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A critical reflection of the self: An autoethnography of a Mexican American educational leader

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A CRITICAL REFLECTION OF THE SELF: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF A MEXICAN AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL LEADER

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

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This autoethnographic study seeks to explain how my "lived experiences" both personal and academic have had a profound effect on the course of my life. Autoethnography has allowed me to utilize "reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection" to "invoke" readers to enter into my "emergent experience" of doing and writing research. As a first generation, Latina, migrant, high school dropout, I was destined to fail according to research. Through the use of *testimonies,* I have inscribed the struggles and understanding, creating new knowledge, and affirming my epistemology by writing about what I know best, "familia, barrio, life experiences." Through *testimonio* pedagogy, we are able to "hear and read each other's stories through voices, silences, bodies, and emotions and with the goal of achieving new *conocimientos*, or understandings." In moving from silence to debate, I, like many other Chicanas," have interrogated schemas of knowledge and social power."

This research study has uncovered significant findings which will enable future researchers to engage in meaningful changes that will provide Mexican-American students the tools to successfully navigate the educational pipeline. Research demonstrates how migrant families continue with their struggles related to "inappropriate living conditions and facilities, health issues, language barriers, and discrimination**.** Migrant students must endure the hardship caused

by the family's high mobility including discrimination, educational inequities, and a deficit thinking mentality that surrounds students of color. Discourse has been extended about the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation. The challenges have arisen in public education today because, traditionally, the practices and policies of public schools (including institutions of higher education) have enacted the cultural values, norms, and otherwise "privileged White," "male," "and "middle and upper class students."

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, David Villarreal, my unsung hero, who has been by my side for the past 35 years. His patience and understanding throughout my studies and my cancer has allowed me to see that there is still goodness in the world. My masterpieces, as I like to call my two daughters, Karey Cecilia Villarreal and Karen Lillian Villarreal provided me with the much needed, support throughout my journey in life. I have been blessed with two beautiful, smart, and hard-working daughters who have served as my fuel to complete this project. Last but not least, my grandsons, Valente Iram Flores, Edren Eduardo Leanos, and David Adrian Leanos have been my inspiration, and to any future grandchildren I might have. I want this study to serve as their ultimate academic goal. I want them to know that anything in life can be accomplished if they set their mind to it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I am grateful to God, my almighty healer who has given me another chance at life without HIM I am nothing. I would also like to thank Dr. Francisco Guajardo, my committee chair for his guidance and support throughout this long and arduous process. His recommendations permitted me to push myself far beyond my limits. As a perfectionist, Dr. Guajardo never gave up on me, even when I felt I would give up on myself, and for that, I will be eternally grateful. I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Velma Menchaca, Dr. Miguel de los Santos, and Dr. Roberto Zamora for your guidance, feedback, and support throughout this study. All my professors in the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley also played an integral role in my preparedness for this phase in my life. I thank each, and every one of them for their commitment to education. I owe my parents Eligio and Aurelia O. Flores all that I am, and all that I have become. I thank them for instilling in me the importance of humility in everything that I do. They have taught me about strength, hard work, honesty, strong ethical values, and serving others. These principles have served as building blocks in my life. My long-time friend Martha Trevino served as my sounding board throughout this dissertation writing process. Her continuous motivation helped me move on when I felt I had nothing left in me to continue with this journey. Her statements, "You can do it, you're a fabulous writer, my beautiful friend" made me feel like I was on top of the world. She has often assured me that I can be the "voice" for the migrant children and

families. I thank her for always believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself. I am blessed to have such a wonderful and giving friend.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study on critical self-reflection and life- altering circumstances of my life as a school district administrator. Through auto-ethnography, I seek to discover how my life experiences were instrumental in the development of my self-identity as a school district educational leader and doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program. My life experiences, which have been humbling yet, insightful have provided me with the necessary tools required for obtaining new knowledge from an organic position (Delgado-Bernal, 2006). I've often heard people say how life has taken them through completely unexpected paths. Such was the case with me. As a migrant farmworker, my path has been saturated with incredible challenges which could have easily prevented me from succeeding, had it not been for my desire to escape the clutches of poverty in my barrio. The story of my family of migrant farmworkers was not much different from that of other migrant farm working families. Crossing the border from Mexico and enduring constant hardships seemed the natural path in reaching the American dream. Despite challenges and hardships, many migrant farmworkers exhibit both individual and family resilience (Kossek & Burke, 2014). As a farmworker's daughter, never in my wildest dreams did I imagine holding a leadership position in the school district I was enrolled in

as a recent immigrant student. The journey, however was not paved in gold. There were many battles to fight and many obstacles to overcome.

January15, 2012, was the day I would embark on the most arduous battle of all, a battle I could not afford to lose because it was the battle for my life. Much to my distress, I was diagnosed with a disease that made me tremble, cancer. Moadel-Robblee (2006) report that "around 40 percent of those living with cancer experience significant emotional distress" (p.1). In the midst of my devastating news, I received a message which would inspire me to continue fighting from a remarkable person, my mother. She said, "*Ahora no es cuando te vas a dar por vencida. Toda tu vida ha sido luchar y luchar y siempre has salido adelante. Hoy tienes que continuar luchando y también de esto vas a salir triunfante"*. "This is not the time for you to give up. Your whole life has been struggle after struggle and you've always managed to come out on top. You have to continue fighting and this you shall also overcome." My mother's sage words still echo in my mind today. Resiliency refers to "the capacity of human beings to survive and thrive in the face of adversity" (Bernard, Gillham & Reivich, & Seligman, 2005 p. 34). I've often wondered how, as a mother of three daughters who are cancer survivors, she finds it within her to be a pillar of strength for her family. As I reflect on this, I realize I'm fortunate to have such a strong family support system. My journey has just begun. This study chronicles my life and the resiliency within me that has always helped me survive.

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us"

-Unknown Author

A Vignette

The nurses whispered with each other as they quickly transported me from one hospital room to another. I asked them, "What's wrong"? One of them calmly responded that my heart

rate was slightly higher than what they'd like it to be. I later found out that "slightly" did not describe the situation I was in. I remember thinking, "Are nurses and other medical personnel required to take a course on how to stay cool and collected during emergency situations"? Once I was stationed in the second emergency room, a slew of nurses and doctors began rushing in. At this point, I realized something was seriously wrong. The multiple myeloma (cancer of the bone marrow) which had originally taken me to the hospital had already been eradicated. According to the National Cancer Institute (2015), multiple myeloma causes "frequent infections, anemia, bleeding, numbness or tingling, and weakness" (p. 123). Although I'd gone to the emergency room with heart palpitations, I didn't foresee it being anything serious. The autologous stem cell transplant I'd had a week earlier had been a complete success. According to the American Cancer Society, the heart should not be directly affected by the transplant. My situation continued to perplex doctors as they scrambled to attend to my condition. A short lady with auburn hair started giving everyone directions while a male nurse stood by my bedside comforting me. He kept asking, "How do you feel?" I told him, that aside from feeling a little out of breath, I felt fine. In the background, I could see my husband standing against the door holding my purse. He looked worried. The commotion inside the emergency room was so chaotic it reminded me of an episode of *House,* where doctors come together to determine the cause of a particular ailment. I mentioned this to the nurses. They found it amusing that I'd have a sense of humor during this critical moment.

After they were done stabilizing my heart rate, the short lady with the auburn hair approached me and introduced herself. Her first name was Carmen (her last name escapes me). She asked me, "¿C..ó..m..o….t..e…..l..l..a..m..a..s?" She spoke in slow motion, as if I was hard of hearing. I responded the same way, by stretching out my name. She then asked if I spoke

English. I told her I did. It turned out she was the doctor in charge in the emergency room. I asked her if she was Latina. She said she was. Because of the trials Hispanic women face in society, I felt proud that a female Latina would hold such a high stature in this hospital. I held up my thumb as a sign of respect and admiration. She smiled.

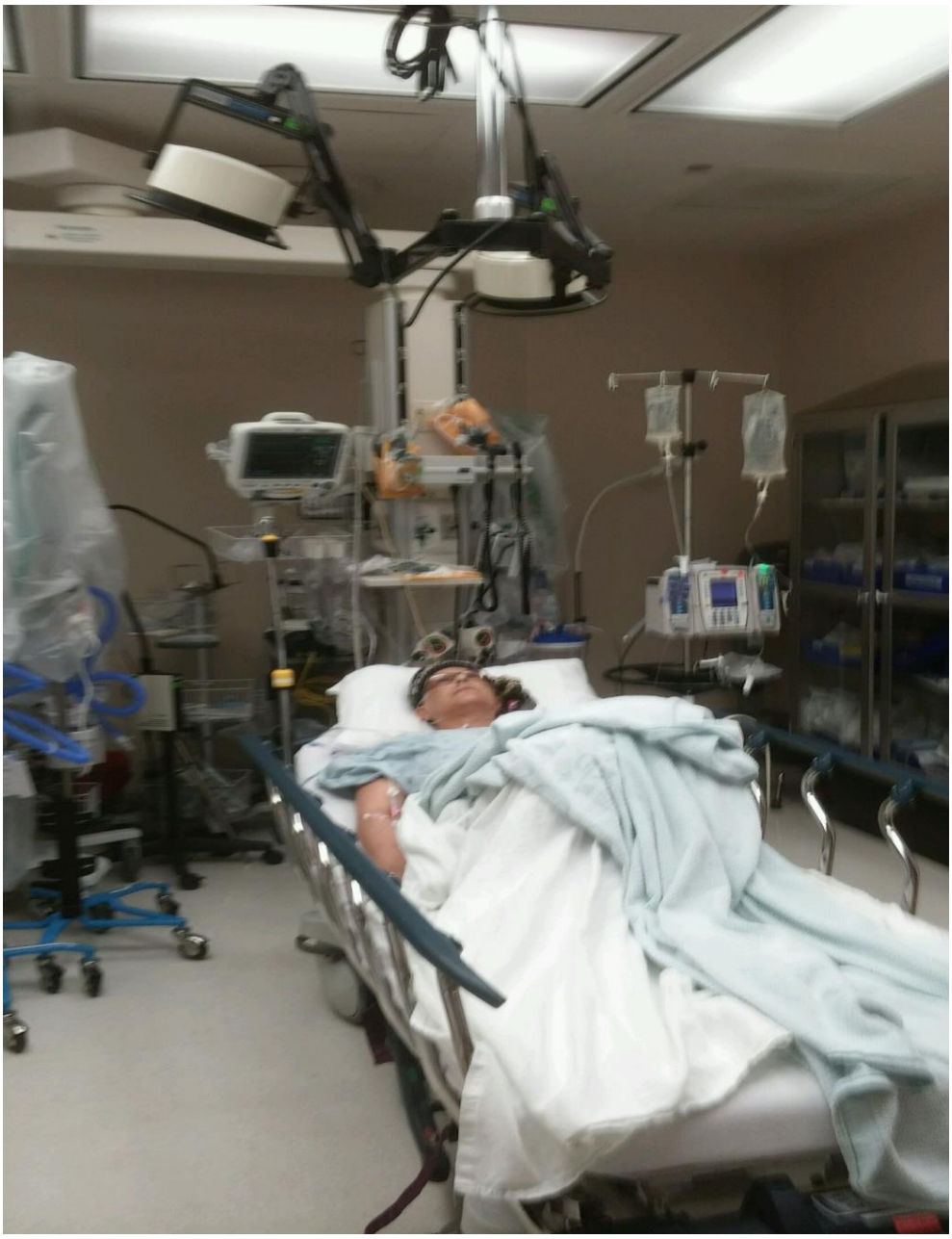

Figure 1: MD Anderson Picture

MD Anderson Cancer Center, November 11, 2014, Adriana Flores- Villarreal

Statement of the Problem

This dissertation is an auto-ethnographic study of my life and my personal experiences. Through the "rich description of personal stories" (Geertz, 1973) this study attempts to make sense of my life as a school leader, mother, grandmother, daughter and cancer patient. Through the use of stories, I will attempt to capture the audience's imagination. Stories in this context are processes through which society becomes culture. The stories are "meaningful selections, deliberate, or subconscious choices (Symons & Maggio, 2014) which I have chosen to construct my world views by connecting certain elements in specific ways" (p. 354).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) describe stories by people of color as a way to "catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism" (p.5). Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context. It also "connects to participants and invites readers to enter the author's world to understand and cope with their own lives" (Ellis, 2004 p. 13). I will use snapshots, artifacts/documents, metaphor, and psychological and literal journeys as techniques for reflecting on and conveying a "patchwork of feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviors that portray a more complete view of……life (Muncey, 2005 p. 74). I will also "consult with texts like photographs, journals, newspaper articles, and recordings to help with the recall" (Delany, 2004; Didion, 2005; Goodall, 2006; Hermann, 2005) (p.5).

