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Michelle Téllez

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# Lectures, Evaluations, and Diapers: Navigating the Terrains of Chicana Single Motherhood in the Academy

Michelle Téllez

*Using the personal experience of a junior faculty member in a women's studies program as testimony, the article explores the numerous penalties that women of color in the academy endure during pregnancy, childbirth, and early child-rearing years. It highlights the sacrifices paid as a result of motherhood not being closeted. Based on gendered, racialized, and classed assumptions of who belongs in the academy, it argues that family-friendly policies that allow for faculty members to choose having both family and career are largely insufficient, nonexistent, or unmonitored. The article centers the lives and stories of the often invisible mothers of color in the academy to critique the misaligned rhetoric for diversity that exists within the universities they serve. It seeks to facilitate the inclusion of their voices and experiences in the reimagining and transformation of university culture, while focusing on several practices that could help shape this vision.*

**Keywords:** academy / Chicana / critical race theory / diversity / feminism / single mothering / testimonio

## Introduction

I gave birth to my daughter nine months after my doctoral graduation party, which was held in my sister's backyard in my hometown in California—a celebration that included mariachi music, chicken mole, and a large community of family and friends. When she was four weeks old, I returned to my position as a first-year faculty member at a public university, resumed teaching, and began my journey as a single mother in academia. As a faculty member who is

also a Chicana, my presence in the academy stands in the face of decades of marginalizing practices and policies in the US education system. These policies and the engrained Western culture of the education system privilege, support, and validate the experiences and bodies of white, able-bodied, middle-upper-class heterosexual males. While universities claim to promote and support diversity, rising expectations, coupled with a lack of institutional support for more marginal experiences, create a gulf between what the university claims as a core value (namely, diversity) and my experience as a single mother of color in the academy.

In order to better understand the depth and width of this gulf, I want to begin by sharing some statistics pertaining to my multiple underrepresented identities. First, in a group of 100 Chicana elementary school students, less than two of them will obtain an advanced degree (Yosso and Solórzano 2006). Second, among full professors, only 26 percent are women (AAUP 2001), and, in terms of women faculty of color, although their numbers are increasing, they remain primarily in the junior, untenured ranks (Stanley 2006). Third, women who have children within five years of completing their dissertation are 20–25 percent less likely to receive tenure (Mason and Goulden 2002). While no data on single-mother faculty members in the academy exist, overall, the situation for women with babies in the academy is challenging at best. Furthermore, 62 percent of tenured women in the social sciences do not have children (*ibid.*), which suggests that having a baby is antithetical to being a successful faculty member. Finally, while one-third of all babies are now born to single mothers and less than 25 percent of all families conform to the nuclear configuration (Juffer 2006), no research examines whether being a single mother outside of the nuclear family configuration is more difficult if one is also a woman of color. In other words, the experiences of female junior faculty members of color and single mothers are rendered largely invisible.

My experiences in the academy exist at the nexus of these statistics. On the one hand, they suggest that someone like me does not belong in the academy, as my presence is historically marked by exclusionary practices that discriminate against people of color, women, and single mothers (Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, and Villenas 2006; Latina Feminist Group 2001). On the other, my presence acts as a source of agency and resistance by giving voice to a story that is largely untold, and by challenging the ongoing exclusionary conditions that must be changed in order to allow for a truly diverse academy. It is because I exist in the intersection of these statistics that I must develop the language to speak of my experience, and to name the contradictions and struggles I lived as a first-year junior faculty member of color who also became a first-time, single mother.

