At Home in the Academy:
Latina Faculty Counterstories and Resistances

By Maricela Oliva, Mariela A. Rodríguez, Iliana Alanís, & Patricia D. Quijada Cerecer

The Academy and Latina Faculty

Maricela Oliva and Mariela A. Rodríguez are associate professors in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and Iliana Alanís is an associate professor in the Department of Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching, all with the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Texas at San Antonio, San Antonio, Texas. Patricia D. Quijada Cerecer is an associate professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Davis, Davis, California,

In the Academy, faculty and institutional leaders traditionally have been White, male, and heterosexual (Aisenberg & Harrington, 1988; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster, 1998; Garcia, 2001; Valian, 1999). Of the 173,395 Full Professors identified in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the U.S. Department of Education in 2007, women represented almost 46,000, and Latinas held only 1,254 of those positions (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). A few years earlier in 2004, non-Hispanic White females earned 617 of the doctorates awarded, whereas only 41 Latinas earned doctorates in the same year across a range of disciplines (Hoffer, Welch, Webber, Williams, Liesk, Hess, Loew, & Guzman-Barron, 2006). Those scarce Latinas on the faculty also cluster at lower ranks (Aguirre, 2000; Contreras, 1995; Padilla, 2003). In 2009, of 28,040 male and female Latina/o

faculty members, the majority were categorized as assistant professors (6,789) and instructors (6,577). As a subgroup of these, the majority of Latina (female) faculty members served in the lower ranks as assistant professors (3,367) and instructors (3,499) (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Slow improvements (Valian, 1999) in institutions' structural diversity vis-à-vis Latina faculty means that they find themselves in alien territory, i.e., in contexts that do not readily understand or accept their difference, such that Latinas find it challenging to become incorporated into and legitimated within academe. Latinos of both genders in the faculty ranks experience subtle racism and hostility from students and peers (Solórzano, 1998) while Latina faculty members report feeling that their credibility as scholars or faculty members is challenged (Delgado-Romero, Flores, Gloria, Arredondo, & Castellanos, 2003), and that White colleagues under-estimate their abilities and discount the value they place on community advocacy (Reyes & Rios, 2005).

In response to experiences like these, researchers in a range of disciplines have focused on the need to be more welcoming and culturally responsive to communities of difference (Cipollone, Grady, & Simmons, 1996; Garcia & Smith, 1996; Hurtado & Cade, 2001; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Marshall & Oliva, 2006a; Rendón & Hope, 1996). Whether the focus is categorical difference associated with race and gender, or identity, scholars and practitioners have come to accept that traditional practices and conceptualizations in education tend to marginalize diverse or non-normative individuals and group members.

Rethinking Diversity as Deficit

As Valian (1999) aptly notes, majority group participants in systems like the Academy rarely question the appropriateness of existing practices and norms, for "an existing state of affairs defines a norm, and norms tend to be invisible" (1999, p. 253; see also Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, & Allen, 1998). Latinas are subject to professional and disciplinary expectations normed primarily on men and to a smaller extent on White women. Diversification efforts and multicultural training does occur within higher education, yet efforts tend not to critically examine the "social regularities" (Scheurich, 1997) that construct Latina faculty and their way of thinking and operating as other within this field.[1] Furthermore, educators rarely have opportunities to listen in on the critical conversations and reflections of Latina faculty members themselves as they grapple with such contexts and/or work to transform the multilayered othering practices to which they are subject as women and as Latinas (Stanley & Lincoln, 2006; Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). Such conversations and analyses come closest to unpacking how Latinas experience the tensions between subordination, self-determination, and identity that can get in the way of their achieving authenticity within academe. Thus, a key purpose of this manuscript is to reveal and learn from the critical conversations about Latinas' academic lives that are captured in this research.

