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CHAPTER 18

UN CAMINO SOLITARIO!/ A LONELY ROAD!

Chicana/o Faculty Storytelling and Counterstorytelling in Academia

Juan Carlos González, Gloria Vaquera,
Cynthia Bejarano, and Edwardo L. Portillos

Several years ago, as we were together for a national conference, enjoying *café con leche* and discussing our challenges as Chicano faculty, Juan Carlos said:

We need to share our experiences with a broader audience of Chicano doctoral students who aspire to be faculty and new Chicano faculty currently in the tenure and promotion process.

These national academic conferences give us the opportunity to discuss our struggles and successes as faculty and learn from one another about how to engage higher education's political systems, and re-energize by being among other Chicano colleagues.

We have been faculty now for an average of 7 years—two of us have been promoted with tenure, and two are at their second institution going

through the tenure process. As Chicano faculty in academe who study Latinos in education and society, we are keenly aware of how racial privilege operates. We feel compelled to write about social justice issues that are of interest to our communities, and to teach on substantive topics in which we are specialists. In this chapter, we share our challenges and successes in hopes that we can inspire and educate other Chicanos to enter the academy as faculty, and add to the literature on the Chicano faculty experience in higher education.

We describe the successes and challenges of academic life as Chicano faculty with a focus on research, teaching, and service, and how faculty socialization has affected our own academic lives and identities. We talk about themes that we have all experienced: the -isms of the academy (i.e., racism, sexism, and classism); academic politics; academic mentorship; marginalization and isolation; and working at predominantly White institutions (PWIs) and Hispanic serving institutions (HSIs). We ground the telling of these experiences within Latino critical theory (LatCrit), a framework that focuses on social justice and equity by focusing on the construction of knowledge via the voices (i.e., *dichos*, *cuentos*, and *consejos*) of Latinos. These voices will be presented through the methodological tradition of autoethnography, and the LatCrit theoretical traditions of storytelling and counterstorytelling. The presentation of Chicano faculty voices will center around this research question: What are some challenges and successes of Chicano professors on their way to tenure and promotion?

BACKGROUND

Chicano Faculty

While Chicanos have been entering the academy since the 1960s, we are still, by far, underrepresented minorities in academe (Delgado-Romero, Manlove, Manlove, & Hernandez, 2007; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008; Turner, Hernández, Peña, & González, 2008). As of March 2008, there were 46 million Latinos in the United States, with 34.2% under 18 years of age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Latinos in the U.S. are one of the youngest racial/ethnic groups, but also one of the least formally educated. In 2009, of the 30.3 million Latinos 18 years of age and older, only 9.2 million (or 30.4%) had completed high school, 2.7 million (9%) had completed a bachelor's degree, 671,000 (2.2%) had a master's, and 94,000 (0.3%) had a doctorate (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2009). If considering only the population of Latinos 25 years and older that had at least a graduate degree in 2009, only 9.5% were of Mexican American

descent, compared to 16.5% Puerto Rican, and 27.9% Cuban American (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

Faculty representation of Latinos is lacking. Of the 94,000 Latinos with doctorates, only 24,975 (26.6%) were working as full-time instructional faculty in the fall of 2007 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Having 25,000 Latino faculty members out of a U.S. Latino population of 46 million equates to having 1 Latino faculty member for every 1,840 Latinos. Needless to say, the education pipeline to these coveted academic positions is problematic. It is described by many Chicanos who "make it" as a journey of survival (see González, 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2001; Turner, Hernández, et al., 2008; Vaquera, 2007).

The Collective Voice of Chicano Faculty

The literature documenting the collective experiences of faculty of color has grown steadily over the last 20 years. Turner, González, et al. (2008) found that, while the experiences of faculty of color (including Chicano faculty) were overwhelmingly negative, there were also positive experiences. When Chicanos overcome the challenges in the hiring process (Reyes & Ríos, 2005), they also experience difficulties that lead to low levels of job satisfaction (Seifert & Umbach, 2008). Experiences of bias in the tenure and promotion process mainly address research, teaching, and service (León & Nevarez, 2007; Tierney & Sallee, 2008). One common research challenge is when Chicanos have their Latino-focused research questioned (Aguirre, 2005; Urrieta & Chávez Chávez, 2009). The critique is that Chicanos are biased in favor of Latinos, and doing research in their communities cannot be objective. This critique mirrors teaching challenges where Chicanos talked about being questioned in the classroom by white students, particularly in diversity courses (Aguirre, 2005), and were evaluated by students as biased in courses that addressed Latino issues (Smith & Anderson, 2005).

