

PERSEVERANCE: A QUALITATIVE CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPY OF THE
EXPERIENCES OF A MIDDLE-AGED LATINO PURSUING A MASTER OF ARTS
DEGREE IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP AT A HISPANIC-SERVING
INSTITUTION.

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Master of Arts

By
Patrick Tafoya

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Student Name: Patrick Tafoya

Student ID: 000659686

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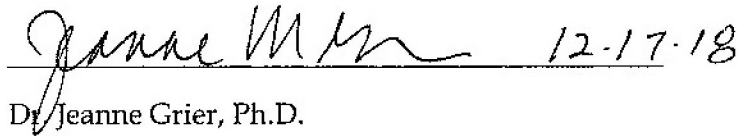
APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

 18/12/16

Dr. Nancy-Jean Pément, Ed.D.

Advisor

Date

 12-17-18

Dr. Jeanne Grier, Ph.D.

Second Reader

Date

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

 12.17.18

Dr. Brian R. Sevier, Ph.D.,
Dean, School of Education

Date

Abstract

This qualitative critical autoethnography represents a highly personalized account of the emotions, experiences, and motivations of a middle-aged Latino engaging in a courageous storytelling and narration about higher education and perseverance. Using myself as the researcher-participant, my experiences, motivations, and culture in a Hispanic-serving educational institution is depicted autoethnographically. Exploring the development of my critical consciousness tells a partial story of how I persevered in graduate school as a middle-aged Latino, and what my experiences represent for others who may be like or similar to me. As a middle-aged Latino student, I reveal my story as an insider-outsider trying to assimilate, and persevere at Southern Western Coastal University (SWCU). This critical autoethnography reflects my lived experiences and offers meaningful insight to students enrolled in a Master of Arts degree program in higher education leadership.

Dedication

To my mom and dad who made me and to my wife and daughters who supported me.

Acknowledgements

This work, and the degree that accompanies it, would not have been possible without the support and contributions of many others. Writing may seem a solitary endeavor, but for me is very much a community effort. Everything I write is informed by those who have shaped me and succored me along the way, and to them I offer these acknowledgements.

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Chapter One

Statement of the Problem

Statement of the purpose

This study provides a critical framework perspective to the experiences of a middle-aged, Latino pursuing a Master's degree in Higher Education Leadership. Through autoethnography and storytelling, the research-participant reveals the embeddedness of race through the lens of Critical Race Theory and examines the social construction of masculinity, and of education to shed focus the experiences of the research-participant. As Creswell (2013, p. 70) states, "Narrative storytelling begins with experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals."

Why Autoethnography?

The aim of this study is to present a partial story of my life through the process of autoethnography. It will describe autoethnography and will consider the features of this method in particular. As a qualitative method inquiry, autoethnography uses narration to focus on research questions of internal condition such as feelings and emotions. It also focuses on external conditions such as one's environment or the temporal dimensions of their past, present, and future (Mendez 2012; Mendez & Peña, 2013). Autoethnography emerged in the 1980's and was first used to explore one's emotional experiences using language learning history to sensitize oneself about the topic being researched and finding reasons about one's motivations and the way emotional experiences shaped them (Mendez, 2012; Mendez and Peña, 2013). Choosing autoethnography for this project allows the research-participant to share their motivations and emotional experiences and how they have shaped their decisions to pursue a Master of Arts

degree. Furthermore, the experiences will be used to offer possible insights into the study and program of higher education learning. The goal is to use autoethnography research to thoughtfully examine a degree program in higher education, aligning the methods to foster insights with the possibility of improving the process of degree attainment and student success.

Research Question

Autoethnography was decided for this research study because two attempts of completing a thesis project were met with circumstances beyond the researcher's control and were unable to come into fruition. The limited timeframe to complete a third thesis project was to offer the motivations and emotional experiences of the researcher and how these events affected the perseverance to complete the Master of Arts degree program. Autoethnography became the method to convey the motivations and emotional experiences designed to share, support, and offer insights to other students, but importantly to the program of higher education. As a result, autoethnography is the research method that will address the question: How do my experiences as a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program specifically, and the study of higher education more broadly?

Theoretical Framework

In researching the theoretical frameworks of autoethnography and narrative storytelling, I uncovered issues about social and cultural status, masculinity, and emancipation through education through the perspective of critical race theory (CRT). A central strategy of CRT, counter-storytelling refers to the use of empirical, experiential knowledge by marginalized and underrepresented individuals and groups to disrupt dominant ideologies (Matusda, M. J.,

Lawrence, C. R., Delgado, R. & Crenshaw, K. W. (1993). 1993; Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Kendall, T. (1995); Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2003, 2006; McMorris, 1999; Parker, 2003; Yosso, 2005). Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) was felt throughout the process of the research-participant's narration and storytelling. LatCrit can be described as a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that effect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 479). This study will use CRT and LatCrit as the theoretical framework to understand the motivations, emotions, and lived experiences that generated the themes throughout the research which have been explored and analyzed. An additional aim is to offer insights through the analysis of the themes researched towards higher education and the possibilities of enhancing or supporting specifically the Master of Arts degree program and the students enrolled therein.

