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ARTICLE

Not "Fitting the Mold": Latina Archaeologists Confront Intersecting Inequalities

Milsy Westendorff[1], Dana N. Bardolph[2] and Mark Schuller[2]

[1]Beaver Creek Archaeology Inc., Cresco, IA, USA and [2]Department of Anthropology, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL, USA
Corresponding author: Dana N. Bardolph; Email: dbardolph@niu.edu

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Abstract
In this article, we seek to engage concretely with feminist and antiracist dialogues by exploring experiences of Latina archaeologists living and working in the United States, a group whose contributions, experiences, and challenges in the field have remained undertheorized to date. In this qualitative analysis of nine semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023 with Latina archaeologists, we consider historical structural factors that have suppressed representation of Latinas in archaeology; through their stories, we explore barriers and experiences that uniquely affect this group within the discipline, including *familismo* (familialism), cultural taxation, disenfranchisement, and harassment. Although much work remains to be done to move archaeology toward restorative justice, our goal by centering the experiences of Latinas is to add to conversations that have already emerged in archaeology and anthropology about the extractivist colonial legacies of our discipline and the various impacts of sexism, gender-based violence, white supremacy, and other hegemonic practices. We conclude with suggestions for how the archaeological discipline can change for the better and become more inclusive and equitable, not only for Latinx scholars but also for those from other historically marginalized groups.

Resumen
En este artículo, contribuimos a los diálogos feministas y antirracista con una exploración de las experiencias de las arqueólogas latinas que viven y trabajen en los EE.UU., un grupo cuyas contribuciones, experiencias y obstáculos en la disciplina han permanecido poco teorizados. Presentamos un análisis cualitativo de nueve entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas en 2023 con arqueólogas latinas. Consideramos los factores estructurales históricos que han suprimido la representación de las arqueólogas latinas, y a través de sus historias, detallamos las barreras y experiencias que impactan de manera única a este grupo dentro de la disciplina de la arqueología, incluyendo el familialismo, la imposición cultural, la privación de derechos y el acoso, entre otros. Queda mucho trabajo por hacer para que la arqueología avance hacia la justicia restaurativa, pero nuestro objetivo en este estudio es aumentar las conversaciones existentes en la arqueología y la antropología sobre los legados coloniales extractivistas de nuestra disciplina y los diversos impactos del sexismo, la violencia de género, la supremacía blanca y otras prácticas hegemónicas, centrándonos en las experiencias de las mujeres latinas. Concluimos con sugerencias sobre cómo la disciplina arqueológica puede cambiar para mejor y llegar a ser más inclusiva y equitativa, para los estudiosos Latinx, y para los de otros grupos históricamente marginados.

Keywords: antiracist dialogues; discipline sociopolitics; inclusivity in archaeology; Feminist archaeology; Latina archaeologists; qualitative analysis

Palabras clave: diálogos antirracistas; sociopolítica de la disciplina; inclusividad en arqueología; Arqueología feminista; arqueólogas latinas; análisis cualitativo

In recent years, social justice mobilizations including the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements have gained momentum across the globe, driving resistance to ultraconservative right-wing policies and state-sponsored police violence. These feminist and antiracist movements are situated within broader trends toward what Montgomery and Supernant (2022) call *historical consciencism*, or attentiveness to long-term histories of oppression and their effects on marginalized communities. North American archaeology is currently experiencing a sea change in discourse about representation, diversity, equity, inclusion, and safety; this has regenerated opportunities to again turn "our gaze inward" (Wilkie and Howlett Hayes 2006:253) toward self-reflection about how sexism, gender- and LGBTQIA+ based violence, systemic racism, Indigenous disempowerment, ableism, neoliberal capitalism, and other extractive practices have affected archaeology, from the makeup of practitioners to the work that archaeologists produce (Black Trowel Collective et al. 2023; d'Alpoim Guedes et al. 2021; Flewellen et al. 2021; Heath-Stout 2023; Laluk et al. 2022; Rivera Prince et al. 2022; Voss 2021a, 2021b).

Recent praxis by Indigenous and Black scholars, including Black feminist praxis, has pushed to create more space for historically marginalized voices in our discipline, inspiring members of our field to reinvest in politicized archaeology and participate in imagining, inspiring, and building just futures (e.g., Agbe-Davies 2002, 2010; Atalay 2006; Brunache et al. 2021; Flewellen et al. 2021; Franklin et al. 2020; Gonzalez 2016; Supernant 2024; Watkins 2003). Society of Black Archaeology founders and members Ayana Omilade Flewellen, Justin Dunnavant, Alicia Odewale, Alexandra Jones, Tsione Wolde-Michael, Zoë Crossland, and Maria Franklin, among others, have drawn particular attention to anti-Black racism and to ways in which to increase and retain Black representation in archaeology more systematically as part of a "collective responsibility to reconcile with the violence this field has done to Black, Latina/o, Asian, Arab, and Indigenous, and other historically marginalized communities in both the past and present and to take an active role in creating an antiracist place of belonging for all" (Flewellen et al. 2021:231).

In this article, we seek to engage concretely with feminist and antiracist dialogues by exploring experiences of Latinas in archaeology living and working in the United States, a group of practitioners whose contributions, experiences, and challenges in the field have not yet received much scholarly attention.[1] We present a qualitative analysis of nine semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023 with Latina archaeologists by the primary author Milsy Westendorff.[2] Most of the women who shared their stories are first-generation college students, either current graduate students or early-career faculty members; two are currently working in cultural resource management (CRM). We consider the historical structural factors that have contributed to the lack of representation of Latinas in US academic and professional institutions, and through their stories, we detail barriers and experiences that uniquely affect this group, including *familismo* (familialism), cultural taxation, disenfranchisement, and harassment.