While the goal of diversity has been promulgated across university campuses nationwide, what does this really mean for those of us existing in the margins of higher education?<sup>1</sup> I argue that diversity should not only be about representation, but also about giving voice to the multiplicity of experiences of

underrepresented groups (Delgado 1989; Delpit 1987; Tate 1994; Tatum 1992).<sup>2</sup> By highlighting the ways in which heterosexual white men are privileged in the academy, I reveal how the university's "neutral" policies are actually based on racial, classed, and gendered assumptions, which, in effect, penalize marginal faculty members and create obstacles to their full contribution to academic life and scholarship. Specifically, I will critique and raise questions about the ways in which university culture and Western norms rest on gendered, racialized, and classed assumptions that disadvantage women of color and mothers, creating obstacles to their full integration, acceptance, and success in the academy. Last, I will discuss the potential loss for the academy, both in terms of new knowledge production and fulfilling the objective of a more diverse academy, when this implicit valorization of the idealized faculty member goes unchallenged.

## Methods

The Latina Feminist Group, made up of the eighteen contributors to the anthology *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* (2001), generates experience-based knowledge by using its life stories to explain the development of its feminist politics. Like its members, I have had a "*papelito guardado*," a piece written in times of isolation, pain, struggle; one that is stored away, kept from the public, but, at times, revisited for contemplation and analysis (1). My *papelito guardado* was first memorialized in the initial draft of this article written six years ago; I have waited to return to it, to analyze it, and to share it with others. In the initial writing of this piece, I wrote with much angst, anger, frustration, and shock about my experience and treatment as a young faculty member during my pregnancy, childbirth, and early child-rearing years working within a women's studies program. I reflected on the contradictions I witnessed and lived through while working in a university that boasts about its diversity while simultaneously delegitimizing, excluding, and tokenizing me through its policies, practices, and culture. What is written and explored in these pages is an isolating experience that is all too common for women of color and mothers within the academy. The use of my narrative is not meant to essentialize or homogenize the experiences of women of color faculty, but rather to personify the critiques I make and create a critical dialogue around them. In doing so, I heed Gloria Anzaldúa's (1990, xxv) call to "occupy theorizing space" and Alma M. García's (1997) appeal to center Latinas as the speaking subject in intellectual discourse.

In this article, I validate and call attention to my experience as a junior faculty woman of color, offering a critique of the academy that challenges the notion that it is a liberal and diverse safe space, and showing the ways in which it continues to exclude, marginalize, and penalize those who do not fit into the academic construct that privileges the heteronormative white male. Following the lead Chicana feminists, such as Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, Ana Castillo, and others, I build on traditions of resistance and liberation, politicizing my

everyday experience, documenting what otherwise would be kept silent, and liberating myself from the university's expectations that I have internalized for too long.<sup>3</sup> In the same spirit as the Latina Feminist Group (2001) and in building on my family's story-telling tradition, I utilize my *testimonio*, or life story, as a tool to "theorize oppression, resistance and subjectivity" (19). Because marginalized people are often silenced, pushed out, and unrecognized, we must thrust our experiences and our voices to the forefront to ensure that, as the academy transforms, we are included and our experiences supported.

### **Navigating the Terrains of Single Motherhood as a Woman of Color in the Academy**

To provide context for my narrative, I first offer a brief review of the literature that describes the climate and culture within institutions of higher education experienced by women of color who are also mothers. Demands within the academy continue to rise (Blackmore and Sachs 2000; Gore 1999) and tenure has become an ever more illusive target as issues of race, class, and gender, which frame a person's experience within the academy, continue to go overlooked and unchallenged on a systemic level. Women of color scholars, and specifically Latinas, experience tokenism and the presumption that they are affirmative-action candidates (Glazer-Raymo 1999; Simeone 1987; Sotello and Turner 2002). Furthermore, they are delegitimized by colleagues and students when they are confronted and questioned about their credibility and competence. Women of color scholars are not recognized for their scholarly expertise because their research is not considered "real" scholarship (Hendrix 1998; Pittman 2010; Rubin 2001; Theodore 1986; Williams, Garza, Hodge, and Breau 1999). All of this is underscored by gendered/racialized expectations for performance, priorities, and self-presentation (Agathangelou and Ling 2002; Hune 1998; Moses 1997; Nieves-Squires 1991; TuSmith and Reddy 2002). For example, administrators assume that women of color faculty want to represent and speak for the ethnic minorities on campus and take on more nurturing roles within the academy. Consequently, department chairs and deans assign women of color faculty heavier teaching loads—often, large introductory courses and courses with more new preparations—and more nurturing service responsibilities, and they expect them to serve on more race-related committees (Aguirre 2000; Allen et al. 2002; Brayboy 2003; Carnegie Foundation 2012; Coe 2013; Johnson, Kuykendall, and Nelson Laird 2005; Medina and Luna 2000; Moses 1997; Pittman 2010; Thorne and Hochschild 1997; Turner 2001). Because these time-consuming responsibilities are added to the ongoing demands of research productivity, women of color have to work twice as hard as their white male counterparts.