Thesis Outline

Chapter One provides the reader with an overview of the statement of the purpose and why autoethnography was chosen for this study. In this chapter I state the research question and the theoretical framework that supports the research. In Chapter Two, I develop the theoretical framework and its alignment with autoethnography. Following a self-analysis, I consider the implications of inequality in education especially for Latinos in graduate school. Chapter Three moves into the methodology strategy and autoethnography which will support the alignment with the theoretical framework and the data collection. The chapter provides an overview of the site, selection, recruitment, consent, and coding process where the confidentiality and pseudonyms will be discussed. Reflexive documentation and the semi-structured interviews will lead the reader into the limitation of the research along with the role of the researcher and the conclusion

of the chapter. Chapter Four leads the reader into the findings of the study starting with the participant then describing the emerging themes that became apparent during the coding process. Three main themes emerged. These themes include, Family, Masculinity, and The Importance of Education as Emancipation. In the concluding Chapter Five, the researcher provides a discussion of his self-reflection and offers concluding statements shedding light upon both personal experiences what these may mean for other Latinos in graduate school. To finalize Chapter Five, the researcher will provide recommendations felt after conducting the study then following up with some final thoughts.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this chapter I will discuss how autoethnography and critical race theory are paralleled together. A review of the literature will provide insight into how autoethnography was introduced to the world and how it is comprised. I will then discuss the experiences of Latinos in higher education and also the experiences of Latinos in graduate school. I conclude with a summary of findings from the literature and how these relate to the experiences of a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master's degree in Higher Education Leadership.

Autoethnography Development

I am a first-generation middle-aged Latino pursuing higher education in a Master of Arts in Higher Education Leadership. The research question that I am striving to answer is, how do my experiences as a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program, specifically, and the study of higher education, more broadly? "Recasting my life" best describes the views and feelings that have moved me to pursue my education through graduate school. I believe in education and valued the significance it has in my life, the lives of my family, and the lives of those students who are like me who will make their own journey even after I have completed the program. It is my perspective that my experiences, challenges, and barriers that I have had to embrace will provide others some realization that in their own pursuits they may achieve the success that I have had the privilege to experience.

I had an awakening period when I realized my current employer and the position that I occupied would not warrant the opportunities for advancement. The experience confined me like a caged bird and I was at a crossroad to remain in a stifling position or to further my education. I knew that the graduate program would require of me hours and years of sacrifice that would take me away from my family and being the fatherly influence that was totally engaged in their lives until my journey was complete. My thoughts raced all around in my head and I wondered how and where I would find the time for my education, where do I place my responsibilities as a father, a husband, and a provider? Reflecting and relying on how I was raised and how my parents made sacrifices for our family, I knew that the only way to accomplish this task was to dive right in and move where the current would take me. I was out of my comfort zone and it was that feeling that became my motivation, my driving force to succeed at whatever the costs. I was saturated in the fear of not knowing how I was going to lead myself, my family, and the thought of being a role model for Latinos like myself was the furthest thought on my mind. The graduate program environment was foreign to me, I felt the Impostor Syndrome (Lippman, 2008), and I was scared. I gathered my courage, and focused on one class period at a time, one class project at a time, and continued that process which has led me to present to you the journey of my autoethnography.

Autoethnography and Critical Race Theory

In this section I present autoethnography as a method designed to identify the development and complexities of self-authoring experiences associated with the transition of higher education while pursuing a Master's degree and paralleling it with Critical Race Theory (CRT). Autoethnography along with CRT exposes the complexities which navigate experiences and tensions associated with privileged and oppressed identities, and issues of social class that

are referenced in contextual influences and identity dimensions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Historically, legal scholarship has given a rise to the development of CRT where race and racism from a legal perspective offers a perception through critical analysis. Since the inception of legal scholarship, CRT has crossed over into many disciplines (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) with many principles that help to explain the theory and connect it to autoethnography. These principles can be exemplified through various perceptions of learning and the changing relationships between race, racism, and power as by groups of interdisciplinary scholars and activists seeking the interests and understanding of these changing dynamics (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Self-Analysis and Autoethnography

As a qualitative research method, autoethnography is a useful tool that analyses people's lives through ethnography. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000) they define autoethnography as "...an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 739). Autoethnography crosses boundaries where personal experiences are explored and the parallels of research are specifically examined (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Maso, 2001). As a research-participant, the narrative analysis being conveyed is focused on relating to a specific phenomenon without the focus being placed on the actual research-participant but more importantly placed on how the information is critically developed towards the study. The description of self-analysis of an autoethnography is that they can be engaged as an insider or outsider to the phenomenon (theories, themes, ideas) where comparisons are being made. The voice conveying the information in question needs to be identified as either the researcher or the investigator to bring clarity to the identity of who is speaking.

Autoethnography has many lenses and focal points. Ellis (2007) offers a better understanding and description by stating that, “Doing autoethnography involves a back-and-forth movement between experiencing and examining a vulnerable self and observing and revealing the broader context of that experience” (p. 14).

Implications of Inequalities for Latino Education

In the process of reviewing literature on Latinos pursuing higher education, the literature shows that Latinos are rooted in a system of inequality (McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997). Latinos are less likely to earn a Bachelor’s, Master’s, and/or Doctoral degrees than any other racial or ethnic group in the United States, and have the highest high school drop-rate in the country with the exception of Native Americans (Bohon, Johnson, & Gorman, 2006). Compared to White and Asian American peers, it is the lower socioeconomic and underrepresented students that have fewer resources and guidance when navigating the college admissions processes (Hill, 2008; McDonough, 1997; Oakes, J., Rogers, J., Silver, D., Walladares, S., Terriquez, V., McDonough, P., et al. (2006); Walpole, 2007; Walpole et al., 2005). When access to college preparation resources are unequal, it becomes consequential to low-income and underrepresented students when educational outcomes are calculated and the “reproduction of a social-class-based [and race- and gender-based] stratified system of postsecondary opportunity that thwart meritocratic ideals” (McDonough, 1997, p. 150). In comparison to middle-class students, the lower test scores, the lower college eligibility rates, the lower college attendance rates, and the probability of attending graduate school, it is these underrepresented and lower socioeconomic students that are less likely to pursue higher education, graduate, or doctoral school historically (Mullen, Goyette, & Soares, 2003; Oakes et al., 2006; Walpole, 2007; Walpole et al., 2005; Zhang, 2005). Additional research has shown that people of color, low socioeconomic status, and