Maricela Oliva, Mariela A. Rodríguez, Iliana Alanís, & Patricia D. Quijada Cerecer

Conceptual Frameworks and Scholarship

Three conceptual frameworks were useful in our consideration of the data that emerged from the Latina faculty dialogues. Concepts of *culture* (including biculturalism, and multiculturalism), *borderlands or thirdness*, and *covering* were useful constructs for making sense of the Latina faculty members' experiences. We also identified several themes bearing on the analysis of the Latinas' stories. Those themes included the centrality of race and racism and the intersection of these with other forms of subordination, their challenge to dominant ideologies and commitment to social justice, the centrality of experiential knowledge, and an interdisciplinary perspective (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Part of this involved challenging the two-dimensional discourse of male/female identity, given that such a binary discourse limits the understanding of the multiple and complex issues involving intersections of racial and gender subordination (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Critical Race Theory and Lat-CRIT frameworks also extend the traditional discourse concerning gender to account for the ways that the layers of race, class, language, immigrant status, and phenotype (Valdes, McCristal Culp, & Harris, 2002; Yosso, 2005) connect and intersect to influence individuals' experiences. The eight Latinas involved in the conversations discussed here concluded that entry into academe was similarly influenced and complicated not only by their gender and ethnicity, but also by their class, language use, and appearance.

Cultural Frameworks

A prevailing theory of student success in college (Tinto, 1988) presupposes that minority and other students must choose between the cultural worlds of home and university as part of transitioning into college and mainstream society. An implicit corollary to this theory is that individuals can best become integrated into mainstream academic environments if they work to reside or position themselves securely in the predominant or mainstream culture. In the case of research universities categorized as Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), the dominant culture has historically been white and male. In contrast to this view, other scholars (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000; Tierney, 1992) describe a view of culture as evolving from a unitary conceptualization (monoculture) to bi-modal (biculturalism) and to multi-modal (multiculturalism) ones. While the monocultural view assumes that assimilation and cultural conformity are ultimate social objectives, the last two explicitly accept that there are culturally diverse ways of being in the world.

Biculturalism and Multiculturalism

For example, Charles Valentine (as cited in Rendón, et al., 2000) effectively illustrates that African Americans do not necessarily choose between mainstream and home (Black) culture to function within American society, but that they alter-

nately live in and move between both (1971). African Americans thus successfully navigate mainstream white environments and neighborhood or family environments. Author Diane de Anda subsequently argued (1984) that the overlapping content of distinct cultures makes it is possible for individuals to move from one to another culture and to be able to function between cultures. These distinct evocations of culture became useful to us as we attempted to make sense of our trajectories, as Latinas, into and within academe. Specifically, a consideration of culture allowed us to ask whether we must assimilate and conform to mainstream ways of being within the academy to succeed, or whether it was possible to enact an authentic sense of self in work as well as home contexts.

Borderlands and Thirdness

The concept of borderlands was first presented in the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who considered herself as not only living in the South Texas region of the United States abutting Mexico, but as someone whose identity had been shaped into that of a borderlander by that binational, multicultural socialization and experience. Defining a borderlander as someone who lives in and between the cultures of both sides of a U.S./Mexico border, Anzaldúa wrote that such spaces are continuously and fluidly navigated in the lived experience of those socialized as borderlanders. The border perspective is an asset rather than a deficit in that, much as Bhabha (1994) contended, the ability to understand and navigate multiple cultural worlds and their rules enhances and transforms an individual's perspective and identity into new or 'third' modes of engagement. Bhabha (1994) argued that the most adequate and complex perspectives and ways of being in the world are not those of individuals who specialize in the cultural knowledge of one country (usually their own), but of individuals who regularly move within and between their own and other nation-states.

Additionally, borderlands and thirdness constructs reflect a view that cultural rules need not be passively received. They can also be transformed and reinvented at the intersection of cultures (i.e., in the borderlands) to meet the needs of borderlanders as cultural migrants. Implicitly, such a worldview resists the pressure to choose or conform to mainstream culture and to otherwise hide a cultural identity that is not mainstream.

Conversion, Passing, and Covering

Of particular use for our work as Latinas is Yoshino's (2007) description of the law (vis-à-vis gays and lesbians) as it evolves from conversion strategies, to passing strategies, to covering strategies. In a largely autoethnographic recounting of society's oppression of homosexuals, Yoshino (2007) articulates the concept of "passing" as the process by which minority group members allow others to believe that they have a mainstream and thus privileged racial, sexual, or cultural identity when they actually have a racially, ethnically, sexually, or culturally subordinated one. He contends that passing developed among LGBT individuals to avoid an

immediate negative consequences of being revealed as gay—in response to the overt pressure to accept society's view of heterosexuality as natural and their own homosexual orientation as deviant. Unlike the "conversion" and "passing" constructs (e.g., convert to become one of us or pass to deceptively pretend you are one of us), "covering" allows society to recognize difference without acknowledging it as acceptable. For example, covering pressures in the corporate world might compel female workers to mimic men by wearing suits rather than dresses, Spanish-speaking workers to avoid speaking Spanish so as to not disturb the myth of English language homogeneity and superiority, and African-American individuals to straighten otherwise curly hair.

