

JCSCORE

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“I AM A MIRACLE, YO SOY UN MILAGRO, I AM NOT SUPPOSED TO BE HERE”: A CONVERSATION WITH BAMBY SALCEDO

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Bamby Salcedo was a 2021 keynote speaker at the 33rd annual National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE). On July 22 and August 7, 2021, Bri Sérráno and Cristóbal Salinas Jr. interviewed Bamby Salcedo via Zoom. *JCSCORE* thanks Bamby for sharing her story with us.

Bamby Salcedo is a national and international recognized transgender Latina Woman who received her master’s degree in Mexican and Latin@ Studies from California State University, Los Angeles. Bamby is the President and Chief Executive Officer of the TransLatin@ Coalition, a national organization that focuses on addressing the issues of Transgender Latin@s in the United States. To learn, donate, and subscribe to the TransLatin@ Coalition’s news and updates visit their website:

<https://www.translatinacoalition.org/>

Bamby delivers powerful, sobering, and inspiring speeches and her warm, down-to-earth presence has provided emotional grounding and perspective for diverse gatherings. She speaks from the heart, as one who has been able to transcend many of

her own issues, to truly drop ways of being and coping that no longer served her, issues that have derailed and paralyzed countless lives.

Bamby has received multiple awards for her service and advocacy work for the LGBTQ community. In 2014, the documentary *Transvisible: Bamby Salcedo's Story* was released. To read more about Bamby Salcedo visit her website: <https://bambysalcedo.com>

On June 10, 2021, Bamby Salcedo was a 2021 keynote speaker at the 33rd annual National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE). After her keynote, in collaboration with Bri Sérráno, *JCSCORE* had the opportunity to interview Bamby Salcedo on July 22 and August 7, 2021, via Zoom. Diana Cervantes, *JCSCORE's* Managing Editor, helped develop the research questions and transcribed the interviews.

JCSCORE: Who is Bamby? Can you tell us more about your story?

Bamby: Who is Bamby? Bamby is a Trans Latina mujer, inmigrante, indocumentada, who is also grateful and humble to be able to breathe today and to be able to live 51 years of life, a life that has been full of horrible experiences, but also amazing triumphs. Bamby is also a very privileged trans woman that has the privilege to be the President and the CEO of the TransLatin@ Coalition.

JCSCORE: Bamby, can you tell us more about your background? Can you start telling us more about your growing up experiences, and now, to where you are right now?

Bamby: I was born and raised in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. I was born in El Hospital Civil de Guadalajara, and I was born on October the 12th, 1969. I grew up in the 70th, and I grew up very poor. My mother and my father — very low levels of education. My father had left my mother before I was born, and so my mother had to raise three children by herself. My mother basically was never home —she was always working. So, for me I never knew my place.

I know and I understand now that I was a very feminine child. In fact, I don't know why, but for some reason, older men were always attracted to me. *Yo les gustaba a ellos* so I was constantly harassed as a child for being effeminate, and even within my own family. I have an older sister, and there was a lot of expectations on me. I was supposed to be the man of the house, right? Traditionally, our family's thinking that way, I was given my father's name, even though I was not given my father's last name. Obviously, that's not a name that I chose, but it was the name that was given to me. I now understand that because of all those expectations that I had put on me, I had to really pretend to be someone who I was not. That's how I grew up, and I think part of repressing all those feelings and all those ways to try to seek support, love and understanding of my life and who I was as a child. And not being able to have access to that support, my way to escape and my way to cope with my reality was to get immersed into using drugs.

I started sniffing glue when I was about eight years old, so I guess I can talk a little bit about how that happened. My mom was always working; so, we were basically left by ourselves in our home. I was heading to school at 2:00 p.m., but my class would start at 6:00 p.m. It was a school for boys. In the morning was for the girls. My sister would go in the morning, and then I would go in the afternoon. And we would go to a school, *escuela urbana número 27*, far from our house. I would have to take this bus to go to the school, and so every day since I started to go to that school, the bus would drop me on the corner of *La Calle Gigantes* and *Cinco de Mayo*, next to San Juan de Dios. From there, I would walk through the mercado first and then walk to my school. Every day I would pass through this neighborhood that was like a mile radius — nothing but bars and

sex workers standing on the streets. A lot of crime, drugs, and children also sniffing glue, shoe-shining and selling chicles.