The ethnographic data provided from the research will allow me to understand the external world and connect the self with others, the self with social, and the self with context (Reed-Dannahay, 1997; Wolcott, 2004). Ellis & Bochner, Richardson & St. Pierre, Holman Jones (2006) argue that "Through our writing and our talk we enact the worlds we study…by enacting a way of seeing and being, it challenges, contests, or endorses the official, hegemonic

ways of seeing and representing the other" (p. 423). The personal stories I share are meant to elicit an understanding of the researcher's "lived experience" (Bochner, 2013 p. 15). These narratives serve as "a means of knowing and a way of telling about the social world" (Bochner, 2014, p. 335)

As a Hispanic eight-year-old member of a migrant farm working family, I never would've envisioned I would ever meet an educated, successful, female Latina. However, unbeknownst to me at the time, the lessons I would learn in the home would prove to be instrumental in my academic and social success (Elenes, Trinidad, Villenas, Gonzalez, & Delgado-Bernal, 2006). Pedagogies of the home serve as culturally specific ways of organizing teaching and learning in informal sites such, as the home- ways that embrace Chicana and *Mexicana* ways of knowing and extend beyond formal schooling (Elenes, Trinidad, Villenas, Gonzalez, & Delgado-Bernal, 2006). My mother often stressed the importance of placing my cultural knowledge and language at the forefront to better understand lessons from the home (Delgado-Bernal, 2002). Although both of my parents had limited schooling, our home was always equipped with reading material. Like other Mexican parents, despite their low socioeconomic status, my parents held high educational aspirations for their children (Gandara, 1995; Ovando, 1977). "Lower levels of parental education and occupation do not necessarily translate into lower levels of encouragement and expectations by parents" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Ovando, 1977) (p. 945).

Dismantling Deficit Thinking

In education, the practice of holding low expectations for students with demographics that do not fit the traditional context of the school system is coined as deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997). The bureaucratic culture fosters the pervasive assumption that when students misbehave, or achieve poorly, they must be "fixed" because the problem inheres in the students or their

families, not in the social ecology of the school, grade, or classroom (Weiner, 2006). Valencia and Solorzano (1997) argued that "one aspect of deficit thinking that fails to die is the belief that low-income parents of color typically do not value the importance of an education, fail to inculcate such a value in their children, and seldom participate in the education of their children" (p.241). Other studies have shown that "Latino parents do, in fact place a high value on the education of their children" (Ceja, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gandara, 1995 p. 77).

As a child, I remember my parents and older siblings reading Mexican *novelas* and Mexican textbooks every day. This practice allowed my siblings and I to develop an appreciation for the written word. According to Chicana feminist pedagogies, community and family knowledge is taught to youth through such ways as legends, *corridos*, storytelling, and behavior. My grandfather told me stories of how as a child he once witnessed Pancho Villa, Mexican revolutionary and guerilla leader riding his horse through his town. As a child, I found it remarkable that my grandfather had been so close to such an iconic Mexican figure. Gandara (1995), for example, "looked at home influences that have facilitated the academic success of low-income Chicano children, particularly the role of family stories told by the parents" (p. 84). Valdes (1996) refers to the use of *consejos* or advice to "depict the manner by which Mexican parents articulate the importance of an education to their children" (Valdes, 1996 p.891). This wealth of household knowledge would subsequently help me overcome cultural constraints (Delgado-Bernal, 1998). As a third grade student, I didn't realize how these 'funds of knowledge' (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992) or "accumulated strategies of knowledge" would prove to be vital to my academic survival (Gonzalez, 1995; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992 p. 245).

As I have traveled the educational pipeline, my educational stories have unavoidably been impacted by the hegemony of dominant educational practices (Chavez, 2012). "Because

power and politics are at the center of all teaching and learning, the application of household knowledge to situations outside of the home becomes a creative process that allows individuals, such as myself to survive in a hegemonic environment" (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990, 1992, 1994; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 1995; Trueba 1988, 1991) (p. 28). "This perspective resonates with the ethnographic research that documents Mexicano/Latino teaching and learning as cultural strengths and demonstrates how children draw on their diverse linguistic and cultural resources to function in schools and society" (Delgado-Gaitán , 1990, 1992, 1994; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco 1995; Trueba 1988, 1991) (p.563). Angela Ginorio (2001) reports that "Hispanic girls have a higher high school dropout rate than girls in other racial or ethnic groups and are the least likely to earn a college degree" (p. 26) according to the American Association of University Women. As a high school dropout, I am part of this statistic. I engaged in meaningful learning which allowed me to work my way through the deficit thinking mentality which permeated every part of my life, however many minority students are not able to do this. I was fortunate and grateful to be an exception to the rule. Current national data show a "60% high school completion rate among Latino students" (Harvey, 2002 p. 64). In addition, "Latino students are less likely to enroll in a 4-year institution immediately after graduation" (Perna, 2000 p.56) "and more likely to be concentrated in the community college system" (Darden, Bagakas, & Armstrong, 1994 p. 342).

As a first generation, college-going Chicana student my parents influenced, continue to influence, and continue to support my educational goals and aspirations (Ceja, 2004). Understanding how parents influence the college aspirations of Chicana students is important given current educational statistics that reflect low levels of higher education participation among this group. Latina/o parents play a critical role in encouraging higher education through

the development of what Gandara (1995) calls a "culture of possibility". The possibility that educational achievement was attainable and available to everyone was ingrained in me at a very young age. It is not surprising that parental encouragement has also been shown to be associated positively with postsecondary educational plans (Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Ecstrom, 1985; Hossler & Stage, 1992 p. 87).

"A subset of findings from a five-year ethnographic study in a Colorado high school serves as the basis for a conceptual framework that honors what Chicana/o students identify as critical to their ability to succeed" (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004 p. 45). These studies suggest that "when teachers reach beyond the hegemony of English and the constraints of institutional structures, they are able to achieve a measure of transformation in their diverse classrooms" (p. 45). Diverse classrooms offer students the opportunity to learn about each other's cultural background. As a migrant student, my family traveled to many states throughout the United States. As a result, I developed an awareness and appreciation for students of diverse cultural backgrounds. Receiving instruction in English was the norm. Many educators, even in our community, believe that teaching students in their native language will automatically make the curriculum culturally relevant, (Valenzuela, 1999); however, this is not always the case. Valenzuela (1999) describes how "authentic caring is essential for student achievement, and how it can exist outside of an additive environment or curriculum" (p. 57). As a result, "these interpersonal connections are the ones that have profound consequences on how students' identities develop and how their academic resiliency is influenced" (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004) (p. 643). Erickson and Mohart (1982) suggest their notion of "culturally responsive" teaching can be seen as a beginning step for bridging the gap between home and school. These "culturally congruent" teacher interactions which use language patterns that approximate students' home

cultural patterns were more successful in improving student academic performance (Ladson-Billings, 1995) (p. 850).

Paulo Freire (1970) wrote that "revolutionary (not reactionary) teachers, establish a permanent relationship with students from subordinated cultures and languages" (p. 380). According to Freire, "the revolutionary teacher practices a humanizing pedagogy where the method of instruction ceases to be an instrument by which the teachers can manipulate the students, because it expresses the consciousness of the students themselves" (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004) (p. 38). Ogbu (1986) hypothesized that "students utilize positive or negative educational strategies in response to their schooling" (p. 45). In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros (2004) tells the story of Esperanza Cordero, who doesn't want to belong to the low expectations the world has for her. As a child, I felt the same way. I wanted to belong to a world where I felt successful and accepted. Although I didn't know about equality and the civil rights movement at this age, I knew I wanted to be treated like every other student. At the age of 12, I attended an elementary school in Florida City, Florida. I had attended many schools in many states prior to this one, therefore, I was quite adept at enrolling myself and my younger siblings. After dropping off each of my siblings at their assigned classrooms, I headed to mine. I composed myself before walking into my assigned classroom. I stated, "Good morning, my name is Adriana Flores and I am a new student from Texas." I handed the teacher my admission slip. He took my admission slip and stated, "I'm busy with these students, but there's some Spanish books for you to read in the library area". "I know how to read in English" I responded. He just looked at me and turned away. These subtle acts of micro-aggression (Yosso, 2009) from teachers were not the first I had encountered. According to Cummins, (1994), educator role definitions are educational structures of "the system" (Cummins, 1994). Educator role

Figure 2: Flores Family Picture

From left to right: Javier Flores, Jonas del Angel, Eligio Flores Sr., Cecilia Flores, Aurelia O. Flores (baby-Aurelia Flores), Sandra Flores Front row: Eligio Flores Jr., Adriana Flores.
Sodus, Michigan (1974)

definitions are defined as "the mindset of expectations, assumptions, and goals that educators bring to the task of educating diverse students." Solorzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) speculate that "reactionary responses and self-defeating resistance have negative educational outcomes, and conformist and transformational resistance can foster student achievement" (pg. 73).

In the model for Chicano/Mexicano students' academic success, "*consejos* are considered a special genre of verbal teaching that typically sounds like a spontaneous homily and is delivered with intent to influence behaviors and attitudes" (Valdés, 1996 p. 36). Most Mexican-American parents use *consejos* to help them guide their children. *Consejos* are a means through which knowledge is produced, "passed on," and negotiated (Villenas & Moreno, 2001). In a

study of students in gifted classes, Riojas-Clark and Gonzalez (1998) found that students succeeded when they were presented with opportunities to learn from and practice being *buen ejemplos*. This meant that students were presented with opportunities to serve as a good role model or to act in an exemplary way. Michele Serros (2000) *How to be a Chicana Role Model*, describes how a Chicana tries to find a way to "embrace two very different cultures-without losing touch with who she is" (p. 98). Many of our students share this struggle every day, communicating in Spanish with parents and interacting with teachers and peers in English. The emphasis on constant ongoing teaching through *consejos* reflects the types of values and interactions in Mexican households. According to Velez-Ibanez (1996), "Mexican children also have opportunities to visit and invest emotionally in a variety of homes and relations" (p. 348).

I, like many other Mexican-American children, was unsure about my ethnic identity as I struggled to assimilate to a new culture while attending various schools throughout the United States. *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodríguez* (1981) explores Richard Rodríguez's coming-of-age in an America that challenges him to understand what it is to be a Mexican American. Richard Rodriguez begins *Hunger of Memory* with a reflection on language and how it marked the beginning of his acculturation and subsequent disconnect from his family. He recounts the trouble he was having in school because of his limited English proficiency. Rodriguez insists that the Spanish language has no place in the education of children, that to "speak the public language of the '*gringos*'" is both a right and obligation (p. 10). He denounces bilingual programs and argues that full assimilation is necessary if children are to have public identities and the full rights of citizenship. It is argued that Rodriguez's own disconnection from his culture and family explains exactly why such programs are needed.

Many people in our community can relate to Rodriguez's stance. As an elementary student in the Rio Grande Valley, I was discouraged from speaking Spanish and only taught in English (Cervantes, 2006). This practice by school districts led to a negative attitude toward the Spanish language by many students and adults in our community. Anzaldua (1987) speaks of this struggle by saying, "because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other" (p. 58). I would eventually learn how my bilingualism would have a positive impact on me academically and socially. I would learn to draw strength from using both Spanish and English in academic and social settings (Delgado-Bernal, 2001).

