
PRIVILEGE UNVEILED: AN ACADEMIC FAMILY FOR FUTURE RESEARCHERS AND SCHOLARS

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As a first generation immigrant and college graduate, I had no idea what it meant to “succeed” in college, in graduate school and even later, the academy. I *had* learned one thing with growing up—access may be withheld, but you must go after it. I learned this as a junior in high school, after hearing for the first time the possibility of pursuing this thing called “college” from a classmate who eagerly spoke of where she would apply as a senior. As with any other high school matter, I asked my guidance counselor’s advice on this new goal. She proceeded to tell me that she was concerned I would be upset after being rejected, and offered instead an application to a nearby community college. Community colleges are just as meaningful in the trajectory of our students and our careers. However, the message I took away was that I did not belong in such a space - and therefore would not be given access.

Over 20 years later, I now know this experience is not unique. The idea of not belonging to spaces traditionally reserved for others who look different than I – mainly White Anglo-Saxons and in many occasions men – is not uncommon for marginalized populations. In fact, we know there are various leaks in our leadership and educational pipeline (e.g., entry to graduate school, entry into

professional occupations, training and mentorship opportunities). Women and most racial/ethnic minorities (i.e., Latina/o, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian) continue to be disproportionately underrepresented in obtaining advanced educational degrees (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2015). Similarly, although Latinas are active participants in the workforce, they represent only 23.3% of management, professional, or related occupations compared to White (41.5%) and Black (33.5%) women - instead, Latinas are more likely to hold service occupations, (USDOL, 2010A; USDOL, 2010B).

Latina/os, Blacks, and American Indians/Native Americans also make up a very small percentage of the “faces” that our students see when they enter college—our professors and our academic leaders. Racial and ethnic minorities represent less than 16% of the country’s full-time faculty (Snyder, Dillow & Hoffman, 2009); among PhDs, women of color are less likely to secure the rank of tenured full professor compared to their male and White counterparts (Ginther et al., 2011). Ethnic minority researchers and faculty members experience a host of challenges, including, but not limited to, discrimination (Gutierrez, Castaneda, & Katsinas, 2002; Pittman, 2012), alienation (Delgado-Romero, Flores, Gloria, Arredondo, & Castellanos, 2003; Pittman, 2012), and lack of institutional support (Polili, Cooper, & Carr, 2010; Zalaquett, 2006; Zambrana, 2012; Young & Wright, 2001). Their work is at times undervalued (Evans, 2007), and in many cases they serve as “token” spokespersons for their institutions (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014). The competitive environments of *publish or perish* and racial/ethnic disparities in securing major grant funding (Ginther et al., 2011) pose additional challenges for underrepresented scholars and researchers when access to academic role models (Arredondo, 2012), training (Tabak, 2013) and mentorship (Polili,

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Cooper, & Carr, 2010; Rangel & Mazzula, 2013; Zambrana et al., 2015) are sparse or not available.

Yet, according to the Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project (Fry & Hugo Lopez, 2012), we also saw Latina/o student enrollment reached record high college enrollment rates in 2011 – Latinas/os became the largest racial/ethnic minority group on four-year college campuses. While college enrollment rates had declined from 2006 to 2012 in general, enrollment of Latinas/os rose from 11 to 17 percent. While we may be underrepresented in leadership roles, our community is growing not only in numbers but more and more educated, *y con ganas y garras!*

THE ACADEMIC FAMILY

As Latina/o leaders, whether we are faculty members, academic *madrinas y padrinos*, researchers, or first time college graduates, we are in a unique position to take hold of this perfect time to harness our country's leadership pipeline, build on the next generations' strength and drive. We are in dire need of a diverse workforce and leadership upstream committed to closing the gap in advanced research and academic careers. These needs have been documented and expressed by various scholars and researchers (Arredondo, 2012; Mazzula, 2013; Zambrana et al., 2015).