That was the view of my every day. That's how I started getting to know other children. I remember, there was this guy who looked young, but was older. His name was El Memo. El Memo was like 12 years old, and he was a shoe-shiner, and so he would always walk around with his shoe-shine box, and with his ... [Bamby takes a pause] I'm fine, I just need a moment. He would always walk around with a bag, eran las bolsas de pan Bimbo, the bread, the Bimbo bread, and so he would just sniff on it. I didn't even know what it was because you couldn't really see the inside. He would walk with me to my school, and then he would say, "Oh, you want to try it?" I tried it and it was great. It was a great sensation and smelled good.

That's how I started, with him, and then what would happen after, at that time, there was La Plaza Del Progreso, which was a bull-fighting stadium. Then La Plaza Del Progreso was demolishing. There was this huge space that it was nothing but rubble. We would go to there because there were so many hiding places. I would leave my house in the morning, and I would just hang out all the afternoon and then I would go to school. Then after school, I would go back to the neighborhood, and then around 9:00 pm or 10:00 pm, I would go back home, which was the time that my mom would get back from work. Then I would just pretend like nothing was happening. It got to the point to where I started carrying my own little bag to school, and I would sniff during recess, or I would ask to go to the bathroom and just do a couple sniffs and then go back to the class.

That happened from second to sixth grade. For four years, my mom didn't know what was happening, although my sister one time found me at my house sniffing glue in the bathroom. The bathroom that we had did not have doors. I was in the bathroom sniffing and my sister came in and saw me, and so she told my mom and I remember I got beat up for that. I promised my mom that I was never, ever going to do it again, but of course that was a lie. I finished sixth grade, and then that's how in some ways everything changed, because I was already immersed in my neighborhood. I already knew

everyone, and I was also doing crime, little things. We would go to the store and just steal things and sell them. Then we would go to La Plaza De Los Mariachis and do all kinds of stuff, as kids.

Then I got out of sixth grade, la primaria, when I was 12 years old, and I started ... Well, because they tell you as you get older, "This is what you need to do," you do other things, and so it was time for me to start snatching purses with other kids, and we would do that. We would take turns, and that is how I got arrested for the first time. By then, they started build La Plaza Del Patilla. That's where the La Plaza del Progreso used to be at, and I remember also that we would go to El Ospicio, which I understand it's no longer El Ospicio anymore. Back then there used to be children there and we used to go to El Ospicio and we would get desayuno, and lunches because we were so poor. My mom would never give us money for lunch or anything, so that's where we would go to eat al Ospicio.

I remember the first time that I got arrested, which is ironic. The first time that I got arrested was on a November 20th, cuando se celebra La Revolución Mexicana. It was a big deal, and it's ironic because November the 20th here in the United States is Transgender Day of Remembrance. It's in some ways a day that I will never forget. So, I got arrested on that day and I was sent to El Centro Tutelar Para Menores at 12 years old, and I was there for about two weeks, and then I escaped that space. Then I got arrested about a couple of months after for another thing, and then that's when I was sent to La Granja de Recuperación Juvenil, which is in the outskirts of the city. It's like a penal for minors, so I was in and out of La Granja. I think that one time I did a year or something, but then, for the next four years it was in and out of La Granja and it was just doing crime and trying to find myself.

Also, at age 12, there were so many interesting things that happened in my life, it was like when Menudo was super famous in Mexico. I met a group of young queer people, who, they had like a fan club for Menudo. We would meet at El Parque de San Francisco, which is a few blocks from my neighborhood San Juan Del Dios. It's like the

epicenter for many different things. I would just a walk from my neighborhood, which is San Juan Del Dios, to El Parque San Francisco in El Centro and go jotear with all the jotas there. Then sometimes we would go to La Calle de Juarez, if you go there was this spot called Las Sombrillas, and then if you go further, there was El Parque de Federalismo, which was also super queer. El Parque de Federalismo there was a particular spot where a lot of queens would gather and do sex work.

I remember with this group of queer people; I was part of a fan club que era de Lucia Mendez. El fan club se llamaba novios y cuñadas de Lucia Mendez. I was part of the fan club for Menudo, and I was also part of the fan club for Lucia Mendez, but it was super cute because we would do a bunch of stuff, super queer and super cool. I was living this sort of double life, with my queer friends. The first time that I dressed up was when I was about 12. It was an amazing experience. Then, in my life I was navigating all of these different places, spaces and people, and my mother didn't really know how to deal with me and everything that was happening with me.