As a high-achieving Latina student, I was able to move successfully and fluidly between the culture of the barrio (Gándara, 1995) of the fields and the culture of high -achieving Anglos. These findings suggest that bicultural dispositions are essential for the academic success of Chicanos/Mexicanos/Latinos (Franquiz & Salazar, 2004). This network constitutes 'funds of knowledge' (Moll & Gonzalez, 1992); and zones of comfort that convey a sense of mutual trust or *confianza* to ensure students gain a sense of self-identity (Velez-Ibáñez, 1996). However, in his struggle to find his voice, Richard Rodriguez (1981) denounces all aspects of bilingualism. Rodriguez writes, "Bilingual education prevents children from learning the public language that will be their passport to success in the public world" (p. 200). As a public school educator, I have witnessed first-hand how many parents of Mexican-American children refuse for their children to be taught in Spanish. They believe the English language is the only way their children will assimilate and succeed in school and society.

The Glass Ceiling

For many Latinas/os, common cultural norms that drive attitudes and behavior, including degree completion, are further defined by gender. "Women remain under-represented in top leadership positions in American corporations" (Acker, 1990 p. 564). The glass ceiling metaphor has inspired scholars to identify mechanisms to explain this reality, including discrimination (Acker, 1990, Baron and Beilby, 1986; Jacobs, 1992; Maume, 1999; Reskin, 2002). As a first generation, Mexican-American female seeking to advance in a male-dominated world, my struggle was unequivocally difficult. I had to inhabit "multiple identities" to (Anzaldua, 2005) understand that movement between these worlds (identities) was necessary for my cultural and political survival (p. 87). A great deal of empirical evidence suggests that gender bias and in-group preferences shape hiring and promotion decisions in ways that tend to limit the occupational mobility of women (Brewer and Brown, 1998; Fisk, 1998). Females in leadership roles must employ resiliency strategies in order to survive a male- dominated environment. Most scholars view resiliency as something that "permits individuals to develop patience, tolerance, responsibility, compassion, determination, and risk-taking" (Christman & McClellan, 2012 p. 901).

McClellan, Christman & Fairbanks (2008) *Ulysses' Return: Resilient Male Leaders Still At The Helm* define resiliency as "an adaptive and coping trait that forms and hones positive character skills and has been attributed to a person's ability to overcome adversity" (Grupton & Slick, 1996; Janas, 2002; Richardson, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1982; Whatlev, 1999) (p.1). Grotberg (2003) furthers this thinking by contending that when enduring adversity, resilient people change their personalities to better persevere through future encounters with hardships. Ana Castillo (1995) speaks of her resiliency on *Essays on the Watsonville strike*, the early

Chicano movement, and the roots of machismo which illustrate the extent to which women still struggle against male dominance. This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color by Moraga and Anzaldua (2015) reflect an evolving definition of feminism, one that can effectively adapt to, and help inform an understanding of the changing economic and social conditions of women of color in the United States and throughout the world (Moraga and Anzaldua, 2015). One study focusing on resiliency within educators confronts the debate of whether resiliency is something that a person is innately born with or whether it is a quality or characteristic of a person's personality that is developed and refined over time (Christman & McClellan, 2012). In a study, Whatley (1998) interviewed 12 gifted women regarding their career choices within education and concluded that their "intense self-reflection" enabled the women "to transform pain into growth and achieve fulfillment in personal and professional domains" (Whatley, 1998, pg. 4).

"The literature in educational administration is replete with warnings about the impending shortage of candidates to fill the expected vacancies in educational administration" (Sharp, Malone, Walter, Supley, 2004) (p. 63). Anderson (1991) suggested "there was good reason to anticipate a shortage because of the lack of numbers within the application pool as well as the lack of quality within the existing pool" (p. 731). "While the number of candidates applying for positions as superintendents and principals dwindles, it is further compounded by the issues surrounding female candidates for administrative position"s (Sharp, Malone, Walter, Supley, 2004) (p. 87). Few women apply for, and are hired for, high school principal positions, yet it is the number one position from which one ascends to the superintendency (Sharp, Malone, Walter, Supley, 2004). This is compounded by the fact that these jobs, principalship and superintendency, are both highly political. are highly political.

Historically, women made up a majority of the workforce in education. "In studying the history of women in the superintendency it was found that in 1910, approximately 9% of the school superintendents were women and this increased to 11% in 1930 (Cited in Bjork, 2000). Shakeshaft (1989) refers to this period as a "Golden Age for women in school administration. Women won the right to vote in 1920, and feminist groups were promoting equality for women. However, "Like their teacher counterparts, women administrators sometimes attained their positions by default either because no men were available or because women were a bargain as they were paid less than men" (Shakeshaft, 1989 p. 324). The gender gap is still evident in the United States today. In 2014 women working full time in the United States were paid just 79% of what men were paid (Brown, 2016). Over the past 25 years, legislative responses to gender equity concerns seem to have affected women's aspirations far more than they have influenced the employment practices of educational institutions (Regan & Brooks, 1995).

"There has been a significant increase in the number of women preparing for careers in educational administration, and while gender equity legislation and affirmative action policies have been enacted, women continue to be underrepresented in administrative positions in schools. Although many women have entered the ranks of educational administration within the last few decades, the participation of minority women in educational leadership positions remains minimal" (Jones & Montenegro, 1982; Montenegro, 1993; Ortiz, 2000) (p. 751). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) posed an important question for us: "How can *testimonio* as self-construction and contestation of power, help us build the theory of our practice, and the practice of our theory?" Through an active exploration of our lived experiences growing up as racialized, gendered, and classed Chicanas/Latinas we create both the theory of our practice and the practice of our theory (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). As teacher educators, we are engaged in

"contradictory and transformative ways of knowing, teaching, and learning as articulations of Chicana feminist pedagogies" (Delgado-Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006) (p. 76).

A person is greatly defined by gender. Gender theorists tell us that when individuals cannot envision independent identity constructions and new gender identities, they are more bound by what *is* than what *could be* (Butler, 2004). Butler (2004) points out that, "most of this identity is beyond our control, that the making up of our own gender is historical, cultural, and politica" (p. 23l). Hannagan (2008) considers the interplay of autonomy and leadership to be "fundamental to an understanding of politics" (p. 135). She posits that among foragers "every adult has autonomy to make decisions to direct his or her own life" and that "men and women alike, participate in decision-making and conflict resolution where it affects them or where they may have influence in accordance with their experience and wisdom (p. 135).

The Utility of Autoethnography

Scholars have described auto-ethnography as a method that utilizes research and writing to examine an individual's personal experience with the sole purpose of comprehending cultural and social behavior (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005) (Cited in Autoethnography: An Overview by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011)). Through auto-ethnography, I share the tenacity needed to survive the hardships of an educational leader. "Continued dialogue provoking us to interrogate the assumptions and processes that define this research method (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010), a researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write auto-ethnography" (Adams, Bochner & Ellis, 2014) p. 15).. Scholars were "troubled by social science's ontological epistemological and axiological limitations" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). An unexpected relationship was discovered when scientists showed how the "facts" and "truths" were tied to language and patterns (Kuhn, 1996; Rorty, 1982); scholars also recognized that it

was impossible to master the use of universal language (De Certau, 1984; Lyotard, 1984); they realized that authors, audiences, and texts were all an integral part of these new relationships (Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1978; Radway, 1984); and they discovered that "stories were complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena that taught morals and ethics, introduced unique ways of thinking and feeling, and helped people make sense of themselves and others" (Adams, 2008; Bochner, 2001, 2002; Fisher, 1984).

Wilson, (2008) explains how, as individuals, we all possess different realities. My story is an attempt to recreate the instances where I collide with hegemonic ideological constructs (Chavez, 2012). As the researcher of my own story, reality is what I make it to be based on the experiences which have shaped my life (Wilson, 2008). In addition, knowledge in itself is not seen as the ultimate goal, rather the goal is the change that this knowledge may help to bring about (Wilson, 2008). The lesson or change I expect to bring about through this dissertation is the realization that hardship and adversity should not be stumbling blocks for achieving personal and professional success at the highest level humanly possible. My story can be presented by using personal testimonies of individuals who have shared similar struggles. Laurel Richardson (1990) observed that "Narratives are the best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their own lives" ((Richardson, 1990 p. 116). Auto-ethnography "provides the opportunity to study subject areas that would not be as easily and profoundly expressed with other methods such as; loss, pain, grief and depression" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). Wilson, (2008) explains that stories "allow us to see others' experiences through our own eyes" (Wilson, 2008).

In addition, Adams, Bochner, and Ellis (2014) explain that "writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry. (Adams, Bochner, & Ellis, 2014). Consequently, writing personal stories can

be therapeutic for authors as they write to make sense of themselves and their experiences. Writing my story has allowed me to delve deep into my memories and recall events which I thought were buried in my mind forever. The process of 'reflexivity' is that of self-reference and fine-tuning the ethnographer as an instrument of data collection (Davies, 1999). This writing process has allowed me to reflect on my life, and to better understand relationships (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2014); and how these transform lives (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2014). Charlotte Davies (1999) argues that 'it is possible to make comprehensive and positive use of reflexivity while avoiding the inward-looking reflexivity associated, with postmodern critiques, which undermines our capacity to do research intended to produce valid and generalizable knowledge".

It is important to note that in autoethnography, the narrative truth is valued by researchers because of the way the story is received and understood. (Bochner, 1994; Denzin, 1989). Auto-ethnographic researchers have also come to understand that the "truth" changes (p.32). We cannot always rely on our memory to remember every event that happened in our lives. Therefore, when terms such as reliability and validity are applied to auto-ethnography, these terms must be altered (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2008). Questions of reliability refer to the narrator's credibility (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2008). "Could the narrator have had the experiences described, given available "factual evidence" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2008 p.32)? My experiences, as I present them, provide "factual evidence" from multiple sources, such as *testimonies*, newspaper clippings, documents and video recordings.

Similarly, issues of validity are also examined. Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, (2011) describe validity as a work that "evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is believable, and possible." (p.34). My story intends to provide coherence and continuity (Ellis, Adams, &

Bochner, 2011). Social scientific standards have regarded auto-ethnography as being "insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, and too aesthetic, emotional and therapeutic" (Ellis, 2009; hooks, 1994; Keller, 1995). In response to this criticism, auto-ethnographers respond by stating that, "research and writing are socially-just acts; rather than preoccupation with accuracy, the goal is to produce analytical, accessible texts that change us and the world we live in for the better" (Jones, 2005, p.764). As a member of a marginalized community, I feel that by writing about my life, I am also writing about the lives of my family members and many others who have felt oppressed by a society who seeks to repress them as individuals.

Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, (2011) state that "auto-ethnography accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Scholars began recognizing that different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world. Conventional ways of doing and thinking about research were narrow and limiting. Many of these assumptions may be due to racial tensions (Anzaldúa, 1987; Boylorn, 2006; Davis, 2009). The wider lens of auto-ethnography provides a wider view of the world. "Understanding that auto-ethnography offers us a broader perspective has allowed us to comprehend ourselves and the kinds of people we perceive ourselves to be as we continue to engage in meaningful research" (Adams, 2005; Wood, 2009) (p. 65). This wider lens facilitates the transmission of knowledge.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerged in the 1970's as an outgrowth of Critical Legal Studies, a movement comprised of legal scholars who wanted to expose how customary legal ideology and practices, based on American values of meritocracy and fairness, served to maintain oppressive structures in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Ladson-

Billings, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses (Yosso, 2005). In addition, CRT provides a framework to consider how common legal doctrine, policies, and practices serve to maintain systems of racial inequity by not considering how deeply embedded racism was in American history and social order (Bustos, Cerezo, McWhirter, Peña & Valdez, 2013). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2000) and Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998, 2002) have asked: "whose knowledge counts, and whose knowledge is discounted?" Throughout US history, race and racism have shaped this epistemological debate (Sheurich & Young, 1997; Lopez & Parker, 2003). It has been over a century since DuBois (1903) predicted that racism would continue to emerge as one of the United States' key social problems. As it pertains to education, CRT has been identified as a useful framework to critique educational policies and policy-making within a historical and cultural context, as well as analyze racial exclusion and other forms of discrimination against students (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Taylor, 1998; Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Villalpando, 1994).