Compounding the problem for women of color faculty is the social isolation, marginalization, and invisibility they experience (Agathangelou and Ling 2002; Sotello and Turner 2002; Stanley 2006) and the lack of support they

are offered, an experience that Linda Christian-Smith and Kristine Kellor (1999, 88) claim they should come to expect. In fact, Bernice Sandler (1986, 13) writes that women of color faculty “are more likely than white women to be excluded from the informal and social aspects of their departments and institutions—sometimes by white women as well as white men.”<sup>4</sup> This social isolation is exacerbated by the fact that these women have few or no mentors with similar identities (Sandler 1986; Sotello and Turner 2002), an experience that increasingly disadvantages working-class faculty who have had fewer academic mentors and role models in their backgrounds (Tokarczyk and Fay 1993) and who simultaneously experience separation and alienation from their roots as they “succeed” more (Gardner 1993). This lack of mentorship and the raced, classed, and gendered differences that seem to create it mean that women of color tend to have less access to the old-boy networks, which additionally affects their developmental advancement and opportunities for sponsorship (Montero-Sieburth 2012; Simeone 1987). Furthermore, alienation within the academy exacerbates the feelings of separation from their roots. Carolina Sotello and Viernes Turner (2002) suggest that the conflict is a psychological divide between home and career, claiming that, although the Chicanos in their study “maintain a strong affiliation with their community and feel a strong sense of responsibility to improve the status of other Chicanos in the larger community” (82), they feel they must sacrifice either their families or their careers. Isolated and faced with microaggressions from all sides, women of color faculty experience greater occupational stress (Sotello and Turner 2002; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001; Turner 2003).<sup>5</sup>

The experience of motherhood among women of color in the academy is an even greater alienating factor, as university culture clearly suggests its incompatibility with university life. Mothers of color who cannot or will not closet their motherhood often do not have the support they need to successfully balance the responsibilities of their personal and professional lives; they experience even greater isolation, delegitimization, and marginalization, which stems from the fact that university culture is steeped in patriarchal norms. Fathers are assumed to be the primary breadwinners and to have wives who serve as primary caregivers. Mothers who are scholars and take on this “double duty” are sandwiched between two clocks—the biological clock and the academic clock—and are made to believe that they must decide between the two (Finkel and Olswang 1996; Hewlett 2002; Williams 2000). Consequently, among professional women, female university faculty members have the highest rate of childlessness (43 percent), and many who 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 (Acker and Armenti 2007; Bassett 2005; Coiner and George 1998; Wilson 1999; Wolf-Wendel and Ward 2006).<sup>6</sup> These examples highlight the ways in which the university colonizes women’s bodies and penalizes their difference.

University culture also privileges heterosexual white male bodies in the academy by integrating racial and gendered notions of who belongs there. Specifically, the notions of professionalism are tied to stereotypically male characteristics, such as being objective, rational, effective, unemotional, organized, and punctual (Martin 1984). Stereotypes of pregnant women contradict supposedly “professional” characteristics. For example, pregnant women are assumed, by students and colleagues, to be experiencing a time of emotional upheaval and physical discomfort and are therefore understandably cranky, rude, emotional, and disheveled (Baker and Copp 1997; Kleinplatz 1992); thus they are rendered unable to be efficient, productive, and fair. Because pregnancy and motherhood are seen as incompatible with academic life, visible mothers are thought to have prioritized familial responsibilities over their professions (Baker and Copp 1997) and are viewed as less serious, less committed, and less credible (Toth 1997). My experiences as a Latina single mother were colored by these stereotypes.

