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## **“A moving target”: a critical race analysis of Latina/o faculty experiences, perspectives, and reflections on the tenure and promotion process**

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This article examines how Latina/o professors perceive, experience, and reflect on the tenure and promotion process. Findings for this longitudinal study are drawn from a purposive sample of nine female and seven male, Latina/o tenure-track faculty participants. Using a Critical Race Theory, Latino Critical (LatCrit) Race Theory, and Chicana Feminist framework, this article documents fundamental inequities in the tenure and promotion policies and practices that affected the Latina/o faculty in this study. Using narrative data, educational biographies, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and unstructured ethnographic interviews, this study found four common themes: (1) tenure and promotion processes functioned as a “tool of fear,” (2) the tenure and promotion process was like a “moving target,” (3) tenure provided limited forms of respect but not full membership, and (4) Latina/o supervivencia enabled the professors to thrive despite unsupportive and sometimes hostile campus and departmental climates.

**Keywords:** Latina/o faculty; tenure and promotion; supervivencia; Critical Race Theory; LatCrit

### **Introduction**

Tenure and promotion is often surrounded by mystery for tenure-track faculty and research indicates that the process is experienced differently by racial and ethnic minorities, and women scholars compared to white males (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; Padilla & Chávez Chávez, 1995). Identified significant barriers to the tenure and promotion of faculty of color, have been categorized into the following areas: negative white student teaching evaluations, devaluing of research, overburdening by service expectations especially around diversity issues, and the unwritten rules and procedures of the tenure and promotion process (De Luca & Escoto, 2012; Turner, González, & Wood, 2008). Using Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical (LatCrit) Race Theory, and Chicana Feminism (Huber & Cueva, 2012; Yosso, 2006), we explore the longitudinal narrative data of 16 Latina/o<sup>1</sup> education faculty members and their perceptions of, experiences with, and reflections on the tenure and promotion process at various universities in the southwestern United States.

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Our study data identified the following themes: (1) the tenure and promotion process functioned as “a tool of fear,” (2) tenure and promotion was a nebulous process, like “a moving target,” (3) receiving tenure gained limited forms of respect but not full membership, and (4) Latina/o faculty’s *supervivencia* (Galvan, 2011) helped them to cope with the negative issues and environments they sometimes felt they were in. Overall, these narratives highlight the perceived inequitable ways in which tenure and promotion policies and practices are not appropriate for, or in support of, a changing racial, ethnic, and gender faculty demographic.

### Latina/o faculty in academia

For decades, faculty of color have documented the institutional and structural “chilly” and “alienating” climate of academia (Aguirre, 2000, p. vi). Latina/o faculty have used *testimonios* to relate their perceived disrespect and hardships of being one of the few, or the only Latina/o faculty in their respective department or institution (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Padilla & Chávez Chávez, 1995). Aguirre’s (2000) contention that academia is often “chilly” and “alienating” for both women and faculty of color is not only tied to the experience of being a racial and/or gender minority, but also to having heavier teaching and service loads that reduced opportunities for research and publication. Aguirre (2000) found that women and minority faculty assumed roles that favored higher education institutions in terms of diversity and pluralism; yet, the deep ideological structures that lead to denial of tenure and promotion for many women and minority faculty remained unaddressed. Recent studies by faculty of color (Garrison-Wade, Diggs, Estrada, & Galindo, 2012) and specifically by Latina scholars (Ek, Quijada Cerecer, Alanís, & Rodríguez, 2010; Quijada Cerecer, Ek, Alanís, & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011) find that universities, including designated Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), do not adequately address the chilly and alienating culture of their institutional climate toward faculty of color. Faculty of color, especially African American women and Latinas, often have to create their own mentoring and mutual support networks in order to survive and remain in the academy (Gutiérrez y Muhs, Flores Niemann, González, & Harris, 2012).

The professoriate generally comes with “bittersweet success” for Latina/o faculty (Turner & Myers, 2000). Based on Table 291 of the Digest of Education Statistics (US Census, 2012), in Fall 2011, there were a total of 761,619 faculty members in the US, of which 563,689 (74%) were white and only a mere 31,331 (4.1%) identified as Hispanic. The specific breakdown of Latina/o faculty by rank is shown in Table 1.

Of the 31,331 Hispanic faculty, only 36.14%, at best, were tenured and only 16.5% were full professors. Latina-tenured faculty represent 14% and Latina full professors, a mere 5.4% of all Hispanic faculty. Of the overall number of US faculty, Latina/o tenured faculty represent 1.48% of the total and Latina/o full professors account for a shameful .68% of all US faculty.

Ponjuan (2011) highlights the dearth of Latina/o faculty in US higher education and the need to increase representation to mirror the growing post-secondary Latina/o student population. Villalpando and Delgado Bernal (2002) argue that marginalizing structures in universities, like tenure and promotion, serve to sustain and maintain epistemological racism and elitism that result in academic apartheid limiting the possibilities for faculty of color. Thus, colleges and universities often sustain racial,

Table 1. Hispanic full-time instructional faculty in degree-granting institutions, by sex and academic rank: Fall 2011.

Rank	Total	Males	Females
Professor	5180	3499	1681
Associate professor	6143	3437	2706
Assistant professor	7428	3692	3736
Instructor	6906	3133	3773
Lecturer	1773	753	1020
Other faculty	3901	1831	2070
Total	31,331	16,345	14,986

Source: US Census (2012).

gender, and class stratification because of “ideological” and “structural” mechanisms (Verdugo, 1995, p. 670) where underrepresentation is the unspoken norm (Stanley, 2006; Turner & Myers, 2000). For Latinas and other women of color, in particular, the academy has been a closed institution where lack of representation, misrepresentation, alienation, exploitation, and presumed incompetence are common and remain poignant issues (Ek et al., 2010; Flores & García, 2009; Gloria, 1997; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Quijada Cerecer et al., 2011; Reyes & Ríos, 2005; Turner, 2002; Walker, MacGillivaray, & Aguilar, 2001). Theories such as CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminism help expose the endemic racism and sexism of the academy targeted at Latina/o faculty through the tenure and promotion process by validating the experiential knowledge of Latina/o faculty, and by challenging the rationalist, white, masculinist cultural dominance of the academy (Harris & González, 2012).