This project is foregrounded by Milsy's experiences as a Hispanic woman and as a first-generation college student and is supported by contributing authors Dana Bardolph and Mark Schuller's commitments to gender and racial equity and activist anthropology and their expertise as Milsy's master's thesis advisors at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Although much more work is required to move archaeology toward restorative justice (Flewellen et al. 2021; Montgomery and Fryer 2023; Supernant 2024), our goal is to add to emerging conversations in archaeology and anthropology about extractivist colonial legacies and the various impacts of sexism, gender-based violence, white supremacy, and other hegemonic practices by centering the experiences of Latinas. We focus on specific contours of racist and patriarchal praxis as experienced by Latina archaeologists currently living and working in the United States, whose experiences differ from challenges faced by women archaeologists in other Latin American countries that this study does not have space to explore. Following standard conventions of ethnographic research and writing, we include quotes, anecdotes, and qualitative analyses of individual interviews that illustrate our arguments, although we make no claim to represent each and every archaeologist who identifies as Latina. We conclude with suggestions for how archaeology can move toward greater equity and inclusivity, not only for Latinas but also for those from other historically marginalized groups.

Moving out of the Margins

For decades, feminist scholars—including Black feminist archaeologists, along with Indigenous scholars and their accomplices—have drawn attention to the sociopolitics underlying archaeological knowledge production and the need for decolonizing work in archaeology (e.g., Atalay 2006; Battle-Baptiste 2011; Conkey 2003; Franklin 2001; Gero et al. 1983; Watkins 2003). It has been four decades since Joan Gero (1985) published "Socio-Politics and the Woman-at-Home Ideology," a seminal article that bridged what Alison Wylie (1997:81–84) later categorized as two main forms of feminist archaeology: content critiques (scrutinizing narratives produced about the past as a result of standpoint) and equity critiques (analyzing the status of the profession). Zooming in on gender relations and gender ideology, Gero (1985:342) wrote, "The discipline is becoming aware that our notions of the past, our epistemologies, our research emphases, the methods we employ in our research, and the interpretations we bring to and distill from our investigations, are far from value-neutral."

Feminist scholars engaging with standpoint theory and other critical science and technology scholarship have long questioned the so-called objectivity of science in probing persisting assumptions and epistemological biases, recognizing that science benefits from the inclusion of diverse and marginalized perspectives (e.g., Haraway 1989; Harding 1991; Hartsock 1983; TallBear 2014; Wylie 1997, 2000, 2011). However, as we write this article in 2025, much more work needs to be done to approach equity in our field. Gendered and racial disparities persist in tenure-track archaeology hiring, senior research grant submissions, conference participation, and publishing in peer-reviewed journals (especially those with high impact factors). In a domain that privileges masculinist gender performance, archaeology faculty remain disproportionately represented by cisgender white men (Kawa 2022), in part resulting from the biased hiring of graduates from "elite" universities (Kawa et al. 2019). Speakman and colleagues (2018) found that, between 2004 and 2014, men were disproportionately hired into anthropology research-intensive positions compared to PhD graduation rates, especially those with doctoral programs. The scholarship of women, particularly Black women, remains underpublished, underrepresented, and undercited in anthropology, a situation that has remained unchanged for decades (Bardolph 2014; Blakey 2020; Heath-Stout 2020; Hutson et al. 2023; Ike et al. 2020). Given the underrepresentation of women in research-intensive positions, it is perhaps unsurprising that the number of submissions by women for senior archaeology grants from the National Science Foundation, Wenner Gren, and National Geographic has been half that of men (Goldstein et al. 2018), a trend paralleled by lower submission rates by women to archaeology journals. Although less specific gender and racial/ethnic demographic data are available for CRM, including the private sector, federal agencies, and other sectors of archaeology, senior positions historically have been dominated by white men in North America as well (e.g., Bardolph and VanDerwarker 2016; Gonzalez 2018; Rowinski 2023; Tushingham et al. 2017).

Both formal and informal structural mechanisms have presented women and/or members of underrepresented groups with more obstacles and fewer opportunities in their career paths within archaeology specifically and across academia more broadly. Critical university studies have turned scholars' gazes toward institutions of higher education, analyzing a range of inequalities and exclusionary practices (e.g., Chatterjee and Maira 2014; Davis 2015; Gusterson 2017; Paperson 2017; Singh and Vora 2023; Williams and Tuitt 2021). Despite recent attempts to increase diversity in academic hiring nationwide, women and faculty of color remain overrepresented in the lowest-ranking and lowest-paying faculty positions, a pattern that has persisted over time (Schneider and Bichsel 2024). Historical exclusions by gatekeeper institutions, including grant agencies, peer-reviewed journals, and R1 universities, have lowered success and retention, often couched within metaphors like "the leaky pipeline" and "the glass ceiling" that obscure how change does (and does not) happen and that absolve individuals and systems from responsibility for the lack of change (Sterling 2021). These issues are particularly acute for multiply marginalized individuals who navigate intersecting biases and identity-based discrimination simultaneously (Cedillo 2021; Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012; Turner 2002): they are further compounded by archaeology's historical lack of attention to racism as a contemporary social issue (Park et al. 2022).

