In it for the Long Run: Teacher Educators of Color Creating Kinetic Counterspaces for Wellness

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In this critical race autoethnography, researchers explored the relationship between running and collective wellness for teacher educators of Color. Central to this study was an awareness that academia reflects and re(creates) oppressive social dynamics which contribute to stress and burnout for teacher educators and teacher leaders with multiply marginalized identities. The study examined the collective efforts of teacher educators of Color to sustain each other within institutional spaces that are often hostile to them. Through an analysis of critical dialogues and written narratives, this study underscores the significance of running (a) for identity formation and negotiation (b) as analogous to the navigation of academia, and (c) as a practice of agency and resistance. Through their "running collective," authors created *kinetic counterspaces* – critical, active spaces for collective theorizing, embodied resistance and wellness through movement. Within the current sociopolitical climate that brings added stressors and uncertainties for already-marginalized educators, findings highlight the value of kinetic counterspaces for teacher educators of Color.

Keywords: Wellness, teacher educators of color, critical race autoethnography, counterspaces, distance running, critical race theory

...running is not strictly a physical pursuit. It is something ancestral and spiritual and it is a means by which to learn, teach and acquire knowledge. It is also a way of knowing. With each footstep we take, we are not simply leaving footprints; we are also creating our own stories, our own narratives…Through collective running, we come to share experience, purpose and understanding, even raised consciousness regarding our own (besieged) community…. (Rodriguez, 2012, p.80)

One by one, I'll face the tasks before me and complete them as best I can. Focusing on each stride forward, but at the same time taking a long-range view, scanning the scenery as far ahead as I can. I am, after all, a long-distance runner. (Murakami, 2008, p.173)

Introduction

Walking to the starting line of the San José Half Marathon, the three authors engage in casual conversation about work. Diane interrupts admitting, "I am starting to feel really nervous. I need a pep talk" she laughs but hopes to hear supportive words as she continues, "We can do this, right? We've gone through so much more." Daniel and Arturo know what Diane means

without her having to name it. As teacher educators of Color, within a field that is "protective of and protected by whiteness" (Leathers et al., 2024, p.12) they have endured so much more. In comparison, a 13.1 mile run flanked by cheering onlookers and the promise of a set finish line suddenly seems less daunting. Though pre-race jitters stem from apprehension about the pain their bodies and minds will have to move through, the three runners have a shared understanding that, unlike their workplace, the racecourse offers some measure of control and predictability as well as an immediate sense of accomplishment. While the world of academia tends to downplay, silence, or exclude the brilliance of queer, women, mothers, people of Color, and first-generation scholars, these identities, experiences, and legacies of resistance are sources of inner strength they channel into this race. Collectively, they draw from the resilience they have cultivated through their training and the practice of claiming space as people of Color who run for themselves and for each other–sustaining and reclaiming their humanity, their time, and their well-being.

In writing about wellness and the lives and experiences of teachers, teacher leaders and teacher educators, we, as teacher educators of Color who hold multiply marginalized identities, find it essential to highlight the connection between our individual experiences and larger systems of oppression as well as possibilities for resistance, refusal, and renewal. Indeed, as teacher educators of Color we have always been acutely aware of the need to develop, cultivate, and maintain our wellness and well-being given our positions as minoritized peoples in a white dominant field. Our existence and persistence in this field requires that we cultivate wellness individually and collectively. These intentional efforts are rooted in and informed by our collective memories and histories as colonized peoples.

While we successfully made our way through the U.S. schooling system and are now tenured/tenure-line faculty members at a public university in the Southwestern United States, we have also inherited and endured numerous, layered traumas during our time in U.S. educational institutions (Sosa-Provencio et al., 2020). The inequities we experienced as K-12 students persisted and followed us through the educational pipeline into our current roles as teacher educators. Research highlights the many ways the field of teacher education reproduces white supremacist, colonial practices, including: Through its epistemological eurocentrism (Souto-Manning & Winn, 2019), shift towards neoliberal principles (Baltodano, 2023), devaluation of teacher education as a field (Brown, 2024), increased attacks on critical race theory and social justice centered teaching (Brown, 2024; Jayakumar & Kohli, 2023; Miller et al., 2023), suppression and silencing of knowledge(s) and experiences of people of Color (Kohli, 2024; Kohli & Pizarro, 2022) and through its demographic composition whereby 87% of adjunct faculty and 91% of tenured/tenure-track faculty are white (King & Hampel, 2018). The current political climate, which is increasingly oppressive for people of Color, adds to professional stress as critical teacher leaders (Bradley-Levine, 2022; Bradley-Levine & Bender, 2023) and teacher educators navigate sanctions on, silencing of, and retaliation for teaching for social and racial justice (Cormier et. al., 2021; Knaus and Rogers-Ard, 2023; Sayman & Schmidtke, 2024).

This study offers an example of how we as teacher educators of Color, proactively and creatively build our collective wellness and well-being. Specifically, the question guiding the research asked: *What is the role of collective running in relation to our wellness as teacher educators of Color?* Our understanding of wellness is informed by traditional and ancestral teachings by Black, Indigenous and people of Color (BIPOC) whose definitions of wellness incorporate a balance between mind, body, and spirit (Desai et al., 2019). We add our analyses and experiences related to wellness as teacher educators of Color living and working in an

increasingly stressful and oppressive climate. Our distance running collective is both a response to oppressive institutional structures and a manifestation of our creative and collective agency rooted in a legacy of survivance (Vizenor, 2008) as colonized peoples[1]. This work is also a call to universities to consider their role in and commitments to supporting teacher educator of Color wellness and well-being.

