

Probationary Faculty Development Grant

Final Report

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Project Title— Pandemic Motherhood: An Autohistoria-teoría of a Chicana Mother-Scholar

Project Objective—

The goals of this project were to: 1) Examine the personal and professional experiences of a Chicana tenure-track professor in the time of the coronavirus pandemic and 2) Analyze the campus racial climate for Mother Scholars at California State University, Sacramento.

Project Description—

Women who have children within five years of completing their Ph.D. are 20-25 percent less likely to receive tenure (Mason & Goulden, 2002). Part of the reason for this is the way mothers in academia are perceived; compared to their non-parent colleagues they are seen as less competent and not as committed to the profession (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004). As such, it should not come as a surprise that among professional women, female faculty have the highest rate of childlessness— 43 percent (Acker & Armenti, 2007). To be more specific, 62 percent of tenured women in the social sciences do not have children (Juffer, 2006). Those that choose to have children are expected to accommodate the university schedule by having a May or June baby and only having one child before tenure (Bassett, 2005; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006). Discouraged by the long-standing gender gap in tenure rates, many female faculty limit the number of children to have, do not take full maternity leave, or choose to not have children at all (Schlehofer, 2012).

For Chicana/Latina faculty the choice to become a mother while on the tenure-clock is even more discouraging, because they experience less mentoring, slower rates of promotion, race-gendered microaggressions, and an increased likelihood of leaving an institution compared to their male and racial/ethnic counterparts (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Pérez, 2019; Vasquez-Guignard, 2010). In fall 2016 of all full-time faculty in degree granting postsecondary

institutions, 2 percent were Chicana/Latina (NCES, 2018). Chicana/Latina lecturers, instructors, assistant professors, associate professors and full professors account for 4 percent, 4 percent, 3 percent, 3 percent, and less than 1 percent, of all full-time faculty (NCES, 2018). Therefore, when Chicana/Latina faculty become mothers their experience is magnified by their already marginal status on college and university campuses. They must navigate sexist perceptions of their work ethic and ability while also experiencing isolation due to their underrepresented status.

Despite this double burden that Chicana/Latina mothers in academia face, there is very little research that has examined their experiences (Castañeda & Isgro, 2013; Saldaña, Castro-Villareal, & Sosa, 2013; Téllez, 2013). The majority of studies on motherhood in academia lack an intersectional framework to account for racial/ethnic differences and tend to focus largely on the experiences of white women. For example, in 2013 the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* published a special issue on Mothering in the Academy. From the 23 articles in the issue, only one addresses the experiences of Women of Color, not one article focuses specifically on Chicana/Latina faculty. This project sought to address this gap in the literature by examining the experiences of Chicana/Latina tenure-track faculty in the California State University (CSU) system who became mothers during their tenure-track process. The research questions guiding the study were the following: 1) How do Chicana/Latina tenure-track faculty navigate motherhood and the tenure-track process during a pandemic? 2) What can the California State University (CSU) system do to improve institutional structures and policies to support Chicana/Latina tenure-track faculty mothers?

Originally the goal of this project was to conduct interviews with Chicana tenure-track faculty across the CSU system, unfortunately once the pandemic hit, I faced many personal and professional challenges to launch the study. I made the decision to hold off on starting the

interviews until the fall semester. This fall I will not only begin interviews but will also launch a CSU wide survey on mothering through a pandemic. In lieu of the interviews I decided to write an autohistoria-teoría and conduct an analysis of the campus racial climate for mothers at CSU Sacramento. The new project objectives were adjusted to fit with the loss of childcare I experienced and the shelter-in-place and social distancing mandates.

Gloria Anzaldúa (2015) explains autohistoria-teoría in the following quote:

I fuse persona narrative with theoretical discourse, autobiographical vignettes with theoretical prose. I create a hybrid genre, a new discursive mode, which I call “autohistoria” and autohistoria-teoría. Conectando experiencias personales con realidades sociales results in autohistoria and theorizing about this activity results in autohistoria-teoría. It’s a way of inventing and making knowledge, meaning, and identity through self-inscriptions. By making certain personal experiences the subject of this study, I also blur the private/public borders (pp. 5-6)

Critical self-reflexivity and Chicana/Latina feminist theory are the foundations of autohistoria-teoría (Anzaldúa, 2000, 2015). Autohistoria-teoría is similar to autoethnography which is defined as “research, writing, stories, and methods that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis & Adams, 2014, p. 254). What differentiates autohistoria-teoría from autoethnography are the following: 1) its Chicana/Latina feminist framing, 2) the challenge to the mind/body dichotomy, it emphasizes an embodiment of theory, 3) the attention to the experiences of marginalized communities, and 4) the connection of the creative and spiritual.