Chicanos also describe having to serve on any and all committees related to diversity, especially if they are one of the few Chicano faculty members on campus (Aguirre, 2005; Rendón, 1996; Urrieta & Méndez Benavidez, 2007). At institutions that lacked a critical mass of students and faculty of color, faculty were more likely to experience isolation and marginalization (Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Moore, Acosta, Perry, & Edwards, 2010; Porter, 2007; Reyes & Ríos, 2005), tokenism (Medina & Luna, 2000; Salazar, 2009; Segura, 2003), and lack of mentorship (Santos, 2005). In addition to ethnic-based challenges, Chicanos also confronted issues based on class, gender, and sexual orientation (Delgado-Romero et al., 2007; González, 2007b; Salazar, 2009).

On the positive side, many faculty members also have great experiences, particularly at institutions where Chicanos find programs that support their work and value their ethnic identity (Medina & Luna, 2000; Segura, 2003; Soto-Greene, Sanchez, Churrango, & Salas-Lopez, 2005). Positive experiences were reported when administrative leaders were supportive of Latino-focused research agendas (González, 2007), and Latino students (or other students of color) were present in large numbers (Castellanos, & Gloria, 2007). However, while research does not show that Chicanos work best when surrounded by a critical mass of Chicano colleagues, positive experiences are documented when they have the opportunity to put their research to practice (González, 2007; Padilla & Chávez

Chavez, 1995) and believe that they are making a contribution to the scholarship in their field (Santos, 2005). Chicano faculty members report positive experiences when they have access to resources and have the opportunity to develop networks with like-minded scholars (González, 2007a, 2007b).

This literature serves as the basis for sharing the challenges and opportunities that we have confronted as faculty. In telling our stories, we will address which of these themes have applied to our experiences.

Using LatCrit to Storytell and Counterstorytell

Latino critical theory (LatCrit), rooted in Chicano studies and the civil rights literature (Johnson & Martínez, 1998), offers a framework for the analysis of the Chicano experience in academia due to its focus on framing issues from a lens of justice and equity. LatCrit theory evolved from and differs from Critical race theory (CRT) in subtle ways, mainly in its emphasis on the pan-Latino experience (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Valdes, 1996). Some of the issues addressed in the CRT literature also coincide with the themes addressed in LatCrit, such as institutional discrimination based on race/ethnicity, class, and gender.

LatCrit has five basic tenets which we use to understand the Chicano experience in higher education: the presence and existence of discriminatory oppression (particularly based on race, class, and gender); the presence and perpetuation of oppressive dominant ideologies (e.g., "deficit theory") that govern university life; a commitment to social justice on the part of historically oppressed peoples and their allies; the vital importance of using experiential knowledge to address institutional discrimination (e.g., storytelling, counter-storytelling, *dichos*, *cuentos*, *consejos*); and the commitment to using interdisciplinary perspectives (e.g., sociology, criminology) to understand the complexity of the Chicano experience (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

To help understand our experiences, we focus on using experiential knowledge to address institutional discrimination. Although there are a variety of methods to exploring experiential knowledge, we use autoethnographic *storytelling* and *counterstorytelling*. These approaches consist of telling stories to each other based on shared ideas and experiences that integrate the tenets of LatCrit. Many times these stories run counter to the established narratives of institutional history at our places of employment. We tell these stories as documentation of struggles that may help other Chicanos in their own navigation of tenure and promotion.