Biographical Backgrounds

Before contextualizing our study within the body of relevant literature, we begin by offering some background on who we (authors/researchers) are and what brought us to write about the intersection of wellness, running, and our roles as teacher educators. We have all participated in serious leisure running for 20 to 30 years while one of us (Diane) was a competitive college athlete (cross country/track). We take our training seriously by expanding our knowledge of running, creating or following competitive training plans leading up to our participation in competitive races, and training for and participating in 3-4 road races a year with the goal of improving our personal records (PRs). We follow each other's running progress, offer advice, support, and share personal victories. Since forming our running collective (and because of this community) we have all improved our running times, our knowledge of the sport, and have become more dedicated and consistent runners. Beyond our tight knit running collective, we are all professors in the same department working to prepare future teachers through racial and social-justice centered teaching approaches and critical pedagogical practices. Our institution is designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) where most of our students (61%) are Chicane/Latine. In what follows, we contextualize our work within focused bodies of literature which fall under the larger categories of wellness and well-being, faculty of Color experiences, and distance running.

Review of Literature

In this study, we explore the role of distance running as instrumental to our mental, social, emotional, and collective well-being as critical teacher leaders and teacher educators of Color. Below, we situate our study within three strands of research: (a) the origins of wellness, (b) wellness in relation to faculty of Color, teacher educators, and teacher leaders, and (c) people of Color and sport.

Historical and Current Understandings of Wellness

The conceptualization and practice of wellness has a long history rooted in the knowledge(s) of people of Color and can specifically be traced back to traditional Indian medicine (TIM) and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) (Patwardhan et al., 2005). According to Gamby and colleagues (2021) whose research seeks to decolonize popularized iterations of wellness by focusing on its historical roots in Eastern healing practices, the wellness movement originated sometime between 3,000 to 1,500 BCE in India. The first documented wellness practice known as *Ayurveda* focused on the balance between mind, body, and spirit or physical, intellectual, and spiritual life. In its original conceptualization, wellness was differentiated based on each person's individual needs (Gamby et al., 2021) and included an emphasis on improved

[1] We believe it is appropriate to borrow Vizenor's (2008) concept of survivance given that two of the current authors are descendants of Indigenous Peoples of Mexico, specifically Zapotec and Mixtec, and thus hold some connection to the painful legacies of genocide and assimilation.

health and quality of life (Patwardhan et al., 2005). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to complete an exhaustive review of the origins of wellness and wellness practices of all colonized peoples, a few important concepts should be highlighted. Wellness as a concept and practice originated from BIPOC communities (Gamby et al., 2021; Johnson-Jennings et al., 2020; Patwardhan et al., 2005) and is based on collectivity and community (Morcom et al., 2024; Narvaez, 2014; 2022). Moreover, scholarship on and applications of wellness should consider the impact of colonization on the wellness of BIPOC peoples while foregrounding possibilities for justice and repair through wellness (Hill, 2009).

Faculty of Color Wellness

Research points to a physical and mental health crisis in academia that stems from various factors, including poor work-life balance (Boamah et al., 2022; Diego-Medrano & Salazar, 2021; Drew & Marshall, 2020; Lester, 2013), isolation (Reeve & Partridge, 2017), emphasis on individualism and competition (Gill, 2018), lack of support (Lau & Pretorius, 2019) and the sedentary nature of academic work (Cain, 2022; Fröberg, 2022). Several studies center the experiences of faculty of Color in predominantly white spaces[2] (Diggs et al., 2009; Orelus, 2020; Turner et al., 2008). The literature highlights a few conditions specifically affecting faculty of Color including (but not limited to) racial stress and harm (Egan & Garvey, 2015; Hong, 2022; Kohli & Pizarro, 2022), isolation (Orelus, 2020; Settles et al., 2019), microaggressions (Aguirre, 2020; Franklin, 2016), racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004) and health complications (Martinez et al., 2023). Studies also emphasize protective and sustaining practices engaged by faculty of Color including, strategic self-care in the form of exercise and meditation (Martinez et al., 2023), everyday acts of resistance such as boundary setting, mentorship, and refusal of tokenization (Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023) and the formation of counterspaces (Margherio et al., 2023; Martínez-Carrillo, 2019).

In their review of research centering wellness, well-being and faculty burnout, Turner and Garvis (2023) highlight the multiple stressors affecting teacher educators. These include, public criticisms of the field, pressure to adapt and respond to reforms, declining enrollments, and decreased funding, among other stressors. A small but growing body of research echoes findings described above but focuses exclusively on faculty of Color experiences in the field of teacher education (see Carter Andrews et al., 2021; Endo, 2015; Goodwin, 2004; Kohli, 2024; Kohli & Pizarro, 2022; Leathers et al., 2024; Morales & Riable, 2021; Prieto & Villenas, 2012; Vasquez, et al., 2025). Three studies highlight how teacher educators of Color create community to resist the challenges of teaching at predominantly white institutions (Morales & Riable, 2021) and counter the racial harm they experience within the white-dominant field of teacher education by developing and sustaining spaces for wellness-infused critical race professional development (Leathers et al., 2024), embodied wellness (Cariaga, 2023) and to collectively theorize around experiences with institutionalized racism (Vasquez, et al., 2025).