### CRT, LatCrit, and Latina/o faculty

CRT emerged from critical legal studies and specifically centered race and the permanence of race through the use of storytelling and counterstorytelling in response to majoritarian stories used to justify US society’s racial order (Bell, 1992). Majoritarian stories, according to Yosso (2006), validate social and racial privileged experiences and serve to rationalize racial subordination through racialized omissions, distortions, and stereotypes. Counterstories respond to and de-center majoritarian stories by recounting people of color’s experiences as valid, valuable, and ancestral knowledge (Delgado, 1989). Bell (1992) also contributed interest convergence theory to CRT. Interest convergence posits that whites will work for minority rights only when it is in their own economic and political interests and without disrupting the dominance of ideological white racism.

CRT scholars have identified the following five tenets of CRT: (1) that race and racism are permanent, endemic, and defining to US society; (2) CRT challenges majoritarian narratives, especially claims of colorblindness, objectivity, meritocracy, and equal opportunity; (3) CRT propagates a commitment to social justice; (4) CRT centers people of color’s experiential knowledge as valid, legitimate, and appropriate to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination; and (5) CRT analyses are interdisciplinary (Espino, 2012). CRT identifies mundane racism as not blatant, but subtle, cumulative racial microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Sue, 2010). Following Pierce’s (1974) foundational contributions, Sue (2010, p. 8) defines microinsults as, often unconscious,

“behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity.” Microassaults, often conscious acts, are “explicit racial derogations characterized primarily by violent verbal or nonverbal attacks meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions” (p. 8). Microinvalidations, often also unconscious, are “verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (p. 8). Cumulative over time, microinsults, microassaults, and microinvalidations build up to racial microaggressions (Solórzano, 1998).

Racial microaggressions are defined as systemic forms of everyday racism that are subtle, layered, cumulative, often nonverbal assaults directed toward people of color in automatic and unconscious ways (Huber & Cueva, 2012). These “insidious, hard to identify, subtle racist injuries” endured as daily stressors by people of color (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013, p. 4) often lead to racial battle fatigue (RBF). Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2012) define RBF as “the result of physiological, psychological, cultural and emotional coping with racial microaggressions in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments” (p. 40). Environmental microaggressions, macro-level “racial assaults, insults, and invalidations that are manifested on systemic and environmental levels” (Sue, 2010, p. 8) create those less-than-ideal, racially hostile, unsupportive environments for faculty of color. In these chronically stressful environments, RBF redirects energy away from already stressful and ever more intensive academic labor demands and toward coping strategies for dealing with the racial microaggressions, often depleting faculty of color in exhaustive mental, emotional, and physical ways in academia.

LatCrit theory (Arriola, 1997) focuses intersectional analyses particular to Latinas/os, such as immigration, accent, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, and surname-based oppression. Huber and Cueva (2012) aptly add that Chicana Feminism and *testimonio* methodology, drawing on theory in the flesh, are also necessary to address the embodiment and healing of racialized intersectionalities with regard to identity, sexuality, the body, resistance, healing, and empowerment of Chicanas’ and Latinas’ lives. Chicana Feminism fundamentally challenges the racialized heteronormative patriarchy of the rationalist, white, masculine-dominated academic culture (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Harris & González, 2012). CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminism thus provide appropriate, important, and necessary frames and insights for studying and understanding the Latina/o tenure-track faculty experiences in this study because they elucidate how and where microaggressions occurred along the tenure and promotion process, and how the Latina/o faculty responded to these.

### **Revisiting and challenging the tenure and promotion majoritarian story**

In the majoritarian story, tenure and promotion is said to be fair, neutral, meritocratic, and premised on autonomy, self-reliance, and individual accomplishment, ultimately rewarded with tenure (Baez, 2002). Tenure denial is usually placed upon the individual faculty’s lack of effort, rather than on the institutional structures in place, including the norms of confidentiality (secrecy) around tenure and promotion deliberations and decisions (Baez, 2002). Faculty of color denied tenure either did not work hard enough, were uncommitted to the academy, were unqualified for the job, or simply were not a “good fit” in the department. The dominant narrative thus

absolves review committees and the institution of responsibility in the process of denial by alluding to meritocracy, objectivity, equal opportunity, and colorblindness.

Tenure and promotion is premised on three areas of evaluation: research, teaching, and service. Universities weigh each of these areas differently (Holling & Rodriguez, 2006). Research I universities typically grant tenure on high research and scholarly production and increasingly on grants awarded. Teaching institutions value teaching and service in addition to some research. The evaluation process is never fully transparent, rarely openly disclosed, but always presented as objective, neutral, and fair (Baez, 2002). Tenure review committees at the department, college, and university levels usually apply, from their own intersubjective interpretation, sets of criteria to faculty candidate dossiers. These subjective applications of “objective” measures usually make tenure a dubious and uncertain endeavor because it remains idiosyncratic to the faculty at the department, college, and institutional levels. Ponjuan (2011) highlights that pertinent, but often overlooked issues in successful Latina/o faculty retention through tenure and promotion include a favorable social and cultural climate, adequate pre-tenure resources, and faculty work role improvement, including monitoring and limiting Latina/o faculty service expectations, teaching related to critical race, class, and gender issues, appropriate mentoring policies, and protecting Latina/o faculty from excessive doctoral supervision.