In regard to storytelling, Rodriguez (2010) stated that it is "used to provide a venue for the marginalized to voice their knowledge and lived experiences" and "serves as a powerful means of survival and liberation" (p. 3). Storytelling is also a way to share stories of oppression and marginalization (Aguirre, 2000; Fernández, 2002). At the point that storytelling integrates the five LatCrit tenets it becomes a counterstory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). For the purpose of this chapter, storytelling and counter-storytelling are used to expose the dominant discourse of universities that exclude and/or marginalize Chicano academics. Both also help Chicanos build a sense of community by providing space to share common realities, inform society about how discrimination operates, and challenge the dominant narratives that marginalize and exclude them (Rodriguez, 2010). LatCrit storytelling and counter-storytelling also allows us to explore the complexities of how institutional racism and various forms of marginalities affect us as Chicano faculty, while simultaneously exploring group differences which are often neglected in studies on Chicanos.

METHOD

Autoethnography

In storytelling and counterstorytelling our academic and personal experiences, we reflect internally. This is what academics call *autoethnography*. Reed-Danahay (1997) described autoethnography as a genre of writing and research that places the self (auto) within a specific social and cultural (ethno) context in the research (graphy) process. These three components carry different weight, depending on the researcher, the project, or the purpose. Wall (2006) stated that autoethnography acknowledges and explores the relationship between the personal and cultural in qualitative research.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) further stated that autoethnographies are usually written in first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness. This method liberates researchers to tell and write about

multiple and diverse truths, histories, points of view, and topics (Berger, 2001; Richardson, 1995; Tierney, 1998), and place the lived experience of the researcher above the outmoded traditional methods of “empirical” and “objective” research (Denzin, 1997; Ellis & Flaherty, 1992) that may not get at the nuances of diverse cultural experiences.

Autoethnography follows a set of norms and structures. Anderson (2006) distinguished between three types of autoethnographies: *realist*, which emphasizes the practical over the abstract; *evocative*, which emphasizes emotions over thinking; and *analytic*, which emphasizes thinking over emotion. It is the analytic that researchers need to focus on in their work as academics (Anderson, 2006). Analytic autoethnography requires the researcher to be a “full” member of the research group under study (e.g., Chicano faculty studying Chicano faculty), visible as a member in published texts, and committed to developing theoretical understandings of the broader social/cultural phenomena under study (i.e., not simply documenting personal experiences, but providing an “insider’s perspective” for the purpose of understanding the relationship of the personal to the larger structure).

FOUR CHICANO FACULTY AUTOETHNOGRAPHIES

Juan Carlos: From Public Midwestern PWI to Public Western HSI

I was born and raised in Los Angeles. I have lived in predominantly Black and largely Latino immigrant neighborhoods as a new immigrant in Southern California. I took my first faculty position at the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), but now have been at California State University-Fresno (CSUF) for a couple of years.

The Midwest was a great place to begin as an academic, but there were also some challenges. When I presented my research on Latina doctoral students during my hiring interview, the term *Chicana* appeared to confuse some of my future colleagues. At this interview, I was asked if I could go into the elementary schools to talk to Latino kids, even though I was applying for a position in higher education. Clearly, my tokenization began before I was hired.

For 4 years I worked and interacted with some great colleagues at UMKC, but I lived a marginal existence as a scholar of color. My brownness made me stand out because there was only one other Chicano faculty at the university, hired as a visiting professor. Upon arrival, I was told that I almost did not get hired because someone on the search committee said that I might not make it since there were no Latinos at the university to

serve as mentors. I quietly wondered how Latinos would ever be hired if only Latinos could mentor them. The major difference between UMKC and the CSUF is that at the former I was clearly a Latino, who happened to be faculty, and at the latter I am a faculty member who happens to be Latino; and this orientation is extremely important in terms of how Latino faculty experience their sense of belonging in academe.

Every year I spent in the Midwest felt like my last because many of my colleagues did not understand what I was doing there. They would say, “We know you’re leaving.” And ask, “How many offers have you had?” In my second year a colleague sent me a position to an institution where there were more Latinos, hoping that I would apply. So when I left after four years I felt like I was fulfilling a prophecy. Few seemed surprised I was leaving, and many were surprised that I had stayed 4 years.

I sought mentorship at UMKC as an assistant professor, but rather was told that I worked too hard. My research agenda on Latinos was supported because I had African American scholars and white allies who understood the importance of my research, even though there were few Latinos at UMKC. At CSUF, it is expected that I engage in Latino-based research, particularly when the results will benefit the local Latino community.