women, compared to White males and middle-class students are more likely than not, attending highly sought institutions (McDonough, 1997). When engaging in the college choice process, it is Latinos who are far less strategic about their application behaviors compared to all other student groups (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997). A reason for this lack of strategic planning can be made to the lack of identity representation of their own ethnic and racial group that has succeeded in the past that they can make a connection with and use as a resource to help perpetuate their own success (Robinson, W.H., McGee, E.O., Bentley, L.C., Houston, S.L., Botchway, P.K., Roy, R., (2015).

The Experiences of Latinos in Higher Education

First-generation Latino college students are at a disadvantage compared with other racial and ethnic minority groups for several reasons. These include, their lack of knowledge navigating the college environment and system or utilizing the resources that may be unfamiliar to them, identifying with a representative that is similar in their race or ethnic culture who has successfully navigated the process of higher education, and that they are the first in their families to attend college (Choy, 2001). It has been suggested that first-generation Latino students are less likely to transition academically when preparing for college and that their expectations of achievement in comparison with other racial or minority groups is less likely to be successful (Choy, 2001). It has also been suggested that first-generation Latino students are more likely to remain closer to home when applying for less selective colleges for reasons of perceived support from their families, and because of their own limited knowledge at navigating the college environment which prohibits them from seeking colleges further away from their family support system (Choy, 2001). According to Thayer (2000) given the lower retention rates of first-generation Latino students, compared to other ethnic groups and minorities, it takes about six

years to complete their degrees. In referencing professorates in the United States, Latinos account for 4.1% of their ethnic group which leaves fewer representatives for Latino students with which to identify (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). When there are limited racial and ethnic identifiable representatives that Latinos can make a connection with, it has an effect on their self-confidence and success (Robinson et al., 2015). Another example of a barrier and or challenge is conveying the value of academia to family members who are unfamiliar to the nuances of the college environment which leaves the student questioning if their pursuit is worth the sacrifice (Thayer, 2000).

The Experiences of Latinos in Graduate School

Latinos in graduate and doctoral school have historically been among the most marginalized and underrepresented students of all racial and ethnic groups (Bohon, et al., 2006). In comparison to White students, Latinos are less likely to attend a four-year university or secondary institution, they are less likely to become full-time students, thus less likely to complete a bachelor's degree, or pursue graduate school (Fry, 2010; Fry & Taylor, 2013). According to the National Science Foundation (2012), 6.3% of Latinos completed doctorate degrees compared to Whites who earned 74% of all earned doctorates. As Latinos make the transitions into higher education, research has found that challenges such as managing coursework, meeting obligations, and balancing the difficulties surrounding their transitions are reasons their high attrition rates (Gardner, 2009). Additionally, challenges in analyzing and thinking, to learning and knowledge producing, while transitioning as an undergraduate, to the expectations of graduate school productivity also contribute to their attrition rates (Gardner, 2009). When Latinos feel self-doubt or stress, these experiences can produce a psychological challenge which stifles their ability to complete their first year in higher education (Austin, J.,

Cameron, T., Glass, M., Kosko, K., Marsh, F. Abdelmagid, R., & Burge, P. (2009); Golde, 1998; Goplerud, 1980; Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Tokuno, 2008; Van Dongen, 1998).

Examples of resources that are essential for Latinos to succeed in higher education include nurturing an environment that creates social capital (Vasquez-Salgado, Greenfield, Burgos-Cienfuegos, 2015); providing assistance to navigate the processes of graduate school (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015); providing a network where their socialization and their academic development is supported (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). These examples may play a vital role in ensuring the success of Latinos, and the achievement of their goals when they are making that transition into graduate school (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Furthermore, a note worth mentioning, as a first-generation Latino shares their academic goals with their family, the family is supportive of their decision but may be skeptical about the distance when their student moves far away from home, and also about the time it takes to achieve degree attainment (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015).

The positives that first-generation Latinos experience in higher education include better representation among scholars who have developed and created pathways for themselves as they achieved their academic goals. When scholars are sharing their journeys, their interests, and their challenges which helped them achieve their educational goals, they help to give confidence and support to first-generation Latino students who are also challenged and struggling while engaging in their own educational pursuits (Thayer, 2000). Having an environment where social capital is cultivated and where the knowledge to navigate the environment of graduate school plays a vital role in their ability to become successful and achieve their goals (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015).

Summary

The literature clearly suggested that it is important to have the resources available to Latinos to assist in navigating graduate school. It is important to understand the implications of racism in higher education as a barrier that one must overcome if they are underrepresented but are still going to progress and succeed in a White-dominated arena of education. The literature also speaks to the supportive role of involving one's family in the student's goals of academic attainment even though some families have never attempted to pursue higher education or stepped onto a college campus (Vasquez-Salgado et al., 2015). Having advisors who are knowledgeable and who can explain a career path when pursuing a graduate degree is important in the student's success (Segura, 2003). The importance of having Latino/a scholars who have similar backgrounds or have had similar experiences that one can identify with is essential in the growth and progress of Latinos in higher education (Segura, 2003). Creating social capital and an environment where socialization of supportive groups that cultivate success plays an important role in the ability of Latinos ability to complete college and to have the knowledge of applying for graduate school (Segura, 2003).