Also influencing these dynamics is archaeology's drinking culture (Miller 2018), one facet of which Leighton (2020) refers to as *performative informality* that reproduces white male privilege and puts those unable to enact or perform informality appropriately (including women, people of color, people from

working-class backgrounds, and foreigners) at a distinct disadvantage. According to Leighton (2020:10), performative informality undergirds the (often unintentional) perpetuation of hierarchies and exclusion in academic disciplines that are otherwise committed to feminist and postcolonial agendas, including archaeology. On the more nefarious side of these dynamics is the disturbing documentation of high rates of gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence in our field. Since Clancy and coauthors (2014) published the Survey of Academic Field Experiences , archaeologists have brought attention to widespread sexual misconduct in field settings, as well as classrooms, laboratories, museums, office workplaces, and conferences (Hodgetts et al. 2020; Meyers et al. 2018; Radde 2018; Voss 2021a, 2021b): this sexual misconduct "creates a cognitive burden for survivors and reduces access to professional opportunities, directly impacting diversity within archaeology" (Voss 2021a:241).

Building on this important and pathbreaking work, we take this necessary conversation in new directions. The experiences and analyses of Latina archaeologists remain understudied for several reasons. From a demographic perspective, archaeology historically has been dominated by white men. According to the most recent Society for American Archaeology (SAA) Member Needs Assessment Survey, 83.5% of respondents identified as "White or Caucasian" (SAA 2020); Black or African American archaeologists are the lowest-represented racial/ethnic group at only 0.5%. Despite reaching relative (binary) gender parity in the makeup of practitioners in recent years (48% identified as men, 48% identified as women, less than 1% identified as nonbinary, and 3% preferred not to state), archaeology remains "stacked toward the privilege of straight white cis men" (Cobb and Crellin 2022, citing what Deleuze and Guattari [1987] call the *majoritarian*) and one in which "elite white men [continue to] control western structures of knowledge validation . . . [and where] their interests pervade themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarships" (Collins 2000:251).

Teasing out the representation of Latinx archaeologists is difficult. Reflected in the debates about the use of terms such as "Hispanic" versus "Latino/a or Latinx/Latine" (see footnote 1), there is vast diversity among people who have been traditionally grouped together. The SAA Member Needs Assessment Survey places people from Latin American countries and people in the United States into a singular racial category. The survey did not distinguish race from ethnicity: 5.8% of survey respondents identified as "Latino or Hispanic." However, this categorical lumping produces a twofold problem. Because this percentage includes archaeologists from Mexico, Central America, and South America, the percentage of Latinx archaeologists living and working in the United States is much smaller than even that 5.8% found in the SAA sample. In addition, the equation of Latinx identity to Hispanic erases differences among a broader assemblage of racial categories; for example, Mexican and Puerto Rican, "a category that is alternately represented as ethnic or racial in official demographic terms" (Rosa 2019:89). Furthermore, there are linguistic exclusions; people of Brazil, by far the largest and most populous country in South America, are not "Hispanic" descended from populations speaking Spanish. Finally, as Omi and Winant (2015), Rosa (2019), and others argue, Latinx people in the United States are racialized through cultural indices, including people who otherwise may have been categorized as "white" in their home Latin American countries' racial landscapes.

It also bears noting that Black archaeologists have recently gained sufficient visibility within the discipline to publicly and professionally advocate for the need for "critical race and Black feminist theories, vindicationist scholarship, and a commitment to partnering with Black communities" (Franklin et al. 2020:755). The Society for Black Archaeologists (SBA), formed in 2011, is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to "center the histories and material culture of global Black and African communities" and to "work to resolve the ongoing systemic exclusion of Black and African scholars and communities from the field of archaeology" (Society of Black Archaeologists 2025): it has created an active space for Black archaeologists. Decades earlier in 1970, the Association of Black Anthropologists was formed with the goal of "breaking down barriers that impeded their full participation in the discipline of Anthropology" (Association of Black Anthropologists 2025). Although there is an Association of Latina/o and Latinx Anthropologists, a section of the American Anthropological Association founded in 1990, a similar group for Latino/a/x/e archaeologists does not exist to date.

Feminist archaeology, particularly Black feminist archaeology, offers important interventions to change disciplinary norms, canons, and practices that continue to silence and even violate women.

We are indebted to the interventions of Black feminist and Indigenous archaeologists who have created spaces for discussion and analysis and for giving voice to the ways in which women of color have historically and continue to be tokenized, treated as native informants, forced to prove their places at the table, presumed incompetent, or all of the above (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al. 2012) while facing endemic harassment. Flewellen and coauthors (2021) and Rivera Prince and colleagues (2022) argue that an intersectional approach to these long-standing patterns of marginalization is required. Intersectionality, a term formalized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) synthesizing more than a century of BIPOC feminist thought and elaborated by Latina feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), is a framework used by many scholars and activists to explore how racism, sexism, classism, and other axes of identity overlap and result in varied consequences for accessing privilege or experiencing oppression. As we discuss in detail later, several patterns of intersectional oppressions emerged from conversations with Latinas who are currently in graduate school or employed in academic positions or in CRM in the United States.

The women whom Milsy interviewed were predominantly first-generation college students who faced unique obstacles posed by their families' citizenship status, including economic challenges that intersect with lower cultural capital, disenfranchisement, and pressure to adapt to culturally specific institutional norms and structures. Family expectations (*familismo*) can become a double-edged sword—providing support and sanctuary in meeting increasing demands in a meritocratic system[3] but also limiting opportunities for travel for graduate school and fieldwork. Despite efforts by feminist archaeologists and archaeologists of color to move away from the masculine ethos in archaeology—embodied by those Gero (1985) called the "cowboys of science"—that privileges excavation above other forms of knowledge generation about the past, field schools and "breaking ground" in excavation remain key gatekeeping rites of passage (Heath-Stout and Hannigan 2020; Sanchez 2008). Within this context, Latina students face specific forms of racialized gender oppression as cultural brokers through their treatment as unpaid translators and by being exposed to harassment at points of contact between field school participants and local communities—a variant of what Amado Padilla (1994) called *cultural taxation*. Furthermore, in a small field with densely overlapping social networks, women often are afraid to speak out about endemic sexual violence, in part because little good seems to come out of reporting abuse to Title IX offices. Given all these economic, cultural, structural, and institutional barriers, mentoring is especially critical for Latina archaeologists.