My autohistoria-teoría includes an analysis of the campus racial climate for mothers at Sac State, as well as a discussion of the pandemic. Campus racial climate examines the overall

racial environment of educational institutions. The racial climate of a campus, whether positive or negative, can be assessed using the following criteria:

1) the school's mission & history, 2) the contemporary socio-political discourse, 3) the infrastructure of the school, 4) school policies & practices, 5) the racial make-up of faculty, students, and administrators, 6) support programs for students, and 7) the classroom curriculum and pedagogy (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009).

The autohistoria-teoría is therefore based on the following: 1) personal and professional experiences, 2) CSU PIMS database, the 2016 Sac State Factbook, and 2018 IPEDS data 3) Scholarly work on mothering, the pandemic, and academia, and lastly 4) the work I have done with the California Faculty Association (CFA) as a founding member of the Parental Rights Working Group.

Project Results—

It was the start of August 2018 and I had just moved into my new apartment in River Park. My husband spent a few days helping me get settled in and then returned to our home in Los Angeles. After all, this was the plan. We would both go on the job market again in hopes of landing jobs either in the same area or institution. As two former first-generation college students from low-income backgrounds, no one had quite explained to us the intricacies of the academic job market. Our family and friends always pointed out how amazing it was that we both had Ph.D.'s, and yet here we were struggling to find jobs. Fortunately, my husband kept his full-time job teaching high school art while he completed his Ph.D., so he had something to fall back on while on the job market. We kissed goodbye and I was left alone in the empty apartment. I immediately started crying, I was reliving my move to Austin, Texas. At that time,

I had moved to pursue my masters degree. I felt alone but decided to keep myself busy with unpacking and preparing for the start of the fall semester.

Finding #1 Sac State needs to invest in the recruitment and retention of Chicana/Latina faculty

The first day of faculty orientation I was surprised to see how many white faculty there were. For some reason, I expected there would be more Faculty of Color. Perhaps it was my romanticized vision of how diverse the CSU was. Now in my third year, I see that the CSU is indeed diverse in terms of student population, but our faculty do not reflect our students. As of November 2019, there are currently eight assistant professors that identify as Latina at Sac State; I am almost sure that I know all eight of them (CSU PIMS Database, 2019). Yet, Sac State is a Hispanic Serving Institution, 30% of our students are classified as Hispanic (IPEDS, 2018). What does it mean to be a Hispanic Serving Institution where only 10% of your faculty are Hispanic? (Sac State Office of Faculty Advancement). It means that you are often the only Latina in the room, it means constantly questioning if this place is the right place for you, and it means that you often don't feel valued, heard, or seen. My experience during faculty orientation was isolating, I felt out of place many times. Since orientation, there have been many other instances in my college and department where I don't feel like I am receiving the mentorship I need as a junior Chicana/Latina faculty member.

While the number of Latinx students has increased on college campuses across the U.S., the number of Chicanx/Latinx faculty has not increased at the same rate. In fact, the overwhelming majority of full-time faculty positions continue to be filled by white men and women (Ryu, 2010). Only two percent of all professors in U.S. institutions of higher education are Chicana/Latina, which means Chicana/Latina college students are unlikely to encounter professors of their ethnicity and gender (NCES, 2018). Considering evidence that shows the

importance of a faculty body reflecting its student demographic to facilitate student retention and academic success, it is significant to understand best practices to support and retain Chicana/Latina faculty (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). As student demographics continue to change across postsecondary institutions, the diversity of our professoriate becomes paramount and key to retaining and preparing the next generation of leaders.

While these numbers are discouraging, it is important to always speak to the resistance that Chicana/Latina faculty engaging in. Soon after faculty orientation a handful of Chicana/Latina faculty reached out to me to welcome me to Sac State. Together, we have created spaces to support each other, to validate our experiences. This includes weekly lunch meet ups, what we call our “mujeres group”, and our work with the Chicax/Latinx Faculty and Staff Association, the California Faculty Association, and the Taskforce for the Center on Race, Immigration, and Social Justice.

Finding #2 Chicana/Latina mother scholars experience a hostile campus racial climate at Sac State.

On the last day of faculty orientation, I found out I was pregnant. I was overwhelmed with emotion. Immediately upon seeing the confirmation on the birth test I was ecstatic but slowly feelings of worry and anxiety began to creep in. This was not part of the plan. I would have to take on my first pregnancy away from my husband. I would also have to juggle the start of a new job in a city I was not familiar at all with, all while being pregnant. My family and close friends are in southern California, so I knew I would need to rely on the small but emerging community I was building with other Faculty of Color.