In Chapter Three the discussion will transition from the methodology strategy and autoethnography and how they are in alignment with the theoretical framework. The data collection, coding process, and limitations and the relations they bring to the methodology will be discussed in greater detail.

Chapter Three

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methods which I have used to answer the research question: “How do my experiences as a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program specifically, and the study of higher education, more broadly?” I will discuss the methodology strategies supporting this research design, along with the theoretical frameworks used to provide alignment of my framework and discuss my positionality as a researcher-participant.

Methodological Strategy: Autoethnography

Autoethnography was first rooted in ethnography, which has been shaped by the study of cultural anthropology and focuses on context-conscious recollection and research (Creswell, 2007). Autoethnography is the qualitative research method that utilizes data about the self and its context to gain an understanding of the connection between the self and others within the same context (Chang, 2007; Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnography is self-focused. In other words, autoethnography systematically approaches the collection of data, analysis, and interpretation about the self within the larger context of social phenomena. The systematic and intentional approach socio-cultural autoethnography is known as a set of beliefs, customs, practices and behaviors that exist within a population that is being conveyed by the researcher-participant (Chang, 2008). The researcher-participant is intending to make connection with others, connecting themselves socially, and connecting themselves to the context being conveyed (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Wolcott, 2004). This focus means that autoethnography connects to the similarities of others sharing like experiences and values of self, and those with different values and experiences, to those with values and experiences seemingly irreconcilable

with one's own which are often present in the stories of our lives (Chang, 2008). The autoethnography process comes together by exploring how the context surrounding self, influences and shapes one's experiences, and how we respond, react or resist to forces innate to the context which we are interrogating (Chang, 2008).

This design method allows the researcher-participant to answer the research question mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. It is anticipated that presenting the researcher-participant's experiences can offer perceptions into higher education specifically, and the graduate program that can be useful for others to achieve success as they make their own transitions.

Alignment with Theoretical Framework

Recalling earlier, autoethnography is self-focused with the researcher-participant at the center of the investigation as both the object and the subject being researched (Chang, 2008). The data gathered provides the researcher-participant a perspective from which the external world is understood. The researcher-participant's validity and truthfulness of their experiences can be challenged when scientific credibility of the methodology is challenged (Anderson, 2006; Holt, 2003; Salzman, 2002; Sparkes, 2002). However, autoethnography research provides opportunities to gain confidential accessibility into sensitive issues, life changing events, and experiences which make the research method a unique tool for individuals and social understanding quite powerful (Ellis, 2007).

A theoretical framework applicable to my research is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Also known as critical ethnographies, these "are a type of ethnographic research in which the author is interested in advocating for the emancipation of groups marginalized in our society" (Creswell, 2007 p. 467). Counter-storytelling also aligns with CRT in that it uses observational, and

experiential knowledge of people that are underrepresented or marginalized that disrupt dominant ideologies (Matsuda et al., 1993; Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2003, 2006; McMorris, 1999; Parker, 2003; Yosso, 2005). According to CRT, working to understand the evolving political context that formulates the crossroads of race and established institutions, and racial intersections are the perspectives that this research seeks to explore through the actual experiences of the researcher-participant shares with the reader.

Autoethnography Data Collection

According to Ellis and Bochner, “autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno), and on self (auto) such that different exemplars of autoethnography fall at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.740). The connection between the narration, description, analysis, and interpretation varies when each is given emphasis but correlating with the others. The continuum could be presented as in Figure 1.