The subtlety of sociocultural (i.e. racial, gender, class, and sexuality) exclusion and invalidations in department, college, and campus climate are often significant overbearing inequities to women and minority faculty’s advancement (Baez, 2000). Such racial and gender micro- and macroaggressions include salary inequities and biased reward systems, where women and specifically African American and Latina/o faculty are presumed less competent than white male faculty (Harris & González, 2012). The persistent unequal treatment of and deficit perspectives of Latina/o faculty are made invisible through white ideological, epistemological, and male dominance that is enforced through racial, gender, sexuality, and class microaggressions at the interpersonal and environmental levels that are not taken into account in the seemingly neutral, colorblind tenure and promotion process (Urrieta, 2009).

Faculty of color and women faculty thus often struggle with social isolation, lack of job satisfaction, poor professional and social support networks, self-doubt, and imposed outsider status (Laden & Hagedorn, 2000). And although many academics experience these, it is “exacerbated by the racism and sexism extant in our society” (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008, p. 317). Latina/o faculty collegial and collaborative alternative coping networks, in response to microaggressions, often become important for personal and professional well-being, mentoring, and support (Ek et al., 2010). Institutional academic social trans/formation to change the rationalist, white, masculinist dominant culture of academia must go beyond existing mission statements with commitments to diversity which often function as a declaration of the university as a not-racist institution, but result in non-action in terms of structural changes in the everyday interactions of academic life (Ahmed, 2006; Urrieta & Villenas, 2013). We will now focus on the perceptions of, experiences with, and reflections on tenure and promotion of the 16 Latina/o faculty participants.

## **Methods**

The Latina/o faculty study participants, nine females and seven males, ( $N = 16$ ), all have tenure-track appointments in either Teaching or Research I public universities.

To participate in this study, participants had to self-identify as Latina/o and have tenure-track faculty appointments in schools and/or colleges of education in accredited US universities. Participants were recruited using a purposeful sampling method (Gall, Bord, & Gall, 1996) through personal contacts and professional organizations. In 2003, six (three males/three females) were untenured at the assistant professor stage, four (two males/two females) were tenured at the associate professor stage, and six (three females/three males) were tenured full professors. We sought Latina/o faculty experiences throughout the different stages of the professoriate. We intended to follow the assistant and associate professors through the next stages of their tenure-track trajectories. From full professors, we sought their reflections not just of going through the tenure process, but also of their participation in tenure and promotion review committees. The guiding research question was: How do Latina/o professors perceive, experience, and negotiate the tenure and promotion process? Informed by the literature on Latina/o faculty, by CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminism, we intentionally asked our study participants about their experiences with racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism throughout their tenure and promotion process.

This longitudinal qualitative study is based primarily on narrative data, including life histories, educational biographies (Stroobants, 2005), in-depth semi-structured interviews, and unstructured ethnographic interviews (Davies, 2001) over nine years (2003–2012). Participants have been formally interviewed at least three times during the nine-year period, each interview lasting between one and three hours. Some participants have been interviewed more than three times out of their own initiative and willingness to talk through their experiences, especially as they advanced through the tenure process. These additional interviews over the nine years, designated as informal unstructured interviews, have been either in person (at various venues such as professional conferences, etc.) or by telephone, Skype, and e-mail exchanges. All interviews have been conducted by the lead researcher and have been transcribed and coded by both the lead and second authors over the nine years.

The data were analyzed using an inductive analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), both individually and collectively, in three phases. In phase one, interview transcripts for all participants were read and re-read with careful attention to emerging themes. Careful notes were kept as well as initial data chunking. In phase two, categories were created from the emerging themes and data were organized according to these themes. In phase three, revision and refinement of the categories developed further included a re-reading of interview transcripts in order to contextualize and triangulate the findings. Representative data examples from the interviews are cited to support each of the emergent categories and themes (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Pseudonyms are used for all people and institutions throughout this article.

In terms of researcher positionality, Luis Urrieta is a Chicano/Purépecha faculty member originally from the barrios of Los Angeles, CA. Urrieta's interests in this study were motivated by his own journey through the tenure and promotion process. Lina Méndez is a Latina from Idaho and became involved in the study as a graduate student and a research assistant to Urrieta. Méndez transcribed the majority of the interviews and continues to be active in the research process. Esmeralda Rodríguez is a Mexicana from the Tejas-Mexico borderlands and became involved as a research assistant to Urrieta. All of the researchers are multilingual, of working-class origins, and first-generation college students.

## Findings

Consistent with CRT, LatCrit, and Chicana Feminist research on Latina/o faculty experiences in academia, our study participants felt alienated through the tenure-track process. They expressed a sense that their scholarly work was devalued and invalidated because their white colleagues were unfamiliar with, unwilling to learn about, and at times dismissed their research. Participants also felt socially excluded by white faculty members in their department and at the institutional level, and were overburdened with the unwritten service expectations seemingly common to minority faculty (Antonio, 2002). Participants supporting social justice and equity issues reported feeling disrespected by conservative, primarily white students, who vocally challenged their progressive perspectives and were disruptive and sometimes hostile in classes. Participants reported this mostly occurred in required diversity-oriented courses covering critical multicultural, bilingual, and race, class, and gender issues in education.

Overall, the 16 Latina/o faculty participants had their own very unique experiences of going through the tenure and promotion process, but also shared some unfortunate commonalities related to racial and gender microaggressions. Our data revealed the following four themes: (1) the tenure and promotion process functioned as “a tool of fear,” (2) tenure and promotion was a nebulous process, like “a moving target,” (3) receiving tenure gained limited forms of respect but not full membership, and (4) Latina/o faculty’s *supervivencia* (Galvan, 2011) allowed them to cope with the negative issues and environments they were in. Chicana feminist theorist, Ruth Trinidad Galvan defines *supervivencia* (survival) as not mere survival for Chicanas but survival plus, which often includes thriving despite difficult situations.