My college retreat was the next day after faculty orientation ended. I remember walking into the retreat afraid people would be able to tell that I was pregnant. Now looking back, I

chuckle, I was maybe six weeks pregnant so in reality you really couldn't tell much from just looking at me, besides the stressed I probably showed in my face. Yet this fear of "showing" speaks to the culture of academia, where we do not welcome pregnant bodies. Only one in three women who takes a tenure-track position before having a child ever becomes a mother, and women who obtain tenure are more than twice as likely as their male colleagues to be single twelve years after earning their Ph.D. (Mason, Wolfinger, & Goulden, 2013). I hadn't even started the job yet and already I was defying the odds. In a way thought I have always lived in the margins or in the "odds," being a first-generation college student, an immigrant, an English language learner, and receiving a Ph.D. I sat through the full day retreat with a knot on my throat. I needed to tell someone, I needed someone to tell me that it was going to be ok.

We wrapped up official business and the Dean announced that there was wine and cheese for people to stay and mingle. I wanted to leave immediately mostly because I was in the brink of tears. As I was walking towards the exit door I saw Dr. Margarita Berta-Avila. We had not formally met yet, but we had talked over the phone before I committed to Sac State. A long-time mentor, Dr. Tara Yosso, had connected us. It's in moments like this that I am reminded of how grateful I am for the small but powerful community that we have built in academia; it is how we survive and thrive. Her simple question how are you doing? paralyzed me. I am sure she saw the anxiety in my face, so she suggested that we talk a walk outside. As we walked, I started crying. I was embarrassed, but I also felt like I could trust Margarita.

I cannot recall the entire conversation, but I remember her saying, whatever it is, it's going to be ok, you do not have to be afraid. "I am pregnant," I cried out. Being the Chicana feminist that Margarita is, she asked and that's good? I appreciated that question because I feel strongly about being prochoice; women should have the choice about when and with whom to

start a family with. Yes, I smiled and continued crying. She hugged me and smiled back. She reassured me that everything would be ok, that she would be there for me, that the union was with me. At the time, I did not quite understand the power of a union, now as an active member in my union I know exactly what Margarita meant by that. Margarita and the California Faculty Association (CFA) would become the greatest resource to me as I navigated my pregnancy as a new professor.

The fall semester started but I had to wait for my insurance to kick in to see a doctor, that was the first thing I needed to do. It took probably another two weeks until I was able to see a doctor. We often don't talk about this enough, but when you start a new academic job you don't see your first paycheck until October, so there is at least a month or more where you are left without an income. The same goes for insurance. This makes it especially challenging for faculty who come from low-income backgrounds like myself. After confirmation from my doctor that I was indeed pregnant, I decided to wait until the end of my first trimester to let my department chair and dean know. In the meantime, I started researching what my options would be for maternity leave. My due date was May 2nd which was actually an ideal date since it was close to the end of the spring semester. Research shows that women that choose to have children are expected to accommodate the university schedule by having a May or June baby and only having one child before tenure (Bassett, 2005; Wolf-Wendel & Ward, 2006).

The information I gathered was overwhelming and disappointing. It was stressful to navigate my first semester and figure out maternity leave at the same time. What I learned was that I would probably only qualify for about a month or so off; thirty days. I am still shocked that somehow we have let this be the norm. Stressed out, I reached out to Human Resources (HR), what I received was a page long automated email with jargon about parental leave policies. I

responded asking for a meeting to help me decipher the language. I was told that I would have to wait until I was 30 days out from my due date, I pushed back. “It’s our policy,” they responded. When I shared the news with my chair and dean, they were supportive, but had no resources or information to share with me. “We haven’t had a baby in a while here,” I remember hearing. I started speaking with faculty both at Sac State and other CSU’s that had children, inquiring if they had them while at Sac State or at their respective CSU. Most had not, the few that had, shared that they waited to accumulate enough sick leave so that they could take a full semester of leave. I was new, so the amount of sick leave I had would not get me much time off. I cried many times, frustrated that we had such a broken system for parents at the CSU.

When I was finally about to meet with HR, CFA accompanied me. I came with a list of questions and a folder full of research I had done about programs I might qualify for. In the end I was presented with two options for paid leave, 1) take eight weeks off in the fall semester or 2) take a reduced workload for the fall semester. What I wanted was a full semester off, so I was deeply disappointed. I ended up going with option two, because I felt that coming back full time in the middle of the semester would be more challenging for me both personally and professionally. The other important part was that I did not get any time off before the baby came. I stopped working on a Friday and my son was born the following Sunday. Having now gone through this experience, I really should have given myself at least a week before he came, it made that first month with him even more stressful. Additionally, when I returned from the hospital I still had to grade and submit final grades. I was also bombarded with emails from HR asking for paperwork that needed to be completed immediately.