It is crucial to note that our research offers a sample of the experiences and "racial battle fatigue" (Arnold et al. 2016) of those who persevered. This study cannot address experiences of Latinas who left archaeology, whether truly of their own volition to seek other interests or career paths or because of bullying, harassment, intimidation, or a constant stream of microaggressions or other forms of disenfranchisement. All the women who entrusted their stories to Milsy had something in common, as Suceli López-Vélez shared, "If people didn't help me, I wouldn't be where I am."[4] Despite the central necessity of mentoring, however, Latina archaeologists had unmet needs, and non-Latina archaeologists misread and dismissed Latinas' experiences. In academic institutions where mentoring relationships often begin, mentors are overwhelmingly white and disproportionately male (Kawa et al. 2019; Schuller and Abreu 2023; Speakman et al. 2018); the very few Latinas in a position to offer mentoring are burdened with cultural taxation themselves (Padilla 1994), which occurs when "faculty members shoulder any labor—physical, mental, or emotional—due to their membership in a historically marginalized group within their department or university, beyond that which is expected of other faculty members in the same setting" (Hirshfield and Joseph 2012:214). Given the lack of diversity within the professorate and the often-hidden cultural biases woven into the fabric of neoliberal universities in the United States, the Latina archaeologists Milsy interviewed discussed the need to organize spaces within professional associations such as the SAA. Pointing to the importance of the SBA and other organizations, our interviewees explored specific suggestions for moving forward.

Methods

Milsy began this research as a Hispanic woman and first-generation college student in the master's program at Northern Illinois University (NIU) under the mentorship of Dana Bardolph. Not seeing

any professor or mentor who looked like her, Milsy persevered despite all odds. She developed the idea for her master's research after her experience in an overseas field school as the only Latina on the team; this program cost thousands of dollars, despite excavation opportunities being limited by the pandemic. From classrooms to museum internships to conferences, Milsy was dismayed by the extremely small number of Latina archaeologists in those spaces and the almost nonexistent literature reflecting her experiences. For these reasons, Dana encouraged Milsy to explore this topic for her master's thesis and to ask Mark, a trained ethnographer and activist cultural anthropologist who had recently published an article detailing racism in archaeology searches (Schuller and Abreu 2023), to cochair her thesis committee.

Milsy recruited participants for her study at a poster session at the 2023 SAA annual meeting in Portland, Oregon, where she had the opportunity to discuss project goals in person and establish a connection with archaeologists interested in participating. Milsy also used standard search engines, university faculty web pages, and professional networking sites, including LinkedIn, to identify potential participants, as well as snowball sampling via suggestions from participants about others to contact. Milsy originally had planned to recruit and interview 10 participants; however, that was not possible due to time constraints, and the study was conducted with 9 participants who lived in various regions of the United States. All interviews were done virtually via Microsoft Teams and lasted between 40 minutes and more than an hour. With their consent, eight of the nine interviews were recorded. The semi-structured interviews consisted of four main sections: background, student experience, field school experience, and experience as a practicing archaeologist. The interviews were conducted as conversations, with Milsy also sharing her experiences as a Latina student in archaeology and at a field school. After the interviews were completed, Milsy transcribed them, anonymizing names of people and places and removing other identifiers. In the data presentation in the following sections, we granted our interlocutors the professional courtesy of using standard citational practices within professional writing of citing authors' last names, following recent decolonizing work in ethnographic writing. Mark coded the de-identified transcripts using the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo and conducted pile-sorting and correlational analysis to analyze each interview thematically, identify patterns among core patterns across the dataset, and prioritize which themes to include in the article.

The Latina archaeologists who shared their stories with Milsy have a variety of backgrounds and life experiences that shaped their careers. One came to the United States for college and subsequently stayed. Two came as children of undocumented parents. Of the US-born archaeologists, three women reported that their first language spoken at home was English, two primarily spoke Spanish at home, and two said that they spoke both languages, code-switching from parent to siblings in "Spanglish." Five shared that they were first-generation college students like Milsy. Two discussed attending community colleges; six of the women attended public schools exclusively, one attended a private school for her undergraduate schools, and one went to private schools for both undergraduate and graduate school. Three had PhDs, four had master's degrees, and one had a bachelor's degree. Four were students at the time of the interview (although two were scheduled to complete their dissertations within a few months). Two were employed as tenure-track faculty, one as a postdoc, two in CRM positions, and another was working as an affiliated professional. Within these trajectories and their differential access to power and privilege, several common themes emerged. Although we do not exhaustively cover all facets of the interview data, we zoom in on several key issues, the first of which is *familismo*.