In making his points about "conversion," "passing," and "covering," Yoshino (2007) contends it is wrong to pressure individual to mask their identity in favor of a more mainstream one. The covering demand is especially problematic in that it compels diverse group members to internalize an inauthentic mainstream way of being, and then to police their behavior and way of being so as to conform to the mainstream rather than to a culturally authentic self.

Covering and Gender

However, whether it is even possible to convert, pass, and cover, differs by individual. Some racial minority group members might be able to pass as white, depending on their phenotype. White and minority men and women are able, if they wish, to intentionally cover their sexual orientation. However, women are generally not able to pass as male, the privileged gender. Furthermore, women of color cannot hide their identity as subaltern on both racial/ethnic and gender terms. Extending Yoshino, the axes on which women can be asked to convert, pass, or cover are various and complex, and are even more so for culturally, ethnically, and racially diverse women.

Latina Faculty Identity as Contested Space

Given the complex implications of these three frameworks, we asked ourselves what could be learned about how women and especially women of color act to manage the various gendered, racialized, cultural, class, and other mainstream rules-for-being within academe? This would seem to require navigating multiple and intersecting rules and roles within the variable contexts in which they are applied.

A work titled *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Holland, Skinner, Lachiotte, & Cain, 1998) helped us to begin to make theoretical sense of these processes. The concept of a figured world can be useful to this consideration of Latinas' positioning in the academy. Figured worlds appear real or natural, but are in actuality the embodiment of a particularistic set of rules and practices that have come to be accepted practices for living, working, and being in a particular cultural space:

> Figured worlds rest upon people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively realized "as if" realms….People have the propensity to be drawn to, recruited for, and formed in these worlds, and to become active in and passionate about them.

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People's identities and agency are formed dialectically and dialogically in these "as if" worlds. (Holland, et al., 1998; p. 49)

This description of a figured world does not conceive of it as natural and real. Figured worlds are more constructed than objective, and have been put in place to meet the particular interests and needs of those with originary purpose and design. The concept of academe as a figured world allowed co-authors to consider by and for whom academe was created i.e., whose interests it best serves? It prompted us to also wonder about the constraints that women and, in particular, Latina faculty, are asked to work in, and to which they are asked to conform. Furthermore, it encouraged us to grapple with the ways in which the identity and agency of Latinas in this figured world are actualized, protected, enabled, and/or suppressed.

Purpose and Methodology

This manuscript contends with Latina faculty members' questions of identity and agency in the largely male and largely white world of academe. Grounded in a multi-year engagement and dialogue involving eight female Latina faculty members in a southwest urban city, authors opened up their experience as Latina faculty members and their struggles to maintain authenticity in the face of cultural, gender, and institutional pressure for conformity to existing institutional norms. The intent in doing was to foreground the complex experience of Latina faculty, and to encourage a reconsideration of institutional practices and norms—many with a deficit orientation—that inhibit Latina faculty authenticity and identity within academe.

In undertaking this project, we were guided by Wolcott's (1994) view that the purpose of qualitative research is not to prove or predict, but to understand. We embraced the particularistic nature of our context (Eisner, 1997) and did not focus on generalizing results to other women scholars, or even to all Latinas. Indeed, given our context at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI),[2] it is unlikely that experiences would generalize in a quantitative sense to other Latinas at Predominately White Institutions (PWIs). However, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) have argued, investigations of a qualitative nature are not meant to be quantitatively validated (Creswell, 2007). Instead, qualitative studies acknowledge their particularistic nature and are guided by qualitatively appropriate validation criteria (Eisner, 1997). Consumers of research, as experts in their own context, are then able to assess the transferability, confirmability, and utility of findings to that context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participants

In this work, we first engaged eight Latina scholars[3] in a conversation about their own sense of identity and agency in the academic environment. All eight participants were tenure-track faculty in an urban South Texas community within colleges of education. One was from a small private institution and the other seven were from a large HSI. The eight Latinas had varying degrees of bilingualism and bicultural-

ism and were the first in their families to obtain a terminal degree. While the group interaction took place from 2005-2010, primary data for this study emerged from two separate sessions that focused on the issues and questions described above. The four co-authors of the manuscript were among the participants, and subsequently extended the dialogue of the original eight by reflecting on transcripts of the earlier conversations. The co-authors considered how exemplars of experience could ground collective insights and potentially explain culturally gendered ways of being and knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) as Latina faculty.