Within a year, I was asked to teach the diversity course, even though this was not my area of scholarship. I was assumed an expert on diversity because I was a faculty of color, and it took a lot of explaining to my colleagues that diversity was its own area of scholarship that required faculty with this unique expertise. The faculty of color did not want me to be pigeon-holed into teaching this course, but they also did not trust the white faculty teaching it because the belief was that they would eventually control the diversity curriculum of the school.

In relation to my service responsibilities, I was not given much direction at UMKC, but constantly asked to serve. Colleagues would tell me, “You need to say ‘no’ because before you know it you are going to be serving on every diversity-related committee on campus.” But engagement through service was my only opportunity to connect to communities of color through the campus. CSUF, despite being an HSI, is no different in terms of the service demands for faculty of color; but being that Fresno is located in one of the poorest areas of the country (the Central Valley), it is more difficult to say no because of the greater need in the Latino communities that surround the university.

Gloria: Midwest, Private, Predominantly White Institution

I was born in California to first-generation Mexicans. In my early childhood, I lived in the Bay Area and in Mexico, but my formative years

were in Michigan. My educational experience, from first grade through my bachelor's degree, was in the context of a PWI. This experience made me keenly aware of my subordinate status and the challenges of navigating education from the margins. Upon earning my doctorate, I accepted a faculty position in sociology at John Carroll University (JCU), a Jesuit liberal arts university just outside of Cleveland, where I have been for 7 years.

There are a number of challenges in working at JCU. When I went on the job market, I wanted an institution that would balance teaching and research priorities. I thought I had come to a school where quality teaching would be emphasized and rewarded, service to community appreciated, and research would be secondary. Despite the liberal arts environment that professes quality teaching, less attention was paid to teaching, and no one ever visited my class for an official observation. Student evaluations remain the sole measure of good teaching. With regard to research, I was told "publications are not that important, we even count book reviews" during the job interview. This turned out not to be the case, and after each annual review the number of expected publications increased. Fortunately, in my third year, a new tenured chair was appointed in my department, and the moving target of publications was made explicitly clearer despite the ambiguous language in the tenure guidelines that stated "contribution to discipline." While I found pressure in publishing, at least the expectations were clearer after my third year.

As a religious institution, I also expected that service would be both encouraged and rewarded. Early in the tenure process, I was cautioned by senior faculty to not get overly involved and that service connected to research was best. Ironically, my dean even took me aside at a religious conference, for university personnel where service was the central topic, to urge me to pull back on my volunteer work. The service work in question involved an educational outreach program for middle school Latino students and was also my new research site. To defend my use of time I had to explicitly detail how this work related to my broader research agenda and clearly make this argument each year as part of the tenure review process.

As noted by the other authors, service for Chicanos is more than just a category on our tenure evaluation. Because there are so few of us, we are approached by many entities to fill in the void where our presence is needed. In my efforts to secure tenure, I limited my service commitments except where it involved the Latino community. In this PWI, doing service has allowed me to stay connected to my community and find a place for myself. The time I dedicate to these efforts is therapeutic and reaffirms why I became an academic—to do research and service that affects my community.

By and large, my experience as a junior faculty member demonstrates a misunderstanding of institutional faculty priorities and vague tenure guidelines. The guidelines were designed to be purposefully vague and thus, open to interpretation. The new tenure chair shared with me her interpretation of this vague document and thus, I trusted and followed her recommendations. In the case of my department, I was fortunate to be evaluated on teaching, research, and service, and met the requirements to be promoted and receive tenure. Across the institution, however, I have witnessed faculty of color being wrongly denied a contract, along with others that have had difficult tenure proceedings. In some cases the tenure process is still treated like an application to a country club where the issue of "fit" becomes the primary criteria. While I would like to celebrate my tenure achievement, this accomplishment has been bitter sweet because of the injustice perpetrated against colleagues of color (and women).