A few days after I had found out I was pregnant, I got on the waitlist at Sac State’s Children’s Center for childcare. I was told that it was near impossible for faculty to get in

because the center prioritized students. Let me be clear, I think it's great that we have childcare for our students, but what about our faculty and staff? My son just turned 16 months and we are still on the waitlist. When I went back to work in the fall, we had no childcare. Soon after starting, I got on several other waitlists knowing that by spring semester we would need something solid. Fall semester proved to be very challenging. Fortunately, my husband secured a job at Sac State and between both of our schedules we took turns watching our son while the other worked. We slept very little that semester and struggled immensely. Because we had no childcare my son came to work with me regularly. He attended meetings, office hours, student advising, and many other work commitments. We had no choice.

Fall semester also proved me to how unfriendly Sac State is to nursing mothers. Lactation and changing rooms are limited. From my research and the Sac State website, there are currently only four lactation rooms on campus. I spend most of my time in Eureka and Benicia Hall, both do not have a lactation or changing room. This meant I constantly had to go to my office to nurse, pump, or change him. It made me want to give up on nursing my son because of how challenging it was. There are also no designated parking spots for expecting mothers. Parking spots are so close to each other that during my last trimester I often struggled to get out of my car. Even after having my son, I had to lug my pump to campus, making my walks even more tedious because of everything I had to carry. At the start of the spring semester we were able to secure a spot at a daycare off campus. Yet because of how expensive it was, we could only send our son three times a week, which again presented many challenges for us. We had three full days to work without any interruptions, the other two days we took turns watching him while the other worked. This was our schedule until the pandemic hit and we lost childcare.

Finding #3 The pandemic has affected Mothers in Academia, in particular Women of Color, in detrimental ways.

Just when we were beginning to get a rhythm of our schedule, the pandemic hit. Our son's daycare closed, and we were left to juggle caring for him while working full time from home. Neither my husband nor I had experience teaching online, so this made the entire situation even more stressful. When I look back at those early weeks of the pandemic, it is as if we were back to that first month of when our son was born. We hardly slept, the house was a mess, I began to lose track of what day it was, and I constantly broke down, unsure of how I was going to finish the semester. I couldn't focus; teaching became extremely difficult because my son was constantly crying for me. I am sure he could sense the stress in his parents. If I was struggling, I knew other mothers were too. The last thing I could focus on was launching this project which I was/am so passionate about, and I couldn't imagine asking mothers to do more for the sake of research. I knew the project would have to wait, but what I didn't know was how this experience would also highlight the importance of this research.

As part of my work, I decided to start collecting links to any online article that talked about mothering in the pandemic or more specifically pandemic mothering while in academia. There were a lot on mothering in the pandemic, so many that I probably was not able to keep track of all of them. In short, what these articles highlighted was the ways in which the pandemic exacerbated all the extra responsibilities that mothers already take on, what is often referred to as the second shift. The pandemic caused the closure of daycare centers and schools across the nation and because mothers are generally the main caretakers in their families, they were tasked to not only navigate working from home but also be full-time caretakers. Because my son was not school age, we did not have to worry about distance learning, but other parents

took on this responsibility. The Atlantic (2020) published an article titled, *The Coronavirus Is a Disaster for Feminism*, which outlined the ways women were experiencing the pandemic differently than men. Compared to their male counterparts, women were doing more of the housework, childcare, and care labor, it also spoke to the economic hit that would come from being forced to leave jobs or work part-time.

Other articles highlighted the intensifying mental load that mothers take on—remembering when the next parent-teacher conference is, meal planning, juggling schedules. Whenever there is extra work to be done at home it usually falls on mothers or women. There were also articles that pointed to an increase of reports of anxiety and depression. Being a working mother is challenging enough, the pandemic made it more difficult. In terms of articles that spoke to women in academia I found two. One spoke to the ways in which the pandemic would block mother's faculty advancement. It described how taking on more caretaking responsibilities made it challenging for women in academia to focus on their research, to write, to publish. All things that are expected of us as academics (Minello, 2020). Academic journals began to report that they were seeing fewer submissions from women (Flaherty, 2020).

As I read through these articles, I would often let out a sigh of relief but also feel the knot in my throat tighten. Relief that what I was experiencing was not singular to me, but also stressed that this was happening. I also knew that missing in this narrative were the experiences of Women of Color, an intersectional analysis, and I am positive that this experience was even more intensified because of what the research tells on the experiences of working Women of Color. I am one of these academic mothers, who struggled to launch her research project, to wrap up writing deadlines, to submit to academic journals, because of the pandemic. My summer writing plans were put on pause because our childcare center remained closed. I took on a

summer class, as was planned pre-pandemic to save up so that our son would be able to be in daycare four times a week in the fall instead of three. I completed the summer online boot camp to prepare for online teaching. While we have managed to find a healthier rhythm for our family, to say we are doing well or thriving would be a lie. We continue to be overwhelmed and stressed out, but we are pushing through. As People of Color we always find ways.

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