Collaborative and Dialogic Process

We engaged in co-operative inquiry with a dialogic epistemology. This allowed us the opportunity to be both researchers and participants in the research (Jenlink & Banathy, 2008). It also allowed knowledge to be critiqued, negotiated, and reconceptualized based on our various backgrounds (Skovsmose, 1994). In such a process, understanding and insight are not always immediate but constructed through the negotiations and reflections of the researcher/participants.

Much as in the work by Paulus, Woodside, and Ziegler (2008), personal context and participant dialogue contributed to the research as a method for interpretation (Jenlink & Banathy, 2008). In this process, group knowledge was co-constructed and individual members became part of a discourse community of learning (Bruffee, 1999) where knowledge was extended (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000), new knowledge was created (Housley, 2000), and cultural norms were challenged (Jones, 2004).

The four authors of this piece used a same role inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1997; Jenlink & Banathy, 2008) where all four authors were involved in the design and management of the data collection. All four were involved in analysis of the dialogue and drawing conclusions; thus everyone took initiative and participated in the process. For example, at each meeting, we would bring our individual interpretations of the research to the table where we would engage in collaborative dialogue. We discussed what each personal interpretation might mean to the others and what it meant for the women in this study as a collective group.

Utilizing these processes, the four of us met to review the data and to expand on the narratives of the original eight Latina tenure track faculty. Thereafter, we met weekly for two hours from September through May of 2008. Each of these sessions was audiorecorded to more accurately represent the participants' perspectives and to facilitate analysis of our dialogues based on the transcriptions of the recordings. In our collaborative process, each of us worked independently with the data which allowed for multiple interpretations. We then integrated these viewpoints to make sense of them as a whole for the purposes of coding. Data were coded on two levels: preliminary coding of cultural conflicts related to race and gender, and pattern coding of responses to the pressures to convert, pass, or cover.

Paulus, Woodside, and Ziegler (2008), reveal the benefits of data analysis from an iterative, dialogic, and collaborative process. Those benefits are that thinking is made explicit in a way that may be difficult to replicate as a single researcher.

Through our collaborative experience and dialogue, we refined what we understood and came to understand about the constraining environments that Latina faculty and women work in, and to which they are asked to conform. Using our epistemology and theoretical frameworks, these collaborative interpretations led us to the findings for this study.

Findings

In their stories, these Latina faculty members attend to their racialized and gendered experiences as they navigate the academy for themselves and for their communities through negotiations of borderlands, identity, and covering/conformity. Their narratives revealed how race and ethnicity complicate gender in the figured worlds of the academy. Bringing those issues to the forefront in conversation allowed the Latina women to identify and articulate how they foster alternative approaches and methodologies for succeeding in academic environments so that as Latinas, they might theorize women's faculty work in ways that "ask to be met halfway" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. ii). Those more authentic approaches were informed or characterized by what scholars have identified as a borderlands or thirdness epistemology; by a view of *covering* pressures as oppressive and even discriminatory assaults on authenticity; and through a commitment to self-determined identity (Acuña, 2003). For the Latina faculty, these three elements were intersecting and mutually influencing.

Epistemology of Culturally Gendered Borderlands Identity

Several of the Latinas who participated in these conversations discussed a growing awareness that they had a point of view not shared by mainstream faculty. For example, Xochitl,[4] who is Mexican-American, understood that difference as arising from her socialization along the Texas-Mexico border:

> We grew up on the border; we grew up speaking multiple languages, we never felt like you choose one. It's always an improvisation. What are you now [as opposed to in another context]? Who are you now? How do you need to be now? . . . Why don't people get it, the way I see the world? It's because people haven't experienced the world that way.

Amanda, an international member of the group who is culturally Brazilian and ethnically Japanese, echoed this sentiment when talking about interacting within the support network of Latina scholars:

> How do you articulate something that for us is natural, but something we need to put into words? We need to explain to people that don't know what is inside of us. So that is something that I always get reminded of when we get together. We may not even talk about it, but you are reminded that you have to explain what a Latino community is and what Latino issues are. You have to know how to explain to the world who we are.