While not addressing race, several studies address possible intersections between academia and faculty wellness (Berardo et al., 2020; Cain, 2022; Clement et al., 2018). Some examples include *walking discussions* to counter the sedentary nature of academic work (Cain 2022), wellness interventions such as access to gym classes, Fitbit devices, and wellness-related lectures (Berardo, 2020), and *active workstations* by way of treadmill desks installed in the

[2] We use the term "predominantly white spaces" to include any work or academic related space where whiteness, including, white people, white perspectives, white epistemologies and ontologies–are centered.

university library (Clement et al., 2018). Though authors highlight the benefits of merging academic work and wellness-related activities, they do not problematize the blurring of boundaries between work and leisure/exercise and what could become an unhealthy emphasis on productivity if individuals are pressured to continue working (i.e., producing) while exercising. Indeed, this research compels us to consider questions, such as: Can wellness and work/productivity intersect in a healthy way? (How) might the merging of wellness and work promote rather than erode well-being?

Within the literature on teacher leadership, Cherkowski and Walker (2014) describe flourishing as an important anti-deficit approach to understanding well-being for teachers, learners, and teacher leaders. They define flourishing in schools as a complex construct that includes aspects of emotional (feeling good) and psychological and social well-being (living well) in the work of teaching and learning. Research also highlights the interconnected relationship between teacher and teacher leader well-being whereby teacher leaders play an influential role in modeling and cultivating well-being through their responsiveness to and valuing of teachers (Cann et al., 2021). Mirroring studies of faculty wellness, research highlights factors that negatively affect teacher leader well-being, including feelings of isolation (O'Neill & Glasson, 2019), the demands of/for emotional labor (Maxwell & Riley, 2017), and exhaustion from overwork (Lefdal & DeJong, 2019). On the other hand, supportive relationships and opportunities for community-building bolster teacher leaders' well-being (Carter, 2018; Cherkowski et al., 2020).

People of Color and Sport: Distance Running

A wealth of literature examines distance running as a sport and form of leisure exercise which has gained popularity in the United States. Connecting running to wellness, studies highlight that running can serve as an antidepressant (Martinsen & Morgan, 2013), which helps reduce anxiety (Morris & Salmon, 1994; Raglin, 2013), facilitate social connection (Shipway et al., 2013) and develop social capital (Ma & Kaplanidou, 2021). Several studies explore the lived experiences of leisure distance runners and seek to understand their motivations for running. Shipway and Holloway (2010) find that the runners in their study participate in running primarily for the health benefits, especially emphasizing the benefits to their physical fitness/body, self-esteem, and overall health and wellness. Most studies exploring psychological motivations for running ignore race, class, and gender (see Pereira et al., 2021; Shipway & Holloway, 2010) though a few do explore these identities and their connection to running.

Seravallo (2000) writes about the relationship between race, class, gender and marathon running, finding that people typically view participation in recreational marathon running through a meritocratic framing. In other words, many fail to recognize how racial, class, and gender privilege facilitate participation. Along this same line of research, Abbas' (2007) study engages an embodied approach to analyze the development of distance running in the U.S. Data are drawn from two sources: document analysis of the popular running magazine, "Runner's World" and ten interviews with runners. The researcher concludes that distance running, "promotes an embodiment of middle-classness that naturalizes gender and age inequalities whilst also individualizing responsibility for them" (p.159). Related, Walton and Butryn's (2006) systematic analysis of 715 running related articles published between 1960 and 2004 explores the construction of whiteness within the narrative of distance running. Based on their analysis, authors assert that distance running in the U.S. is a "white space" (p.1) where whiteness, masculinity, and nationalism are preserved against external threats of "African dominance" (p.7)

and internal threats such as, "lack of white success" (p.15) and a "perpetual quest for the 'next white hope'" (p.16). Indeed, this research highlights the ways running and access to running reflects larger systems of white supremacy, oppression and exclusion. Still a handful of studies find that BIPOC communities participate in running to navigate whiteness and white institutions, build community and center wellness.

Research by Matusitz and Simi (2019) explores the intersection between Latina cultural identity, leadership and sports. Applying Cultural Identity Theory (CIT) to analyze case studies of successful Latina athletes, researchers find that these athletes deal with marginalization in US colleges by leaning into their cultural/racial identities while persisting and excelling in sports. Researchers argue that Latina athletes who are supported in strengthening their cultural identity are more likely to pursue leadership roles. Similarly, Gloria et al., (2016) interviewed five Latino male college athletes to understand their educational coping processes. Findings indicate that participants engage in running (and other exercises) as a coping process to navigate a predominantly white institution (Gloria et al., 2023). Bettie's (2014) ethnographic study follows 60 high school students in California's Central Valley demonstrating that Latina athletes turned athletic ability into cultural capital whereby their participation in sports became important for accessing and navigating academic spaces. Other research considers the experiences of women-runners through a feminist lens, exploring the intersections of running and motherhood. Through semi-structured interviews of 6 marathon runners, Bean and Wimbs (2021) explore how participants balance their roles as athletes and mothers of young children. These runners experienced identity conflict having been runners before becoming mothers as well as feelings of guilt when prioritizing running over motherhood.