The Latina Feminist Group (2001) argues that as “women of accomplishment, we have had to construct and perform academic personas that require ‘professionalism,’ ‘objectivity,’ and ‘respectability’ in ways that often negate our humanity” (14). As a Chicana single mother, achieving academic excellence, maintaining credibility, and modeling the professionalism and respectability demanded of me within the university culture meant unnaturally hiding my pregnancy and my motherhood.

### **Retelling: First Steps of Resistance**

I was three months pregnant when I arrived in the city I would soon call home. There are still moments today, seven years later, when I catch the smell of the plants that grow alongside my office building that take me back to those first days. I remember walking through the empty hallways by myself—trying to make sense of the maze that is my floor—feeling overwhelmed, not by the impending beginning of the semester, but by the life that was growing inside of me. I was facing the reality of raising the child on my own away from family, and, as a first-year tenure-track professor, I carried a lot of guilt for not being a better family and academic “planner.” I internalized the belief that having a child as a junior faculty member was indicative of a lack of commitment to my job and career. My sentiments were defined by fear. I was scared to admit that I was pregnant; I was scared to let my department down because it had hired me as an emerging scholar, not a new mother; I was scared to face it all alone. The incompatibility of motherhood and the academy was deeply ingrained in me during my graduate-school training; therefore, I thought it was imperative to keep my pregnancy a secret until I could prove myself beyond any perceived shortcomings.<sup>7</sup>

Hiding my pregnancy began when I drank milk to coat my queasy stomach before setting off to campus on the morning of the new faculty orientation.

Upon arrival, I remember looking across the auditorium at my earnest peers, not once seeing myself reflected in their eyes. Clearly, I was one of a handful of people of color hired in that cohort. The reality was sobering. Despite the nausea, I participated in the ice-breakers, ate the stale lunch, and mapped out my research goals, all the while wondering if I would even make it past my first year. Over the next week, I hung posters on the walls of my new office, prepared classes, and committed myself to campus initiatives. The weight of my secret became unbearable two months later when a student approached me and bluntly asked: “Are you expecting?” I was shocked at her candor and realized that I finally needed to speak with my director before word got back to her. At five months, there was no room to hide anymore.

At the time of my pregnancy, the university had no clearly defined parental-leave policy. Each professor’s experience differed based on the kindness and consideration of his or her department head and his or her willingness to cover classes or redistribute work assignments. Later, through my interaction with women across the country at various national conferences, I found this to be a common occurrence at universities. In my experience, my department provided little guidance or support in terms of covering my classes during and immediately after childbirth. In theory, babies were welcome in my department, but in praxis, the implicit understanding was that having children should not disrupt teaching and academic life. In fact, the summer before I arrived, one of the lecturers in my department took only *one week* off after giving birth.

However, because I was hired in a women’s studies program and because my chair was a woman of color, I had misguided hope that I would be supported in some way. I had assumed that, because women’s studies programs are supposed to be an extension of the feminist movement, the implications of my life at multiple levels would be considered. Given the low number of women of color faculty on our campus, did my chair not find it important to ensure my retention? The reality was that I was offered no maternity leave and, in order to recover and spend the first few weeks of my daughter’s life with her, I had to find substitutes to cover two weeks worth of class, which fortunately were followed by spring break. In essence, I scraped together an unapproved “leave.” Yet, in my plan, absolutely nothing could go wrong.