As expressed in these sentiments, a fundamental challenge for members of this group was the possibility of doing work in borderlands spaces at the intersection of mainstream and Latina/o cultural worlds. The women had a propensity to shift standpoints and to interdisciplinarily cross borders, much as they would in liminal borderlands, but this way of being presented a challenge. Traditional disciplinary practice requires specialization and focus that is particularistic rather than inter-disciplinary and cross-cultural. Thus, the cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinarily flexible work of the Latina scholars tended to be viewed as 'lacking in focus,' and the women had often been advised to do 'more traditional' work.

Nevertheless, the lived borderlands experiences of the women led them to a critical self-awareness that prompted them to actively choose not to follow the path of traditional scholarship and discourse, but instead to author their own path (Baxter-Magolda, 2009). Isabel, a Chicana on a postdoctoral fellowship, articulated the tension in this way:

> I am resistant to following the traditional rules that are communicated in academia. Academia wants you to pin yourself in one area or another. The daunting part is what comes after this, in terms of how to frame my work in a way that fits within the requirements, the expectation of academia while still honoring what is authentic to me in terms of how I look at questions and address research.

Isabel's desire to be authentic to Latina/o identity as a disciplinary borderlander while staying within the requirements of academe is something that others also negotiated. Victoria, a Yucatec Mayan-Chicana faculty member, cautioned that if ever the group's work became bound primarily by individualistic success and tenure expectations, "to some extent . . . we as scholars and researchers are abandoning parts of ourselves."

Positionality as Identity in Academic Spaces

Managing the multiple and intersecting axes of culture, language, gender, and race within their lived experience permeated the Latinas' consideration of personal and professional identity. This research uncovered and made explicit multiple possibilities for being within academe and made evident the Latina faculty members' desire to author an authentic self (Baxter-Magolda, 2009). Furthermore, in keeping with the borderland perspective, the women came to understand that they mindfully enacted variable subject positions depending on the demands (for authenticity) of the particular circumstance and context in which they found themselves. In other words, since multiple subject positions are implicitly available to borderlanders, identity standpoints were understood to vary as the context and purposes demanded. Isabel commented:

> So depending on whether I'm trying to make a stance that 'I'm more U.S. than you' or I'm trying to make a stance of 'I come from an immigrant background as well as you do,' then I make the argument of what [immigrant] generation I'm highlighting within my family background.

Latinas explained how they had come to embrace a belief in the utility of a shifting identity for themselves as scholar/professionals. For example, Isabel continued,

> Through fate, whatever you want to call it, just through life, experiences got shifted over into a multitude of different areas from community advocacy and outreach to parent training to special education to vocational rehabilitation. I've had experiences in all those fields, so talk about [self] authoring and identity. I shifted in many, many different ways. But I think that part of that had made me look at issues that were vague or that I had questions [about] in a very interdisciplinary way.

Xochitl similarly reflected this intentional tendency to shift positionality as needed. She commented, "You could be Mayan in one context and a U.S. Latina in another context." As these comments show, the Latinas gave themselves the freedom to "improvise who you are based on where you are."

Resistance to Conversion, Passing, and Covering

Unlike Yoshino's experiences that provoked, for him, the process of having to pass and then to cover his homosexuality, this group of Latinas did not question the importance of maintaining a strong and authentic sense of self within the academy. However, they described their efforts to do so in White, male-dominated academic settings as a struggle. They reported that tensions and even conflicts had arisen when they had attempted to maintain borderlander selves rather than convert, pass, or cover in the performance of mainstream identity. Their personal narratives reflected that these Latinas avoided assimilating and protected their agency and ability to choose among possibilities, including the potential of a borderlander self. Xochitl, articulated this as a need to "be authentic and true to whoever we are and whoever we want to be. I've always been aware and reflective about the struggle to be authentic, to find the authentic voice, to author myself in a way that doesn't diminish the things that I value in myself." Like her, other Latinas believed it was important to be authentic in the teaching, research, and service required in academe. Consequently, these women made choices throughout their academic careers that engaged academe in unanticipated ways. This was illustrated by one of Xochitl's stories about her first awareness of male colleagues' inability to understand or accept her for who she was:

> I remember being in a faculty meeting where I happened to disagree with something a senior, White male scholar proposed. He looked at me completely taken aback, like what do you mean you don't agree? … It dawned on me that yes, they wanted diversity. [In that sense] I looked different, I was a different gender, but they assumed because I was socialized through academe that I would actually be "one of the [White] guys."

