the gang injunctions negatively impacted myself and my family, I came across the gang injunction map of Oxnard. There is a high-risk, red-shaded area in this map to indicate where Oxnard is most dangerous, and more importantly, the area where police could pull you over because of their subjective suspicion of you as a Brown person. That shaded area is where most Brown people live. It is where I grew up. So, I measured that shaded area. Technically speaking, I calculated about 15 square miles. Rather than criminalizing and vilifying mi gente and seeing them as “dangerous”, I try to empower them. So that they can see value in themselves. So that they know that I see them as worthy. As capable. As human. As beautiful. Oxnard is 15 miles of beautiful Brown people who are readily criminalized, often misunderstood, and rarely appreciated.



Figure 8 Majoritarian Story Explanation: During the height of COVID-19 and the 2020 Black Lives Matter uprisings, many people called for their cities to divest from and defund police departments rather than cut financial support to social services, maintenance services, mental health services, housing services, and so on. Yet, during this same time and as a way to address the city's debt, City of Oxnard council members and the city manager thought it was a good idea to propose cutting funding for La Colonia Library, a small public library branch located in La Colonia, a historically divested, intentionally segregated, and impoverished part of Oxnard. Although never said aloud explicitly for fear of being called racist, the logic to shut down a library in one of the most marginalized parts of Oxnard was very clear: poor Brown people are illiterate, and they do not like to read. Poor People of Color do not need libraries because they will not take advantage of such a valuable resource. This is an exemplar of the culture of poverty theory, which is a deficit-oriented theory that argues People of Color are poor because their culture does not value behaviors and practices such as reading that will enrich their culture and ultimately help them out of poverty (Yosso 2005). This cultural racist ideology "blames the victim" by arguing that the standing of People of Color is the product of their lack of effort, loose family organization, and inappropriate values (Bonilla-Silva and Dietrich 2011, p. 193).



**Find your way to La Colonia Library.**  
***Encuentra tu camino a la Biblioteca La Colonia.***

Figure 8. La Colonia Library maze.

Figure 8 Counterstory Explanation: Contrary to popular belief, Brown kids in Oxnard like to read. It may seem as if they do not like to read because books that represent them, and that they would be able to relate to and engage with, are seldom assigned to them in their classes or are not readily available for them to read. Even then, there are Chicana kids who are nerds, or what Oxnard-raised professor Dr. Cristina Herrera (2020) calls "ChicaNerds", and love to read any kind of books. Unfortunately, a white supremacist society does not allow folks to imagine poor Brown kids reading for fun. I am invited to K-12 Oxnard schools frequently to talk about my books that address cultural empowerment and social justice in Oxnard through counterstorytelling, and very regularly, there are a few students who are labeled "troubled/traviesos/as/xs" who approach me after my talks and say different variations of these lines, "I don't like to read, but I want to read your books". That is the part that is missing from most conversations about Brown kids who are

labeled as not liking to read, which is that anyone can like reading, if it is the right book. It happened to me. I came across Oxnard writer Michele Serros' (1998) book, *Chicana Falsa and Other Stories of Death, Identity, and Oxnard*, and it inspired me to be an author. When a library is shut down in a part of the city where it seems as if kids do not like to read, then the possibility of finding that right book also gets shut down. Therefore, this activity coloring page encourages Brown kids to find their way to the library in hopes that they will find that 'right' book for them. Those Brown kids who were able to find the 'right' book can grow up and write the 'right' book for the next generation of Brown kids. Just like Michele Serros did for me.

## 6. The Unquantifiable Impact of a Counterstory Coloring Book

When I visit K-12 schools in Oxnard, and other schools across the nation, I always ask the students, "When was the last time you had a social justice coloring book?" and most of them look at me, speechless and confused, as if they have never heard the words "social justice" and "coloring book" in the same sentence. Only a handful of times has anyone raised their hand to admit that they had a social justice coloring book. Culturally empowering representation matters, especially in coloring books. Visual, artistic representations of counterstories are necessary in the struggle to challenge and dismantle systems of oppression. Coloring pages that are grounded in counterstorytelling make way for us to have conversations about important social issues through a more palatable avenue, that is, through coloring. This social justice coloring book has allowed me to share my message of cultural empowerment with audiences across all ages, especially kids.

In thinking about the majoritarian story that tells us Brown people make Oxnard a bad place, I often wonder, "What would it have meant for me to have this social justice, culturally empowering coloring book as a poor Brown kid growing up in Oxnard?" The impact that this coloring book has made is unquantifiable. There is no way I will ever be able to measure the exact impact this coloring book has had on la gente de Oxnard. While there is no guarantee, I am confident that this coloring book would have changed my outlook on life and would have certainly made me proud of mi comunidad. The reason why I am so confident in saying that is because of how mi comunidad has responded to this coloring book. I have received so much positive feedback from kids, parents, community members, educators/teachers, and I would like to share a few of the most memorable responses.