### *“A tool of fear”*

Most of the faculty in this study expressed that the tenure and promotion process often functioned as a control mechanism, a type of surveillance, in their lives that caused them a lot of stress. Mario, an assistant professor at a state university in 2005, with a strong social justice orientation shared, for example, his concerns about teaching about critical perspectives of the US Government. He worried this might impact his chances for receiving tenure:

Is someone who is going to sit on a committee somewhere down the line for RTP [retention, tenure and promotion], the tenure and promotion committee, going to remember that I am the crazy guy that actually said that CIA and secret service operatives are on par with Osama Bin Laden’s operatives? You know I thought about all that shit.

Mario expressed concern about his teaching and self-censorship, especially when he thought about the possible future consequences of the critical perspectives he shared with his students. In that sense, tenure and promotion functioned as a tool of fear impacting, inhibiting, and silencing Latina/o faculty, like Mario, in this study in significant and varied ways.

Informed by Chicana Feminism, our data analysis indicates that for Latina faculty especially, the alienating physical space of the university, including the hallways and offices, caused physical and psychological fear in distinctive ways than for the men. For example, for Karina, an assistant professor at a flagship institution in 2007, the walls formed part of a surveillance she felt hovered over her:

As an assistant here I feel very embattled by the process. I feel that the walls whisper continuously. I have a colleague next to me in my hallway that is limping even worse than I am in regards to the process [tenure]. And she's told, she's made to feel at all times as if she's not writing enough, and she's made to feel at all times as if she will not get tenure. And it doesn't necessarily happen by her immediate colleagues, but it happens by, you know, with regard to ... the message gets carried in other ways, subtle ways, but they're accounted.

Karina's words, "the walls whisper continuously," reveal that the very physical space can become haunting for a Latina assistant professor on the tenure track in an unsupportive environment. Karina also noted the patriarchal nebulous rhetoric communicated to "junior" faculty about tenure and promotion requirements, when she stated: "... she's told, she's made to feel at all times as if she's not writing enough ..." with regard to her female colleague. Importantly, Karina makes reference to the "subtle" messages and ways she and her colleague were told and made to feel inadequate, consistent with microinsults on racialized and gendered ascriptions of intelligence and presumed incompetence (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012). This continuous feeling of inadequacy was expressed by most of the Latina/o faculty participants, but especially Latinas, and was itself another fear tactic (tool) used to keep the untenured faculty in limbo about the certainty of receiving tenure, often creating an intense amount of pressure to publish without an accurate or specific goal of what was required to receive tenure.

The metaphors of being broken and physically injured, inferred by Karina's "limping," and "limping even worse," represent the debilitating psychological, emotional, and actual physical injuries (Karina's colleague was actually limping because of a fall) of the tenure process (Harris & González, 2012). By using this metaphor, Karina revealed the emotional and bodily toll the tenure and promotion process can have on women. Interestingly, Karina knew of her colleague's progress toward tenure in comparison to her own; thus, the process inadvertently is competitive and comparative. While tenure and promotion is said to be an individual process, Karina had a sense of constant murmuring in regard to her own and her colleague's scholarly productivity before the official tenure review even began. According to what the academy values, tenure and promotion is an imposed value system, especially at more prestigious universities, where faculty are accorded higher or lesser value based on their research, publication, and increasingly, grant record. It is not just about the number of publications, however, but also about the type of knowledge being produced and the publication venues. Karina and her colleague would be reviewed for tenure the same year and it was widely known, according to Karina, that their dossiers would by default be compared. Tenure and promotion thus functioned as "a tool of fear" for compliance to the individualistic value system of the academy that coerces tenure-track faculty to compete and engage in practices that comply with the rationalist, white, masculinist expectations. Latina/o faculty compliance or "buy-in" to majoritarian expectations, however, is never a guarantee for tenure (De Luca & Escoto, 2012).

Andrea, a full professor at a research I institution in 2003, reflected that she was aware of the majoritarian knowledge her institution valued during her tenure and promotion process; however, Andrea felt very committed to challenging these types of knowledge production "rules." She stated:

... of course it's a huge tension (laughs) because there are people within the academy who believe that there's one kind of knowledge. And that kind of knowledge of course

is privileged in this setting. And I think our job, people like me, people like you [people of color], is, I think to always call it into question.

Andrea understood that the type of scholarship about Latina/o communities she produced was not privileged, and was often devalued. She felt, however, that it was her duty to challenge privileged knowledge even before she was tenured, although there was always the fear imposed by environmental and interpersonal microaggressions that devalued or, at best, ghettoized people of color's knowledge at the university. There was clearly a sense amongst all of the Latina/o faculty participants that the scholarly work produced by people of color was not attributed equal value (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) and some had been "advised" through very direct and personal microinvalidations that their research could hinder their prospects for getting tenure. By monitoring knowledge production, tenure and promotion review committees used tenure as a "tool of fear" to discipline the Latina/o faculty in this study.

Karina also described the tenure and promotion process as "like shoveling smoke." For most participants, the tenure and promotion expectations were never made clear enough and the process became something intangible and indeed, figuratively "hazed in smoke." Karina suspected that this process was, in a way, designed to keep her in line with department, institutional, and disciplinary norms of whiteness. Karina questioned: "How much of it [tenure] is myth? How much of it is true? How much of it is indeed just this huge fear tactic so that faculty, junior faculty in particular, will publish endlessly?" Other faculty also expressed that the uncertainty and the subjective and nebulous nature of the tenure and promotion process added enormous amounts of stress to their lives. The lack of specificity led to the theme of tenure as "a moving target."

### *A moving target*

Although there are general guidelines about the tenure and promotion process, these are often purposefully vague in terms of specific requirements and vary by institution. Óscar, an assistant professor in transition from a teaching institution to a major research university in 2007, explained that he understood tenure and promotion as "a very subjective process, even though they might have set out to be objective." According to Óscar, guideline interpretation in the review process can have either beneficial or detrimental impacts on the tenure and promotion of Latina/o faculty, "especially if they do not understand their research or some of the publishing venues that are important to Latinos." Óscar aptly expressed that the areas and focus of Latina/o research and publishing venues would not necessarily be valued or understood by white colleagues sitting on tenure review committees. Because of the subjective interpretation of vague guidelines, the secrecy of committee decisions, and the lack of understanding of Latina/o research and publication venues, it was generally difficult for the Latina/o faculty in our study to ascertain how they would fare in the tenure and promotion process.