Edwardo: West, Public, Predominantly White Institution

I am from Colorado, born in Pueblo, and raised in Colorado Springs. Since entering the public school system I was always told that if I worked hard enough that I could do whatever I wanted. The reality is that I encountered many stumbling blocks in academia. I landed my first assistant professor position at California State University, San Marcos (CSUSM) while I was *All but Dissertation* (ABD). I found myself in a department where over 50% of my colleagues were faculty of color or a part of the gay and lesbian community. In the midst of diversity, I found supportive colleagues who guided me through my first-year evaluation and provided important insights on how to succeed at CSUSM.

After I defended my dissertation, several job prospects presented themselves in Colorado where I still have family and friends. I applied for, and accepted, my current job at the UCCS. My current department in Sociology is also diverse, with white professors in the minority. My experiences at various institutions have been one of support and mentorship rather than one of isolation that many faculty of color experience at their institutions.

At UCCS, I have been able to develop a research agenda focusing on my expertise in criminology, while at the same time centering on issues relevant to the Latino community. My colleagues have come to recognize that there are a wide variety of venues in which academic work can make a contribution to the discipline and to the communities we may desire to help. Although I have remained committed to the traditional venues for publication, I still have the opportunity to utilize nontraditional methods. At the same time, I do not feel that I can only publish in journals related

only to my discipline, which allows me to work on interdisciplinary projects. This is not always the experience for all scholars.

Teaching experiences at CSUSM and UCCS have been very positive. At both institutions, I chose what I wanted to teach each semester. I have had the opportunity to develop new courses and many of my courses are cross-listed with the women and ethnic studies major. Also, at each institu-

tion, I was able to negotiate a lower teaching load during my first year, and it was largely due to my mentor who guided me throughout the negotiation process for both positions. Again, these experiences are different than those of some faculty who are forced to teach certain classes where they have no interest in the substantive field.

Teaching evaluations at both universities have been largely positive. The student population at CSUSM was much more diverse than the UCCS student population, but I found that students from both institutions are receptive to my critical thinking approach to teaching. Part of the reason is that my colleagues also teach from a critical perspective and students self-select whether or not they want to hear this perspective when they enroll in a sociology class.

Service work has been both to the department and to the local community. In fact, my service work to the local community is just as much valued as the work that I contribute to the department, the university and the discipline. Many of my departmental colleagues at CSUSM and UCCS have been involved in activist work within the community. At each institution, I was mentored by the chair of the department to stay away from service work during my first year and then slowly become involved in work at various levels within the university and discipline. This again shows how the departments wanted to ensure that I was successfully working toward tenure by allowing me the time to transition to a new community and to focus on research. Later, I chose my service work, and no one in the department dictates what service work I do. Of course I do my share of work in the department, the university, and the discipline, but I also engage the local community to address issues of social and economic justice on a variety of levels.

Cynthia: Southwest, Public, Land-Grant, Hispanic Serving Institution

I grew up in New Mexico, 20 miles from the international border, in a Mexican/Mexican American community wracked by poverty and violence. It lacked infrastructure and resources, and was infamous for its overburdened educational system and endemic gang rivalries. These experiences now shape my perspectives as an associate professor of criminal justice at

New Mexico State University (NMSU). My research focuses broadly on border violence at the U.S.-Mexico border and Latino youth in the Southwest. After completing my PhD at Arizona State University, I moved back to the borderlands in 2001, and started my tenure at NMSU, my alma mater.

I was excited about working at NMSU, the only HSI land-grant institution in the U.S. However, despite serving a significant portion of Latino students, the demographics of most departments did not ethnically reflect the region and students served by the university. For 5 years, I was the only person of color in my department; yet, our department served close to 500 undergraduate students and roughly 70 graduate students, nearly half of whom were Latino. We now have four tenure-track faculty of color and over 900 undergraduate and graduate students.

Shortly after starting, I was independently told by two White male professors not to “hang my brown beret outside my front door” and that “the men’s bathroom had been turned into my office.” They made these comments in the hallway with no one nearby to bear witness. This is how I began the professoriate. I was intimidated by these individuals and experienced what some would call academic bullying, if not racism and sexism. Both of these men sat on my promotion and tenure committee.

I also discovered that male students of all ethnicities often asked why a woman was teaching criminal justice. I was challenged by some male students, but was also fortunate to have other students come to my defense. With these experiences, I had few people to turn to. I immersed myself in work with Latino students across campus, joined the university’s Hispanic Caucus, and insulated myself with these individuals, and people from the local communities working on social justice advocacy for my own self-preservation.