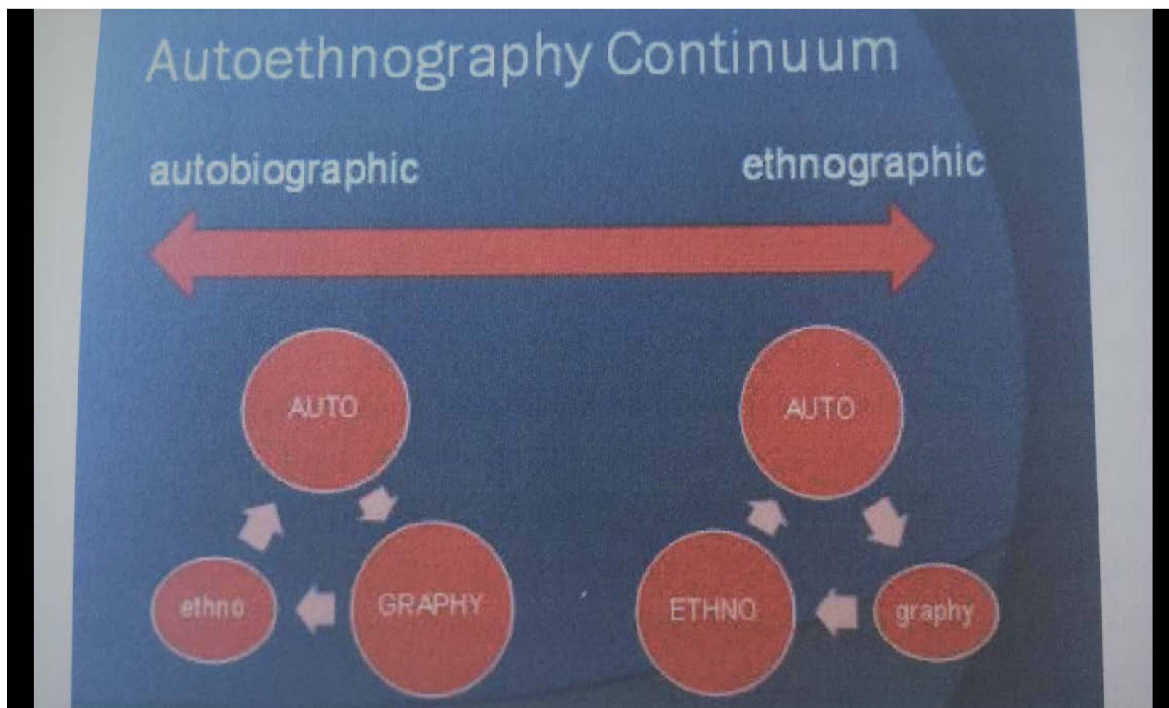


Figure 1. Autoethnography continuum, adapted from Ellis and Bochner (2000).

Wherever one may be on the continuum, autoethnography represents a mix of artistic representation, scientific inquiry, self-narration, and ethnography. However, one could argue that some presentations of autoethnography, particularly in the way they are presented, offer more emphasis towards art, whereas others provide more purposeful attempts at traditional scientific analysis. Moreover, the position which one is on regarding that continuum could also be in flux, continuing to change according to the particular writing project and the goals of the researcher-participant (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Site Selection, Recruitment, and Consent

The setting and location which this research project was conducted was at Southern Western Coastal University (SWCU). The university is a Hispanic-serving Institution that offers multiple Master's degrees, one with an emphasis in Higher Education. As a researcher-participant, I consented and recruited myself because in two previous attempts to complete the thesis project, I was met with challenges that did not allow me to do so. The SWCU student demographics are broken down as such, the total Race and Ethnic Composition Count Percent Hispanic or Latina/o at this university is n=3517 or 50% of all students at the university. Twenty-nine percent of all students are White (n=2019), six percent are unknown (n=449), 5% are Asian students (n=383), 4.5% are multiracial (n=320). Two percent of all remaining students at SWCU are African American/Black, and less than half a percentage point are Native Americans or Alaskans (n=26). International students account for 2% (n=158), and Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander are the smallest population at 0.1% (n=9). The total underrepresented minority population at SWCU is approximately 53% (n=3715). (CSUCI, 2017). The importance of these

figures supports SWCU as a Hispanic-serving institution and also provides insight into the diversity of the campus environment.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Three one-on-one interviews were scheduled at the participant's convenience to gather the data necessary. The interviewer was the researcher-participant's thesis advisor. The researcher-participant selected and secured a meeting location where one interview was conducted in person and the others were undertaken virtually over a digital conferencing platform. The interviews were recorded with multiple audio recording devices to secure the data which was outsourced to be transcribed. The time it took to conduct one interview was approximately 60 minutes. The interviewer began asking the research-participant about his educational experiences during his childhood and adolescence, higher education, and post graduate education periods. The researcher-participant was asked to elaborate on any and all challenges and experiences that resulted while engaged in the three different time periods of his life. When the interviewer wanted more clarity they continued probing with questions like "tell me more about..." and "I hear you saying..." or "could you elaborate more on..." which allowed the researcher-participant to bring additional clarity to the subject being discussed. The goal of the interview was to assist in locating themes relevant to pursuing a Master's degree, while offering any insights specifically directed towards higher education.

Coding Process

I outsourced the audio recordings for transcription in order to expedite the process of coding. Using the text data, I divided the coding process into segments that allowed for multi-stepped coding. As such, I carefully examined the transcribed text of the semi-structured

interviews and looked for areas that were redundant or overlapping and placed these codes into segmented themes that supported my research project (Creswell, 2007).

Confidentiality and pseudonyms

To secure confidentiality, a pseudonym was used to describe the university. No pseudonym was used for the researcher-participant because he is the object and subject of the study.

Reflexive Documentation

Self-reflecting of the researcher-participant's experiences and validity was a concern of the language translation. When processing this autoethnography, I used audio recording devices to keep an accurate account of the content conveyed and to be as truthful as possible. A written journal was also used to help in the recollection of events. The audio recordings and journaling were used to improve the credibility of the experiences foretold.

Limitations

The objectivity of my limitations through my reflections and experiences are truthful and validated but can also be construed by some as flaws within the research project because of issues of credibility and legitimacy. Limitations and weaknesses can affect the results of autoethnography research, but they are also areas where further examinations of the data can be measured in support of, or to eliminate questions about the research as a scientific study. As a researcher-participant, my limitations can be enumerated and also be relatable to the inadequacies of the measurable errors with which the analysis and the data collection is conveyed to the readers (Creswell, 2007).

Role of the Researcher

My entire research project, from the methodological strategies to the topic of choice, and all my findings are derived from the knowledge that I have gained from my own experiences. This leads me to the answer the question: “Who am I within the scope of the research?” My identity is prominently construed as a multiracial middle-aged Latino who is living in 21st-century America. I am a graduate student seeking to understand the study of oneself through the lens of an autoethnography research study. I make no illusions to dispel that the accuracy of the experiences presented hold the utmost validity and truthfulness therein and are a consistent portrayal of myself as such.