"Unless We're Getting Married, We Shouldn't Leave": *Familismo*

Many Latinas encounter unique challenges of managing families and family expectations. *Familismo* (also termed *familialismo*), or familialism, is a central cultural value in Latinx communities: it refers to "the importance of strong family loyalty, closeness, and getting along with and contributing to the well-being of the nuclear, extended, and kinship networks" (Ayón et al. 2010:744). In traditional Latinx families, *familismo* is associated with interdependence, cooperation, loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity; in turn, they imply that, when making decisions, it is important to consult and keep in mind the entire family unit, not just oneself (Galanti 2003). Although unquestionably a source of support and strength, strong ties to families can disadvantage Latina archaeologists in a field where people are expected to travel long distances to remote locations for extended periods of time. The interview data indicated that

the choice of colleges and graduate schools was linked to *familismo* in many cases. As López-Vélez noted, "I went to [local state college] and a big reason for that is because culturally we can't leave unless we're getting married, or we shouldn't leave." This issue was compounded for students with undocumented family members, as experienced by Noemí Girón. She was accepted into a well-resourced R1 university with a good reputation in archaeology, but her parents are undocumented; as a result of xenophobic racial profiling policies and policing, she had to make do at a less-prestigious, less-resourced university for college. Girón recounted, "Because of my parents' immigration status, I was also really nervous about going to [border town] because of the chance that they, that something could happen to them if they were ever to go visit me. It always made me kind of upset that they wouldn't be able to go see like what my school looked like or, even if they did, to go for graduation." The other woman with undocumented parents also stayed within a two-hour radius for graduate school. Several women shared that non-Latina professors still expected students to conform to the prevailing white, middle-class model of the independent, residential student moving away to college. López-Vélez's advisor, a white woman, told her of her hostility to *familismo*: "She said some pretty disparaging things, such as, 'What do you want to do? Just stay home and have babies or something? Is that what you want? Do you even want to graduate? Do you wanna be here?' I have never cried so fucking hard in front of somebody else."

When López-Vélez did have children while in school, she kept conversations with her advisor to a minimum. Devastated by this experience, she shared that she did end up accessing mental health resources on her campus. She was able to endure because of the support of her husband, who is also an archaeologist. López-Vélez's parents could not help her navigate this situation because they did not attend college, which is another common theme we observed. Indeed, our analysis of the interview data revealed that the tethering of young Latinas to their families was less pronounced among the women whose parents had experience going to college. Being a first-generation college student significantly affects opportunities, which we explore in the next section.

"Not What an Archaeologist Looks Like": First Gen and Financially Constrained

Being a first-generation, low-income student can profoundly affect education and career trajectories: unique barriers can hinder success that are not experienced by peers from more privileged backgrounds. Given historical patterns of discrimination and institutional racism (Bonilla-Silva 2022), Latinas are less likely to go to college, and those students' parents are far less likely to have gone to college, particularly if they are undocumented, are members of what Turner (2002:74) calls a "no collar" class like farmworkers, or both. Being first generation, or first gen—students with no four-year-college-educated parents/guardians—further disadvantages students in many ways: it does so not only because of geographic constraints influenced by *familismo* where Latinx students feel obligated to remain closer to and maintain relationships with family (see Covarrubias et al. 2019) but also in highly competitive, meritocratic environments where first-gen students are less likely to speak out. As López-Vélez recalled, "Your white counterparts that are educated, that have family that are educated, they know that they have the right to argue for certain things, whereas I'm always like, 'Ohh, thank you, thank you for throwing me a piece of bread.'" As feminist scholars have long pointed out, women and other marginalized groups' not feeling entitled to negotiate for salary and working conditions increases inequality over time (Artz et al. 2018; Babcock and Laschever 2003). López-Vélez asserted that this pattern is magnified among first-gen students: "I'm not speaking for you, but for me, we've always had this mentality. Like, don't brag, be humble. But the whole thing with promotions and getting a raise is you have to be like cocky to a certain extent and be like, I deserve this. I deserve that. And I've had to learn that, and it's hard because it's so embarrassing."

Poverty also often goes hand in hand with being a first-generation college student. Although family poverty or lack of generational wealth disproportionately endured by Latinx families presents barriers to college education overall, making it as an archaeologist is particularly difficult for low-income students. As Ana Garcia shared, "I didn't look like how an anthropologist was supposed to look like, being a Latina, and then also my family was poor, and I was working multiple jobs to put myself through school." Having to work during college was a common thread in the interviews, as Girón expressed: "For the majority of my college career I was working full-time. So, it did feel a little bit alienating when a lot of my peers

were, like they were able to go to campus like all day, like they had all day to study." In addition to losing study time, students who work full-time often are left out of additional opportunities provided by professors, student clubs, and other socializing extramural activities; such experiences dovetail with Leighton's (2020) notion of performative informality, where no matter how rigorous a student's formal scholarship, they often will find themselves struggling to make the kind of informal connections that contribute to opportunities for career advancement.

Field schools also are prohibitively expensive (Heath-Stout and Hannigan 2020), presenting fundamental barriers for first-gen and working-class students. Scholarships, often touted as a one-size-fits-all solution to alleviate the financial costs of college programs like study abroad, are ineffective for mitigating the expense of field schools for low-income students: even if a scholarship covers program fees, many low-income students cannot afford to take off work. Garcia, now a tenure-track professor, recalled, "I didn't have the free time or luxury to do things like take a field school or get experience because I had to pay my bills." She was far from alone, as Girón explained:

> I was trying to look for field schools or opportunities for students that are nontraditional; for those that couldn't take off multiple months of work at a time to go off into a whole different country to excavate. So that was really hard as well. Archaeology is so rooted in academia, and it's hard for people to get out of that mindset and acknowledge there's people that don't necessarily fit this mold.

Having somehow made it through a field school and then get the golden ticket into graduate school and a career in archaeology, struggles for Latinas do not end. Given the enormous power that mostly white and male field school directors wield, Latina students face particular racialized sexual harassment, detailed next.