Recent scholarship has also called attention to more effective models on training and retaining underrepresented academics, researchers and scholars. For a long time, I also thought that we needed more visible mentors. I believed this to be true due to the lack of visible Latina/o role models I saw in my own career—and from both research and anecdotal accounts that discuss the importance of mentors in our career trajectory (Zambrana et al., 2015). However, through findings from roundtable discussions (e.g., Mazzula & Quiros, 2010; Mazzula & Rangel, 2013) and my work the last three years creating a network for Latina scholars and researchers (www.LatinaResearchers.com), I have come to understand this differently. Yes, we are underrepresented in most leadership roles, across all disciplines. Few of us also belong to networks that open doors for us.

However, mentors have always been present—from community leaders organizing social change throughout the history of the U.S., to our *abuelitas, padres y tios* who have *sacrificado todo*

para el bienestar de nuestra familia y gente! Within the National Latina/o Psychological Association (NLPA), women and men have been fighting for justice in their home communities, in academia and in leadership for decades. Like NLPA, other networks provide support for the next generation of leaders in our country and a framework for an academic family – a place to call home, a space where one can belong and where our interests and scholarship are valued. It is well documented that access to social networks and mentors is critical to leadership development and career success (Zambrana et al., 2015). We have that. We have mentors all around us. Therefore, we must not fall into the trap of seeing “lack of mentors” as another deficit of our *gente* (Tuner, C. Personal Communication, 2014).

Our White colleagues have had mentors all along the way – although the mentorship may be called something different or simply look differently. There are various definitions of mentors - from those who create personal relationships (Osborn, Waeckerle, & Perina, 1999) to those who give their mentees information that increases their capital (Jacobi, 1991). Attention must be focused on the ability to exchange information to increase our next generations' capital. For Latinos/Latinas, and other underrepresentative groups, the question remains on who they have access to that grants them the same opportunity to social and institutional capital as their counterparts receive. Consider, for example, my guidance counselor who refused to give me 4-year college applications. Was she a mentor? Possibly for some. Or was she a gatekeeper, irrespective of serving a mentorship role? Across all levels – whether a student or an academic leader – Latinos, and other underrepresented groups, all at one point or another experience gatekeepers. Is this not another aspect of privilege that Latinos/as are not afforded? Anecdotal accounts show that our most renowned researches, scholars and academic leaders come across gatekeepers that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, support racial and ethnic discriminatory practices. I argue that while we do need increased representation and people who can serve as visible role models, it is equally important for our mentors to have the same access to information, resources, and treatment granted to others. Attention must be drawn to the inequalities, barriers, as well as overt and covert experiences of

discrimination experienced by our mentors and colleagues who have doors closed on them throughout their career. Regardless of our mentorship approach, or whether or not we see ourselves as mentors, it is our responsibility to empower the academic family, inclusive of students, faculty of color, as well as, allies to:

1. **Speak up.** We must not let discrimination go unnoticed. We must stand up for those who experience discrimination, gatekeepers and other inequalities. We must also, however, become well versed in our institutional culture and intentionally “pick” our battles, especially those who currently have less perceived power (e.g., students, supervisees, un-tenured faculty).
2. **Reframe mentorship.** Yes, we need more mentors. However, not because we are unable to produce them or because we somehow have a “deficit”. We have mentors across all levels. What we need is a collective effort to fight injustices and gatekeepers as a *familia*.
3. **Be clear that there is an academic family** ready to stand together in this plight. *La familia* has, for many, included extended family members, blood and non-blood relatives, and members of our community. The academic family is a natural extension. We need innovative ways to present this academic family, inclusive of allies, to support those in the pipeline.
4. **Share access to information** that will increase social and institutional power. We have all heard it before, it's your skills, knowledge and expertise --- but also who you know. For many of us, it takes a lot of ourselves to penetrate spaces reserved for others who are different than us. When we do, we have to share our process, our stories and the tangible things we had to do along the way (e.g., from resumes and grant applications, to tips on who, how and when). We need effective ways to not keep this secret.

As our country's major social problems persist, the importance of investing critical and diverse thinkers in the United States has never been greater. However, until we fight inequality and injustices faced by our mentors, we cannot win this fight. The academic family has the power to change this.

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