As a high school junior, I attended school in Wahpeton, North Dakota. My brother, who was a freshman at the time, and I were the only two Mexican-American students in the school. Students were genuinely accepting and inquisitive about my background and culture. They asked many questions about my school in Texas, my family, and the Spanish language. Staff members were not as receptive. Before withdrawing from school, my English teacher tabulated my semester average and exclaimed in total surprise, "Students, I can't believe that the Spanish girl has an A in 'English' class. It's not possible she's doing better than you." By this

time, I had grown quite accustomed to insensitive remarks by white educators who sought to denigrate me and my culture simply for being different.

My very presence, "the presence of the brown, female body and my lived experiences is a reminder of class and racial inequities" (Chavez, 2012 p. 338). The ongoing battle to provide equity for all Mexican-American students is reflective of the lack of political influence over the educational success of our students and community as a whole (Villalpando, 2004). "The need to prepare and transition Latina/o to college, a college for-all policy at the federal level would send a strong signal across the continuum that college or a form of postsecondary training is expected of all students" (Gandara, 1982 p. 5). One of the most prevalent forms of contemporary racism in US schools is deficit thinking (Valencia, 2002); which takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education (Valencia, 2002). "These racialized assumptions about Communities of Color most often leads schools to default to the banking method of education critiqued by Paulo Freire (1973)" (p. 451). CRT is conceived as a social justice project that works toward the liberatory potential of schooling (hooks, 1994; Freire, 1970, 1973). This acknowledges the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower (Yosso, 2005). Those injured by racism and other forms of oppression discover that they are not alone and moreover are part of a legacy of resistance of racism and the layers of racialized oppression (Yosso, 2005).

As a Mexican-American college student, a white professor once asked me to stand in front of the class to illustrate to the students what an "indigenous" person looked like. He also had a white female student stand beside me and told the students, "There's no way any one can

ever confuse her (me) for an American". Everyone laughed. He later apologized and said it was my fault for dressing in a traditional Mexican dress. I felt humiliated and powerless once again, but had to refrain from complaining for fear of repercussions. As found by Yosso (2009), many Latina/o students gain the skills needed to navigate university by learning to confront incessant, often subtle, racial micro-aggressions that question their belongingness on campus. As I traveled the educational pipeline, my educational stories have unavoidably been impacted by the hegemony of dominant educational practices (Chavez, 2012). Macedo & Bartolome (1999) write of the "ethnic and cultural war" facing educators and how this argument is ignored in much of the academic research and rhetoric. Critical consciousness is the ability to perceive oppression within social, political and economic realms and to encourage others to take action against oppressive systems (Freire, 1970). Research centers, created to assist minority students, have provided educational opportunities for many underprivileged students.

The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development in South Texas has engaged many students in meaningful work and empowered them to succeed academically. "We employ curricular and pedagogical approaches that we believe are generalizable and applicable to other schools and communities", states Dr. Francisco Guajardo, Co-founder and Director, "there are principles, strategies, and ideas that can be taken and integrated into other cultural and political contexts". A shift in thinking toward an historical and interdisciplinary perspective would need to occur for many students- a perspective that considers the contexts and events leading up to college attendance (Yosso & Solorzano 2001; Villalpando, 2004). "These may include emerging from under-resourced schools, low-income communities with disproportionately high gang activity and violence, and less cultural capital" (Coleman, 1988 p. 65); from family members that can pass down information to access higher education, among other factors. The goal of

considering such factors was to help students recognize their resiliency and strength as college students—that their educational success often included overcoming hardship to arrive to the university, and while at the university, navigating a sometimes unfriendly or hostile campus climate toward members of their ethnic group (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Hurtado, 1996; Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003; Yosso, 2009). Growing up in a marginalized community and member of a low- income family, structural, ideological, and academic inequities were an unavoidable result.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) has been developed to engage in critical assessment of conditions faced by this population. For example, LatCrit emphasizes issues that affect Latina/o people in everyday life, including immigration, language, identity, culture, and skin color (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Espinoza, 1990, Hernandez-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Villalpando, 2003). Traveling through different states as a migrant family, communication was a major issue. With my oldest brother's and my father's limited English skills, we traversed through different states searching for work. Consequently, the younger children attended schools from different cultural, social, and academic worlds (Gonzalez, 2010). Critical race scholars continue to help us better understand the racialized, gendered, and classed structures, processes, and discourses in the field of education (Delgado-Bernal, Solorzano, Villalpando & Yosso, 2001). Racial barriers still persist in American society which impedes full access to education, employment, and other opportunities for the poor, women and people of color. The racial and social division which was once legislated is now more insidious, unwritten and informal, or exists in the form of public policy which has a negative impact on minorities (Dill, B, Zinn, M.B., & Patton, S. (1999).

Counter-storytelling is also an important aspect of critical race theory. Counter-storytelling is a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e. those on the margins of society) (Delgado-Bernal, Solorzano, Villalpando & Yosso, 2001). Counter-stories can shatter complacency, challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle for racial reform (Delgado-Bernal, Solorzano, Villalpando & Yosso, 2001). Richard Delgado (1989) reminds us that, "oppressed groups have known instinctively that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation" (p.2436). The methods by which people of color are choosing to describe their knowledge include forms of "storytelling, family histories, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, *testimonios,* chronicles, and narratives" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). My mother often shared the story of her upbringing in Rosita, Coahuila, Mexico. She spoke of the hardships her family endured because of their poverty-stricken situation. Her mother (my grandmother, who is currently 107 years old) walked barefoot in the snow to wash clothes for other families. Her stories reflect the oppressive reality which was the case for many families living in poverty. Critical race theorists call for the recognition of diverse forms of knowledge, created by people of color, as a challenge to hegemonic forms of understanding the experience of the "despised others".

Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices (Crenshaw, 1989). The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failures of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women (Crenshaw, 1989). Mexican-American parents, including mine, believe their male offspring are superior to their female counterparts. This "machismo" belief is still alive within our community. Hurtado

(1996) explains the subordination of women in her analysis of gender oppression. She advances the theory of *relational privilege* to explain differing conceptions and responses to feminism (Hurtado, A. 1996). The authoritative universal voice—usually white male subjectivity masquerading as non-racial, non-gendered objectivity--- is merely transferred to those, who, but for gender, share many of the same cultural, economic, and social characteristics (Crenshaw, 1989).

Methodology

From a positivist perspective, according to Wall (2006), there is only one way to "do science," and any intellectual inquiry must conform to established research methods. Researchers have questioned the legitimacy and reliability of auto-ethnography as a research method. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) describe auto-ethnography as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others (Spry, 2001) and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act (Adams & Hollman Jones, 2008).

As a method, auto-ethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. Most often, autobiographers write about "epiphanies"- remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992). The trajectory of my life was impacted at the age of four, the day my father was horrendously burned with gasoline with 3rd degree burns all over his body. As the sole bread winner, my father was now unable to work. My mother took the reins and began working in the fields. She was transported in a life raft across the river by my two oldest brothers (we were still living in Mexico during this time). They stayed in a small shack in La Grulla, Texas for weeks at a time

while the rest of the children were left unattended in our humble house in Díaz Ordaz, Tamaulipas, México. This experience changed my life and that of my family's forever. We have learned to be resilient in the face of adversity. Because my story is filled with so much emotion and struggle, I will use a qualitative research method in the form of an auto-ethnography to present this dissertation. I will use empirical data from different sources to support my findings. I will state my truth by utilizing *"testimonios*" from individuals who have been affected by an oppressive system which has sought to silence them. Through the use of "*testimonios*" I will move away from silence and give voice to my experiences and those of my community (Cordova, 1998). I will also consult with texts like photographs, journals, newspaper articles, and recordings to help with the recall (Delany, 2004; Didion, 2005; Goodall, 2006; Hermann, 2005).

My second "epiphany" occurred when I was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 48 years old. Anyone who has ever been diagnosed with cancer can relate to the feeling of paralyzing shock, sheer exasperation, utter disbelief, intense denial and pure powerlessness. Before the devastating diagnosis, I had plans to complete my doctorate and apply for a promotion within a specific time frame. However, my life was totally disrupted and instead, I found myself grieving the loss of my health. The trajectory of my life has changed drastically since my diagnosis, and subsequent stem cell transplant. Although I am currently in remission and back on track with my education plans, I realize how much cancer has changed me. My decision to write my dissertation as an auto-ethnography will allow my 'patchwork of feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviors that portray a more complete view of…life (Muncey, 2005, p.25) become more self-evident.

Ellis (2004), in a methodological novel about auto-ethnography, restated a number of the methodological points she put forward with Bochner (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). She acknowledged that "auto-ethnography does not proceed linearly" is complex, is not conducted according to a special formula Muncey (2005) and added some concrete assistance to the question "how to do" auto-ethnography. She suggested that use of snapshots, artifacts/documents, metaphor, and psychological and literal journeys as techniques for reflecting emotions and behaviors." (Muncey, 2005, p.25)

My research technique will do more than just "tell" a story. It will present data that is scholarly and justifiable. The events used in this paper did not occur in a linear manner. Events that transpired completely transformed the direction of my life. Moreover, like Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, *testimonio* "empowers the speaker or narrator to transform the oral to its written representation not as an act of oppression and ignorance but rather as an acknowledgment of the revolutionary aspect of literacy" (p. 97). This qualitative research will allow me to connect with people and build the relationship necessary to conduct the study with integrity and responsibility.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how critical self-reflection has been crucial in allowing me to develop a deeper level of understanding about myself as an educational leader. As a first generation, Latina, migrant, high school dropout, I was destined to fail according to research. There are clear disparities in educational attainment when looking at Latinos and the general population in the United States, with Latinos being at increased risk of dropping out of high school; and having academic achievement that falls below that of their non-Latino White peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Angela Giornio (2001) reports that

Hispanic girls have a higher high school dropout rate than girls in other racial, or ethnic groups and are least- likely to earn a high college degree, according to the American Association of University Women. Research also indicates that Latino immigrants often fare better than their second or third generation counterparts, possibly due to the protective benefits of cultural values and norms (Harker, 2001; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

Framing Questions

The following are the questions I will attempt to answer in the process of my research (Cresswell, 2013).

1. What factors influence me, as a Mexican-American female student to succeed in an educational environment in spite of the obstacles and challenges I encountered?
2. How is resiliency important for a female Mexican-American in a leadership position?

Limitations of the Study

"All ideas are developed through relationships. I cannot know the entirety of anyone else's relationship web. Without this knowledge, I cannot judge one over another. That which seem wrong from my perspective may be perfect from another perspective. Therefore, all ideas are be equally valid. To criticize or judge another is really only showing ignorance of the possibility of other points of view" (Wilson, 2009).

More than a limitation, my "Telling" strategy, according to Ellis and Bochner (2006), has allowed me to convey information needed to appreciate what is going on. I have attempted to engage the "reader into the scene" particularly into thoughts, emotions, and actions in order to "experience the experience" (Ellis, 1993 p.711). Sometimes autobiographers may use first person to tell a story, typically when they personally observed or lived through an interaction and participated in an intimate and immediate "eyewitness account" (Davies, 1999). In my case, I

lived through my experiences and I am able to draw from that knowledge to present it in a story format.

Significance of the Study

As social constructivists, we, the researchers, are attracted to inquiries of power structures and the social conventions that reinforce them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Studies on leadership development have proven that" people in leadership positions gravitate toward protégés that remind them of themselves" (Feibelman & Haakmat, 2010) (p.909). If we want to seriously work on increasing the number of female heads of school in our institutions, we will have to look at this problem squarely, study patterns, and put systems in place that foster greater collaboration between experienced women leaders and those in the pipline (p. 909). Over the past few decades, 'change' has been a constant feature of educational systems and organizations. During 1995, 1996 and 1997 data were collected for a project of women and educational leadership in an era of educational restructuring. "The research sought to investigate why some women become educational leaders and some do not" (p. 909). This project also explored "the cultural conditions, the personal and institutional strategies as well as different approaches to leadership that are most conducive to women gaining and maintaining educational leadership" (p. 964). "Women in traditional male positions are faced with the dilemma of balancing rationality, as demanded by institutional norms, and the affective dimension of emotionality" (p. 964). Gender identity and leadership are more complex than fitting them into one gender model or another (Christman & McClellan, 2012).