Furthermore, because this culture of invisible motherhood is entrenched within the academy, the relationship I had with students was a complicated one. Having a visible, pregnant body put me in a particular spotlight; in some ways, it humanized me and made them curious about my personal life, but their curiosity carried many assumptions. Over and over again, I was asked about my nonexistent husband and his “excitement” about my pregnancy. Moreover, ironically, while my pregnancy humanized me, my student’s expectations of me as a professor assumed that I was not a mother. In other words, the responsibilities of both of my lives were incongruent. For example, the semester that my daughter was born, my student evaluations were dismal. Essentially, students complained



that I was strict about attendance, but yet I could not “grace” (quoted from a student evaluation) them with my presence throughout the semester. Nowhere did my evaluations highlight that I had actually taught until I was thirty-nine weeks pregnant, and, in fact, only took three weeks off that semester before I was back at work.

This is precisely where my intersecting identities collide. While I espouse a critical pedagogy in the classroom and value knowledge exchange, there is a level of authority I must achieve; being young, pregnant, and brown made it strikingly difficult to do so. I know this because of the comments I received in my evaluations, many of which focused on my physical attributes and mentioned my age repeatedly. I know this because of the countless times I was, at best, addressed as “Mrs. so-and-so” or “teacher” rather than “Professor” or “Doctor,” and at worst, I would get a “Hey” in the classroom or through virtual communication. I know for a fact that my white male colleague hired at the same time as I never had to underscore his authority; we discussed this many times, and, once, while giving a guest lecture in his class, he had to correct students when they addressed me incorrectly. And finally, I know this because of the violation I felt when, the semester following the birth of my daughter, I ran into a former student—a white male—who, upon seeing me, literally touched and rubbed my stomach and said “Hey, Mrs. Téllez, you lost your baby fat!” I was shocked at the encounter and uttered a feeble “Please don’t touch me.”

As my daughter grew, I lived in what Arwen Raddon (2002, 387) refers to as the complex and contradictory discursive intersection of the “successful academic” and the “good mother.” On the occasions that my childcare fell through, I dutifully brought my daughter to campus, as I did not have family nearby to assist on short notice. Her presence caused annoyance and frustration, and it was made clear—through slammed doors and glares—that she was not welcome there. Unlike fathers in my department, who were lauded for their active parenting—as witnessed through the hallway conversations I was privy to—as a mother, I was expected to separate my work and family life. This expectation that I would segment my life was similarly expected in other aspects of my work, such as traveling and attending conferences. At only six weeks old, my daughter began traveling with me to national conferences, meetings, and colloquia. For the most part, colleagues have lent a helping hand. However, I have also received looks of disapproval. I make it clear to everyone that my daughter’s well-being is my first priority, and I will not apologize for her presence. In fact, at one meeting, when she got hungry after my panel had begun, I had to breast-feed her as I was being introduced. If the audience were to have had access to evaluation sheets, I am not sure what “grade” I would have received.

When I applied for a tenure extension (to stop the tenure clock), my request was not automatically granted. I had to wait for the approval to eventually arrive the following fall semester. I believe that if my academic production slowed down because I reproduced and became the primary caregiver of another human

being, tenure-extension denial should not be an option. The issue is not simply that the physical toll of giving birth influenced my academic productivity, but that the continuous demands of a newborn, and the accompanying sleep deprivation, is all-encompassing. Moreover, the first summer after my daughter was born, I was on full-time mommy duty, which left me with very little time for research and writing. Without a tenure extension, every week that went by with nothing to show on the computer evoked knots in my stomach. Additionally, there was nothing I could do to alleviate the issue; I did not have the financial or community resources to seek outside help and, as is true at many universities, summers are not paid.

In that first year of my daughter's life, I remember describing to a colleague my mornings of "music-together," story time, and "mommy and me" yoga classes with my daughter, along with my evenings of teaching my undergraduate students about gendered development policies in the global South. She responded that I was a "schizophrenic." I know there is a better word to describe my life than "schizophrenic" because my experience is neither one of dysfunction, nor is it an anomaly; rather, it is a complex lived experience informed by multiple identities that have been ignored and silenced by Western patriarchal standards.