A few studies explore what is referred to in the literature as, 'self-organized running groups' (Xie et al., 2020). Tarabochia and colleagues (2022) describe their running group composed of women faculty members as, "Collaborative running [which] upholds mutual mentoring as a consistent practice of participatory self-care and collective well-being" (p.91). Smith-Tran's (2021) study features a running group created by and for Black women to build community, promote health, and challenge stereotypes about their communities. Many of the group members found the running group through social media. One participant appreciated the opportunity to, "meet runners she could relate to all over the country that she may not have met otherwise" which, as she shared, was especially significant for "middle-class Black women…living in predominantly White neighborhoods and working in predominantly White offices" (p. 245). Another identity-based running group –The Front Runners (TFR)– was created for LGBTQ+ identifying runners to find a sense of safety, community, and inclusivity while promoting wellness (Van Ingen, 2004). Specifically, "The social geography of the TFR provides…a social space for contact and community" and a space that is, "considered safe for queer athletes" (p.257). Finally, Rodriguez (2012) writes about a group of Mexican American runners in Arizona who combinie running with critical pedagogy and community engagement to resist political attacks on their community. Many identity-based running groups form for similar reasons as those described in the research. These groups challenge the idea that sport, and specifically running, is exclusively a white, masculine, heterosexual and middle-class domain. Still, the lived experiences of marginalized runners are underexplored in the literature as most research centers the experiences of white, heterosexual men and women.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study was guided by critical race theory (CRT), a theoretical framework that makes visible the embeddedness of racism and white supremacy within U.S. society and its institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Harris, 1993). CRT centers an analysis of racism in intersection with other forms of oppression such as sexism, classism, ableism and linguicism (Annamma, 2016; Crenshaw, 1995; Yosso, 2005). With roots in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), CRT emerged within the field of education in response to the under-theorization of race and racism in education scholarship (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano, 1998). CRT scholarship brings to the forefront the manifestations of institutional racism in a range of educational contexts including, curriculum and pedagogy (Crowely, 2013; Lynn, 2004; Matias, 2013; Yosso, 2002), campus racial climate (Jayakumar et al., 2009; Ledesma, 2019; Yosso et al., 2009), policy and finance (Alemán, 2013; Parker, 2003; Stovall, 2013) and teacher education (Kohli et al., 2022). Furthermore one of the core tenets of CRT in education centers the experiential knowledges and voices of people of Color (Solórzano & Bernal, 2002). For a study that focuses on the often-unrecognized knowledge and experiences of teacher educators of Color and explores how they navigate racialized climates within higher education and teacher education specifically, CRT is an apt theoretical framework. Through a CRT lens, this study challenges race-evasiveness by confronting majoritarian narratives, including "post-racialism" (Cho, 2009) which denies the ongoing reality of racism and promotes a meritocracy that seeks to ignore the workings of power and the legacies of racism in the experiences and outcomes of people of Color (Ladson-Billings, 2006). This study also confronts deficit ideologies that pathologize communities of Color and blame them for the injustice they experience (Valencia, 2010).

The CRT framework of counterspaces, or spaces on or off campus that can serve as sites where "deficit notions of People of Color can be challenged" (Solórzano et al., 2000, p. 70) is also a lens through which we examine how teacher educators of Color create spaces of re-humanization that sustain their wellness within the oppressive dynamics of academic institutions. Through the use of CRT in their work on campus racial climate, Solórzano et al., (2000) conceptualized counterspaces as spaces of protection that Black college students created in response to the racial microaggressions they were subjected to on college campuses. We build on this concept but also emphasize our agency and power is not limited to and by whiteness. In other words, the spaces we create are not merely a response to whiteness and white supremacy.

Methodology

This study uses critical race autoethnography (Camangian et al., 2024) as its guiding methodological framework. By combining autoethnography's emphasis on personal narrative and reflection with the analytical lens of critical race theory (CRT), this approach allows us to critically examine how running, academia, and wellness intersect in the lived experiences of teacher educators of Color (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Through storytelling, critical race autoethnography highlights systemic inequities, creating opportunities for reflection and transformation.

Autoethnography creates a bridge between personal experiences and broader social, cultural, and institutional dynamics. By placing lived experiences at the center of the inquiry, it legitimizes personal narratives as critical data sources. This approach emphasizes how individual stories highlight systemic issues and challenge dominant epistemologies (Chang, 2008). For

scholars of Color, this method is particularly significant as it centers voices that are often marginalized in traditional academic research and positions these narratives as sources of resistance and agency. When framed through CRT, autoethnography transforms into a powerful tool for deconstructing racism and structural inequities. By combining CRT's analytical tools with autoethnography's reflective methods, this study investigates how teacher educators of Color utilize running as a practice of resistance, resilience, and renewal in navigating academic spaces. This approach also amplifies the role of community and solidarity in fostering collective well-being among those facing systemic marginalization (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014).

By utilizing autoethnography, this study provides deeply personal insights into these systemic challenges, offering a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse. This methodology is essential for exploring counterspaces—environments where individuals marginalized by societal structures can assert agency, build community, and foster resilience (Solórzano et al., 2000). These counterspaces are more than sites of survival; they are spaces of transformation where individuals engage in acts of creativity and resistance. Within this framework, running is analyzed as more than a physical activity—it becomes a form of embodied resistance, a way to reclaim agency, and a strategy to assert belonging in spaces that often exclude.