"I Was Just Trying to Do Work Here, Damn It": Cultural Taxation and Racialized Harassment

As members of racially marginalized groups, Latinas confront incidents daily that are often dismissed as "microaggressions." Four of the women in this study reported being called a racialized slang term that is often sexually charged. Vivian Castro's field school director treated her as a nanny: "He also asked me to watch his toddler because his daughter was there. I said, 'I'm not a babysitter, I'm not watching your toddler,' and I walked away." In response the professor derided her lack of "maternal instincts," which Castro found especially insulting because she had to pay thousands of dollars to attend the program—as she lamented, "I'm here to learn archaeology!" Other students also extract free labor from Latina peers during field schools. After Milsy shared her own experience in the field of being asked to translate "little stuff" as the only Spanish-speaking student on the project—for example, she was asked to communicate the need to fix plumbing in another student's dorm—Garcia recounted the same experience: "You're being asked to literally work in your free time. We're expected to go help them do their laundry, go with them to the bodegas because they don't remember how to [order what they want in Spanish] but instead of being able to learn, and experience, and have freedom, students are relegated to this role." Garcia's and Milsy's experiences—and that of countless others—are examples of cultural taxation (Hirshfield and Joseph 2012:214; Padilla 1994): additional labor is extracted on marginalized groups based on their identities. Exasperated, Castro exclaimed, "I was just trying to do work here, damn it!"

In an even more insidious vein, cultural taxation can lead to more aggressive forms of bullying and harassment. Voss's (2021a) findings revealed that archaeologists of color are disproportionately harassed (along with LGBTQIA+ archaeologists, nonbinary archaeologists, and archaeologists with disabilities), and some of the interviewees were no exception. For example, Castro described how her field school director (who was twice her age) would put his arm around the small of her back as they were crowded in a car. Archaeology is finally reckoning with persistent sexual harassment in the field, thanks to the bravery of women willing to risk their safety and careers to speak out. But as cultural brokers and in marginalized positions, Latinas face particular forms of racialized sexual harassment. Similar to what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) called "outsider within" (see also Harrison 2008) or Lila Abu-Lughod's (1991) concept of "halfie," Latina archaeologists are held to different sets of standards or rules in the field: they

are expected to maintain proper gender roles within the country without the passes that foreigners are given because of their cultural difference. Being a "halfie" opens women to other types of passes, as Castro recounted: "Local guys were really especially friendly with me, and I think it's because a lot of the other students were white and couldn't understand them. Or maybe I just have a look that they like."

Although it may be tempting to dismiss these actions as reflections of an essentialist *machismo*, as many white archaeologists do by using familiar racist tropes, they are reflections of global inequalities that were even reinforced by women supervisors. When Castro went to see her advisor—a woman—about her concerns, the advisor dismissed them: "She said, 'You should be flattered.' And I think she meant that in a good way, but I didn't take it in a good way." Relationships with local communities are often structured by inequality at archaeological field sites (Leighton 2016; Mickel 2021), with laborers paid a fraction of what specialists in North American universities are paid (and in some cases are sexualized themselves; see Mickel 2023). As Adriana Fernandes noted, foreign archaeologists dismiss the professionalism of local specialists, treating them as manual laborers only. Because they cannot take out their frustrations or talk back to white male field directors, local men take it out on Latina students, whom they identify as less powerful, as Jessi Obrador explained: "I would be like the only one that could speak Spanish as well and so, like, people feel more comfortable talking to me."

Unfortunately for Sandra Arredondo and many others, incidences of harassment do not stop at field schools. Because of *familismo*, Arredondo needed to attend college near her family, and given her and her family's economic situation, she first had to attend community college and then a local public university designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Although she felt at home with fellow students, Arredondo recalled that "the faculty was pretty white predominantly, and specifically the Anthropology Department." It was recommended that she work with the senior white male archaeologist so she could become a "star student" given his stature in the field. She shared, "But it was toxic, very toxic. Dr. Raymond would always ask me about my sexual relationships." She also was sexually harassed numerous times in the field by Dr. Raymond's male students and noticed that her advisor would play favorites; he "wouldn't take on female graduate students if they weren't attractive." One of her colleagues was shut out, because she was considered too old to be sexualized by her advisor and therefore useless. Dr. Raymond's codirector told Arredondo's colleague, "CRM is good for you because you were never fit for academic archaeology."[5] Although the comment was made pejoratively, her colleague ended up happily working for a CRM firm; according to Arredondo, "Last I heard, she was doing real cool things." For those whose parents are rightly concerned about employability, Girón reported that "CRM is blowing up!" Castro had a similarly positive experience, especially contrasted with academia: "It was the total opposite; everybody in the archaeology CRM firm that I worked for was so amazing and supportive, and I never had anyone harass me."

A compounding problem is that in cases where supportive colleagues do urge women to speak out, there is no guarantee that action will be taken to resolve the issue. "A lot of people had tried to report it to the university, but the university always protected him," Arredondo continued. "Three women in our department filed sexual harassment charges, but because they didn't have any physical evidence, he ended up winning it and then he countersued the university for defamation." Unfortunately, this case and the university's protection—at least initially—of tenured white males occur too often, as evidenced by high-profile cases involving anthropologists like John Comaroff, Gary Urton, and David Yesner (Viaene et al. 2023; Vieth 2022; Wade 2019). Arredondo took her case to the SAA, including to the organization's president and Ethics Board, to no avail. Although stories like Arredondo's unfortunately are familiar to many feminist archaeologists, Latinas face a particular threat in part because they are so easily identifiable. Almost all the women recounted their heightened visibility as the only or one of very few Latinas in their department or university and certainly within archaeology.

Perpetrators and their collaborators wield further power as reviewers for articles and grant applications, writers of job recommendations, or members of search committees. Latinas face yet another specific form of silencing, discipline, and marginalization: in a predominantly white field, Girón said, "This is gonna sound messed up, but I ended up feeling kinda whitewashed." As Hutchings and La Salle (2014) argue, the past is political, and marginalized groups are politicized by majority scholars.