Xochitl had already understood that her standpoint was different from that of her colleagues. As the story illustrates, she also came to better understand that some of their views of diversity were superficial in that they did not encompass (and hence did not make room for) her way of being as a person and scholar.

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Negotiating Received and Authentic Identities in the Academy

Faced with the constant need to diagnose context and circumstance to improvise a way of being appropriate for that situation, and the persistent need to do so in ways that maintained or created a culturally authentic space, these Latinas valued and appreciated the freedom to let their guard down around each other. This sentiment was echoed by Victoria, who stated:

> I was really excited the way we formed REÁL [Research for the Educational Advancement of Latina/os] because I do think that, for me, it is a space that really nurtures me. They are like my circle or my family. And I think if I had to attribute my success in academia, it would have to be to these supportive collaborative networks.

For yet another woman, the cultural space made available within the Latina group was unlike the interactive space of other academic gatherings. It reflected not only women's gendered ways of being, but also the Latina/o cultural perspective. Laura explained the familial sense of belonging that she felt among other Latinas:

> I like the comadres [a kind of fictive kinship] feeling of when we meet. We meet differently than other groups; we bring food. Even if people don't make it, they buy it. It's a different kind of a space. And I feel when I say something at REÁL, I feel that confianza [trust] that it will stay there and that it is for us.

The Latinas came together in a space in which issues could be safely communicated and in which they could get a culturally more authentic perspective.

Discussion: Towards Latina Faculty Empowerment

We have attempted to describe and discuss how these Latina faculty members' culturally distinct orientation to academic life, coupled with their women's standpoint, differed from the practices and images of academic work that they received and otherwise perceived within their institutions. Their incongruent approach, vis-à-vis those other models, resulted from a need to enact kinship and community values at the intersection of female and Mexican American identities. Such an orientation to academic work was present in every aspect of the women's thinking and actions, but tended to produce dissonance when contrasted with their institutions' individual- and disciplinarily-focused orientation. Notwithstanding such dissonance, the women resisted the pressure to wholly conform to received models for being in academe. They instead persistently considered how to open new cultural spaces for themselves within scholarship and practice domains. In terms of scholarship, Victoria reflected this tension when she said, "To some extent I think that we . . . are abandoning parts of ourselves through the kinds of work that we do…Traditional ways of doing research are constricting work toward social justice." Isabel agreed that "the daunting part is . . . how to frame my work in a way that fits within the requirements, the expectations of academia, while still honoring . . . how I look at questions and address research."

The stories told by the Latina women indicate that the faculty role positions them to confront the question of whether to accommodate, embrace, or resist the structures and assumptions embedded in figured worlds designed for and by white men. Whether resisting the loss of self is done by recourse to strategies of multiculturalism (DeAnda, 1984; Rendón, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000), by navigating multiple worlds in the borderlands rather than acculturating (Tinto, 1994), or by embracing the creation of something wholly new (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bhabha, 1994; Delgado-Bernal, 1998; Marshall & Oliva, 2006b; Oliva, 2000) preoccupied the Latinas whose narratives and voices were presented in this paper. They recognized the challenge of achieving communitarian and borderlander ways of being within the individualistic and otherwise constraining and monocultural figured world of academe. In the end, they aspired to transform the figured world to one that is more affirming of who they are and of their community of origin.

At the beginning of this inquiry process, we asked ourselves several questions about life in the figured world of academe. It seems appropriate to return to these as we consider what we have learned and what we have yet to accomplish. Namely, if academe is socially constructed, then what and whose needs is it intended to serve, and how can the identity and agency of Latina faculty members in this figured world be actualized, protected, and enabled?

Normative Constraints: Academe for Whom?