Participants/Researchers

Through this autoethnographic study, our roles as participants and researchers merged into one. The three of us first met in 2021 when Arturo was hired as a tenure track faculty member in the Liberal Studies department, Diane was hired as a lecturer and Daniel was already a tenured faculty member and leader serving as department chair in the same department. We bonded over our shared experiences as critical scholars of Color and soon realized we were all current or former distance runners. Having struggled through the challenging first years of parenting, completing doctoral programs, and securing positions as faculty members, Arturo and Diane ran intermittently but had not raced since starting graduate studies. Daniel had been running consistently for 27 years and regularly raced half marathons. With Daniel's fervent encouragement, Arturo and Diane joined him in registering and training for the San José half marathon, thus beginning their running triad and active commitment to wellness. In the table below we share details about our identities and relationship to running.

Table 1.
Descriptions of Researchers/Participants

Participant	Salient identities	Relationship to running
Diane	Chicana, Mother, First-Generation, Bi	Runner 25+ years; former college athlete (track/cross country) Post collegiate organized races: 20+ 5Ks; 10+ 10Ks; 6+ half marathons
Arturo	Chicano, Parent, First-Generation	Runner 25+ years former high school athlete (track/cross country)

Participant	Salient identities	Relationship to running
		Post collegiate organized races: 10+ 5Ks; 2+ 10Ks; 6+ half marathons
Daniel	Asian (Thai) American, Queer	Runner 25+ years; Post-collegiate organized races: 20+ half marathons; 1 full marathon.

Data Collection

To gather data, we engaged in five critical discussions, which were recorded and transcribed. These discussions offered a structured yet flexible space to collectively reflect on and articulate the connections between running, wellness, and academia. As teacher educators of Color, we examined how running intersects with our personal and professional identities, while exploring its role as a practice of resilience and resistance against systemic inequities in academic spaces (Ashlee et al., 2017; Martin & Garza, 2020). Following these discussions, each of us wrote a personal narrative that delved into our individual journeys as runners and educators. These narratives captured the significance of running in our lives, highlighting its impact on our identities as scholars and its role in fostering a sense of community. Specifically, we answered three guiding questions: (a) what brought you to running, and how did it first impact your life? (b) how is running connected to your work and/or identity as a teacher educator of Color? (3) how did your teacher educator of Color running community develop, and how has it shaped or impacted your experiences in academia? These narratives served as the foundation for our analysis, providing a rich set of experiences that underscored both shared and unique themes.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, we began by individually reading and coding each narrative for recurring themes and patterns. Through collaborative discussions, we refined and consolidated these codes to identify overarching themes that reflected the intersections of running, wellness, and academia. This process was iterative and dialogic, as we engaged in reflective conversations to revisit and interrogate our interpretations. Dialogic reflection became a critical part of our methodology, sparking new insights and deepening our understanding of the systemic issues that shaped our experiences (Roland & Jones, 2020; Liu, 2017). These reflections also helped us remain accountable to the collective nature of this work, ensuring that our analysis honored the voices and experiences of all contributors. Each of us revisited the emerging themes and interpretations, confirming that they resonated with our lived experiences. This practice not only strengthened the reliability of our analysis but also illuminated connections that may have otherwise remained obscured (Martin & Garza, 2020). By continuously engaging with each other's perspectives, we expanded our collective understanding of the data.

Throughout the analysis, we drew on the concept of counterstorytelling as articulated by Solórzano and Yosso (2002). This framework enabled us to frame our narratives as acts of resistance, challenging dominant narratives in academia while centering our experiences as teacher educators of Color. Running emerged as a counterspace—a site where we could reclaim agency, foster collective resilience, and build solidarity in the face of dehumanizing structures. We conceptualized running as a *kinetic counterspace*– an active, embodied space and practice

that transcends the physical act of running to encompass healing, resistance, and community-building. This approach allowed us to identify and highlight themes that resonated beyond our individual experiences, offering insights into the transformative potential of running as a practice of resistance and renewal. By centering our collective voices and experiences, we underscored the importance of creating spaces where teacher educators of Color can thrive, both personally and professionally, amidst the challenges of academia.

Findings

The question guiding this study asked: What is the role of collective running in relation to our wellness as teacher educators of Color? In what follows, we describe three themes that emerged from our data. These include: (a) identity formation and negotiation through running, (b) navigation of academia as analogous to competitive running, and (c) running as a practice of agency and resistance.

Identity formation and negotiation

Throughout our critical dialogues and written narratives, we see instances of identity building and negotiation in relation to our intersecting (and developing) identities as runners, scholars, educators, and BIPOC individuals. All three narratives reflected ways in which we encountered running and made a place for ourselves in the sport while running against or in spite of whiteness. As racialized, gendered, and classed individuals we became aware of our marginalized locations in a white dominant society very early on. Diane specifically notes that she started running in junior high when it was "easy to become invisible" and when young people become aware of their identities, especially their marginalized identities and their place in the white cis-heteropatriarchy. She mentions that she "struggled emotionally in junior high with some of the common (but challenging) identity issues that many kids this age experience. It was the feeling of 'bodily-not-enoughness' (Hughes-Decatur, 2011) –feeling not pretty enough, smart enough, white enough, athletic enough…" In contrast, running served as a protective force and a "part of [her] identity that [she] could rely on to find strength, confidence, and admiration."

For Diane, her participation in running impacted both her own sense of belonging as well as her family's belongingness in a white dominant society. This is articulated when she writes about running in relation to family:

> I often think about how [my participation in] sports, and specifically, running was an important way for my dad–an immigrant Spanish speaking father who didn't attend school in the U.S.-- to connect with me and my siblings. He may not have felt comfortable talking to my white, English-speaking teachers at back-to-school night, but he proudly attended every one of my races, up until my final race as a college athlete. Running was my way of connecting with my dad, of proving my worth and of making us both feel like we had a legitimate place in this country. I believe sports was always a way for my dad and for other oppressed and racialized people in the US to feel a part of something and to feel valued.

