



Narratives of Latinas in the Midwest Higher Education in the Midwest Education

Daisy I. Barrón Collins, Missouri State University

Jamille Palacios Rivera, University of Missouri-Columbia

Sandra I. Enríquez and Theresa Torres, University of Missouri-Kansas City

Abstract: The Pew Research Center (2017) noted there are 30.1 million Hispanic adults in the United States and 14.4 million of them—or 48%—are women. According to recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates among immigrant Hispanic women, 57% have arrived since 1990, and from those, six-in-ten Hispanic women immigrants were born in Mexico. This paper presents narratives from four professors who currently hold adjunct and tenured positions in higher education institutions in the Midwest of the United States and who shared their experiences during the Cambio de Colores conference.

Dr. Daisy I. Barrón Collins' Narrative:

It seems as if I was called to be the primera/first during my life's journey. I was the first child of a medical pastor and a nurse who were expecting a son and no name was picked for me when I was born in Guadalajara, Jalisco, México. My maternal grandmother and her psychologist's daughter picked my first and middle name. I was the first one in the educational system to start elementary school at five years old. I was taller than all my classmates in Pre-K. My mother's enthusiasm for me to learn all the skills I needed to start my educational journey helped me be two years ahead of my classmates. I was also setting an example for my only hermano/brother. I am the oldest hija/daughter, dark skinned, a bilingual woman, learning systematic educational processes and living in two countries, raising bilingual children, and now, going through a divorce.

In Mexico, I earned a bachelor's in Information Technology. After marrying, I moved to the United States and completed a bachelor degree in Mass Communications and Spanish from Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri, a Master's degree in arts of teaching and Spanish from Missouri State University, and an Educational Leadership doctoral degree from the University of Missouri, Columbia. Despite this, a glass ceiling or sticky floor is keeping me in the same place. I continue to seek opportunities to learn skills to help our Latinos' subcultures. I completed a TESOL certificate from Cambridge University while overseeing the Spanish Department at Southwest Baptist University, teaching Spanish at all levels and supervising dual credit high school Spanish teachers, being an interpreter and translator in public schools in the surrounding counties, and taking part of the bilingual programs with the Greene County libraries in Springfield, MO. In addition, I have been actively advocating for the Hispanic community and other minority groups in southwest Missouri for more than 18 years through different non-profit organizations. My areas of research include Hispanic women/Latinas in higher education and leadership, bilingualism, adaptation, organizational frameworks, health and minorities, educational foundations, and

multicultural education. I have earned several scholarships from childhood to doctoral level for being the primera, making me the first in my family to be part of the 3% of Latinas with doctorate degrees in the United States (Census Bureau, 2018).

I conclude my narrative with a call to action for higher education organizations to genuinely continue the process of recruiting, retaining, and promoting Latinos. I am one of many whose effort and dedication has not been acknowledged. It seems as being the only female bilingual Latina, as well as social and systematic perceptions, have affected my attainment of a tenure track position. There is lack of mentoring and guidance for scholarship projects. To improve conditions, I propose to establish a center for Latin/Hispanic Women in Higher Education to genuinely focus on recruitment, retention, and promotion.

Dr. Jamielle Palacios Rivera's Narrative:

I am sharing my journey for the sake of this year's Cambio Conference theme of knowledge, connections, and actions. I hope readers get to know me, connect with my story, and get motivated to act for the success of Hispanic women, and all other underrepresented individuals in academia. I was born in Caguas, Puerto Rico. My father was a Christian pastor, son of a U.S. World War I veteran. My grandmother, with just a high school diploma, became a widow and took care of 11 kids under financial struggles. My mother was also daughter of a U.S. World War I veteran and a Cagüeña who only got to 8th grade. Both of my parents completed graduate degrees when my siblings and I were kids, implanting value to education. My mother became a first-generation college graduate, completing a terminal degree in clinical psychology; my father finished an ABD in theology. Education and hard work allowed my parents to move from poverty thresholds to middle class. I attended the University of Puerto Rico, and while per-credit cost was relatively low, it was still a financial stretch for me. I received financial aid and worked part-time at Sears where I met my husband. After marrying, I began graduate coursework and resigned to accept a

Financial and Economic Analyst position at the Puerto Rico Department of Treasury. In 2002, my husband and I moved to Gainesville, Florida. We circled back to work at Sears, although this time while pursuing higher academic goals; mine being a PhD in Food and Resource Economics at the University of Florida. After completing the core courses, I had a baby, presented my research proposal, and passed the specialization test. Financial needs forced me to search for a full-time job. My first academic job was a result of that search. That position was at a higher education institution with little diversity, but it brought about my regard for teaching.

After completing my PhD degree, I was sure about wanting a teaching-focused job. My current Assistant Teaching Professor position is result of that search. It is non-tenure track (NTT) with a few cons. NTT contracts are short-term (in my case annual), more vulnerable to budget cuts and enrollment drops than tenure track positions, are heavy on teaching and service loads, and in many cases, do not support research and scholarly work. I constantly strive to advance my research agenda; not doing so can hinder opportunities for promotion and tenure positions in case of job displacement.