My goal became to demonstrate to my students, colleagues and peers that I was very capable of teaching, research and service, and had my department head and a colleague assist me throughout the process. Latino leaders across campus offered me significant support, good advice, and a sympathetic ear, but since the situation in my home department was difficult, I anticipated the grueling tenure process. When I went up for tenure, I submitted my portfolio and a supplemental portfolio that included my scholarship, a university press book published the year before, strong teaching evaluations, and federal grant awards for a successful program that offered services to primarily Latino students from agricultural backgrounds.

Despite the contents of my portfolio, I was told that one of my White male colleagues said that I achieved tenure not for what I had accomplished but because of “who I was.” I interpreted this as meaning I was a local woman of color from a poor community who did not merit tenure,

or that my teaching, community service, and scholarship at the U.S.-Mexico border were insignificant. Although I received support by my department head to continue my advocacy work, my interdisciplinary research, and my teaching interests, it was a long road to tenure. Often, I was asked by other faculty of color to get involved in advocacy efforts and in order to stay grounded and secure in the academy, I would agree to these initiatives, while always aware of how closely others watched every step I made.

CONCLUSION

Initially, when we first talked about the idea of writing this chapter, we did not realize the power of sharing stories and counterstories to acquire a deeper understanding of how institutional racism operates in higher education. It became clear in our sharing that Chicano faculty cannot navigate higher education alone. New Chicano faculty members need mentorship and networks within institutions that will provide them the rules of the academic "game." In addition, the balance that Chicano faculty members are required to maintain between research, teaching, and service always depends on the expectation from the institutions in which they work. As stated by Eduardo, "you need to seek mentorship from people across the campus, and sometimes these people will be White colleagues."

Our experiences have varied, but echo much of what has been documented in other studies. Whether we are Chicano professors at a PWIs or HSIs, many of us still experience isolation and marginalization (e.g., Aguirre, 2005; Baez, 2003; Rendón, 1996; Reyes, 2005). Some of us have also been fortunate enough to have a critical mass of faculty of color in the universities in which we work. Consequently, when critical masses of Chicanos exist within institutions, their stories and counterstories are more likely to lead to institutional change.

Some of us have also been fortunate enough to have the flexibility to do research in our Latino communities. We are all engaged in work related to Latinos and have found little resistance from our colleagues. We have also successfully found respected venues to publish our work, and recognize that, as U.S. Latino communities continue to grow, there will be more need for research on Latinos.

Teaching is also an area in which we have achieved successes and faced challenges, similar to what was found by Aguirre (2005). Some of us have been asked to teach out of our areas, and have been pigeon-holed into diversity-related courses, and some of us found these types of courses affirming to our research. Some of us were challenged by students when we talked about Latinos, and some of us were assumed experts on Latinos. Unfortunately, challenges remain.

We also have become involved in a range of service activities on and off-campus related to Latino communities. Where previous studies indicate that Chicanos experience taxing service burdens (Aguirre, 2005; Rendón, 1996; Urrieta & Méndez Benavídez, 2007), we have each chosen to be involved in service while still reserving time to meet our research obligations. Some of us have found creative ways of blending research interests with service and excel in both areas. This service to our communities alleviates the isolation we feel and empowers us to continue our academic work. Thus, while it is probably true that we perform more hours of service than our White counterparts, the hours spent are an investment in our own well-being.

Finally, as other studies have found (e.g., González, 2007b; Reyes & Ríos, 2005), we continue to experience challenges in institutions that lack diversity in the administrative ranks, the professoriate, or the student body. To confront these challenges, we have built systems of mentorship and support with other Latinos and progressive-minded individuals. We also have remained committed to research and service that is grounded in social justice.

We owe it to all Latinos who aspire to be academics and to those that exited the pipeline before their contributions were complete to mentor others who desire to be academics and to continue the struggle against institutions that are not ready for our contributions. At the same time, however, institutions need to increase the pipeline for Latinos, from the undergraduate level to the graduate school, if they are serious about hiring and retaining more Latino faculty.

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