Feeling disempowerment and rejection from a country that seems to only value people of Color, and immigrants specifically, for their ability to labor, compete, or entertain, Diane navigated an oppressive climate by regaining some agency through running.

Daniel found that through running he both challenged and negotiated race and gender expectations as a gay Asian college student who was making sense of and (re)creating his identity. He writes:

> Reflecting on my pre-college years, I realized I was never drawn to traditional male sports such as football or basketball. The rigid heteronormativity embedded in those activities often made them unwelcoming spaces for me. Running offered a path to athleticism that felt individual, accessible, and free from those social constraints…I was also navigating my sexual identity and stepping into the gay club scene in early 2000s Los Angeles—a space where physical appearance was kind of a ticket for entry. The standards were painfully clear: Being lean, muscular, and, more often than not, white, defined what was considered desirable. As someone who didn't fit all those categories, I felt pressured to focus on what I could change—my body. Running became my way of feeling like I could belong, or at least get closer to feeling valuable in that racialized space.

While sport is generally a heteronormative space, the sport of running, for Daniel, felt open and validating. His experience echoes studies demonstrating the way Asian American males in sport engage in "hegemonic bargaining" (Chen, 1999; Lee, 2016) or the strategic process of negotiating hegemonic masculinity and whiteness to resist oppression.

For Arturo, running was first introduced to him as a "brown kid growing up in southeast Los Angeles" in his own community. Here, he describes this formative experience:

> Driving with my family down Tweedy Boulevard on any given evening in "downtown" South Gate, I'd see groups of runners, mostly Mexican/Latine, making their way along the roughly one-mile loop of green space that is South Gate Park. Seeing people who looked like my cousins, my parents and me participate in this sport instilled in me the idea that running was something I could also participate in. I later learned that there were established running groups in my community comprised of Brown, working class, and serious competitive runners.

Arturo's participation on the high school cross-country team was significant as he was learning how to navigate and succeed within the oppressive constraints of a white supremacist schooling system. He describes this experience below:

> Being a runner…helped cultivate my sense of belonging and connectedness to high school. As a kid from a working-class family who attended an all-boys Catholic high school, I never stopped feeling like an outsider given the class backgrounds and lived experiences of my peers that differed starkly from mine. But being a runner and good at the sport allowed me to gain acceptance and even some measure of respect within a school community that did not necessarily reflect the ways of being, language practices etc. and knowledge(s) of my home community.

Although studies accurately describe distance running as a predominantly white, middle-class, heteronormative sport, especially when reviewing popular media (see Walton & Butryn, 2006), each author countered the pervasive whiteness of distance running by finding and making a place

for themselves in the sport of running. They did not completely break away from dominant norms and expectations but, instead, formulated their identities around these expectations in a way that helped them enact a sense of agency and empowerment.

Navigation of Academia as Analogous to Competitive Running

Narratives reveal the ways running and academia parallel each other, especially in that they both promote and (re)produce a culture of isolation, competition, and individual success. Diane noted,

> I see many parallels between the endurance and inner strength that is required by being both a runner and a scholar. Earning a Ph.D. degree takes many years and requires commitment, and for some, prolonged suffering. It is often a solitary journey where personal goals and victories are achieved in isolation for no one but your own self to witness.

Adding to this, Daniel wrote about the academy as a place which fosters alienation and invisibility. Indeed, academia and competitive running both tend to promote and reward individual success over collective and community well-being. Here, each author described an inner tension between wanting to reject the individualistic and rivalrous nature of both academia and competitive running versus a desire to nurture ancestral practices rooted in collectivism. Through critical dialogues they reconciled with the reality that running, for them, is in fact a competitive enterprise where they run to improve their times (i.e., personal record) and to rank highly among fellow race competitors. Admittedly, both in running and in academia, individual rewards and accolades are a source of motivation. Together, they identified this investment in individual reward as a manifestation of their socialization as students, scholars, and teacher educators, into a system that is built on hierarchy, rankings, and competition. Indeed, they have had to adapt to the demands of the institution to navigate into and succeed in their current roles as teacher educators of Color, even when these practices are at odds with their desire to transform education. They recognized these skills as tools they have honed for their survival.

Data revealed another similarity between the work of BIPOC teacher educators and competitive runners–the idea that both are political acts. Arturo articulates this when he writes,

> To me, running just like my teaching, is political. As one of a handful of Chicano teacher educators and faculty members within a school of education, I am an anomaly. In a white supremacist world I am not supposed to be a faculty member, I am not supposed to have a PhD, I was not supposed to graduate high school and college. Thus my presence in the academy is a thorn in the side of a white supremacist world and is a political statement in and of itself. Because my mission and goals of collective liberation and transformation as a teacher educator stand in direct contradiction to the exploitative, transactional and dehumanizing reality of the academy in a racial capitalist society, my presence and my work in the field is political. I run to claim space in the same way that I take up space in the academy as a person of Color. As a runner and academic I try to move in community with others as a form of resistance and to assert my humanity and the humanity of my community.