I am a minority, one among few Hispanic female faculty. Challenges faced by under-represented groups in academia are widely documented. They include a difficulty building strong networks, finding mentors, and getting support. An additional challenge faced by faculty of color is tokenism. A research article by Flores Niemann and Dovidio (1998) explains that small representation of faculty of color results in “tokenism,” isolation, and distinctiveness, which have statistically significant negative relationship with job satisfaction (Flores Niemann & Dovidio, 1998). In their article is the following quote from Washington and Harvey (1989): “Where there are a very small number of African-American or Hispanic faculty members ..., the burdens of institutional and individual racism weigh heavily. Psychological safety ... is not available to persons who work in these.” Like this reference, there are more that are ac-

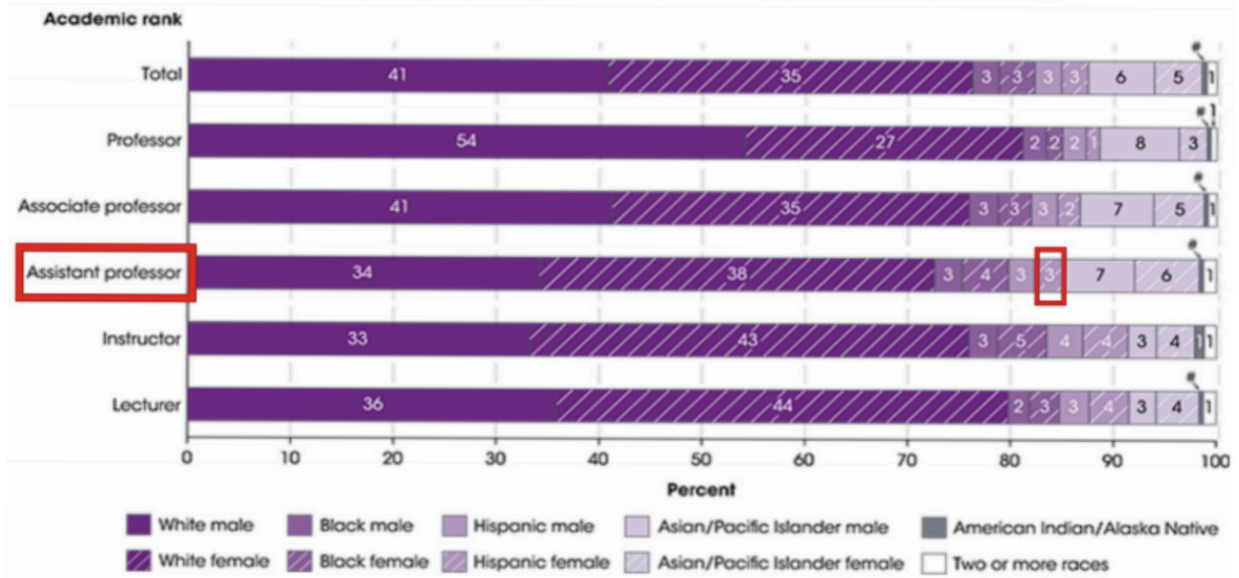
cessible to institutions and individuals seeking guidance for addressing tokenism, isolation, and distinctiveness, improving retention, and other related issues. The format of this narrative and page limit only allow me to list one more reading recommendation: Retention of Underrepresented Minority Faculty: Strategic Initiatives for Institutional Value Proposition Based on Perspectives from a Range of Academic Institutions by Whitaker, Montgomery, & Martinez Acosta (2015). It identifies barriers faced by academic institutions while promoting and addressing diversity and related issues. It also provides strategies to ameliorate them.

In my view, obvious strategies to deal with tokenism, isolation and distinctiveness include the following: 1) recruit – increase the number of faculty of color; 2) retain – improving job satisfaction by fostering diversity and inclusion competencies and counseling; and 3) develop – provide mentorship, networking opportunities, scholarship support, and training. To minorities in academia, I recommend to find encouragement in your own journey, set goals, device a plan with strategies to achieve them, and periodically evaluate and accordingly adjust.

Dr. Sandra I. Enríquez’ Narrative:

My testimonio will describe my life as an Assistant Professor, juggling a number of responsibilities including being on TT, directing a program, mentoring dozens of students, and being a community-engaged scholar. I am a proud *fronteriza*—border person: a Mexican woman who as a teenager immigrated 16.6 miles from her childhood home in Ciudad Juárez to a new life in El Paso, Texas. I call myself a semi-1st generation college student because my father completed an engineering degree in México; yet I was the first in my family to attend a university in the United States. I am one of three Master Degree holding cousins on both sides of the family, and the only one with a PhD. I earned my PhD in History from the University of Houston in 2016. That same year, I accepted a TT position in the History Department at the University of Missouri—Kansas City.