When I was in La Granja, I met my father. My father was living at the United States at that time, and then he went to Guadalajara to visit. I don't know if he went to look for us. The thing was that, yeah, he looked for my mom and then he came to visit one time. So, I met him when I was 15, and then he needed to return to the United States. Then he told me that if I want to come to the United States, to hit him up. He left me his phone number. That's how I came to the United States, I was 16, and I didn't even know that if I would stay in Mexico, I would end up in prison for a long time. I think in some ways, getting to know him and coming to this country was like another escape for me – to get away from everything that I knew, and in some ways, trying to start a new way of life.

I came to this country obviously not knowing anything. My father was living at this little town in central California called Huron. I got to his house and obviously he had formed his family. I wasn't really welcomed by his wife or his partner, so that created a bunch of things. I also didn't really know my father, but I knew that I wanted him to love me and accept me. Then, my father knew he had some cousins that were living in Northern

California at a small town called Gridley. So, I was basically shipped to Northern California with my father's cousins. They had a restaurant and a tortilla factory, so I worked with them. I started working at the tortilla factory as a minor, instead of, my father taking me to school.

I started working at this tortilla factory, which was hard, super hard work. It was just crazy work. How do you stop a machine from spitting tortillas? Right? You're just catching the tortilla and fixing them and putting them on a rack, and then bagging them. It was just nonstop, constant work. I remember that I used to work long hours. I would work between 12 to 14 hours, nonstop – I was exploited as a minor. Then, I started getting to know people, and then I started to know heavier drugs – I was shooting up heroin and cocaine at that time. To me, it was heaven, because again, it was taking me away from my reality, always repressing who I was. Also, I grew up in Guadalajara, a big city where like there's so much going on, going to this tiny place to where it only had one school, and one hamburger stand. Everybody knew everybody, I couldn't do nothing. I could only handle like two years of that.

Then I left that little town, and I came to Los Angeles. Well, I went back to Mexico because my sister was going to be 15, so I came to Los Angeles for a year and then I went back to my sister's 15th. Then I came back to Tijuana because there were some friends of mine who were part of the fan club who had also left Guadalajara, and so I went with them. We met and then we came together, we crossed the border again together, all the jotas running el cerro. Then, that's how we ended up in Los Angeles, in Hollywood specifically at that time. Super jotas, undocumented, started doing sex work on Santa Monica Boulevard, because back then, it was like Hollywood – mucho mucho sexo y drogas y de todo. Sexo, drogas y rock n roll.

So that's when I started my transition because I also started seeing the Trans women. Then, I didn't have anybody but people who really loved me and supported me, which was my queer people, community. That's how I started my transition, and then that's how I studied, because I was familiar with the streets. Then I started getting arrested for

sex work. In fact, I remember when I got arrested the first time in the United States, in 1988. I think I was maybe 19, and that's when I started going to jail here in Los Angeles, to HOJJ, which is the Hall of Justice Jail, which was the old county jail. Then, I was arrested different times. I was one of those ... I'm a survivor of the war on drugs. Back then they'll arrest you for anything, even for weed.

So, I was in and out of county jails. Then they closed that HOJJ, and then they sent us to west side, and I ended up going to prison for the first time. When I finished my time in prison, they sent me back to the county jail, I finished my time. And then, oh no, no, no, no... for the second time I went to prison, in 1993. That's when I met Bob, he was an amazing person who I met in prison who, we fell in love. I did three years in prison; it just so happened that we were going to get out around the same time. We got out and started living together, and then obviously, we were talking about the different dreams that we had, living together in a white fence house. But everything went out the window because drugs took precedence. Then we started doing crime, and we both got arrested. I think it was in '95 or '96, and we both went to do time in prison.

I got out in '98. He had to do more time, and then that's when I started being involved more in the community. I learned about different support groups for Trans women, back then it was 1996 or 1997, when they started having support groups. I started going to some of those, and then I started being involved in the community, but then I was still doing sex work. Then I got arrested again in 1998 and I did another term, and I was deported. Then, I come back to the United States, back then it was easier. After 9/11 the border changed. Then I went to prison again, and then I got out. The last time I got out was June of 2001.