Pepe, a full professor at a flagship research institution, reflecting on his tenure and promotion journey, referred to the uncertainty and implicit nature of the tenure and promotion process as "a moving target." Pepe said (2005):

There's culture that's different at each campus, and not only is each campus a little bit different, the way they implement the tenure process, but it's also a moving target and

this is something I think I learned here and that is, uh, well there might be certain sets of standards that are published some place, but now they can change it. The people that sit on these committees to decide tenure rotate, so as membership on a committee changes, there's little nuances that change.

Pepe shared that as an assistant professor, he researched the tenure requirements at his institution, including in the faculty handbook. He discovered, going through the process from assistant through to full professor, that what was published in the handbook was very vague and substantially different from the process he experienced in his department. Pepe recalled that members of the tenure and promotion review committees, including himself after he became a full professor, interpreted the review criteria differently over time. After over 35 years at the same institution, Pepe attested (in 2011) to how different tenure and promotion had become, especially in terms of the increased number of publications and grants expected. Pepe also explained the nuanced ways tenure expectations had been applied differently to different candidates depending on the committee composition. Pepe expressed that although there were guidelines, they were not always applied to all people in the same way, especially over time.

The vagueness of the tenure expectations caused an exhausting and excessive pressure to publish where, in order to “to play it safe,” the Latina/o faculty felt they had to produce twice as many publications as were expected of white male faculty. Camille, a full professor at a research university in 2006, reflected on her tenure experience:

I came here [the university], I asked about how many publications do you need [to get tenure] and they said, oh about 12. It never would change, and I noticed that when ... a white colleague, would come in they would say oh, 8 or 9 publications, but then they told me 12, then I hear the numbers. I was wondering and asking different people how many [publications] do you need? And there was never any consistency so I just figured I needed at least twice as many of whatever they said, I needed twice as many, because the number just varied so much and I saw how it varied. I saw [white] people who did get tenure with 6 or 7 publications. It became very clear to me that it was this whole construction of identity.

Camille pointed out the difficulty of making sense of the inconsistent information she received about the number of publications required for tenure. To assure she would have a solid dossier, Camille said she focused on publishing to exhaustion, to the detriment of her own physical health, a trend common with other Latina faculty (Harris & González, 2012). Despite her amazingly prolific publication record, Camille, like most of the study participants, added that, “the tenure process was one of the most unsettling processes, I think of my life. It was unsettling because of the uncertainty of it.” Camille also noted how she later came to observe as a full professor, like Pepe, the varying application of the tenure and review process to faculty of color as opposed to white faculty.

As a voting member of tenure and promotion committees now, Camille observed that whose case for tenure was being presented and who presented it before the committee affected the decisions made. Camille said:

But what I do now is that I make sure that I'm the chair of tenure committees, strategically for people [of color] that need it, because I understand when you do that, then you can pick the reviewers [of the dossiers]. In other words, I'm going to do what everybody else [whites] always does. So I don't feel I'm doing anything unethical because that's what high people [whites] do all the time.

Latina/o full professors' presence on tenure and promotion review committees, like Camille and Pepe, cannot be understated or underestimated in making the tenure and promotion process one that can evaluate Latina/o faculty dossiers more equitably. This includes having Latina/o faculty represented on Deans' committees and in faculty affairs, as well as in higher-level administration positions such as deans and provosts. As chair of tenure committees for faculty of color, Camille said she could recognize the excellence in their work, she was better able to seek appropriate external reviewers to evaluate their work's merit more fairly and would be able to translate the value of this work for a broader audience, namely the predominantly white tenure and promotion committee.

Unfortunately, consistent with microaggressions of Latina/o faculty exclusion, Camille also shared that even after she was promoted to full professor, there remained ways in which Latina/o faculty and other faculty of color were never fully socially accepted as full members of the academic community in her department. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2008) assert that minority women professors are not generally seen as intellectuals and that their membership in the academy is often credited to their gender and racial group, rather than their scholarly accomplishments, as was the case with Camille. Camille, like other participants, shared that receiving tenure gained them limited forms of second-class citizenship with some power, but not full membership.

### ***You might be respected, but you are not a member***

Most of the study participants reported, to varying degrees, feeling isolated and socially excluded by white faculty in their departments while going through tenure and promotion, and even after having earned tenure. This is not a new phenomenon and has been studied during the past 20 years (Turner et al., 2008). Some of the Latina/o faculty participants developed a "sense" that because of their race and gender they were incapable of gaining full access to the academy. Karina described this sense as not knowing "the secret handshake." According to Karina, the secret handshake was not designed to be known by Latina/o faculty. She expressed that the handshake was not only something that got passed down amongst white faculty, but "something that gets taught, that you need to have the right genetic code for," alluding to coming from a particular gender, race, and class background. Karina believed she would never have full access in academia because she was Latina, even if she was awarded tenure.

Despite the limited access to tenure-track faculty positions for Latina/o PhDs, academic departments sometimes express commitments to hire Latinas/os, but their recruiting efforts are minimal (Urrieta & Villenas, 2013). Recruiting effort usually means including a faculty of color in an all-white faculty search committee, which often creates a hostile environment. For example, serving on a faculty search committee, Ramiro, an associate professor at a flagship institution in 2009, was reminded through verbal microaggressions that minority candidates, even for a senior faculty position, are not thought of as qualified by white faculty. According to Ramiro, "every single minority in the pool was eliminated even when some had better CV's than some of the faculty on the committee!" When Ramiro protested the elimination of the last minority candidate on the list, he was verbally reprimanded by a white female colleague who said: "We are not just going to hire anyone to meet our diversity quotas, we want someone who is talented." According to Ramiro, this

demeaning microinsult conveyed to him that the minority faculty candidates in the pool were assigned degrees of intelligence and competence based on their race and treated as second-class applicants compared to whites. Other tenured professors in our study serving on faculty search committees had similar demeaning experiences.