Research on how academe privileges certain groups, particularly white males, is well documented (Delgado-Romero, et.al., 2003; González, 2003; Reyes & Halcón, 1988; Reyes & Ríos, 2005). The culture of power structuring academe affords privileges to individuals based on their race, class, and gender and in so doing marginalizes those, like Latina faculty members, who find themselves on the wrong side of the power binary. As a group of non-traditional and even scarce actors in academe, these Latinas experienced being pressured to choose mainstream values and practices within the academy in order to succeed. As seen elsewhere (Bettez, Kier Lopez & Machado-Casas, 2009; Rendón, 2008), those pressures compel Latinas to reconsider (in response to challenge) and continuously rebuild an authentic sense of self. However, rather than simply integrate into existing normative structures of the academy, the Latinas in this study have worked to safeguard authentic selves by creating their own space—the REÁL Collaborative—for being in the larger institutional context (Alanís, Cuero, & Rodríguez, 2009). This group supported the Latinas to resist the pressure to conform, convert, or cover by serving as the liminal space in which they are able to continue to enact their borderlander selves.

Within that space, all of the women initiated or collaborated in research organized around Latina/o educational issues. In this way, the women served as each other's support in the faculty development process (Turner, 2002) even as the group served to expand the peer network into a strong peer mentoring team. It should be noted that because the figured world of Academe discounts alternative and diverse non-normative perspectives and ways of being, academic research generated by

its newest members—women and faculty of color—is often misinterpreted and undervalued (Reyes & Rios, 2005). Understanding this, the Latina faculty also participated in forging new publication venues[5] to disseminate their work and organized their own research-related events to communicate, share, and promote their work to colleagues, graduate students, and community members.

Implications for a Transformation of Figured Worlds in Academe

As Latina scholars who grappled personally and reflectively with the constraints and dilemmas posed in/by Academe, we conclude that long-term progress to authentically include Latina voices depends on the extent to which we are willing to take on the challenges of institutional transformation. There are several implications from this research that relate to the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Latina faculty within the contested space of academe.

First, we advocate that institutions of higher education acknowledge that the underrepresentation of faculty of color in academe and their clustering in the lowest ranks might be due to hiring practices that do not actively seek them out (Vigil Laden, 2009) or that inappropriately filter them out of consideration and advancement (Sagaria, 2002). Until Latina faculty are present within institutions in the critical mass necessary to be visible and transformative, they will continue to be pressured to convert, pass, or cover in order to be successful. Although some efforts are made to diversify faculty at many four-year universities, we advocate that an institutional commitment be made to also ensure that all departments extend the commitment by monitoring their openness to Latina/o epistemologies (Contreras, 1995; Delgado-Bernal, 1998) such as those we have sought to identify and articulate here.

Second, numerical diversity alone is not sufficient and we advocate that support programs also be institutionalized. For instance, designing, implementing, and formalizing culturally responsive mentor programs for untenured Latina faculty is critical and would demonstrate an institutional commitment to retaining Latina faculty. Mentoring programs that make transparent the rules for tenure are also essential in illuminating the hidden subjectivities that can emerge around securing tenure. Institutional advocacy of research and scholarship that focuses on issues of diversity and equity would further support and empower Latina faculty to foster equity oriented practices and research to counter the existing normative structures of academe.

Finally, programs that provide alternative tenure and promotion criteria should be investigated to assess their impact on Latina and other diverse faculty. Examples of this include investigating whether incorporating community, school-university, and service or outreach with underrepresented groups and valuing such engagement for tenure, are effective in facilitating Latina progress toward tenure and advancement in rank. Additionally, it is critically important that institutions of higher education advocate and support research and scholarship that centers on issues of diversity and equity.

Congruent with the findings of this study, we also encourage research that

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examines whether Latinas in academe are expected to achieve academic success at the cost of authenticity and identity. That is, we wonder if converting, passing, and/or covering are prerequisites or precursors to Latina success in academe. Research in this arena would lead to important discussions and potentially to the revised practices, with respect to tenure and promotion, that we have suggested are necessary. Finally there is a need for research that helps explain how institutions of higher education can transition from engaging in systemic, hegemonic, and exclusionary or marginalizing practices to multiculturally oriented ones. While some attention has been directed at making institutions multiculturally competent for the benefit of students (Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2004), recommendations may differ regarding how to making them multiculturally competent with respect to faculty.

Limitations

One limitation in this study is the purposeful sampling of eight Latina scholars within one Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), which in traditional research is not sufficient to generalize. Nonetheless, we addressed this point early in this manuscript by acknowledging that we do not intend to generalize our findings to other women, or even to all Latinas in other types of postsecondary institutions. Purposeful sampling, however, is necessary to move from general experiences of women faculty to the specific lived experiences of Latina faculty members, especially since their voices are often precluded from the majoritarian discourse. Our findings bring these hidden and sometimes private issues to the forefront in pubic conversations to reveal how Latina scholars create alternative approaches and methodologies for succeeding in academe.