Then I started doing the same thing. Then I was also deported back to Mexico, and then I crossed the border for the last time on July 4th of 2001. I was lucky to cross the border because it was the 4th of July. I was beat up in Tijuana by some people. So, I came running to the border after I was beat up. I was like, all despeinada and bruised. I went running to the border and was like, "Please, help me, help me. I've been beat up. They

stole my ID and everything else. They took everything from me." So, me dejarón pasar, they just let me in. That's how I crossed the border for the last time. By then obviously I knew how to speak English, así aunque no sea mucho pero por lo menos me escucharón, me entendieron.

Soon after, I started doing the same thing. I started being on the streets. I started doing everything else that I knew, and it just ... Something just got in me and told me that I needed to do something with my life. My entire power to help me to find what that would be, and finally got into treatment in August of 2001. So, I'm coming up on 20 years of being clean. Since then, I've been just super involved in the community and doing all kinds of stuff, so here we are.

JCScore: Bamby, thank *you* for being so open and vulnerable, and sharing with *JCScore* so much. How have your lived experiences shaped who you are today?

Bamby: So, what really has shaped my life is everything and anything that I have, not just survived but the fact that I know that I hold privilege. Simply because I do have a job, because I do have a place to stay, because I'm clean and sober, because I think of myself as, "I am a servant to my people." And truly because I see everything that particularly my sisters still go through and those are the same things that I went through early in my transition and even throughout my life.

The violence, the sexual abuse, the drug use, the sex work, the homelessness, the hunger that we experience, the criminalization that we experience simply because of who we are. All those things I see every day with the people that I work for. And so just because I have had the privilege to overcome those challenges, my horrific experiences... I have had the privilege to overturn those horrific experiences into opportunities, it really is what allows me for me to know that what I'm doing is what I am supposed to doing. And so, I'm just grateful and always reminded of where I come from and the privilege that I hold.

JCScore: Thank you Bamby. In your website you stated, "I am a miracle, yo soy un milagro, I am not supposed to be here." Would you please share a little bit more about the story behind this powerful statement?

Bamby: I had had so many things that happened to me that I could have been dead. For instance, I have been left in downtown LA in an alley when I OD'd. Somebody just dropped me there, we were shooting up in somebody's house and I passed out, they just drove me and left me there. I was lucky enough that I woke up in the ambulance. I don't know exactly if they called the ambulance, I don't know, I don't know exactly what happened, but I remember that they injected a substance on me. I woke up and I was being helped by an ambulance. And as soon as I woke up, I just took off running because back then you would get arrested for OD'ing. So, I survived that.

Also, I have had guns pointed to my head when I was robbed. I had been chased out of neighborhoods by gang members. They didn't want me to be in their territory. I was beat up multiple times, I had guns pointing to my head, being on my knees. And even in Mexico when I was picked up by the police, there was five policemen and they put me on this pickup truck, in the back of the truck and they took me to the outskirts of the city and they raped me, shaved my head, beat me, and they just left me there. I survive that.

There have been multiple things that I was supposed to be dead. I got stabbed and I survived that and even when I was in prison I survived, this guy just out of the blue came up with a big stick, a big four by four, and just started hitting me. And he hit me a few different times, in my head and busted my lip and just a bunch of stuff. Yet, I survived even when I was in prison. The sureños didn't want me to be in the yard so I had to fight with knives with them and I made it. I made it out of the streets, I made it out of prison, I made it out of drugs, all those things. So, for me when I say, "I am a miracle, yo soy un milagro, I am not supposed to be here," it's a reminder, a reminder of where I could have been and where I am today.

JCScore: Your work has also shined and has been a milagro for many people. You've been the person, the servant for many people. And we know that the Trans Latin@ Coalition has worked tirelessly to support other Trans Latin@ immigrant people. Could you share the process of creating this organization and who else was involved?

Bamby: I've been doing social justice work for almost 25 years. In fact, I turned 20 years clean and sober.

So that is a Milagro. And, so when I started doing this work obviously, and as an organizer because that's sort of the root of who I am. I was doing this work and as I was seeing and developing programs and organizations that I work for, that have also been marginalizing and oppressive. I was seeing that and it's something that the local community here in Los Angeles have been wanting and advocating for. I remember in my early time working at a nonprofit organization doing HIV prevention, there were other Trans women who had support groups.