For a Hispanic female in a leadership position, the struggle is much greater. My personal and institutional challenge stemmed from political forces hell-bent on exerting tenacious pressure geared towards changing me, my ideals, values and principles. Hispanic immigrants,

and U.S.-born Hispanics alike, may be vulnerable to ethnic-specific stressors of stigmatization and discrimination (e.g. Brondolo, 2005; Schneider, Hitlan, & Radhakrishnan, 2000; Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003). As an Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources (HR), requests were frequently made for me to allow individuals with questionable backgrounds to be cleared for hiring. As an ethical individual, I swam against the tide and refused to sanction those requests, fully understanding the repercussions I would suffer. Educational administrators must be resilient in overcoming all obstacles ALL the time.

Wolin and Wolin (1993) developed a Challenge Model which describes seven characteristics of highly-resilient people. The characteristics are: insight, independence, relationships, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality. Resiliency develops and substantiates self-awareness and identity. "As individuals encounter adversity, they navigate potential responses—to fight or flee" (p. 86). Much has been written about resiliency and its contribution to identity development, but little of it explores how it contributes to the shaping of leaders (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002; Christman & McClellan, 2008: McClellan & Christman, 2008: Komives, 2005). Hence," understanding how leaders define and describe their resiliency tells us how they attempt to identify themselves. In leadership positions, gendering one's identity beyond the social constructions may create an interesting intersection of society and self" (p. 860). "How others perceive the leader's gender and how the leader acknowledges the constraints and freedom of his or her gender can be both a threat against and a catalyst for resiliency" (p. 860) .

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In selecting to write my dissertation as an auto-ethnography, I have concentrated on ways to produce meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded on personal experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). As an educator in the public school system for 28 years, I am aware of the tribulations teachers and administrators face as they try to make a difference in the lives of all the students at their school and/or school district. This dissertation is not just about my life as a professional. I've chosen to write about my life and the resiliency needed to overcome all obstacles in order to accomplish my goals. Through auto-ethnography, I will compare and contrast my personal experiences against existing research (Ronai, 1995, 1996), interview members from my culture (Foster, 2006; Marvasti, 2006) and/or examine relevant cultural artifacts (Boylorn, 2016; Denzin, 2006).

When I was interviewed for the doctoral program, I was asked about my topic for my dissertation. I had anticipated I would be asked this question, so I mentally prepared a response. I shared that I would be interested in writing about the lives and educational struggles of migrant students. I wanted to write about how many migrant students are able to achieve a Master's or Doctorate's degree. As a migrant student, I felt I could engage in this process with the enthusiasm needed to complete the task. However, I didn't realize it at the realize it at the time,

but my plans would change drastically. Since my life took a drastic turn when I was diagnosed with cancer my thinking shifted and I decided to share the emotional roller coaster, which was my life, and the uncertainties I faced as an educational leader. These are the reasons why I decidedto write my dissertation as an autoethnography. Through this process, I felt I could reach a diverse audience whose academic and social struggles resemble mine; and as a result, make personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner, 1997, Ellis, 1995, Goodall, 2006; hooks, 1994).

Personal Journey

My personal journey began many years earlier when I dropped out of high school to get married. After receiving my GED at the age of 19, I applied and was hired by La Joya School District as a counselor's clerk. After working three years as a clerk, I decided to go back to school. I enrolled for 15 college hours my first semester. I was still working full time, raising a one year old child, and pregnant with my second child. In three years, I graduated with my bachelor's degree and started my professional career. I was a teacher for 12 years. During this time, I continued going to school and soon graduated with my master's degree. I served La Joya School district as an assistant principal and principal shortly thereafter. It seemed like a natural course for me to continue searching for opportunities to advance. After serving as principal for five years, I applied for Human Resource Director and was hired. Serving the school district in the Human Resource capacity was a humbling and rewarding experience. I had the opportunity to get to know so many district employees on a more personal basis. It was at this time, that I decided to go back to school and obtain my superintendent's certification. Once I received this certification, I applied for admission into the doctoral program. Once there was an opening for assistant superintendent for human resources in the school district, I felt that the doors for me

were opening, so I took another leap of faith and applied for this position. I was hired. As Assistant Superintendent, my responsibilities were tremendous. I had many duties which required me to work late and sometimes on weekends. I didn't mind. I enjoyed working and learning. By all accounts, my dream to obtain a district leadership position had been realized. I was thankful for the opportunity to demonstrate my capabilities. But this surge of energy, which had always defined me, would soon be redirected and channeled into fighting the greatest challenge of my life. Cancer.

Road Map

This autoethnographic study seeks to explain how my "lived experiences" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010), both personal and academic, have had a profound effect on the course of my life. My burden as a storyteller has been to unravel and make sense of my memories and experiences (Bochner, 2013). Although human experiences may be significantly different, highlighting the struggles of ordinary people, like myself, and the ability cope with these situations can lead to a legitimate contribution to an existing body of knowledge. It might seem the sections in this chapter lack cohesiveness, however, in autoethnography, sensemaking is not a linear process that has clear and logical structures (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016). In the following paragraphs, I will explain why I decided to include each section. I will also discuss how these connecting "roles" in my life have contributed to the formation of "my story".

As a Latina in a leadership role, it was imperative that I learn to navigate the highly political arena which at times seemed to discriminate against women. Although studies have demonstrated that information, such as experiences and educational administration of Hispanic women is limited, Mendez-Morse (2004) argues that one barrier is a lack of mentorship. As an assistant principal, I was fortunate enough to work with a highly compassionate and experienced

principal who served as my mentor for three years. In all my subsequent administrative positions, I did not receive mentorship or guidance from anyone. As a highly resourceful individual, I would contact other administrators with more experience than myself to inquire on issues pertinent to the job. Despite all the barriers I confronted, I was able to succeed and served as a school district leader for more than twelve years. I attribute this to a strong sense of self, a firm belief in my competence and abilities to improve education, (Ortiz, 2000) and a strong familial support (Mendez-Morse, 1999).

In the next section I discuss Feminism and Critical Race Theory and how these have been an integral part of my life as a student, an educator, and a Spanish speaking family member. The beginning of my educational career was very grim. I was a recent immigrant student who spoke no English and was painfully shy. As a doctorate student, I have immersed myself in literature which has aided in understanding how I survived despite the overt acts of discrimination by teachers and students. I can relate with Gonzalez (1995), Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg (1994) who define "funds of knowledge" and how these strategies are accumulated within minority students to help them survive.

I have purposely included the sections of "Cancer Statistics" and "Resiliency and Cancer" sections to raise an awareness on an issue which has not only affected me, but affects over a million Americans throughout the United States yearly. I'm sure everyone has heard the saying, "cancer changes everything". I agree. The diagnosis of cancer has disrupted my life as an educational leader, a doctoral student, and a family member. Although I am now in remission, there are follow-up exams, maintenance treatments, and medications that remind me that my life will never be the same. I am thankful that autoethnography has served as a

vehicle to share my story and expose my vulnerability (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010) and for allowing me to share sensitive issues and inner-most thoughts (Ellis, 2009).

The resiliency needed to survive cancer and many other traumas is largely dependent on the strength of personal relationships in one's life. Another study indicates that one important factor in measuring a person's resilience is how well a person has coped with other things in their life. I have become resilient as a result of all the events which have transpired throughout my life. It is important to point out that being optimistic and viewing events in a positive light is also crucial in overcoming adverse situations (Melchor-Beaupre, 2015).

The lessons I learned as a young migrant student have been instrumental in the development of my character as a female Latina. Traveling to so many states and working in the fields from the age of 7 to 19 taught me to appreciate the value of hard work. However, the reason I have included this section is to highlight the dangers and consequences of pesticide exposure among Mexican-American migrant farmworkers (this was not something I was aware of when I was growing up). Research has stated that 'exposure to pesticides causes an increase in cancer in migrant farmworkers as compared to the general population (Goldsmith, 1989). This has made me reflect on my own situation. Did pesticide exposure cause my cancer? I might never be able to prove if this is the case, however it is important to use the data I have collected to enhance the body of knowledge regarding this issue.

As a recent immigrant student, I was confronted with many obstacles, some of these were adjusting to the norms, and cultural traditions of a new country, language acquisition, and racial discrimination. The latter (racial discrimination) was prevalent in every aspect of my life. As a student at the university level this discriminatory culture continued. In Chapter One I mentioned how a college professor humiliated me because of my skin color.

Being bilingual is considered a strength in any society; however, our society does not deem proficiency in Spanish and English a strong quality. There are many studies that prove that bilingualism in children benefit them academically in many ways. These children's brains are very active and flexible. As a young child, I was very inquisitive and spoke only Spanish. During my elementary years, we were prohibited from speaking Spanish and punished for doing so. My story through autoethnography reflects how these difficulties as a bilingual student help form my identity as an educational administrator and a doctoral student.

Why Autoethnography

The process of autoethnography can uncover many different feelings within the writer. It can be joyful, sad, revealing, exciting, and at times, painful. Diana Raab (2013) writes, "Because many autoethnographical studies relate to painful experiences, the researcher may encounter difficult moments during the course of the research and writing" (p. 14). Carolyn Ellis in the *Handbook of Autoethnography* describes this powerful qualitative method eloquently. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living (Jones, 2013, p.10).

The term autoethnography has been in use for more than 20 years (originated by Hayano, 1979) and has become the term of choice in describing studies of a personal nature (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In his work "The Fatal Flaw: A Narrative of the Fragile Body-Self" Sparkes (1996) offered a great example of autoethnography. In it, he describes his personal journey from elite athlete to a man who is forced to face an "interrupted body project" (p.463)

when back disease became a permanent part of his life and interfered with his participation in sports, many activities of his ordinary life. Holt (2001) published an autoethnography that is similar to Sparke's (1996), although it was a different topic. He offered his story as a graduate teaching assistant. He incorporated previous research and existing models of teaching into his work by contrasting his personal ideology and past experience. In addition, Holt offered an insightful article in which he told his story of his struggles to have his authoethnography accepted and published. He encouraged future researchers to be persistent and resilient., to continue to "develop new avenues of criticism and support for such work (2003, p. 6), and to pursue autoethnographic publications in journals.

Duncan (2004) discusses autoethnography as a" method of inquiry in which the inner dialogue of the researcher was considered valid, that encouraged systematic reflection, offered an organized and traceable means of data analysis and resulted in a scholarly account" (p. 78). Rigor in the research process is emphasized by Duncan. Those who support autoethnography have argued "that it is more authentic than traditional research approaches, because of the researchers's use of self, the voice of the insider being more true than that of the outsider" (Reed-Danahay, 1997 p. 98). Frank (2000) noted that "those who criticize the rigor of personal narrative are missing the point, maybe the point is not to engage systematically but to engage personally" (p. 355). In judging narratives, we should "seek to meet literary criteria of coherence, verisimilitude, and interest" (Richardson, 2000, p. 11). "The aim of qualitative inquiry is to connect with people on the level of human meaning" (Duncan, 2004 p. 98). Duncan's (2004) work "allows gentle step into the world of autoethnography" (p. 98).

More than a decade of cultural and autobiographical studies has extensively problematized narrative representation of hegemonized voices (Anzaldua, 1990; James & Busia,

1993; Jerome & Satin, 1999; Jones, 1997; Morago & Anzaldua, 1983; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Simpson, 1996; Smith, 1993) argues that autoethnography originates as a discourse from the margins of dominant culture. Ethnographer Ruth Behar (1997), working from the writings of George Devereux asserts, "*What happens within the observer* must be made known, if the nature of what has been observed is to be understood" (Behar, 1997). "The researcher, interacting with others becomes the subject of research, blurring the lines of personal and social, self and other" (Conquiergood, 1991; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Richardson, 1992) (p. 543). "Experience, discourse, and self-understand," writes Trihn Mihn-ha (1991), "collide against larger cultural assumptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and age" (p.157).

Anthropology for Behar (1996) "is closely knitted with writing autobiography (p. 76). "The self is redefined to give place to affects: mourning, loss, memory, desire fear, angst, defiance. These feelings of utter selflessness impact the researcher as he/she tries to put those feelings on paper" (p. 76). Ruth Behar (1997) explains that" vulnerable writing is a holistic, more personalized approach which brings strength and inner power of authority from someone with experience in the field" (p. 76).