Guadalupe, full professor at a flagship institution, also commented on not being fully accepted:

... I think that at particularly conservative, predominantly white institutions they hire you because you're Mexican or Latina but they don't want you to be one. I think that uh ... there is that sense for young scholars that ... they're being too ethnic or too minority. In a way that suggests a [faculty of color's] lack of commitment and devotion to the academy, which when translated to the tenure-track means lack of dedication to your career.

Guadalupe, a darker skinned Latina, highlights how institutional diversity commitments to recruit "Brown bodies" usually come with the expectation of suppressing their racial, ethnic, gender, and political ways of knowing and being. Guadalupe's statement that "being too ethnic or too minority" is equated with a lack of devotion and commitment to the academy is consistent with the message conveyed to Ramiro that "minority" is not associated with "talent" (i.e. intelligence, quality, etc.). Guadalupe's comments on the recruitment of Latina/o faculty highlight a contradiction consistent with interest convergence; the university fills a minimal diversity quota, while denying Latina/o faculty full membership by not providing the needed social, cultural, and career support systems to retain and promote them (Ponjuan, 2011).

Annel, also a darker skinned, short Latina and tenured associate professor at a research university, poignantly described the alienating reality she experienced:

You know we want this Brown face to come, we heard he is great or he's doing great work, and then they get there and they don't get the support from the person who recruited him. People are making fun of the way they [Latina/o faculty] dress calling things [clothes] like it's a costume or why is she wearing you know, bright colors or why does her office look like that [a museum] or why there's always all these people of color there, like there's too much activity, it looks like a party.

Annel echoed that Latina/o faculty are often not supported or mentored by the very people who recruit them. According to Annel, lack of support isolates Latina/o faculty and facilitates "Othering." Commenting on Latina/o faculty's office décor and clothing, especially clothing like indigenous *huipiles*, bright colors, make-up, large earrings, and other aspects of personal appearance were common ways that Latina/o faculty, especially Latinas, experienced microaggressions. The general disapproval of people of color in numbers larger than three, as well as the dismissal that anything serious or intellectual could be occurring, according to Annel, were expressed by whites' comments on the number of people of color gathered in Latina/o faculty offices at her institution. Annel echoed Guadalupe's sentiments when she claimed, "that they might hire you because you are Brown, doesn't mean that they want you to be." Annel's example, like Guadalupe's, highlights intersectional forms of oppression they experienced as darker skinned, working-class-origin Latinas.

Most of the participants felt they were recruited and hired, in part, because they were Latina/o, but once they joined the department faculty, this also became the very reason for which they were either ignored or rejected. Camille advised: "you have to be prepared for this, no matter how much you accomplish you still are not going to be respected, and you might be respected, but you won't be a member." Camille

realized that she was not a full member during her own post-tenure process. Camille shared a story of two white female colleagues that were celebrated with parties organized by another white scholar in the department for receiving tenure. When Camille received tenure a year later, she noted that she was not celebrated in any way, calling her two white colleagues “lucky.” A year later, another of her female white colleagues received tenure and she too was celebrated with a party. Camille commented:

It’s not like we want the party! But it, there’s always this reminder that you’re not really in the club and that happens all the time, but they have to respect you ‘cause you certainly earned your dues! ... You’re always still reminded that you’re not really uh, an insider so you just have to know that. ... just because you get tenure that’s not going to change.

Camille experienced her colleagues’ celebrations prior to, and after her tenure, as microaggressions by her white colleagues. Although Camille agreed that tenure did bring with it some respect for having “earned your dues,” there were continuous microinvalidations that told her: “you’re not really uh, an insider.” For our Latina/o faculty participants, from the faculty search committee through to earning tenure, there were interpersonal and environmental microaggressions that conveyed perceptions of deficit, suspicion, exclusion, and second-class membership. Although tenure and promotion conceded forms of respect for the Latina/o faculty, it did not grant them full access. However, the Latina/o faculty in our study, although burdened and stressed by the expectations of the tenure track that all faculty bear and the microaggressions they experienced as faculty of color, were also very resilient and learned to strategically cope and to thrive at the various institutions where they worked. Of the 16 faculty in our study, only 1 has been denied tenure. This important finding led to the theme of *supervivencia*.

### *Supervivencia*

Galvan (2011) defines *supervivencia* (survival) as a state beyond mere survival encompassing the full intricacies of people of color’s everyday survival, including unending resourcefulness, creativity, and resiliency despite difficult conditions. Indeed, even in less-than-ideal and racially hostile or unsupportive environments, the Latina/o faculty participants all developed adaptive coping strategies to survive in their everyday lives as faculty while being creative and resilient in the process. Many found sources of strength and support: (1) in local Latina/o communities, both on and off campus; (2) they established collaborative working relationships with other faculty of color; (3) they found gratification in mentoring Latina/o students and Latina/o tenure-track faculty.

Elsa, an assistant professor at a teaching university, shared that the one thing that kept her working toward tenure was the amount of support she had built in the local Latina/o community:

I have a lot of [Latino/a] community support! Not the kind that gets you anything maybe, but the kind where people know you are doing a job and people say, “Thank God you’re there!” [at the university]. So that is like *algo* [something].

Elsa’s university was located in close proximity to a Latina/o working-class barrio in a major urban center. Elsa worked directly with people in the community, including principals, teachers, student teachers, children, and families in the local schools.

While many of her white colleagues did not value the time she invested in establishing and maintaining these relationships, for Elsa, it was worth *algo* (something) that she hoped would somewhat count on her behalf.