### **Discussion: Politicized Identities**

My experience personifies Jane Juffer's (2006, 98) statement that "universities have historically assumed a disembodied, transcendent worker and this history is visible in the architecture." I am not alone in this experience. The longstanding assumptions that faculty and staff are heterosexual, have a certain level of class privilege, and belong to traditional two-parent households in which the mother is the primary caregiver and the father is the primary breadwinner have notable consequences for those who do not fit into this norm. There are gender, race, and class assumptions inherent to the policies, or lack of, that affected my experiences as a single parent in the academy.

First, the absence of paid parental leave. Less than one-fifth of all institutions of higher education in the United States offer paid parental leave (according to Juffer), therefore leaving family life and well-being to the discretion of department heads and university administrators, and to one's privilege and circumstances. Federal law does grant some reprieve, which allows for twelve weeks of leave for parents who adopt or naturally conceive; however, this time is unpaid and, therefore, is a benefit only accessible to those who have the financial means to forego twelve weeks of pay, which is less likely for working-class faculty of color. Other women in my position have reported using their sick days in order to receive some compensation during childbirth; however, they are left in a difficult situation when sick days are used up and are needed later (Wolf-Wendel and Ward 2006). The lack of parental leave also has gendered consequences, as women bear the physical burden of childbirth and typically experience more

stress and tiredness due to the additional parenting responsibilities they shoulder during child-rearing years. As a single mother and the sole provider of my family, I did not have the luxury of parental leave. For many women, the lack of institutional support compels them to choose between having a family or career, thus forcing some out of the academy altogether (Mason and Goulden 2002; Menges and Exum 1983) and others into part-time and nontenure-track positions (Benjamin 1998).

Carol Colbeck (2006, 33) writes about family integration as a scholar's ability to "funct[ion] well and [find] satisfaction in both work and personal life, regardless of how much time is actually spent in each domain." If the university is to successfully integrate families, there must be a shift in policy and culture across all campuses. Although the American Association of University Professors (AAUP 2001) and numerous scholars (Bassett 2005; Bracken, Allen, and Dean 2006; Coiner and George 1998) have proposed specific family-integration policies, such as paid disability leaves for pregnancy and paid family-care leave that recognizes diverse family types, change has been slow. Even as more universities adopt policies that recognize care-giving roles, faculty members report fear of utilizing the leave or other benefits (Finkel, Olswang, and She 1994; Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger 2006; Wolf-Wendel and Ward 2006). In fact, 70 percent of women in Susan Finkel and colleagues' (1994, 266) study reported that they feared that taking leave would hurt them professionally, and 56 percent reported that there would be pressure from their departments to return after the birth of the infant regardless of the institution's policy. They found that while faculty generally support the use of leave, the culture within the institution heavily influences how they act and whether they will take advantage of it. Unless maternity leave and other family-care leave is institutionalized and becomes common practice, motherhood will continue to be a risk factor that can adversely affect a faculty member's future in the academy.

Another way in which institutions of higher learning can level the playing field to account for motherhood is through the provision of affordable, easily accessible childcare and childcare allowances, including during work-related travel (AAUP 2001; Acker and Armenti 2007; Armenti 2004; Hornosty 1998; Mason and Goulden 2002; Wolf-Wendel and Ward 2006). In addition to mothers being more accessible and flexible, being able to accommodate last-minute meetings, and staying focused and productive at work, all of which benefit the university, onsite childcare saves parents time and transportation costs, and allows the opportunity for parents and children to share occasional daytime activities or a meal, thus strengthening their bond and easing the obstacles to involved parenting (AAUP 2001).