Cancer Statistics

"In 2015, there were an estimated 1,658,370 new cancer cases diagnosed and 589,430 cancer deaths in the United States" (Howlader, Noone, Krapcho, 2015) (p.876). "Cancer is the second most common cause of death in the U.S., exceeded only by heart disease, and accounts for nearly 1 of every 4 deaths" (p. 876). "The 5-year relative survival rate for all cancers diagnosed in 2004-2010 was 68%, up from 49% in 1975-1977 (p. 876)**.** "The improvement in survival reflects both the earlier diagnosis of certain cancers and improvements in treatment.

While 5-year relative survival is useful in monitoring progress in the early detection and treatment of cancer, it does not represent the proportion of people who are cured because cancer deaths can occur beyond 5 years after diagnosis" (p.876).

The type of cancer I was diagnosed with was Multiple Myeloma. Multiple myeloma (MM) is a "neoplastic disorder characterized by a single clone abundance of plasma cells occupying in the bone marrow and generating a monoclonal immunoglobulin, which sequentially results in end organ damage and related complications such as anemia, renal insufficiency, hypercalcaemia, skeletal events, and infection" (Amend, Wilson, Chu, Lu, Liu, Serie, Su, Xu, Wang, Gramolini, Wen, O'Neal, Hurchla,Tomasson, 2015) (p. 765). It is a relatively uncommon cancer. The exact cause of multiple myeloma is not known, scientists are learning how changes in DNA can cause plasma cells to become cancerous (Osborne, Ramsenthaler, de Wolf-Linder., Schey, Siegert, Edmonds, and Higginson, 2014). "MM is a disease with a long latent period therefore exposures over extensive periods of time have interested researchers in particular agricultural occupations and exposure to pesticides" (Osborne, Ramsenthale., de Wolf-Linder., Schey, Siegert, Edmonds, and Higginson, 2014) (p. 98)**.**

Resiliency and Cancer

Adjusting to cancer can be very difficult and stressful (Melchor-Beaupre, 2015). According to Ungar (2014) "resilience is not some type of heroic personal strategy, it is rather all of us, family and friends, who contribute to a person's resiliency" (p.1). He adds, "when we have good relationships, a sense of belonging, experience some personal control (even in a situation of powerlessness, like coping with cancer), and have our basic needs met, we are much more likely to cope well with adversity" (p. 1). Rosenberg (2016) argues that" resiliency is an

innate personality trait; however, other individuals can work at improving their outlook on life through support and practice" (p. 76).

Cancer diagnosis and treatment, are thought of as adverse experiences. For some individuals, they represent significant stressors, and for others, the diagnosis of cancer is a traumatic event (Kangas, Henry, & Bryant, 2002; Kopman, 2002). O'Leary and Ickovics (1995) developed a model to describe three potential responses to adversity, which has been further elaborated by Carver (Carver, 1998). Carter describes *survival with impairment* as continuing "compromised functioning, but he distinguishes this pattern from *resilience*, defined as a return to normal or baseline functioning" (p. 77). This is further distinguished from thriving, described as" exceeding one's original level of functioning" (p. 77). Most studies support the survival with impairment model, with cancer survivors exhibiting greater psychological distress, poorer mental health, greater role impairment due to emotional problems, and poorer social well-being relative to those without a cancer history (Arndt, Merx, Stegmaier, Ziegler, & Brenner, 2004, 2005; Baker, Haffer, & Denniston, 2003; Hewitt, Rowland, & Yancik, 2003; Rabin, 2007).

One definition of resiliency is 'The human capacity to face, overcome, and even be strengthened by the adversities of life' (Alvord & Grados, 2005 p.238). A great deal of research has gone into distinguishing the characteristics of resiliency. "An individual who is socially competent will have good communication and conflict resolution skills, and possess a healthy sense of humor" (p. 238). Problem solving skills refers to "a person who is able to think creatively and flexibly about problems, to make plans and take action on them" (p. 238). People who have a well-developed sense of their own identity have established a healthy degree of independence or autonomy (p. 238).

"Optimism encompasses the sense of having a bright future, a tendency to see challenging situations in positive terms, and a belief in one's ability to deal with whatever life brings" (p. 238). Optimism is often defined as a disposition to expect the best and view events and situations in a positive light. In the context of resiliency, optimism refers to a sense of a positive future, to a tendency to find positive meaning in experiences, and a belief in one's ability to impact positively on one's environment and situation (Alvord & Grados, 2005).

"Resilience won't make your problems go away—but resilience can give you the ability to see past them, find enjoyment in life and better handle stress" (http://mayoclinic.org/). When you have resilience, you harness inner strength that helps you rebound from a setback or challenge, such as a job loss, an illness, a disaster or the death of a loved one (http://mayoclinic.org/). Resiliency is the ability to roll with the punches. When stress, adversity or trauma strikes, you will experience anger, grief and pain, but you're able to keep functioning—both physically and psychologically (http://mayoclinic.org/). However, "resilience isn't about toughing it out, being stoic or going at it alone. In fact, being able to reach out to others for support is a key component of being resilient" (http://mayoclinic.org/).

Resilience does not mean that one is forced into thinking positively all the time (Melchor-Beaupre, 2015). For many years, having a positive attitude was strongly emphasized because it was believed that attitudes might affect survival. This assumption is not without controversy, but most studies show that "feigning a positive attitude may actually become an added stressor" (Melchor-Beaupre, 2015). Studies suggest it may be "perfectly okay to be sad and angry, and not unusual to find patients (even for those who cope well) bargaining for survival with a higher Being (Clinical Psychology Associates, 2015). It is important to recognize that several factors contribute to how well one adjusts to anything in life, especially cancer.

"Studies have shown that one important factor is how well an individual has coped with other things in their life, and how well developed their coping strategies and stress management skills are" (p. 4). "The good news, though, is that coping strategies and stress management skills can be learned" (p. 4)). Most everyone touched by cancer is going to fall into the statistical picture at times. We have to grieve the loss of our health, bodily integrity and identities. "There will be times when we long for our previous selves and there will be triggers that remind us, like the pink ribbons in October, that cancer has left its mark on us personally" (US News, 2015). But we also can glean from the resilience of so many others among us and before us who have taken their scars and made them into symbols of strength, unity, and empowerment (p. 84). "Individuals who have risen above difficult situations and succeeded demonstrate that this is not an impossible feat" (p. 84).

The Struggles of Migrant Seasonal Farmworkers: Pesticide Exposure

As migrant farmworkers, we were exposed to a wide variety of carcinogens, including "pesticides, solvents, oils, fumes, ultraviolet radiation from chronic sun exposure, and biologic agents such as human and animal viruses" (Donohoe & Hansen, 2002) (p. 679). Farm laborers have increased mortality rates for "cancers of the lip, stomach, skin (melanotic and nonmelanotic), prostate, testes, and hematopoietic and lymphatic systems (e.g. multiple myeloma, and Hodgkins and non-Hodgkin's lymphomas) **(**p. 679**).** "Mexican-American migrant farmworkers often unaware of the chemicals inside agricultural pesticides are getting sick or dying at alarming rates" (Treisman, 2015) (p. 65). Picking tomatoes in Osgood, Ohio was detrimental to my family and many other farmworkers. Several families shared facilities. All farmworkers had to take turns using the only two showers and three toilets provided for a total of six families. After picking tomatoes in the fields all day, we were forced to wait an indefinite

amount of time for shower availability. Edward R. Murrow's (1960) documentary, "Harvest of Shame", describes the miserable living conditions associated with migrant agricultural work and depicts them as "sweatshops in the fields." (p. 3). Under the duress of poor housing, limited sanitation facilities, inadequate diet, and substandard health care, migrant farm-workers and their families are at greater risk for communicable and chronic health problems than the U.S. population (Dever, 1991).

Migrant farm workers come stateside when the crops come in, and often move from state to state as each plant is ready to harvest (Goldsmith, 1989). Agriculture has been a main venue for these workers (Chase, Kumar, Dodds, Sauberlich, Hunter, Burton, 1985.) "Not only do migrant workers face innumerable hardships such as low wages, unacceptable housing, and lack of health care, yet to make matters worse, Mexican farm laborers are faced with the complete lack of regard of their lives as human beings" (p. 65).. Millions of farmworkers throughout the United States are forced to work in conditions that put their lives in peril (Chase, Kumar, Dodds, Sauberlich, Hunter, Burton, 1985). Research states that "exposure to pesticides causes an increase in cancer in migrant workers as compared to the general population" (Goldsmith, 1989**).** In spite of improvements in working conditions in many industrialized nations, agriculture has repeatedly been shown to be among the most hazardous industries in the United States (Baron, Beckman, Das, Harrison, Steege, 2001). Pesticide-induced illnesses are undercounted partly because farmworkers may not seek medical care for them, or they may seek it abroad (Baron, Beckman, Das, Harrison, Steege, 2001).

Bradman, A., Eskenazi, B., Salvatore, A., (2008) report that "The US EPA Worker Protection Standard (WPS) provides pesticide safety information to farm-workers" (US EPA 1992, 2005 p. 75). "A few studies of field farmworkers have also confirmed that protective

clothing (McCurdy et al., 1994; Krieger and Dinoff, 2000) and glove use (Gomez et al., 1999) can reduce the amount of pesticides reaching farm workers' skin" (p. 876). Other studies also demonstrate that "hand washing can reduce worker exposure to chemicals, including pesticides" (Boeniger and Lushniak, 2000; Marquart et al., 2002; Curwin et al., 2003) (p. 543). Overall, the literature on worker pesticide exposure preventions has several implications on the potential for take home exposure: (1) "if dislodgeable pesticides are present in the fields it has been shown that they accumulate on farmworkers' hands, other skin, clothing, and shoes: and, (2) if not removed either by changing clothes or washing, pesticides may be carried home where they can contaminate homes and/or directly expose other family members" (Barr, D,; Bradman, A.; Boeniger, M.; Castorina, M.; Eskenazi, B.; Jewell, N.; Kavanagh-Baird, G.;Salvatore, A.; Snyder, J.; Striley, C., 2009).

"Migrant farmworkers and their families have restricted access to health and human services because of their frequent relocation between states, language and cultural barriers, and limited economic and political resources" (Bechtel, Shepherd, Rogers, 1995) (p. 98).. Migrant farmworkers face numerous barriers to medical care, including "lack of transportation, insurance, and sick leave; the threat or fear of wage or job loss; language barriers between farm workers and health provides; and limited clinic hours" (p. 54). Illiteracy further limits verbal communication and the degree to which written information can be relied on to provide educational or preventive advice and information regarding how to get health care (Donohoe & Hansen, 2002). "Although many migrant seasonal farm-workers are eligible for assistance programs, as few as 15-20 percent actually obtain benefits" (p. 321). Finally, as few as 1-2 percent of migrant farm-workers have protections afforded by labor union representation, which could provide collective bargaining agreements for services such as employer-provided health

insurance (Donohoe & Hansen, 2002). These factors can contribute to work related stress experienced by many individuals.

Stress has many effects on the lives of individuals themselves, their relationships with others, and their reactions to situations they encounter in their environment around them (US Census Bureau, 2009). This is especially true among educators, with 59 percent of teachers lasting more than four years on the job due to teacher burnout (Farber, 2016). The same holds true for individuals with health issues. "Around 40 percent of those living with cancer experience significant emotional distress, including feelings of depression and anxiety" (US News, 2015). While research also tells us that most people who are post-treatment are not more likely to experience psychological distress than those who haven't been through cancer, post-treatment can be a vulnerable time for cancer survivors, with signs of depression often going unrecognized and untreated (US News, 2015). Defining how you are going to face the challenges of a cancer diagnosis may be the first step in forging a new identity and approaching cancer with two attitudes, 'I am a victim of cancer and I have to get through this' or 'I may have cancer, but cancer does not have me' (US News, 2015, p.3). Depression can also have serious negative effects on emotional, psychological, and physical well-being and is cited as a leading cause of disability as well as a major contributor to the global burden of cancer and disease (World Health Organization [WHO], 2009).