Elsa, like Óscar, was not naïve about the types of activities that “count” for tenure in academia and knew that the “community support” would likely be devalued, yet she found it an incredibly rewarding part of her job as a Latina professor. Research suggests that community service can be detrimental to faculty of color for tenure purposes, but it provides inspiration and fulfillment when it is in response to community needs (Turner et al., 2008). In that regard, Guadalupe shared the following:

...that’s probably the part that I like best about my job actually, and that’s why I’m actually doing what I’m doing is to be of use to the community. But when you’re in the tenure-track you’re clearly like battling two separate sets of expectations. And one is from the community and the other one is from the academy, and they don’t necessarily come together. So the tenure-track typically, it doesn’t encourage young scholars to actually find ways to bring this together but rather to tow the line according to dominant definitions of what it means to be an academic.

Faculty like Elsa, Óscar, and Guadalupe found working with Latina/o communities an important aspect of their university roles and one from which they drew strength and inspiration for supervivencia. Unfortunately, “faculty of color are often burdened with heavy service loads, specifically the need to use their scholarship expertise and experience to give something back to the community... and is often not rewarded in merit” (Stanley, 2006, p. 719). Guadalupe, Elsa, Óscar, and others, while corroborating Stanley’s (2006) findings, also offered important counter-narratives of majoritarian definitions of academic work. Latina/o faculty and other faculty of color disrupted by their very presence and community commitments the white normalized notions of academic commitments and academic life (Urrieta & Méndez Benavídez, 2007; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012).

Latina/o faculty participants also built and belonged to communities and networks of scholars of color and white allies working for social justice. Andrea expressed this clearly:

There are two sources of gratification, and one is this network of Chicano scholars that it’s such a really wonderful part of my life. The other is being able to work with students .... and I choose to work with people who will make a difference.

Working in collaboration with faculty and students “who will make a difference” was an important source of motivation for faculty like Andrea. Similar experiences were shared by most of the participants and are consistent with the social justice goals of other faculty of color.

Local- and national-level networks of faculty of color also helped to provide the support and mentoring opportunities that were often missing for most of the Latina/o faculty in their own departments. Camille, like Andrea, also established networks of Latina/o scholars. Reflecting on her tenure trajectory, Camille commented that for all of the major decisions she ever made as an untenured faculty member, she always consulted with senior national Latina/o faculty mentors. Camille said: “Whenever I got advice from senior white colleagues, I always called my national senior Latino faculty mentors and got their advice too. I never made a major decision without consulting my Latino mentors!” Although not all of the Latina/o faculty in our study felt completely isolated in their home departments, most did have senior Latina/o

mentors, scholar of color communities, and white allies that enabled and sustained in them creative, hopeful ways to cope with intersectional oppressive microaggressions and persevere on the tenure track.

Overall, persevering in academia was a gratifying experience for the Latina/o faculty. All of the participants expressed a commitment to ensure that the next generation of Latina/o scholars would survive through the tenure process. Many were also hopeful that future generations of scholars would make greater contributions than they; thus, mentoring was indispensable. “Opening doors” for other minority scholars and students somehow made the microaggressions many of the Latina/o faculty participants endured worth surviving. Eduardo, a full professor and administrator at a flagship university, felt such a deep sense of responsibility for mentoring that he compared it to becoming a *padrino*, *madrina* (a godparent). Eduardo said:

Should anything happen to the parents, you’re [godparent] supposed to do it ... you know, to help them, nurture them, support them, not just, it’s not just an honorific relationship, it’s a responsible relationship. ... It’s the same way I feel now towards other Latinos and others working in this field [Education] ... we have to nurture and support [them], understanding they’re the next generation. So it’s a huge responsibility.

Mentoring Latina/o faculty through the tenure and promotion process for tenured faculty, like Eduardo, was not an “honorific relationship,” but a “responsible relationship” going beyond majoritarian understandings of mentoring. When Latina/o faculty mentored graduate students or untenured faculty, like Eduardo, they took this responsibility very seriously, including at times from culturally appropriate, religious, or spiritual understandings. Faculty understood the need to nurture and support students and younger scholars in authentic caring (Valenzuela, 1999) ways, hopeful they will become the next generation of Latina/o faculty committed to “make a difference.” Local and national Latina/o community networks, collaborative relationships, and mentoring became sources of strength and sustenance that enabled more than strategic coping with microaggressions, but an overall resiliency and perseverance guided by *supervivencia*.

## Discussion

Our study shows that prejudice and discrimination persist in less-than-ideal, racially hostile, and unsupportive university environments (Smith et al., 2012) for Latina/o faculty. For our participants, tenure and promotion functioned as a disciplining “tool of fear” that was ultimately psychologically, physically, and emotionally debilitating, especially for women. This included chronic illness for some faculty, including surviving breast cancer and emotional distress. In the majoritarian narrative, tenure is said to be an individual meritocratic, gender-neutral, colorblind process, but it is a comparative and competitive process, as highlighted by Karina. Rationalist, white, masculinist knowledge and culture is the unspoken normative comparative standard for tenure and promotion. As a patriarchal, heteronormative, racist regulatory process, tenure and promotion becomes the fiduciary of the knowledge production and cultural norms of academic life; thus, even the “walls whisper.” Lack of faculty racial, gender, and class diversity serve to maintain and sustain these cultural norms and regulatory practices.

Faculty like Óscar, Elsa, Andrea, and others were not naïve and they knew that Latina/o research and knowledge production were “apartheid knowledge” (Delgado Bernal & Villalpando, 2002) or at best, not understood by their white peers, but they honored and exercised their right to epistemic diversity and academic freedom. Even when faculty like Camille worked to exhaustion to produce twice as many publications as her white colleagues, the haziness and “mystery” of tenure expectations helped sustain the majoritarian tenure narrative because it inevitably created environments of uncertainty, inadequacy, and self-doubt for untenured Latina/o faculty. Because of the legally protected norms of “confidentiality” (secrecy) in tenure deliberations and decisions, there was never enough “proof” to guarantee a favorable decision, therefore reifying and reproducing the majoritarian tenure narrative.