Indeed, each author confronted the question of who belongs in academia/running as they made sense of their roles in both. Finding and claiming space in a field and sport that excludes

minoritized peoples requires the ability to manage the suffering and discomfort–to endure and "take up space." The very act of enduring is symbolic and political, while the ability to endure in a way that builds and sustains wellness, is revolutionary. In what follows, we expand on the idea of taking up and creating space for wellness.

Running as a Practice of Agency and Resistance

Within the field of teacher education which has been shaped by whiteness (Matias et al., 2016; Sleeter, 2001) and where racial harm is embedded and pervasive (Kohli et al., 2022; Solórzano, 1998), the shared running community the authors created offered them the wellness, affirmation and humanization that academia and its institutions often fail to provide teacher educators of Color. In forming a "running collective" authors created what they conceptualized as kinetic counterspaces–active spaces which transcend boundaries of time and place; generative spaces for moving while theorizing and building knowledge; and supportive, critical spaces for collective, embodied resistance and well-being.

For Daniel, the collective nature of the running group functioned as a safe haven as a faculty member of Color within the isolation and disconnection of academia. In turn, this contributed to his mental and physical wellness:

> The running group I've found with my fellow teacher educators of Color is, in a way, a lifeline. It came together naturally, sparked by a shared passion for running and fueled by a common commitment to critical and transformative approaches to education. Our shared experiences as people of Color bring a depth to the connection. We've all faced the uphill battles that come with navigating academic spaces steeped in historical and structural inequities. But in this group…it's about staying well, mentally and physically, in a system that so often does the opposite. Running with this group reminds me that I'm not alone in those struggles, and it gives me a space where I can thrive, both on and off the track. Running, for me, is more than a physical activity—it is a practice of resistance and reclamation. It allows me to reject and confront the limitations imposed by systemic inequities and affirm my value. The personal victories I experience on the pavement remind me that I am capable of breaking through barriers, a lesson I strive to impart to my students and peers. My journey underscores the importance of finding spaces—physical or otherwise—that nurture one's spirit in the face of adversity. Through running, I have discovered not only my strength but also the power of community in fostering growth and belonging.

Effectively, the kinetic counterspace of their running group, was as Daniel described it, a "practice of resistance and reclamation" that challenged the inequities that contribute to burnout for teacher educators of Color and helped them reclaim, through collective creativity, the community to resist the challenges of teaching in predominantly white spaces (Morales & Riable, 2021). In this way, Daniel notes that it allows him to exercise personal agency against an institution that as a teacher educator of Color does not– in practice – prioritize his wellness.

For Diane, running with Daniel and Arturo helped her reclaim her identity as a runner (post motherhood) along with offering her the dynamic space to theorize in community:

> After becoming a mother, it was difficult to keep up with running and a challenge to secure a tenure track faculty position as I lacked time, energy, and support with childcare.

> Running continued to be a big part of my identity–an identity I'd try to reclaim time and again. Becoming a part of this running group got me back into training consistently and gave me a goal to work towards. We are accountable to each other, we sign up for races, talk about our running goals, share running woes (injuries) and advice. When we are able to run together we have really great conversations about the work we do. Our run becomes a dynamic space for theorizing and doing something for our mind and body while building on and supporting each other's ideas. There's something powerful, healing, and motivating about thinking through research or pedagogy while running. As faculty members in the same department, we experience similar challenges and stressors (for example living and working in predominantly white spaces) so it's nice to have this shared community of people who understand one-another and prioritize wellness beyond our lives as faculty members.

This running collective was a (re)generative space where the authors, through a shared movement practice, built on their thinking and affirmed their commitments to their work as teacher educators of Color with social/racial justice orientations. As Diane emphasizes above, the synergistic interaction of mind and body within this kinetic counterspace was also a source of renewal and healing that nurtured her wellness, helped her reclaim her identity as a runner/athlete, and sustained her in the collective work of transforming education.

Discussion & Implications

We each came to running in different ways, but we built our identities–as competitive runners, and educators of Color committed to transforming education–for similar reasons. These included a need to develop a healthy work/life balance to sustain ourselves through this career, the recognition that our resistance is fundamentally an embodied resistance which brings together our full identities, histories, and lived experiences as marginalized and colonized peoples, and the awareness that we cannot create other worlds in isolation. Here we offer our unique narratives that trace how we navigate academia, and specifically, the whiteness of teacher education. We illuminate how we look to each other to counter the oppressive and isolating climate that pervades the field and contributes to deteriorating physical, mental, and emotional health.

Counterspaces are spaces of (re)humanization, protection, agency, and community-building (Solórzano et al., 2000). We build on this foundational conceptualization of counterspaces by articulating spaces defined by movement –hence the term "kinetic"— alternative spaces that are intentionally created to prioritize well-being. In creating and sustaining this counterspace we exercise agency and reclaim our humanity through collective commitments to justice and endurance in the field and in the world. Important to note is that kinetic counterspaces can incorporate all types of movement and should not perpetuate ableist ideologies that identify some bodies and forms of movement as more or less worthy. We identify as educators and runners and therefore developed our counterspace around the intersections of those identities, however, similar communities can be created to engage and intertwine other forms of movement, athleticism, and wellness. In what follows we describe two approaches to engaging wellness for teacher educators and teacher leaders: community-based wellness and institutionally driven wellness.