I remember there was Trans Generación 2000 or Trans Generation 2000 that was led by Christina Lugo and they used to meet at an arena, and I know that this sense of community people always had. Even when I started my transition. Trans women were there supporting me. So, there was always this sort of sense of building something that it was for us. I was learning everything in 2009, I was working at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. So, I created a program that is called Angels of Change, but it was specifically for young Trans and gender non-conforming people.

And now I raise funds to support the healthcare services for Trans youth, who don't have insurance or a way to pay for their health services. Once, there was a 17-year-old child, from El Salvador, and undocumented. She came to the organization looking for support, she wanted to get hormones and because she didn't have insurance, services were denied. So that's why I created this project. Also, I was seeing that there wasn't a voice for Trans Latina immigrant women. I have been in immigration detention when

ICE had picked me up from prison a few different times, I was deported four times and I was in immigration detention.

So, knowing that there was no support for Trans women who were in immigration detention and for those of us who living here in the United States, there are no resources for us, or even a voice to advocate for us. In 2009, I was part of a planning committee for a statewide conference that it was sponsored by the Department of Public Health State Office of Aids. And because I was part of this planning committee, I requested the conference was held here in LA. I made sure that I contacted Trans Latina women from across the state to come to this conference. I requested a room for us to have a meeting and so we had a meeting and we just started talking about what are we going to do.

We have no voices, no representation for us and that's how we started. We started doing visitations and letter writing to Trans women who were in immigration detention. And the statewide conference took place in January and October of the same year, then I was invited to the national conference that took place in San Francisco. They invited me to be a plenary keynote speaker. And so, part of the packet that I requested was for them to also give me a room so that we can have a meeting at this conference I made a flyer and everything, I posted it in different places within the conference space. I invited the Trans Latina girls.

There were 32 Trans women who came to our initial meeting from different parts of the country from Boston, New York, Texas, California, Arizona, and many different places. And it was interesting because everybody was there on a scholarship. And so that's how we sort of went national and how we started our organization even today is made of Trans Latina and Latinx (gender-nonconforming) leaders from different parts of the country. Like those are the core group of people who made the board of our organization. And initially, we started thinking about how we influence change within the institutions that continue to marginalize us. We need to do policy work, really thinking about this micro level work. All of us were volunteers.

Some of them were like volunteering, organizing locally. That's how we started, and our work has evolved. In 2012, for the first time we generated a research project and a report in collaboration with our sibling Carla Patron, a Queer Trans woman, a professor but back then, Carla was working on their dissertation. That's how we partnered, we generated this report and we brought lights to the specific needs and issues of Trans Latina immigrant women who are living in the United States. And we also produce *Dying To Be A Woman*, which is a short documentary about silicon injection in the Trans community, particularly Trans woman. And that documentary was pick up by the Pan American Health Organization, which is part of the World Health Organization. And they reproduced 5,000 copies to distribute to their state members in different countries.

We did a lot of work, we work with the Department of Justice to address the violence of Trans woman, develop recommendations about HIV prevention, and allocating resources for Trans woman, and segregating data between Trans women from men who have sex with men. Because HIV is about infection, and the ways of transmission. They were lumping us with men who have sex with men. So, we fought for that and there's now a separation of data that indicates statistics about Trans women vs men. And then, in 2015, our national group got together as we were trying to organize in different parts of the country, we were seeing that Trans people were not having access to the basic things that they needed. Our national group got together and decided that we also needed to move into doing service provision and we agree that it made sense to start in Los Angeles to build this model. And then from there, replicate the model. So, there are different places where we have chapters, and we got our first grant in January 2016.

In just five years we have built almost \$2 million organization and there's 15 of us working. Some of our chapters have service provision, like Ariana center in Florida, Grupo TRANSGrediendo in New York, Organización TransLatina de Texas led by Andrea, Georgia Community Estrella led by Estrella Sanchez, and Arizona Mariposas Sin Fronteras led by Carolina. Let me see I'm thinking about where else... so little by

little yeah. And this year our DMV chapter they have Trans Latinx DMV, I fiscally sponsor other organizations, one is a Alianza Trans Latinx Orange County and Trans Fronteriza San Diego. We're doing a lot of work and policy, legislation, and resources to better support Trans Latina women.