Arredondo's advisor Dr. Raymond refused to allow her to publish in Spanish and to be accountable to her collaborators, and he tried to prevent her from doing community engagement, threatening to withhold letters of recommendation. Rather than face this continued abuse, Arredondo left the institution, continuing a successful career elsewhere. Even people who advanced to the professoriate like Garcia faced similar experiences: "I have a very hard time with grant writing because I feel like I'm expected to explain my research and how I think about the world and theory one way that's based on the history of what's accepted in the discipline, which has historically been defined by white men and white women. I find that I get resistance to what I write." These disciplining silences marginalize people and their experiences, keeping them in the shadows. López-Vélez was inspired to become an archaeologist by her father, who faced violence crossing the US border from vigilante groups, ICE agents, and coyotes (an issue that is being studied by archaeologists of the contemporary; e.g., Beck et al. 2015; de León 2015). As López-Vélez recounted, "He always gave me the PG13 version. Because he had to. And then just knowing that I'm able to be here because he decided to do that and like there are so many people that need their stories told. That's why I wanted to talk about structural violence, because it's often pinned on the people that immigrate." Yet her advisor told her that she should not be doing this type of work: "If I knew this is what you wanted to study, I would have never accepted you." However, like the migrants whose stories she tells in her analysis, López-Vélez exhibits resilience in the face of structural violence and is continuing her desired work.

"That's Gone a Long Way for Me": Mentoring, Solidarity, and Representation

Especially in the context of an overwhelmingly white discipline in historically white institutions, mentoring is crucial for creating spaces for Latinas to become successful professionals. It is imperative that BIPOC students see themselves in their professors, field supervisors, principal investigators, peers, and the scholarship they are expected to master (Rainey et al. 2018) so that they can envision themselves in those positions. Girón stuck with archaeology in the face of adversity because she took Latino and Chicano Studies courses with three Latino professors, even though those classes did not count toward her major. One mentor was "so approachable and relatable because he had a lot of the similar experiences as me, being the first-generation college student, kind of trying to figure it out, like worrying about your parents' documents and immigration status," stated Girón. However, as important as providing culturally appropriate mentoring is to students—and therefore future archaeologists—such mentoring adds to cultural taxation (Padilla 1994) borne by the very few BIPOC faculty. As Obrador explained, "Departments are trying to diversify their departments; BIPOC faculty get stuck having to be on all the committees for diversity, inclusion, and equity, and they're not getting paid for it. Or all of their time is taken up from going to all these committee meetings and like being a part of this and that."

Given the overwhelming overrepresentation of white archaeologists, most Latina students must seek support outside their institution, but few first-generation students can afford even traveling across the state (let alone out of state or internationally). Several women specifically acknowledged the importance of the Sally Casanova fellowship, which offers resources and cultural capital for underprivileged, underrepresented minority students to create a pipeline to attain their doctorates. Most of the women interviewed who have attended SAA meetings said that the institution does not do enough to support Latina scholars. Underscoring the importance of the SBA, several interviewees proposed creating something similar for Latinx and Latin American archaeologists. Lupe Poderoso enthusiastically endorsed such spaces: "At least in my own life, that's gone a long way for me. And I think that that has helped a lot in my success in archaeology and in academia, just being surrounded by like-minded people who support each other. I think that's pretty important." Garcia, who attended a diversity fellowship conference, called it "the best professional experience I've ever had, because it was the one time I got to be me as an academic without having to perform for this expectation or standard of whiteness"; she did not have to worry about how her hair, clothing, jewelry, or any other performative aspects of her appearance did or did not align with expected standards for academics (read, whiteness). Not everyone supported the idea of a society for Latinx/Latin American archaeologists, however. Fernandes, who identified as white in her home country in Latin America, worried about the splintering of identity. Garcia pointed

out that the experience of xenophobia as an immigrant and being marginalized as a racialized minority facing US racism are two separate experiences and identifications, although she felt it was important to offer spaces for solidarity, support, and empowerment.

The Society for California Archaeology offers another model, the Coalition for Diversity in California Archaeology (CDCA). Its goal is to "provide a venue for members to seek support and mentorship in the profession, advocate and work towards increasing diversity, visibility, and to discuss and address issues and challenges related to ethnicity and race in archaeological practice in California" (Society for California Archaeology 2024). The coalition has four task forces: Native American Archaeologists, Black American Archaeologists, Hispanic and Latinx American Archaeologists, and Education/Curriculum/Community Engagement. CDCA aims for its members to work together as allies and to create a welcoming space for everyone, providing training, workshops, mentoring, and networking for members. To Castro, CDCA empowers members who feel isolated. López-Vélez, who worked in CRM while finishing her dissertation, said these workshops were essential for confronting institutional racism. However important these spaces are, they have their limits. Marginalized people are looking for more than virtue signaling, as López-Vélez indicated:

> They don't always wanna pay, but they love diversity statements. "Help us write a diversity statement." "Ohh we support people of color." You know that BS? And so, we help them write their diversity statement. But then when it's time to pay up, they're like, "Ugh, well this, this, that." And we've called them out. We're like, if you're gonna say you support us, and you're gonna have a diversity statement that you encourage and support, they need to do something about it. And we're doing something about it. The big turnoff for me is they keep doing these diversity statement BS, and when people actually speak up, we got threatened with a lawsuit.