A second potential limitation is that the dialogic process of research has been critiqued in the literature (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Creswell, 2002). Like the first limitation, this critique has a foundation in positivist epistemologies, i.e., those grounded in what Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified as an objectivist view of research. Again, our use of collaborative dialogue is meant to lead to a framing and reframing of the data based on participants' particular, and not typical epistemology and perspective within their situated context. The dialogic process allows for the development of knowledge among the participants as members of a research community that prioritizes the evolving and emergent nature of knowledge (Paulus, Woodside, & Ziegler, 2008).

Conclusion

The normative structures and taken-for-granted expectations of mainstream society are like received cultural rules for being in the world (Holland, et al., 1998; Oliva, 2000). Normative cultural structures can be so taken for granted that they appear natural and assume a discursive power that is difficult to challenge by those, like these Latina university faculty members, who can be subjugated and oppressed

by them. Taken-for-granted forces act in more subtle than explicit ways as they circulate to reproduce and enforce the norms of academe that have been discussed. The subtle and invisible nature of these norms makes their oppressive nature difficult to describe, discuss, and resist. Attempting to do so is even more difficult when identity is complex and informed by multiple and intersecting characteristics like culture, race, gender, and language (Delgado-Bernal, 1998), as it is for these women. The dialogues of the Latina scholars presented here reflect their struggle with marginalization and for self-determination and self-identity, along with the barriers that make it difficult for them to be authentic within academe. By taking their private dialogues and transforming them into a vehicle for public discussion, this manuscript extends research about Latina faculty and reveals how they must actively contend with questions of identity and agency in the largely white and male world of academe.

Through a process of self-reflection and analysis in this research, we as Latina scholars came to better understand academe's rules of the game, while actively resisting its pressures to conform in terms of identity. We are collectively engaging in "resistance with accommodation" (Achor & Morales, 1990, p. 281) and as tempered radicals by rejecting and challenging existing power relationships while working through rather than against institutional mechanisms for attaining educational advancement.

Nevertheless, a desire to transform and not simply accommodate ways of being within academe distinguishes us as Latinas. We create counterstories of being in the academy that reflect our ability and desire to negotiate borders and to portray our fluid cultural and linguistic experience. Furthermore, we view the ability to epistemologically manage and navigate multiple cultural worlds as an asset in the continuous process of self-authoring. As we have demonstrated, an ability to enact transformative borderlander interactions grounded in context is one of our Latina markers of identity and practice. This reveals itself as an important attribute and a potentially unique contribution to academe. As non-traditional Latina scholars, we embrace this part of ourselves in order to be more at home in academe as we work to re-figure it for greater inclusiveness.

Notes

[1] For a longer discussion of how we must look behind the collective understandings of a problem to unpack assumptions that impact how we construct and consequently see a problem, see Scheurich's (1997) discussion of policy archeology.

[2] Hispanic Serving Institutions, or HSIs, are otherwise traditional institutions with two important characteristics. Their enrollment is at least 25% Hispanic and 50% or more students qualify as low income (Benitez, 1998; Obrien & Zudak, 1998).

[3] The eight participants are founding members of the Research for the Educational Advancement of Latina/os (REÁL) Collective. A key reason for the formation of the group was to establish a female support network among junior scholars working in a White-male-dominent environment (Cuadráz & Pierce, 1994). The group members share similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds, perceptions of marginalized status within academe, research agendas that include a commitment to advocate for underrepresented communities, and a desire to transform the academy to a more just and equitable environment (Alanís, Cuero, & Rodriguez, 2009). REÁL thus reflects its members' critical understanding and perception of their positions in academe, and embodies the Latinas' purposeful creation of a place for themselves within the ivory tower.

[4] Participant names are pseudonyms.

[5] Of the co-authors, Oliva is on the Editorial Board of one journal that combines a focus on Hispanic and higher education issues and she contributes to a consideration of those topics and others. Alanís serves on the Editorial Board for a primary journal in bilingual education and PK-16. Quijada has served on the AERA Scholars Advocating for Gender Equity Committee (SAGE), and Rodriguez co-organized a graduate students of color symposium for a national organization's annual meeting.

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