JCScore: What do you think are the most immediate current policies that need to be addressed when it comes to Trans rights and what policy makers should do to support Trans Latina/o/x people?

Bamby: I am advocating at the federal level – I'm very lucky that I have been integrated into the administration right now. I have had a couple of meetings in the White House and what I'm advocating for is for the administration to create a Presidential Transgender Advisory Council. But in the last meeting that we had with ambassador Susan Rice, Director of the Domestic Policy Council in the Biden Administrations, said that she would not recommend that because having a public council, a presidential public council, it is subjected to the Brown Act – meaning that everything has to be public.

So, people have to make public comments and so we would get a lot of right-wing conservatives who would just try to trash us. Nonetheless, there is going to be a task force that is going to develop recommendations specifically to really mandate. What I want to see is an intentional investment in the lives of Trans people. Transgender, gender non-conforming and intersex people in which resources will be able to support the leadership of Trans people as well. We know that in the last five years, and more Trans-led organizations continue to be developed. However, there's not enough resources for us. An example of the lack of support is, last year funders for LGBTQ issues released a report that 20 cents of every \$100 are invested in the LGBTQ community.

The money that is invested in the LGBTQ community, 20 cents of every \$100 are not going to Trans people. So even within the LGBTQ community, there's a huge disparity.

We need to make sure that Trans people are supported the way we need to be supported. There is an infrastructure development that needs to happen in our community. I would like for resources to be available for our community, for us to be able to develop our economic power. We know that land equates to power, to money and so we want to acquire land, we want to acquire property, we want us to be able to provide the services that our people need without the fear of thinking that we can potentially not provide services because we can't pay the rent.

We as an organization, we pay about a \$100,000 in rent every year between the center and the house that we rent. And so that's a lot of money and we want to put down some money so that we can buy a building, and even across the United States. I wish that the federal government would do something like what we've done here in California, which is the Transgender wellness and equity fund, a fund specifically allocated to support Trans-led organizations and groups.

So, we can develop and build infrastructure of our community and of our organization and I'm hopeful that is going to happen. It's going to take some time obviously. Right now, next year is election year so a lot of efforts are invested in that but at least this year we started we are starting conversations and we are going to continue to develop this task force and provide recommendations. I'm hoping that before this administration or the end of this term of this administration, that there's something that is meaningful and intentional to our community.

The government has responsibility. It's their responsibility. They are public service and so they are the ones who hold the purse, it's not like there're no resources. And so, I'm going to push and push, and people will continue to criticize me. Like when I was invited for the first time to the White House in June, people were putting comments on my social media that I was that I was a sellout. But there's a strategy behind it. I do things the way I think it's best for my people. I'm not looking for popularity, I'm not looking for followers, that's not important to me. What's important to me is the lives of my people.

JCScore: How do you create sustainable community building coalition? And what are some examples of community building and ways to support one another in the Trans coalition?

Bamby: Our organization and in some ways, I have been influential in the broader Trans movement. And the work has spoken for itself. And that has been through community building. If we are able to support our people with the basic things that they need, then we are able to organize. Because you can't expect someone to show up if they're preoccupied to figure out where they're going to lay their head next, or if they're hungry where will they eat. You cannot organize in that way and so for us, that's why it's critical that we do both. The way we think about the work that we do is not just doing work from the bottom up or from the top down.

We do it in a multidimensional way. But most important the work that we do is guided and informed by the community. And so that's how you build community, that's how you build trust, and when you call people to show up, they will show up because they trust you. You can't build something out of smoking air. You must have some type of solid foundation with the people first and foremost, who are the ones who are going to support. And if you don't have that then you can't do it, you can't paint this picture that is just an illusion. People know and is the people who build community, who build what needs to happen. Because if the people don't respond or don't agree with it, then it's all lie.

JCScore: What can cisgender people, white Trans people and people with USA citizenship do to work collaboratively and advocate for Trans people?

Bamby: They can do different things but the first thing that we need to do is to be able to be truthful. Meaning that if people are saying that they in fact support Trans people, they need to show it with actions, not just giving us lip service. Anybody can say anything, but people need to be intentional about that. People also need to be educated

about the ways they can support our community. I mean it's not enough to have a Trans conference. It's not enough to say that you understand us that when you can possibly do it, if you don't know. You need to go to places like our center so that you can see people who are struggling.

