



Photo: Psychologist of the Week

Martha Bernal

Bloomington, Monroe County

April 13, 1931 – September 28, 2001

Born in San Antonio, Texas, Martha Bernal was the first woman of Mexican descent to receive a Ph.D. in clinical psychology in the United States. She received her doctoral degree in 1962 from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana. She earned her graduate degrees during a time when there were not many women and minorities studying psychology.

After she finished her postgraduate degree, Dr. Bernal was unable to find an academic position. She was told that “we do not hire women.” Instead, she was able to obtain a U.S. Public Health and Service Postdoctoral Fellowship at the University of California in which she was able to engage in a number of research topics. Her first research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) in 1965 to study the use of classical conditioning on autistic children.

Dr. Bernal received a National Research Service Award in 1979 from NIMH to study how psychologists prepared for work with multicultural populations. She published results that showed few clinical psychology programs offered multicultural curricula as well as a lacked a diversity of students and faculty of color. In 1986, she became a professor at Arizona State University. There, she studied how Mexican-American children developed their identities and how schools could improve their efforts to provide clinical psychologists with training in minority mental health issues.

Dr. Bernal battled cancer throughout her life. After recovering from cancer three times, she was diagnosed with lung cancer and died in 2001 at the age of 70.



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- For more information about Martha Bernal, go to:
<http://www.apadivisions.org/division-35/about/heritage/martha-bernal-biography.aspx>.
- For more information about *Writing Her Story*, go to:
<http://www.in.gov/icw/2440.htm>.

Additional and more detailed references available at the end of Women's History Month