Percentage distribution of full-time faculty in degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by academic rank, race/ethnicity, and sex: Fall 2016



Rounds to zero.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2018). *The Condition of Education 2018* (NCES 2018-144). [Characteristics of Postsecondary Faculty](#).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in fall 2016, the same year I arrived at UMKC, Latinas comprised 3% of assistant professors. Since 2016, Latinx professors at UMKC comprise 3% of assistant professors, and 3% of the total full-time tenured or TT-faculty.

In my academic journey, I have faced discrimination, numerous microaggressions, and dealt with outside perceptions of my “presumed incompetence.” These are some of the visible obstacles Latinas and women of color face in academia. But what about the invisible obstacles? The barriers that are disguised and quickly dismissed as part of the TT journey? Are all TT’s journeys equal? Or, does more burden fall into the backs of Latina and other women of color faculty? To earn tenure, I should focus my efforts as follows: 40% research, 40% teaching, and 20% service. Junior faculty is told to abstain from doing too much service—because it is one of the biggest “death traps” for women of color. However, in summer of 2017, I inherited the directorship for the Public History emphasis. In this role, I supervise internships, advise students, and sit on the committees of all Public History MA students, and meet with

community stakeholders to discuss potential collaborative projects. This service does not include my active role in supporting Latinx students.

Although these are the responsibilities of my title as a director, most of this work falls under service, the 20% of my workload. I am also responsible for teaching courses for our Public History emphasis, which are high-impact, project based, and active in making bridges between UMKC and the greater Kansas City community. These courses are very demanding because they are training future professionals in the field. Students are not only learning methods, theories and practices of public history, but also researching and writing projects to build their portfolios. In order for my students to succeed, I have to make sure their work is professional and that they are truly connecting and engaging with diverse communities in Kansas City. Despite these responsibilities, I still maintain an active traditional research agenda.

I am working on my book, I am active in my department’s career diversity initiatives, and in our public and digital humanities projects. These invisible obstacles—whether imposed by others,

by my inability to say “no,” or my determination to prove myself as “worthy” of being in academia can clearly affect both my mental and physical health, as well as my performance towards promotion and tenure. My department has been supportive in adopting my discipline’s new standards for promotion and tenure when it comes to publicly engaged historians. I can safely say that my community engagement, public history work, and development of project-based and community engagement coursework, has been included as part of my tenure requirements. In closing, I recommend reading articles on faculty burnout, especially as it relates to faculty of color, and the Presumed Incompetent book. Do not be afraid to see a therapist, and be your best advocate.

Dr. Theresa Torres’ Narrative:

As a third-generation Mexican American growing up in a small town in the Midwest, I often experienced being the only or one of a few people of color (POC) in academic settings. My Iowa public school education was excellent with teachers who knew our backgrounds. My classmates and other students were aware that I am Mexican American from a low-income, single-parent home. These were strikes against me, and while in elementary school, I had only a few friends. By middle school, several mean girls decided to exclude me. At this year’s class reunion, they expressed that are impressed by my accomplishments, but little do they know that even as an academic, I encounter challenges. I am proud of my heritage as a Latina, Mexican American, and Chicana. My grandmother told me many stories of growing up in Mexico and why I should be proud of who I am. As immigrants and as a family, we have gone through many struggles. My extended family, however, is “successful” by U.S. standards. Growing up surrounded by my extended family who kept the family tradition of Sunday dinners at my grandmother’s home taught me the value of *la familia*. This central Mexican value remains important to me. Valuing my heritage and understanding immigrants’ struggles, I have chosen to study and work with immigrants and Latinx.

While in college I encountered discrimination, but I also experienced support from my professors and friends. I learned there were only a handful of Latinas in my freshman class of five hundred. We were virtually non-existent in higher education. Post-college years, I taught high school for eleven years, earned my master’s degree and then spent five years working with inner Latinx youth in Kansas City. I witnessed unequal resources, poverty, and inadequate educational systems. In response, started a Latinx family support non-profit organization affiliated with the Avance model in San Antonio for parents of children from 0-3 years. I then prepared to pursue a PhD to be a leader, role model, and advocate for Latinx youth. Earning my doctorate was, at the time, the hardest experience of my life. After my first semester, one professor recommended I quit the PhD program. By graduation, I not only proved myself; I excelled and created a support system among my colleagues. I let them know they were not alone, since half of the first-year students were encouraged to quit the program.

As a teaching assistant and later a teacher at a primarily white Midwestern university, I experienced the myth of incompetency, a belief held among some faculty and students about faculty of color. Multiple articles challenge reliance on student evaluations since they lack understanding of good pedagogy and have bias. Few faculty have studied pedagogy and have their own bias when evaluating peers of color. Receiving tenure was the hardest thing I have accomplished. I sustained myself through support systems. I recommend making alliances with other POC and be a part of the local community of color. They can sustain and remind you of the importance of your leadership and advocacy role. Do not let the detractors get into your psyche by having a personal support system. Create a semester, monthly, weekly, and daily writing goals that you must accomplish. Do collaborative projects, if possible, since they help you keep to your goals. Be your own best friend and supporter.

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