"Although stress does not affect individuals equally, it can lead to illness through the direct physiological effects on blood pressure, or indirectly through negative coping behaviors such as unhealthy eating behaviors, smoking, drug and alcohol use, and violence" (US Census Bureau, 2009). Manifestations of stress include "relationship problems, substance abuse, domestic violence, and psychiatric illness" (p. 44). Children of migrant workers experience a

six-fold greater risk of mistreatment than children in the general population (Donohoe & Hansen, 2002). Farber (2016) explains that "educators must develop coping strategies as stress management and school based solutions, like workshops and teacher centers" (p. 79) These strategies are essential in helping students develop the resiliency they will need to overcome obstacles in life.

Critical Race Theory, Feminism

Critical race theory builds on the insights of two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism. It also draws from certain European philosophers and theorists, such as Antonio Gramsci and Jacques Derrida, as well as from the American radical tradition exemplified by such figures as Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. Du Bois, Cesar Chavez, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Black Power and Chicano movements of the sixties and early seventies. The group also built on feminism's insights into the relationship between power and the constructions of social roles, as well as the unseen, largely invisible collection of patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination (Delgado R. & Stefancic J., 1994).

In the essay "*Towards a Revolutionary Ethics*," Carmen Vasquez writes:

"We can't even agree on what a "Feminist" is, never mind what
She would believe in and how she defines the principles that
Constitute honor among us,.Feminism in America has
Come to mean anything you like. There are as many definitions
Of Feminism as there are feminists".

"Implicit in the simplistic definition of women's liberation is a dismissal of race and class as factors that, (hooks, 1984) in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an

individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed" (p. 67). Freire (1970) describes liberation as a painful childbirth. "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world, in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970).

Following the publication of Charles Darwin's, *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex* (1871), a number of Victorian women intellectuals started appropriating evolutionary propositions to their own feminist purposes (Blackwell 1875; Gamble 1894; Gilman 1898). Many male scientists

Thomson 1889; Romanes 1887; Spencer 1862). In discussing how feminism relates to primatology, Darwinian feminist Hrdy (1999), for example, stresses that, as a scientist, she is first and foremost led by scientific concerns: Feminism was part of the story, but not because women primatologists and biologists had different sensibilities than male scientists, or because feminists do science differently. Rather, women fieldworkers were predisposed to pay more attention when females behaved in "unexpected" ways. Women were also more likely to have been affected by feminist ideas. As Low (1992) says, "most definitions of politics lack a consideration of why we have evolved to strive for power, status, and influence" (p. 754). Low (1992) argues that "men, being typically more focused on mating effort, and women, being typically more focused on parental effort, will tend to form different sorts of coalitions" (p. 754). Because of these differences in focus, "both sexes will differentially be involved in community and wider levels of politics" (Vandermassen, 2008).

"Contemporary feminist movements challenged sexist thinking about women's liberation. While much feminist scholarship tells us about the role of women in the workforce today and how it changes their sense of self and their role in the home, we do not have many studies which tell us whether more women working has positively changed male domination"

(hooks, 2000) (p. 341). Breaking through the denial about race has helped women face the reality of differences on all levels. "Critical interventions around race did not destroy the women's movement; it became stronger" (p. 341). "The feminist movement managed to face critique while remaining committed to a vision of justice, of liberation, demonstrating its capacity to maintain their strength and power" (p. 341).

Wolin (2004) proposes that politics include the following: a) "a form of activity centering around the quest for competitive advantage between groups, individuals, or societies; b) a form of activity conditioned by the fact that it occurs within a situation of change and relative scarcity; c) a form of activity in which the pursuit of advantage produces consequences of such a magnitude that they affect in a significant way the whole society or a substantial portion of it (p. 11). Shumaker's definition fits perfectly with that offered by primatologist Waal (1998): "If we broadly define politics as social manipulation to secure and maintain influential positions, then politics involves every one of us" (p. 208). Nelson (1982) maintains that "exclusive social sub-systems produce common values and behavioral uniformity" (p. 31). By choice or by force of circumstance, individuals have limited many of their important social relationships to those who share racial, religious and/or nationality characteristics (p. 31).).

Acculturation

"Throughout most of the 20th century, social scientists theorized about the process by which newcomers to America become incorporated into mainstream culture" (Padilla & Perez, 2003). Robert Park (1950) (the best known of the melting pot theorists) "undertook the study of what happens to people from diverse cultures and languages when they come in contact with one another" (p. 3). Park drew on the ecological framework model-contact, accommodation, and assimilation (Parsons, 1975). An important element to consider was the" process of adapting to

their new environment newcomers took when they came to America" (p. 45). According to Park (1950), "as immigrants learned to accommodate to the dominant group, a process of cultural assimilation ensued culminating in intermarriage and unity" (p. 98) This, according to Park (1950), "was an irreversible process of assimilation" (p. 98)

Teske and Nelson (1974) offered the first complete psychological perspective on acculturation. Researchers began to consider values, such as; "material traits, behavior patterns, norms, and institutional changes" as integral components in the assimilation process (p. 218). However, Teske and Nelson "did not go further in their psychological analysis of how members of diverse cultures accommodate to one another" (p.218). Berry (1980), "expanded the view of acculturation to include varieties of adaption and specifically identified the following four: assimilation, integration, rejection, and deculturation" (Berry, 1980 p.5). Padilla & Perez recognized the significance of Berry's model. It included "multicultural societies, minority individuals and groups, and people had a choice on how far they would go in the acculturation process" (Padilla & Perez, 2003, p. 35).

Padilla (1980, 1987) and Keefe and Padilla (1987) "presented a multidimensional and quantitative model of acculturation that relied on two major supra-constructs—cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty" (Padilla, 1980, Keefe and Padilla, 1987 p.47). According to this model, "cultural awareness represents the implicit knowledge that individuals have of their cultures of origin and of their host cultures" (p.47). This knowledge includes important" historical events that have shaped cultures, understanding and appreciation of the artistic and musical forms of different cultures, and standards of behavior and values." (p.47).

Ethnic loyalty, on the other hand, relies on the "self-assignation of ethnicity of the individuals, the ethnic group membership of their friends, and preferences for such things as

recreational activities." (Padilla, 1980, 1987 p. 47). "The steepest decline in cultural knowledge occurred between the first and second generation" (p.47). "An important discovery was the finding that ethnic loyalty to the culture of origin remained consistently high from the first to the fourth generation. In identifying with their Mexican heritage, respondents preferred friends of the same ethnicity and preferred to engage in Mexican-type activities" (p.47) These findings have been replicated in other studies of Mexican Americans (Arbona, Flores, & Novy, 1995; Montgomery, 1992) since being reported by Padilla in 1980. One of the features noted by Padilla (1980, 1987) in the original model of acculturation was that "the greater the perceived discrimination reported by an informant, the more likely he or she was to identify with his or her heritage group" (Padilla, 1980, 1987) (p.47). The most commonly used definition of acculturation explains that, "acculturation is a process which occurs as the result of the first-hand contact between autonomous groups leading to changes in the original cultures of either or both of the cultures (Garcia-Vasquez, 1995). One of these changes includes language.

Interpretations of the voluminous research on bilingual education, has been highly controversial among both academics and policymakers for more than 25 years (Cummins, 1999). "The only thing that academic opponents and advocates of bilingual education seem to agree on with respect to the policy-related research is that it is almost universally poor quality" (August & Hakuta, 1997; Greene, 1998; Rossell & Baker, 1996 p. 670). Jim Cummins (1999) *Alternative Paradigms in Bilingual Education Research: Does Theory Have a Place* argues that "poor quality" is in the eye of the beholder. Viewed through the lens of "methodologically acceptable studies," it is possible to find fault with virtually all of the research studies, including many of those that survived the "rigorous criteria" established by Greene (1998) and Rossell and Baker (1996).

The alternative paradigm claims that the relevance of research for policy is mediated through theory. In complex educational and other human organization contexts, data or "facts" become relevant for policy purposes only in the context of coherent theory (Cummins, 1999). Research findings themselves cannot be applied across contexts. For example, "the fact that students in a Spanish-English bilingual program in New York City performed well academically in relation to grade norms (Beyknot, 1994) tells us very little about whether a similar program might work with Mexican American students in San Diego" (p. 53). However, when certain patterns are replicated across a wide range of situations, the accumulation of consistent findings suggests that some stable underlying principle is as work (Cummins, 1999).

The dominant assumption, assumptions among academic opponents and advocates of bilingual education has been that we can draw policy-relevant conclusions regarding the effectiveness of bilingual education only from "methodologically acceptable studies." Typically, these studies are program evaluations that involve treatment and control groups compared in such a way that outcome differences can be attributed to the treatment rather than to extraneous factors (Cummins, 1999).

Bilingual children benefit academically in many ways. A number of studies have documented the benefits associated with bilingualism. Results indicate that bilingualism is reliably associated with several cognitive outcomes, including increased attention control, working memory, metalinguistic awareness, and abstract and symbolic representation skills (Adesope; Lavin & Thompson, 2015). "Individuals who are bilingual switch between two different language systems". Their brains are very active and flexible (Zelasko & Antunez, 2000). Research also shows that "bilingual people have an easier time: understanding math concepts and solving word problems more easily (p. 432); developing strong thinking skills

(Kessler & Quinn, 1980); using logic (Bialystok & Majumder, as cited in Castro, Ayankoya, & Kasprzak, 2011); focusing, remembering, and making decisions (Bialystok, 2001); thinking about language (Castro et al., 2011), and learning other languages" (Jessner, 2008).

Bilingual children benefit academically in many ways. Because they switch between languages, "they develop more flexible approaches to thinking through problems" (Adesope; Lavin & Thompson, 2015 p.73). Their ability to "read and think in two different languages promotes higher levels of abstract thought, which is critically important in learning" (Diaz, 1985). Current research shows that "people who use more than one language appear better at ignoring irrelevant information, a benefit that seems to exist as early as seven months of age" (Kovacs & Mehler, 2009 p. 6556). "Children who learn to read in their home language have a strong foundation to build upon when they learn a second language" (p. 6556). These children "can easily transfer their knowledge about reading to their second language" (p. 338).

"One-half to two thirds of adults around the world speak at least two languages. In our global society, bilingual individuals have have many advantages" (Zelasko & Antunez, 2000). Bilingual adults have more job opportunities around the world than monolingual adults (Zelasko & Antunez, 2000). "Research shows that they also earn an average of $7,000 more per year than their monolingual peers" (Fradd, 2000).

Summary

This autoethnography communicates the details of my journey as an administrative educational leader. In my story, I discuss how all the mosaic pieces of my life have been instrumental in the development of my identity as a female Mexican American educational leader. As a transformative research method, autoethnography has allowed me, the researcher, to incorporate all the different elements of my life, and celebrate my individuality (Ellis, 1999). As

Sarah Wall (2006) states of transformative autoethnography, "I was confronted, challenged, moved and changed by what I learned" (Wall, 2006). I see myself in a different way because "autoethnography has been a vehicle of emancipation from cultural and familial identity scripts that have structured my identity personally and professionally" (Spry, 2001, p.708).

This chapter has allowed me to present to you (the reader) an analysis of every component of my life. Starting with my life as a recent immigrant, migrant, Mexican American female student and ending with my life as an educational leader, and how everything that was lived in between has been mired by struggle, pain, and oppression. These obstacles, one way or another, have impacted the trajectory of my life. I could have easily given up on life (and education) as many before me have done. That is why I felt it was fitting to include a section on resilience, and how this has played a major role in my life. It was resilience that helped me pull through when confronted by subtle acts of micro-aggression because of my race. It was resilience that sustained me in a leadership capacity for 12 years. It was resilience that helped me cope with the uncertainty when I was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma. And finally, it is resilience that helps me get through each day as I complete the requirements for this dissertation.

As I seek to construct knowledge that will enhance the body of existing knowledge, I understand that autoethnography extends beyond self-study. The focus of autoethnography is not the literal study of self but the space between the self and practice. Autoethnography has given me the ability to explore introspectively for an enhanced cultural understanding of self and others and it has also given me the power to transform myself and others (Starr, 2010).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

My desire to learn how my personal transformation has affected my professional efficiency is what guides my research. Throughout this process, I have asked myself, "What role do I play in creating and shaping knowledge? This question has led me to a place of tension with traditional empirical science and allowed me to display significant subjectivity regarding human development and my uniqueness as a researcher. In research, "postmodernism denies the existence of an ultimate principle or religious truth which will explain everything for everybody" (Ellis, 1999; Spry, 2001; Wall, 2006, 2008 p. 350) (cited in Kelley, 2014). The goal of postmodernism "is not to eliminate the traditional scientific method, but to question its dominance and to demonstrate that it is possible to gain and share knowledge in many ways" (Ellis, 1999; Spry, 2001; Wall, 2006, 2008 p. 350) (cited in Kelley, 2014).