Community-Based Wellness

The literature offers models of wellness that originate within marginalized communities. These grassroots, community-based spaces emerge outside of formal education venues and are designed to meet the holistic needs of participants (Kohli, 2019; Pour-Khorshid, 2018). Moreover, research on spontaneous/self-created running communities shows that these identity-based communities offer safe and affirming spaces for marginalized groups (Tarabochia et al., 2022; Van Ingen, 2004), support political involvement and advocacy (Rodriguez (2012) and can develop and be sustained by way of social media (Smith-Tran, 2021). Indeed this is important for teacher educators/teacher leaders of Color who are often the minority in their institutions and are geographically dispersed. These organic spaces can be especially beneficial for critical teacher leaders (Bradley-Levine, 2018; Bradley-Levine & Bender, 2023) and critical teacher educators given the multiple roles they perform and their active commitments to advocate with and for students while transforming institutional culture.

While several studies describe possibilities for wellness to merge with work, such as through active workstations (i.e., treadmill desks), Fitbit devices, and wellness related lectures (Berardo et al., 2020; Cain, 2022; Clement et al., 2018), these suggestions for merging wellness and work ignore the historical roots and original intentions of wellness. Reviews of wellness literature emphasize that these concepts were developed by BIPOC communities, based on collectivity, and center justice and repair against harms of colonization (Gamby et al., 2021; Patwardhan et al., 2005). Like the teacher educators of Color in the Leathers et al., (2024) study who created spaces for wellness and regeneration, our kinetic counterspace is a regenerative space where the intent is to cultivate community for (re)humanization against the isolation and individualism of academia (Gill, 2018; Orelus, 2020; Reeve & Partridge, 2017; Settles et al., 2019) and the pernicious racial harm and exclusion of teacher education (Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Hong, 2022; Kohli & Pizarro, 2022).

We run to regain and sustain our health (Martinez et al., 2023; Shipway & Holloway, 2010) and humanity, not to become more productive wokers. Our communal participation in running forms a protective shield against academia's tendencies to drain our time and energy. We hold each other accountable and support each other in reclaiming our humanity and disrupting what Fillingim and Hayes (2023) refer to as "time-theft" –the institution's practice of taking from and wearing down their faculty of Color which ultimately impacts their/our physical, emotional and mental well-being. Embodying Cherkowski and Walker's (2014) conceptualization of flourishing–we are vulnerable, playful, and joyful, both on campus and on the racecourse and support each other in working toward shared and common goals.

Institutionally Driven Wellness

The field of teaching and teacher education continues to be impacted by shifting policies and legislative rulings. Given the current political climate, these changes have been and continue to be shockingly disruptive and often disastrous to the work of scholars committed to social justice and transformative education. Community care, wellness and well-being for teacher educators of Color is needed now more than ever. Our ability to creatively navigate oppressive systems that erode our wellness, does not absolve institutions from their role in making systemic change to support the well-being of teachers and teacher leaders. We echo prior work centering teacher educators of Color that implore educational institutions and departmental leaders to look honestly at the ways the field of teacher education inflicts harm on Black, Indigenous and People of Color (Souto-Manning & Winn, 2019) and, instead, move toward "centering intersectionally

minoritized communities of color" (p. 312) to develop a healthy racial climate (Kohli et al., 2022). While we celebrate the kinetic counterspace we created we ask, *how can teacher education programs intentionally sustain and support the well-being and wellness of teacher educators of Color?*

First, institutions can and should sustain the collective care practices created by and for those whose very time, labor and energy benefits such institutions. Availability of a university-wide or college-specific "wellness fund" can be instrumental in supporting teacher educators of Color in maintaining their kinetic counterspaces by offsetting the cost of equipment and participation in their care practices (Amaya et al., 2019). In the case of our running collective, for example, the cost of shoes, registration for races or physical therapy can add up quickly and can be a hindrance to full participation. Making university facilities available for wellness collectives to gather and take part in their practice(s) is another intentional way institutions can utilize their resources towards sustaining faculty well-being. Most universities have various facilities (e.g., tracks, indoor and outdoor pools, gyms, tennis and basketball courts, spaces for yoga or dance, etc.) that faculty can utilize to cultivate their kinetic counterspaces for regeneration and renewal. Institutions can make these accessible by (a) opening them up to faculty use, (b) eliminating membership costs and (c) extending hours of operation/availability (Hunt & Griffeth, 2020).

A robust offering of faculty development opportunities for faculty to be able to grow their own wellness collectives can also be beneficial. Communicating the availability of these resources during new faculty onboarding (Amaya et al., 2019) can be essential to helping newly-hired faculty prioritize wellness as they acclimate to their new positions. Fostering a culture of wellness can also be integrated into the supports and mentorship offered to faculty at the departmental and college levels. For example, formalizing or including dedicated time during departmental and college-wide meetings for "wellness check-ins" to ask about how faculty are faring in regard to their well-being. Finally, opportunities for recognition of non-academic accomplishments related to faculty well-being can also help sustain a culture of wellness.

Concluding Thoughts

Through this critical race autoethnography we explored our relationship to running and, specifically, engaged in thoughtful introspection to bridge our personal and collective experiences to broader social, cultural, and institutional dynamics. We highlighted the increasing need to center wellness and well-being for teacher leaders and teacher educators, offering possibilities rooted in our own creative resistance and survivance (Vizenor, 2008), while also holding institutions accountable. Our hope is that educators will find and/or create their own kinetic counterspaces where movement (in all forms) is restorative and generative. It is in the creation of and participation in these alternative, life-affirming spaces where we collectively theorize, resist, and sustain one another–for the long run.

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