Conclusions

In this chapter I sought to provide justification and an accurate account of the methodological choices that I chose for this project. The goal was to align my research question to my methodology, theoretical frameworks, a valid account and trustworthiness of my experiences, and to answer the question: How do my experiences as a middle-ages Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program specifically, and the study of higher education, more broadly?

In the next chapter, I invite the reader to know about me, my story, and the themes that align with my research question and methodology.

Chapter Four

Findings

In previous chapters I discussed why I chose to write an autoethnography and I provided relevant research which explains my strategies and methodological choices. The preceding chapters have been guided by my research question, how do my experiences as a middle-aged, Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program specifically, and in the study of higher education more broadly?

In this chapter I highlight the themes and sub-themes that inform the research question. I ask the reader to keep in mind that the researcher-participant's story is unique and multifaceted. Examined are insights into the program specifically and how these experiences can offer the programs of higher education in a broader sense any educational knowledge to support the needs of other students currently in or contemplating to attend a graduate program.

The Participant

The participant is a 51-year old middle-aged, first-generation Latino. He is identified as biracial. As mentioned in the last chapter, I did not use a pseudonym because the method of this research focused on autoethnography. The description of the researcher-participant is described in the narrated story that follows below.

Emerging Themes

Using the coding processes described in Chapter Three, I identified three main themes along with sub-themes that made themselves felt throughout the research. The themes are family,

masculinity which explores the culture of machismo, and the role of the provider. The last is the importance of education as emancipation. What follows is the description of the themes through the recollection of awareness and experiences by the researcher-participant.

Family

Father. My father grew up in late 1940's, he is the second oldest of eleven children, and he met my mother in high school, married her, and started a family soon after his graduation. As a foreman in the family farm laboring business, he would move our family from city to city wherever the seasonal produce needed to be harvested, and wherever he had to move, we moved. Owing one vehicle, I learned that whatever my father needed to perform his job was the most important issue to address despite all our other needs. That was just the way it was in our home. My father was the provider and he ruled with a firm hand. My father had a difficult time showing love and affection because his own father had eleven children to support and did not make the time to show love and affection because he was always working. Machismo is a sense of masculine pride and an exaggerated sense of power and strength, with my father exemplifying that, he instilled in me that that was what a man should be like. Emotions and crying were a sign of a man's weakness and hiding your emotions was a good thing to do my father once told me. My father told me one day, graduate from high school, get a good job, and help to support the family is what a young Latino is supposed to do. This was the norm. The question of attending college was brought up one day, and with my mother and father never seeking to pursue higher education themselves, the idea of attending college did not really have a chance to blossom because I really did not have the support or resources to make it possible. I repeatedly recall my father mentioning to me that working was a way to help support the family, pay my own way, and eventually support my own family by working for good companies like General Motors or

other companies which offers a good pension, medical benefits, and a good retirement program. My father was a proud and strong man and he was a product of his own environment, his own father, and eventually became a machismo man.

Mother. My mother met my father in high school, dropped out of in the eleventh grade, married, and started a family. In the era when television shows like *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, or *Leave it to Beaver*, the constitution of marriage and family took on a simpler role where women were homemakers, tending to the needs of children, PTA boards, and the fathers would go to work and provide a means to support his family. My mother did not buy into the machismo way of thinking and nurtured in the most loving and compassionate way that she knew how. My mother, a devout Catholic woman taught me religion, discipline, mannerisms, and respect for myself, others, and especially towards women. She also taught me that it was okay to show emotion, let your feelings be known and validated, and to love and cry did not make you less of a man. My parents clashed with this notion because my father did not want me to be “pansy” and my mother did not want me to a macho jerk. My mother mentioned to me that my father’s way of showing tough love and being machismo was not the only way to raise a young man. My mother brought stability to our home. Since we were always moving from one place to the next, she demanded respect, and hard work in every facet of our lives and especially at home when completing our chores around the house. Settling in Santa Paula, a small farming community, I began to see my father less and this was about the time that my mother assumed the responsibilities to provide for her children in the absence of my father. Witnessing my mother assume the roles of providing and sacrificing for her family was a lesson that I have come to replicate and practice within my own family, my education, and my employment positions.

Extended Family. Extended Family is like what the right hand is to the left hand, they just go hand-in-hand. My extended family consisted of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and really close friends that were instrumental with helping care for the, financial, spiritual, emotional, and disciplinary support of my family. Combining our resources was the nucleus that kept our family and our extended family relationships strong especially during difficult times. Family gatherings like bar-b-ques, weddings, funerals, birthdays, holidays, and Sundays, were social events that allowed for the families to come together to share a meal but to also address challenges or issues depending on their severity. Our family gatherings were opportunities to showcase our cultural capital, pay our respect towards our elders, but more importantly, a place where we could be our true selves within our own skin and without prejudice. These were times where everyone was welcomed, all the worries of the world were put on hold, and the focus was just being together in solidarity as a family. Many lessons and traits were passed down from our elders to the younger generations like proper mannerisms, self-respect, respect for your elders, respect for others, self-discipline, strong work ethics, and a continual evolution of building social and cultural networks and capital.