Finally, universities can facilitate greater numbers of mothers earning tenure by offering an automatic tenure extension for each child they have. As it stands, women and faculty of color are less likely to earn tenure and to enter tenure-track positions. Research shows that family formation—specifically, marriage

and babies—explains why more women are, overall, less likely than men to enter tenure-track positions (Coe 2013; Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger 2006; Valian 1998; Williams 2000; Wolfinger, Mason, and Goulden 2006). In fact, Mary Ann Mason and colleagues (2006, 19) reveal that “nearly half of women reported that certain career responsibilities, such as attending conferences or giving conference papers (46 percent), other professional work that requires travel away from home (48 percent), and the time-intensive activities of writing and publishing (48 percent), cause them a great deal of stress in their parenting.”<sup>8</sup> Although demands made by both university and family are unrelenting, many women faculty attempt to make do and inconvenience the university as little as possible out of fear of retaliation or negative impact on their careers (Chilly Collective 1995, 10). In fact, a study of University of California faculty found that while 66 percent of respondents knew about tenure-extension policies, only 30 percent of women and 8 percent of men utilized the option, citing lack of knowledge of the policy and/or fear of policy use as the reasons why they chose not use it (Mason, Goulden, and Wolfinger 2006, 20). This fear-based response was observable not just in the low use-rates of existing family-friendly policies by eligible faculty, but also in the conscious attempts of faculty women to delay or forego fertility (Armenti 2004; Finkel and Olswang 1996; Varner 2000). Although tenure-extension policies, promoted by the AAUP as necessary accommodations, recognize the important role of parents, the deeply rooted institutional culture and climate is not yet amenable to the use of such due to their costs and inconvenience to the system. Women of color, especially those from working-class backgrounds, already experience isolation and a lack of support and mentorship in the academy; by not recognizing their concurrent roles as mothers and the impact that their parenting roles might have on their productivity and overall well-being, the university continues a tradition of exclusion and penalization for difference, making the incorporation and success of women of color in the academy less likely. By continuing this tradition, universities make it clear that incorporating diverse faculty members and experiences is not a priority; thus, universities allow mothers of color to be forced out of academia rather than investing in them and their families.

Rather than being innovative leaders of family integration and standard-setters for diversity, universities are behind the times. Although equalizing policies have been researched, vocalized, and promoted by various entities, these policies have not been implemented across the board; and where equalizing policies have been incorporated, university culture smothers the possibility for change, as fears of job loss and retaliation prevents faculty members from taking advantage of them. What will it take to both implement new policies and create new cultures of acceptance and inclusion of families and experiences that drastically differ from the traditional environment?

Considering these challenges, it is imperative that we examine who is rewarded and who is penalized in this academic system. Chairs, directors, deans,

and university presidents need to examine faculty members' success stories, and to think seriously about the cost that these women and men paid to access jobs in academia. Is diversity being practiced when women are choosing not to have children because of the demands placed upon them? Is diversity being practiced when heteronormative families are privileged so as to allow men to successfully pursue their career while their wives take on the responsibilities of the home? Is diversity being practiced when women of color choose to leave the academy in order to remove themselves from a hostile environment?

In showing how what seem like private concerns are actually part and parcel of the politicized identities that the university penalizes, I contribute to the numerous voices who expose the oppressive contradictions in higher education institutions, and point to the systemic violence and devaluation that remains ingrained in university culture and climate (Bassett 2005; Bracken, Allen, and Dean 2006; Coiner and George 1998; Latina Feminist Group 2001). It is critical for the survival of women of color and single mothers that we utilize our stories as tools of empowerment and change. Our presence is critical to the future of our universities and society as a whole: we offer not only a unique perspective that enables innovative and unique knowledge production and ideas, but also the ability to relate and support the ever-diversifying base of students.

I do believe that if the policies that are now in place at my university had been available to me seven years ago, some of my stress would have been alleviated. But this does not change the reality that over the years I have worked at the university, I have chaired more committees, taken on signature university events, and mentored and been a thesis advisor to more students than perhaps anyone else in the programs I service, particularly as a junior faculty member. All of this, of course, has meant time away from my daughter, my research, and other responsibilities. While policy change is important, a dynamic culture shift must occur as well.