Most of our faculty participants also continued to suffer from social exclusion even when tenured. This sense of second-class membership was most often conveyed to them through race and gender microaggressions, especially since many felt devalued as researchers, teachers, or leaders amongst their white colleagues, despite several being nationally and internationally recognized scholars. Faculty like Guadalupe and Annel, both darker skinned Latinas, expressed that departments paid rhetorical commitments to recruiting “Brown bodies,” but not to mentoring or supporting their cultural, ethnic, racial, or gendered ways of knowing or being. This push to suppress “Latino/a-ness” was often communicated through intersectional microaggressions in reference to language, clothing style, office décor, and dismissal as credible, talented, or quality scholars. Included were overt and subtle forms of Latina faculty sexual harassment.

Faculty like Pepe and Camille also had the opportunity to observe how the tenure and promotion process was applied unfairly to tenure candidates. In some cases, predominantly white tenure and promotion committees, and committee chairs did not understand the research and did not fairly evaluate or advocate for the faculty of color’s scholarship. Camille’s assertion that as a tenure committee chair for Latina/os, she would better understand and translate the value of the scholarship to her white colleagues and find the appropriate external reviewers to evaluate the work fairly, highlights Latina/o full professors’ agency potential. Latina/o faculty participation would ensure more equitable tenure reviews for Latina/o faculty tenure candidates.

Supervivencia contributed to the resiliency and perseverance of the Latina/o faculty. Our study participants drew strength and satisfaction from working with local and national Latina/o and other progressive communities. Through these community engagements they established collaborative and cooperative working relationships that ultimately helped to sustain them in their faculty positions (Flores & García, 2009). This included doing collaborative research, multi-authored publications, mutual support, cultural nourishment, and hope (Ek et al., 2010). Mentoring Latina/o students and untenured faculty of color, especially those that sought to “make a difference,” was a major source of satisfaction. Overall, Latina/o faculty thrived despite uncertainty and chronically stressful, less-than-ideal environments.

The tenure and promotion process is thus often detrimental to Latina/o faculty when predominantly white tenure review committees, especially the chair of the committee, are unfamiliar with and unwilling to learn about Latina/o research agendas, Latina/o-focused publishing venues, progressive and critical approaches to teaching, or with the often collaborative and cooperative aspects of Latina/o research and scholarship (i.e. sharing co-authorship). The hegemony of patriarchal,

heteronormative, white racism in academia, guised as individualism, competition, and merit, impedes a fair tenure evaluation because critical, cooperative, and collaborative practices are often viewed in deficit and perceived as weaknesses, rather than strengths. The lack of tenure expectation specificity communicated to the faculty in our study made the experience of working toward tenure stressful and exhausting. The nebulous, vague, and, at times, contradictory information, or “moving target” our study participants experienced contributed to “unsettling” and “embattled” feelings about the process. This lack of specificity, itself a microaggression, is meant to protect the process, to absolve review committees of their decisions, protected by secrecy, and to create a disciplining condition by leaving tenure-track faculty in a hazing suspense, “like shoveling smoke.”

Based on our findings, we offer the following recommendations for committees, chairs, deans, vice chancellors, and provosts reviewing Latina/o faculty tenure and promotion dossiers: (1) become educated and familiar with Latina/o research, including previous research relevant to the candidate’s research agenda; (2) be aware of the generally collaborative aspects of Latina/o research since collaboration and cooperation tend to be important to Latina/o faculty, including co-authorship; (3) learn more about Latina/o faculty conference and publishing venues, especially because these are important in terms of target audience, accessibility, and visibility. These are no less rigorous than traditional venues, and often review Latina/o scholarship with greater scrutiny because of the deeper familiarity with Latina/o research; (4) review committees, chairs, and deans, should appropriately select external reviewers for Latina/o candidates’ dossiers. Contrary to majoritarian views, Latina/o faculty make appropriate, and perhaps more rigorous external reviewers of Latina/o dossiers because they often understand and can better evaluate a candidate’s scholarship to tenure review committees; (5) become familiar with Latina/o faculty’s general community commitments and collaborations that often form important bases for supportive networks and nurturing relationships generally missing for Latina/o faculty in academia; finally, (6) Latina/o faculty often teach important courses addressing critical topics like diversity, race, class, and gender and also often become the targets of conservative white students’ negative teaching evaluations and hostile teaching environments. Tenure review committees should find alternative, more equitable assessments of Latina/o faculty teaching such as peer observations and Latina/o faculty self-assessments.

## **Conclusion**

Our study contradicts the majoritarian tenure and promotion narrative as an objective, neutral, colorblind and merit-based process. The Latina/o faculty participants in this study experienced tenure and promotion as a vague, nebulous, and inherently intersubjective process that caused fear, uncertainty, and distress. The chronic stress of academic labor in addition to coping with intersectional race, gender, and class microaggressions often physically, psychologically and emotionally debilitated our study participants. Tenured Latina/o faculty participants continued to experience forms of social exclusion that communicated second-class membership even after having “paid their dues.” Guided by their supervivencia, the Latina/o faculty continued to believe that community commitments, collaboration and cooperation, and mentoring were worth their struggles in less-than-ideal and sometimes racially hostile environments. Latina/o faculty resiliency and perseverance, however, should

not absolve predominantly white universities from addressing the racial, ethnic, gender, class, and sexual orientation needs of its changing faculty and student population. Structural and cultural changes must be made to challenge the patriarchal, heteronormative, and racist regulatory aspects of tenure and promotion as a gate-keeping and exclusionary process. It is timely and necessary.

## Note

1. In this paper, we will use the general term Latina/o to refer to people of Latin American descent in the US, including the wide range of Latina/o experiences from immigrants to those of multiple generations in the US. We prefer the term Latina/o because it is more inclusive of the complexities of Latina/o experiences, which include racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and generational diversity. We use the term Hispanic only when referring specifically to census data, since it is the official government term used.

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