When this coloring book first came out, an after-school art director for K-8 schools in Oxnard that serves mostly Brown kids reached out to me for digital coloring book pages and "Brown is Beautiful" buttons, which were given to the art instructors who then put them on their work lanyards. Weeks later, the art director told me that she had never seen so many kids use brown as the skin tones for the characters in their drawings or to color in general. She told me that, normally, they would use any color other than brown, but since introducing kids to the "Brown is Beautiful" slogan via the coloring pages and buttons, kids were proudly utilizing brown crayons, markers, and watercolors. I recall doing the same thing as a kid; I remember I used peach instead of brown. Maybe I would have been more likely to use brown instead of peach if someone explicitly told me that Brown is beautiful. Along these lines, there was a mother who tagged me and later sent me a personal message and a picture of her daughter on Instagram, thanking me for the coloring book. Her daughter was holding a brown crayon with her fist clutched next to the coloring book, mimicking the front cover. The mother told me that when they received the coloring book, her daughter ran to get her crayons, came back with the brown crayon, and said, "Mommy look! We are the same color!" to which she responded, "Yes you are baby girl!!!" and then added, "#representationmatters". Culturally empowering representation matters, and it makes a huge difference in how we perceive ourselves. Our journey in disrupting white supremacist views of ourselves must start earlier than later, so we do not grow up hating our skin, cultura, and barrios.

It is never too early for Brown kids to see empowering messages about themselves, especially while they color and experiment with color hues. When my first book was published, there was a white teacher in Oxnard who questioned whether my book was

school-aged appropriate. I do not know the exact reasoning behind her claim, but I assumed it was because my book talked too much about social justice and cultural empowerment. The policing of a culturally empowering book in Oxnard schools reminded me of a conversation I often have with my students and teachers/educators during workshops, which is guided by the following question: Are kids ever too young to talk about systems of oppression like white supremacy, patriarchy, sexism, racism, anti-Blackness, homophobia, classism, transphobia, ableism, and so on? My answer is simple. If kids are not too young to bully each other because of their differences in skin colors, hair texture, clothes, shoes, accents, etc., then kids are not too young to learn about what is the root of this bullying, which is a manifestation of systems of oppression. Abolitionist leader and author Frederick Douglass famously said, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken [adults]" (Advancement Project 2020), and with this social justice coloring book grounded in counterstorytelling, I aim to build strong, culturally empowered Brown kids.

This coloring book also reminds us that our journeys to disrupt systems of oppression do not only begin when we are young. It is never too late to reflect critically on your identities and past experiences and appreciate the many aspects of yourself, your cultura, and your community that you have been made to feel ashamed of. For example, local Oxnard resident, Yecenia Marròn, a Latina mother who received coloring books and conchas for her kids, was beyond excited for her children to have a coloring book that highlighted important aspects of her upbringing in Oxnard. She recorded a video blog of the coloring book to explain how these coloring pages related to her own experiences (for the full review, see Viva Oxnard 2020). In this video, she skims through the coloring book while reminiscing on past and current memories of Oxnard. Yecenia insists that this coloring book incorporates subtle, yet vital aspects of Oxnard, and such aspects are important to keep relevant since some marginalized areas of Oxnard are facing threats of demolition and gentrification. Nonetheless, as you listen to Yecenia explain what the different coloring pages mean to her, you cannot help but to realize how these counterstory coloring pages can help to sustain our memory and cultura. In this way, counterstory coloring books can serve as a valuable tool for educators, community leaders, or anyone interested in creating curriculum and lesson plans that not only build a critical consciousness (Freire 1973) but are also culturally sustaining (Paris 2012).

## 7. Moving forward. . . Counterstory-Telling

Whenever I teach the course, "Counterstorytelling", there is usually a lot of confusion amongst my students as to whether something is considered a counterstory or not. Some of my students automatically think that if a research article has responses from People of Color about oppression, then that is considered a counterstory. To this, I would say this is more of a critical counter-narrative (Miller et al. 2020) but not necessarily a critical race theory counterstory because there is not an actual story being told, displayed, or written. If it is simply a Black or Brown person responding to questions about and addressing racism, then they are surely "countering" or challenging the majoritarian story that racism does not exist anymore, but there is no telling of a story. Counterstorytelling urges us to *tell* actual stories that directly challenge systems of oppression. Notice that I italicized *tell* because it is important to remember that counterstories come in all forms and shapes, and not just in written form. When discussing the various ways to *tell* counterstories, I remind students and audience members at workshops and presentations that counterstories can come as theater (Celedón 2011), visual art (García 2015), music, specifically corridos (Chew Sánchez 2006), graphic novels (Trazo and Kim 2019), and so on. There are so many ways to *tell* a counterstory and you should not allow your perceived limitations to prevent you from telling your own counterstory. We all have talents, and we can use our talents to *tell* our counterstories in our own unique ways. Our counterstories make us agents of social change, no matter how young or old we are. This counterstory coloring book serves a prime example of how something so seemingly simple can be so impactful and trigger transformation toward humanization and liberation (del Carmen Salazar 2013).

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