It's not the same having a Trans friend who is an academic than to know a Trans person who is homeless or who's struggling to get off drugs or who is a sex worker. You need to come down to get to know who our people are in a real way but come without prejudice, leave all the bullshit on the side, and be truthful. If you really want to support us, then do it. If you have the ability, support the work that Trans people are doing or the work that Trans-led organizations are doing. And there are different ways that academics can support. There are groups in different places across the United States, help them fundraise, help them write grants, help them make introductions or if you invite them to speak at your colleges or whatever, pay them and don't just pay them crumbs. They don't have to be celebrities to be compensated. They are people too, they have needs.

Also, if people are thinking about doing research, pay them. You need to use community participatory research. Involve the community from the beginning, don't reach out to us, tell us like, "Oh, I need you to recruit people." So that you can look cute and meanwhile we don't ever know what happened after your research project. Put us as part of the process. Get with us and let's be co-PIs, let's be co-authors, let's partner together. Don't just do it for us, include us in it. So, there are different ways but first and foremost, I think for us to get there, we need to get rid of the biases that we hold and be able to open our hearts and open our minds, look at our humanity and understand the issues that Trans people have to go through, otherwise it's not going to work.

JCScore: What can higher education institutions do to serve at colleges and universities Trans students and their families better?

Bamby: Academia has been super exclusionary. We're not welcome in those spaces, simply because of who we are. So, colleges and universities need to create programs that are specific for us, they need to create scholarships that are specific for us, they need to develop classes that talk about us. It's funny because when I wrote my thesis, I wrote about Trans Latinas, and I found out that there was no other Trans Latina who in academia who was writing about other Trans Latinas. Yes, there were other people who were writing about Trans Latinas but no Trans Latinas themselves had written about other Trans Latinas. We need to be able to get into higher education, but I think the education system also needs to change even before we get into higher education. Because if there's no opportunities for us, then we are going to continue to be where we are even 20 years from now.

JCSCORE: What do you envision for the future of Trans people in the country?

Bamby: I envision a world where we all Trans people can live without fear, fear to be who we are, fear that we are going to be attacked simply because of who we are, and I want to live in a world where all Trans people have access to anything and everything that they need regardless of who we are. I don't know if I'm going to get to see the world that I want to live in, but I know that I'm contributing to that.

And that is also what helps me to continue to push and to fight and to live, because it's not easy, it's not easy. This world is not easy for us, but I also understand that it's not impossible for us to create it. I see the possibilities and the possibilities are there we need to organize and strategize to live our lives unapologetically. Not asking permission to be who we are but rather just being who we are, who we are destined to be.

JCSCORE: Bamby as you allow us to see how can we contribute to the world that we should be living in to create better for Trans people, what words of wisdom or consejitos will you also tell or pass on to *JCSCORE* readers?

Bamby: Un consejo que les doy es que whether people like it or not Trans people are coming to places with power, and we are going to be in places everywhere integrated in our society, we are going to be judges, we are going to be doctors, we are going to be lawyers. There are some of us already in places with power, but we are going to be integrated in our society and there will be a time where people are not going to be afraid to be who they are.

JCSCORE: You are a public figure, you are “a servant of the people” as you stated in your NCORE 2021 keynote, and a fearless leader for our community. You have been interviewed multiple times but has there been a question that you wish people would ask you? What is this question and the answer?

Bamby: Oh, my goodness. I guess a question, maybe this is not often a question that I get asked but I guess where I get my strength. And for me, where I get my strength is through my spirituality. Have a connection with my creator and my higher power always gives me the opportunity to continue to be humble, to continue to be kind to people, to continue to be fearless too because I know that at the end, I will be okay. If I am okay with my creator, my higher power and my people, everything else is secondary.

JCSCORE: Bamby, thank you. You have shared your story with us, and as bell hooks says, “telling the story is one of the ways that we can begin the process of building community”. So, thank you for building community with us. You have allowed us to get to know you but also see beyond the endless possibilities. Through your story you have allowed us to engage, to think and to feel more about those possibilities of how we can make a better world for Trans people.

Bamby: ¡Gracias a ustedes! It's totally an honor and I'm very grateful for the opportunity to share space with all of you and JCSCORE.