Through autoethnography, the theme of extended family allows the research-participant to paint for the reader a vivid picture of the character which is being crafted by the descriptions of the stories shared. Throughout the combined themes, “the personality of this character acquires shape, force, and meaning through representations of questions and concerns, actions and passions, personal and professional life” (Goodall, 2000, p. 69). This allows the reader to connect and identify with the memories and experiences which are conveyed, helps the reader to resonate with the story within their own life experiences (Goodall, 2000). Wanting a more personal, collaborative, and interactive relationship, autoethnography allows the researcher-

participant to use human experiences to show others through an introspective lens, how students who may be challenged pursuing higher education, can identify with someone who may have or had experiences similar to them, and can seek support through a common experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Masculinities

Culture of Machismo. Culture of Machismo is one that focuses on a strong sense of masculine pride and an exaggerated sense of strength and power. The culture that I was a part of taught me to be an athlete. Being an athlete and competing with a win at all costs attitude was instilled by my father and which was taught by his father. Sports were the masculinity proving ground exhibiting acts of strength and power. While playing football or baseball I would be praised and rewarded for taking an opposing player out of the game with a crushing blow or taking a hard slide at second base to break up a double play. I learned that being machismo from an early age was the way males in the Latino culture should emulate. Masculine, strong, a good provider and protector were just a few of the characteristics that I was bred to be like. Domineering over your female partners was also a form of machismo and was what I thought was the norm according to my father, but my mother taught us that it was not so. Crying was a form of appearing weak and was a sign of lacking in machismo-ness.

The Provider. Being a provider became a theme worth mentioning after witnessing the sacrifices that my parents encountered while addressing the needs of the family. My mother working two jobs, my father working where the produce seasons would take him, exemplified doing whatever one had to do to provide. What parents do when they have a family to support, weighing out the sacrificial costs, are lessons that I practice to this day. Collaborating resources within the extended family has also proven to be vital in keeping the family together and

supporting one another today. Providing opportunities for the families to come together has taught the younger generations socialization, adaptability, and the value of social and cultural capital. The perseverance and sacrifices that I have engaged in as a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master's degree has been guided by the lessons and the examples set forth by my parents and my extended family.

The Importance of Education as Emancipation

The History of our Ancestors. The history of our ancestors was to create a better way of living not only for themselves, but for ourselves, the children and the extended families. My grandparents started a family business that employed their children and the extended families with the hopes and dreams that all would prosper and experience an improved way of living. The business was passed down to my father, his siblings, and the extended family of cousins, aunts and uncles. Back then, advocating for education as emancipation began with the improvement of the productivity of labor and products to the market. Eventually family members began to emancipate themselves by attaining a college education which was a means to remove themselves from the labors of the fields. Prospering in education would eventually help to pave the way for additional family members seeking higher education as a way of improving their lives and others around them. A labor foreman, a seamstress, a housecleaner, and a stay at home mother were the employment positions that my parents undertook to provide for their children. I wasn't fully aware at the time of the value of the sacrifice that my parents endured for me and my siblings, but as I reflect today, I am humbled and grateful as they did their best to offer a better life than what they experienced growing up. My father eventually obtained a real estate broker license and my mother found a clientele of esteemed homes to clean which offered a higher salary. The increased salary kept my mother from having to hold down two jobs to help

support the family. Today, sacrifice and hard work exemplified by my parents has shown me that with the same dedication, drive, and perseverance, are the building blocks that I have come to embrace while pursuing my goals and dreams in higher education.

Personal History. My personal history has impacted the way I perceive and advocate for education not only for myself but for my own family and others pursuing higher education. I experienced the Impostor Syndrome because I felt that I was not smart enough to navigate the college environment and compete with the other students in the classroom. I felt like I did not belong in the graduate program because I was sixteen years removed from the field of education and had a hard time articulating. I also faced language barriers because I did not know how to, or feel comfortable to express my ideas, thoughts, or perspectives in an educated and an intellectual way. These were obstacles made me feel less adequate and confident about transitioning into higher education. Having experienced a fire that destroyed twenty-two years of everything that I ever owned including my original thesis project, having suffered two strokes shortly afterwards, having my second thesis attempt fail, and rescuing and retrieving my college daughter from a horrific car accident, I credit and pay homage to the support of my thesis advisor, colleagues, family, friends, strangers, but most importantly, my faith in God which helps me persevere with my education. The challenges and experiences that I witnessed my parents endured are the driving forces that have propelled my efforts into never giving up while pursuing a Master's degree in Higher Education Leadership. This driving force and my experiences fuels my passion to help others obtain their educational goals and improve their own social and cultural capital. Emancipation through education allows me to advocate for others and become a representative that despite adversity, we can succeed if we put our resources together to reach our goals. My personal history is a testament to never give up and even though you may get knocked down,

getting up and placing one foot in front of the other will help you reach the finish line. My favorite quote is “It is not the dog in the fight, but the fight that is in the dog.” I am the fight that is in the dog.

Conclusion

The themes that arose from the interviews, transcribing, and coding processes are a by-product of the challenges and experiences that I endured throughout my life but more importantly as a college graduate student. These themes are simple and are less complex but are as follows: family, extended family and father and mother, masculinities, the culture of machismo and the provider, and the importance of education as emancipation through the histories of our ancestors and our own personal histories. The correlation of these threadlike themes are the fibers that make the quilt which weaves the connection between my challenges and experiences and my pursuit of higher education.

Consequently, this chapter had two secondary aims. The first was to address the experiences associated with the research-participant and the pursuit of a Master’s degree in Higher Education. The second was to show, specifically, how they provide insights into the program and the study of higher education more broadly.

In the next chapter, I embark on a discussion of how the findings presented here relate to the larger structural and theoretical conversations. I leave the reader with the question: How do my experiences as a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program, specifically, and the study of higher education more broadly?

Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

In Chapter One I outline the rationale and purpose of this project. I argue that an autoethnography is a useful methodology to examine the intersection of my own story as a foundation for understanding the experiences of a middle-aged, Latino in a Master of Arts in Higher Education Leadership program. In Chapter Two, I provide a succinct review of the literature which focuses on autoethnography. In this chapter, I also define the theoretical framework which guides this study. In this case, I consider my life experiences within the framework of critical race theory (CRT) a perspective which encompasses storytelling, family histories, testimonios, and chronicles and narrations. In Chapter Three I describe autoethnography as a self-reflexive methodology. In each chapter, I remind the reader of the research question that guides this project. This research question is: How do my experiences as a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program specifically, and the study of higher education more broadly?

Chapter Four introduced the study's participant and after collecting, transcribing, and coding my story as a middle-aged, Latino graduate student in a Master of Arts program, three themes emerged. These themes are explored in Chapter Four and include family, masculinities, the importance of education as emancipation. Chapter Four demonstrated the range of experiences I have encountered as a middle-aged, Latino in higher education.

In this chapter I will use the literature, narration, and the experiences I encountered to reflect on my life as a middle-aged Latino and how my story is associated with higher education. This chapter will provide insights into the findings from Chapter Four and consider them in light of the larger theoretical framework. The research-participant's standpoint in relation to education along with cultural practices presented themselves through the lens of Latino, student, minority, a family member, and a role model. Finally, connecting the experiences, literature, and the research study can bring an awareness from which Latinos can learn and prosper.

Personal Experiences

My personal and cultural experiences have impacted the decisions I made to pursue higher education for reasons of social and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). The partial and reflexive story of my life presented here may offer other Latino graduate students a representative which they may readily identify with when engaged in their own academic and educational pursuits. Also, it is important to connect with others within one's cohort and with one's professors to ensure student success.

Humbling life experiences like losing everything you have ever owned because of a fire, suffering two strokes, has fueled the desire to complete the graduate program. Persevering after a fire, two strokes, and having to revisit two previous thesis projects due to circumstances beyond my control is a testament to my willingness to succeed whatever the costs may be. The attainment of a Master's degree will improve the social and cultural capital of not only myself but for my family, and other Latinos who may identify my experiences.

Latinos in Graduate School

A Latino in graduate school has many meanings. A Latino is a representation that others see themselves identifying with, offering reassurance knowing there are graduate students that have gone through similar situations that most students endure. The commitment and dedication which it took to graduate provides confidence for other Latinos to succeed (Robinson et al., 2015). Latinos have one of the lowest graduation rates in higher education (Bohon, et al., 2006). Understanding the underrepresentation of Latinos at a university helps to explain, in part, our experiences feeling like an imposter and as someone who does not fit or belong in the college environment (Lippman, 2008). Also, Latinos who never had family attend college may be asked by their family if their pursuit is worth the sacrifice and their time.

Having more Latinos in higher education will help the community acquire the resources needed to succeed across generations as well as facilitate the transition into the college environment (Yosso, 2005). Having representatives who are knowledgeable about the educational navigation process helps with the student's confidence as they move forward. Fostering an environment where Latinos feel safe and secure to congregate, study, and relax may also have productive effects on student transitions (Gardner & Holley, 2011). By having more Latinos in higher education, not only are we empowering the individual, but empowering the social capital of the family, thus empowering their communities with educated individuals. Latinos that are in higher education and are graduating become leaders, and role models for the communities, within Hispanic-serving (and other) institutions, and for future Latino graduates.

Recommendations

Recommendations that should be considered are having a designated readily identifiable place for students to congregate, study, and associate in a comfortable environment. Having representatives that have made the journey that most of the Latino students are engaged in is important because the students have leadership that they can identify with. Resources that are easy to access and visible to the students is also a recommendation that is vital in the student's success. Such recommendations have already been brought to the attention of colleges and universities about properly serving the needs of Latino students so that this is nothing new to report. However, improving the programs that make these resources highly visible and easier to access will only further support the changing needs of Latino students in the future.

Conclusions

Throughout this study, I have strived to answer the question: How do my experiences as a middle-aged Latino pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership at a Hispanic-serving institution offer insights into the program specifically, and the study of higher education more broadly? This question has led me to question how critical race theory along with LatCrit theory are used to reflect and inform understanding of the experiences that I shared and how they play a role in the development of other Latino students in higher education. In keeping with the conventions of qualitative research, I have explored personal experiences, and in doing so have generated three themes applicable to the research question mentioned: family, masculinity, and the importance of emancipation through education. I have recommended for colleges and universities that wish to support their Latino population to provide designated formal and informal places where Latino students can meet, associate, and study. Cultivating an environment that is highly visible for Latino students to identify with faculty and staff

representatives that can help with navigation, support, and resources that Latino students need to be successful is essential. This is my conclusion in a conventional sense. It is my journey and my experiences in pursuing my Master of Arts degree in Higher Education Leadership that I can share with others specifically, but it is also the barriers and challenges which I have faced that others can identify with, that I can broadly share and bring to the program of higher education.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Introduction and greetings:

Thank the participant for attending the meeting. Describe the project.

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Tell me about your childhood.

What has it been like for you growing up?

How would you describe your experiences at school?

HIGHER EDUCATION EXPERIENCES

Tell me about your experiences in higher education.

What did you study?

What resources were available to you?

Were any of these resources more helpful than others?

POST GRADUATE EDUCATION

Tell me about your life after you graduated from the university?

What motivated you to return to university after your undergraduate degree?

Given your experiences, in your view, how might we make the world more just?

What life lessons would you like to share with the readers of my thesis?

I would love to know why you agreed to tell me your story?