Another way to increase diversity in the field can be public outreach in K–12 schools. Getting to talk with students at various grade levels about what archaeology is, what archaeologists study, how archaeology affects different community members, and the opportunities for careers can spark interest and motivate a greater diversity of students to pursue this path. This outreach is particularly important in schools in disadvantaged communities with predominantly BIPOC students to combat prevailing public perceptions that only white people (namely, white men) do archaeology, based on the largely monoracial nature of the field. This racialized and gendered socialization starts at an early age, as Girón recounted: "I actually had a substitute teacher in my third-grade class. And I remember telling him that I wanted to become an archaeologist, and he goes, 'Oh, honey, girls can't be archaeologists.'" In contrast, Castro recalled a particularly impactful experience she had doing professional outreach at a school that was majority Latinx: "This was a Title One school, and I think it was majority Hispanic. When I went to the class, one of the boys was like, 'Ohhh you're like me! My last name is also the same!' And I had this moment, because maybe he never thought he would meet an archaeologist that had his name."

The experience of that child is one example of how a small intervention can have a big impact on what an archaeologist looks like. With that in mind, we conclude our discussion with some recommendations for change. Although these recommendations are by no means exhaustive, we hope they will serve as a starting point and call to action.

Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

The voices and experiences shared in this study highlight the need for further structural changes within archaeology to create a more inclusive, equitable, and just discipline. By centering the lived realities of Latina archaeologists, this work not only contributes to ongoing conversations about diversity and equity but also underscores the importance of intersectionality in understanding and addressing systemic barriers. The challenges shared by the women in their interviews—from familial pressures and economic constraints to cultural taxation and racialized harassment and mentorship needs—highlight the need for specific, intentional interventions that address the unique needs of historically marginalized groups within archaeology. Because most of the women interviewed were graduate students or in academic positions, more research is needed on the struggles and pathways of women employed

in different career sectors in archaeology, including government agencies, private-sector CRM, and museums. Yet, *all* employment sectors must prioritize the recruitment and retention of diverse personnel, while compensating mentors for the additional labor they take on to support students and junior staff of underrepresented backgrounds. Organizations should invest in workshops on grant writing and publishing, navigating tenure and promotion, and other career advancement processes, with a focus on empowering first-generation and underrepresented scholars and professionals. Transparent hiring and funding practices, as well as efforts to dismantle bias in peer review and hiring committees, are key to creating level playing fields as well. Formal mentorship programs, modeled on initiatives like the SBA or the CDCA that provide practical career guidance and emotional and cultural support, should be tailored specifically to meet the needs of Latinx and other historically marginalized archaeologists to foster spaces of belonging and solidarity. That said, the labor to create such programs should not solely rest on marginalized archaeologists.

Field schools, where hands-on training often begins but that can serve as gatekeepers and financial barriers to many students, can be reimagined as programs to recruit, train, and retain archaeologists of color. For example, the UC-HBCU Graduate Pathways Internship in African Diaspora Archaeology summer training program offers paid internships for undergraduate students enrolled at accredited Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to introduce them to archaeological research methods at African Diaspora sites. In the summer of 2024, Milsy completed the National Park Service Latino Heritage Internship Program, an internship with an emphasis on cultural and natural resource stewardship, interpretation, and community outreach to establish "a pipeline for converting talented Latino students into career positions in the NPS" (National Park Service 2025).[6] Funding for similar initiatives for field schools, museums, and other heritage institutions to train Latinx archaeology students, including from HSIs or Minority-Serving Institutions, should be pursued, with options for training at field sites within the continental United States for undocumented students. As archaeologist Bill White points out, most CRM projects do not require Secretary of the Interior–qualified field technicians, so companies should hire and train BIPOC youth and demonstrate archaeology's viability as a career (SuccinctBill 2020).

There is so much more work to be done to redress historical inequities and work toward stamping out racism, sexism, and other intersectional forms of oppressions in archaeology. The inequities in our field will not improve unless we take concrete steps to address them, which will require redirecting resources and labor, continued critical self-reflection, and committing to changing the way we act, live, and do archaeology. We hope this article inspires a future where what an archaeologist looks like does not constantly reinforce the white masculinized ethos of the rugged fieldworker (Gero's [1985] Cowboy of Science), but where archaeologists are those with any number of faces including women, first-generation students, and scholars of historically marginalized backgrounds. The women's stories presented in this article give us hope for a just future, and we hope that it inspires our readers to fight for this future as well.

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Notes

1. Many terms have been used to refer to people of Latin American origin or descent, including but not limited to Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx/e (which serve as gender-neutral and LGBTQIA+ inclusive alternatives to Latino/a), and Chicano/a/x (which specifically references an ethnic identity for people of Mexican descent who live in the United States). Because all the interview participants in this study have Latin American origins and identify as cisgender women, we use the term "Latina" in our broader discussions and summary analytical analyses of interview responses, except when referring explicitly to information gathered from participants who used their preferred terms (e.g., the primary author of this study, Milsy Westendorff, identifies as Hispanic).

2. We obtained human subject approval from the Northern Illinois Institutional Review Board (#HS23-0448). Informed consent was obtained from all respondents.

3. For a critique of how meritocratic ideology perpetuates and masks class and gender discrimination in the United States, see Leighton (2020).

4. To protect the identity and careers of the people who entrusted their stories to us, all the participants are given pseudonyms and other identifiers have been removed, as well as those of their perpetrators.

5. Despite some faculty mentors' implicit biases about the value of CRM, many practitioners prefer its working conditions, autonomy, and salary to that of university employment. Further research is required to compare experiences of Latina women and their career choices; the sample size in the current study is too small to conduct meaningful analysis, and the interviews did not specifically address this issue.

6. President Trump's January 2025 executive orders targeting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) initiatives, along with federal grant withholding and hiring freezes, have halted programs like the NPS Latino Heritage Internship Program, and the white supremacist agendas of the current administration will hamper efforts toward change in our discipline.

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