## Conclusion

While research has shown that recruiting and retaining faculty of color is necessary for institutional growth and benefits the student body and the future of US society in general (Bowen and Bok 1998), this goal will not be realized if the academy does not recognize our voices and our experiences in all of their complexities. By de-centering white married men as the ideal university intellectual, a transformative understanding of diversity can begin. I am a single mother and a professor, and while there are days that are very, very challenging, I know that I was meant to be a mother as much as I was meant to be in the academy. Instead of penalizing me for my multiple positionalities, the institution must be reformed to truly value my diversity so that those who do not share my experience are still compelled to listen, respect, value, and learn from who I am. This reformation must include a shift in the cultural and professional expectations of

and roles for faculty; it must take into account the realities of modern society. This shift will come with new university leaders who value faculty for their whole beings and are, therefore, committed to investing money and resources into policy development, implementation, and monitoring.

My story and the stories of others with whom I connect throughout this article are part of the strategy for change. Virginia O'Leary and Suzanne Stiver Lie (1990) suggest that institutional strategies, which include well-presented and documented arguments, as well as a mechanism for the monitoring of women's progress, are the most successful ways to assist women in "achieving their rightful place within the academy" (238–39). By documenting and sharing our testimonies, we participate in the change that we demand, and offer guidance to the university for how this change must look.

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*Michelle Téllez is an interdisciplinary scholar who teaches in the School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies and the Masters in Social Justice and Human Rights program at Arizona State University. In her twenty years of community engagement and activism, she has been involved in multiple projects for change at the grassroots levels utilizing critical pedagogy, community-organizing, and visual media. Her writing and research projects seek to uncover the stories of transnational community formation, migration, and resistance. She can be reached at Michelle.Tellez@asu.edu.*

### Notes

1. I invite readers to review the diversity policies of the universities for which they work or where they study, and to evaluate how well the university's corresponding policies on parental leave, tenure extensions for parenting, and so on allow faculty who are mothers and women of color to accommodate both family and academic life.

2. Data reveal that the representation of faculty of color (African American, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, and Native American / Alaskan Native) in institutions of higher education lags behind the diversity of the student body, and the numbers remain significantly low in comparison to white faculty members. In 2000, African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans constituted only 5 percent of full professorships, yet people of color constitute 20–25 percent of the US population (Stanley

2006). Undeniably, diversifying faculty has been the least successful aspect of campus diversification (Gordon 2004).

3. In his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1970] 1997), Paulo Freire uses education and literacy as tools to engage people, calling on them to self-reflect on and take action against the various powers that oppress them.

4. See also Anna Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling (2002); Maria V. Balderrama, Mary T. Teixeira, and Elsa Valdez (2004); Lena W. Meyers (2002); Janice W. Smith and Toni Calasanti (2005); and Gloria D. Thomas and Carol Hollenshead (2001).

5. William A. Smith and colleagues (2006, 300) define *racial microaggressions* as “1.) the subtle verbal and non-verbal insults directed at people of color, often automatically or unconsciously, 2.) the layered insults, based on one’s race, gender, class, sexuality, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname, and 3.) the cumulative insults which cause unnecessary stress to people of color while privileging whites.” Daniel G. Solórzano (1998) argues that the racial and gender microaggressions, or systemic everyday racism and sexism that make up interpersonal relations and culture within the university, are used to keep these scholars in their proverbial “place” (that is, to maintain the status quo). Microaggressions are a symptom of what Agathangelou and Ling (2002, 385; emphasis in original) describe as the liberal paradox: “The liberal paradox allows little *negotiation* between the bearer of difference and liberalism’s rigid parochialism (sold as benevolent cosmo-politanism). The former, typically, must conform to the academy’s version of diversity.” The rules by which one is judged are assumed to be impartial and rational, when, in fact, they are highly subjective and culturally defined.

6. Note that race was not a factor in the study; see Emily Toth (1997).

7. Phyllis Baker and Martha Copp’s 1997 article “Gender Matters Most: The Interaction of Gendered Expectations, Feminist Course Content, and Pregnancy in Student Course Evaluations” explores undergraduate students’ contradictory expectations of a pregnant feminist professor, and how the professor’s fulfillment (or lack) of gender roles throughout her pregnancy influenced teacher evaluations.

8. Research on tenure among single parents does not yet exist.

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