This chapter examines why auto-ethnographic method became my research strategy of choice. Auto-ethnography and critical race theory "are the manners in which I view the world and the ways in which I have chosen to engage in educational research" (Chavez, 2012 p.334). During this process, I will present data about self and context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between myself and others and how these have played a major role in the evolution

of my life, both personally and professionally. These will help answer my research questions: *What factors influence me as a Mexican-American female student to succeed in an educational environment?How is resiliency important for a female Mexican-American in a leadership position?*

Autoethnography

Autoethnography as a methodological tool captured my attention from the onset. I first heard about auto-ethnography in one of my doctoral classes. I was immediately intrigued by this new and different way of translating, "knowing" into "telling" (Wilson, 2008). However, as I sat down to write about those experiences of my own identity which were formed in relation to particular "hegemonic, ideological constructs, whose dominant class beliefs have influenced my perceptions and world views," (Chavez, 2012 p.334) my inner dialogue struggled with how much I should share. This process led me to many revisions. I felt that I needed to find the right words to convey the emotions I wanted to evoke in my readers. In order to get my readers to feel anger, elation, disgust and passion I needed to re-energize my imagination and relive experiences in my mind. At times, I had to let the writing sit and incubate for a while. This "slowing down" allowed creativity to re-surface. Anderson (2001) refers to this slowing down process as "a way of looking for resonance and allowing the unique qualities of the writer to surface" (p.123). This process was crucial in allowing me to approach my writing with a fresh set of eyes.

Autoethnography has provided me, as a researcher, with the opportunity to communicate multiple world views (Anzaldua, 1998) without compromising the need to be scientific (Anzaldua, 1998). Rather than seeking to escape subjectivity, authors considering autoenthrographic techniques should do so precisely because of the qualitative genre's capacity to engage first person voice, and to embrace the conflict of writing against oneself as he or she

finds himself or herself entrenched in the complications of their pedagogical/social positions (Hughes, 2008). Similarly, Reed-Danahay (1997) explains that autoethnography is a transferable self-critique which invites "a rewriting of the self and the social." (p. 765). Although the blurred distinction between the researcher-participant relationship has become a source of criticism challenging its scientific credibility as a research method (Anderson, 2006; Holt, 2003; Salzman, 2002; Sparkes, 2002) (cited in Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010), access to sensitive issues and inner-most thoughts makes this research method a "powerful and unique tool for individual and social understanding" (Ellis, 2009 p. 13).

"Creativity and innovation that inspire change, transformation, and revolution offer multiple ways of seeing the world" (Anzaldua, 1998). As a community of beings, "one truth or vision is not sufficient for we all live unique stories" (Custer, 2014). Sarah Wall (2006) states, "The intent of autoethnography is to acknowledge the inextricable link between the personal and cultural." (p. 1). In other words, "I am the world and the world is me." Wall (2006) also states that "each human being creates society and culture" (p. 67). As such, we all have the responsibility to create our living reality as individuals. "Autoethnography incites creativity by enabling the imagination of the readers, and is innovative by design because it focuses on unique individual experiences" (Custer, 2014 p.1). The circumstances of my youth have been reshaped and reformed many times over the last few decades. The subjective nature of memory allows me to hold my experiences in my mind, adjust them, and see them from different angles.

Many of the experiences we participate in during our lifetime are generally positive psychologically; however, there are many experiences which are traumatic and horrific to recall. This is where I have struggled the most. I'm normally open about discussing traumatic events

which have occurred in my life. But, having to recall the two months I spent away from my family in order to receive my stem-cell transplant, the physical and emotional pain I endured, and losing my hair as a result of the chemotherapy are not easy memories to bring to the surface as I write about my life. Creating the illusion that my life was not negatively impacted by my dad's unfortunate gasoline accident when I was four years old, and that my entire family was not debilitated as a result of this tragic event surmises the reasons why I should share my story as an autoethnographic study. Rowe (2009) writes that those who use the concept of "space-time dimensions of movement" understand the significance of moving through time and space in the healing process (p.127).

The dynamics of autoethnography has given me the opportunity to "gain new perspectives of lived experiences" (Custer, 2014, p.1). "Auto-ethnography enables empathy through the embodiment of stories" (p.1). Auto-ethnographers "value narrative truth based on what a story or experience does, how it is used, understood, and responded to, for, and by us, and others as writers, participants, audiences, and humans" (Bochner, 1994; Denzin, 1989) (cited in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). My story is an attempt to "recreate the instances where I collide with hegemonic ideological constructs" (Chavez, 2012), which have been imposed on me by a dominant society (p.334). It is important to realize that "stories are complex, constitutive, meaningful phenomena that teach morals and ethics, introduces unique ways of thinking and feeling, and help people make sense of themselves and others" (Adams, 2008; Bochner, 2001, 2002; Fisher, 1984) (cited in Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

Chang (2008) claims that auto-ethnography promotes better understanding of ourselves within multicultural world, and measures teaching practice in the context of educators' personal and professional experience. Autoethnography is a research methodology for the marginalized. It

is a principle of hegemonic forms of ideology which intends to impose on us the ideas of a dominant and ruling economic, political, and social society. This must be highlighted as I consider my own aspect of self-identity (Chavez, 2012). Auto-ethnography sets the stage to reveal my assumptions as an individual and as an educator. In the course of this study, I research multiple sources to gain an understanding how these have had an effect on my life as a school administrator.

As I write my "facts" and "truths" (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011), I intend to sensitize readers to issues of identity, politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us. "Stories, indeed, have a unique power to possess the minds and the hearts of people around the world (Symons, & Maggio, 2014) particularly stories with an emotional grip that pulls on the readers' emotions" (p.2068). My story of oppression, struggle and grief dealing with an illness (Ellis, 1995; Lee, 2010) is a particularly popular topic which explores "lived experiences". Vryan (2006) argues that an analytic autoethnography must also include data from others (Vryan, 2006). There are many ways analysis "via self-study may be accomplished, and the term analytic autoethnography should be applicable to all such possibilities" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, Chang, 2010). As an auto-ethnographer, I have been a part of my own culture (Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011 p.201), not merely an observer. I have not only tried to make "personal experiences meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also make personal and social change possible for more people" (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006, hooks, 1994) (cited from Ellis, Adams, Bochner, 2011 p.14).

"Social science storytelling intends to make meaning out of all the stuff of memory and experience; how it felt then and how it feels now" (Bochner, 1984). That's why the truths of

"stories can never be permanent truths" (p.595). Autoethnographers recognize how we understand the "truth" and how this changes. Bochner (1984) states that the past is always open for revision and so too are our stories of the past and what they mean now (Bochner, 1984). Ellis and Bochner (2000, 1996 p.733), Bochner and Ellis (2002 p.165) emphasize "subjectivity, self-reflexivity, emotionality, dialogue, and the goal of connecting social sciences to humanities through storytelling." I acknowledge that my educational research "does not ignore the premise that we are all in a relationship with existing social, political and economic conditions that are structured hierarchically to one another" (Chavez, 2012 p. 334).

Honoring Subjectivity

"Autoethnography is intrinsically subjective" (Custer, 2014). "It brings the researcher/writing into the self-awareness and honors their ability to affect the world around them" (p.1). As I write my story, I am constantly reminded about the separation of research from the researcher. "There could be no room for personal opinion, feeling, or relationship with the theoretical constructs that I was considering" (Custer, 2014 p.1). Sell-Smith and Lax (2013) mention that "A successful dissertation equals one that rejects the null hypothesis" (p. 1). We, the students are "required to write about an inquiry from afar, failing to situate ourselves in a personal relationship to the study and failing to reveal how the study relates to us personally" (p.1). I felt that science was telling me to sell myself short by denying my intuition and creativity as a researcher and by rejecting my own experiences as valid. I have found autoethnography to be a valuable transformative research method because it celebrates individuality. It also allows me, the researcher, "to understand my intimate relationship with the research process itself" (p. 1).

Self-Reflexivity

Considerations of reflexivity are important for all forms of research. In doing research of any kind, there is an "implicit assumption that we are investigating something 'outside' ourselves that the knowledge we seek cannot be gained simply through introspection" (Davies, 2012). Debates about reflexivity overlap with concerns about subjectivity verses objectivity in social research. Some of these concerns involve attempts to ensure objectivity (Davies, 2012). Reflexivity is defined as a "turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference which incorporates insights into research practice that fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience and reflection as an intrinsic part of research" (Davies, 2012 p.1303). This self-examination, has also been seen, as a form of "self-absorption in which boundaries between subject and object disappear, a process that denies the possibility of social research" (p. 1303). The search for a philosophically sound base ethnographic research which fully accepts "reflexivity maintains that it's a product and explanation of external reality which requires both an ontology that asserts there is a social world independent of our knowledge and an epistemology that argues that it is knowable" (p.1303).

As I write my autoethnography, I am engaging in "self-reflexivity which allows me to explore my own strengths and shortcomings as a researcher" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 p. 733). I am having an ongoing conversation with myself about "what I am experiencing as I am experiencing it" (Nagata, 2004, p.177). Being able to regulate my inner psychological processes allows me to "manage my emotions skillfully and make it possible to free up my cognitive resources" (p.177). Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. "The gazing outward and inward through an ethnographic wide lens exposes the vulnerable self (Ellis & Bochner, 2006) that allows for the production, of a meaningful text" (p. 429). One goal in

engaging in reflection is to learn from experiences with the "intention of improving the quality of interactions with others in future encounters" (Nakkula & Ravitch, 1998).

Emotionality and Dialogue

Producing evocative texts designed to bring "readers into the scene" particularly into thoughts, emotions, and actions (Ellis, 1993; Ellis & Bochner, 2006) is an integral part of an autoethnography. Most often, through the use of conversation, showing allows writers to make events engaging and emotionally rich. Sometimes authors utilize "telling" of a story as an effective way to communicate information needed to appreciate what is going on (Ellis, 1993; Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

Autoethnography has been dismissed for social scientific standards as being insufficiently rigorous, theoretical, too emotional and therapeutic. Autoethnographers however, "value the need to write and represent research in evocative, aesthetic ways" (Ellis, 1995, 2004; Pelias, 2000). The most important questions to autoethnographers are: "who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going" (p.39)?

Connecting Social Science to Humanities Through Storytelling

In an effort to connect the social sciences to humanities, "autoethnographers engage in conducting research of self in relation to others" (Holman Jones, 2005). He or she engages in an "analysis of personal experiences to interrogate why his or her story is valid and legitimate as a research subject. Autoethnographers should find ways to use personal experience as a "critical examination of class, cultural, racial, and gender struggles from historical, social, and political perspective by creating the space of dialogue, between the researcher and the readers" (Holman Jones, 2005 p.763).

Life story/life history narrative research is a "method of looking at life as a whole and depth study of individual lives" (Atkinson, 2012). Each person's lived experience should be a fundamental understanding which "should not be discarded at the expense of pursuing scientific knowledge" (p.325). Scholars have taken "the narrative turn" pointed inquiry toward "acts of meaning" (Bruner, 1990), focusing on the functions of stories and storytelling in "creating and managing identity; the expressive forms for making sense of lived experience and communicating it to others; the reflexive dimensions of the relationship between storytellers and story listeners; and the canonical narratives that circulate through society, offering scripted ways of acting" (Bruner, 1990 p. 3) Telling stories of traumatic life experiences, states Juzwik (2010) can be "troubling, disturbing, and even harmful as individuals must "*re-enact the suffering over and over*" (Juzwik 2010 p.37)

Testimonios

"Testimonio writing has a long and varied history; it is most often seen as a voice from the margins or from the subaltern—a political approach that elicits solidarity from the reader" (Rendon, 2009 p.3). *Testimonio* is a tool for "inscribing struggles and understandings, creating new knowledge, and affirming our epistemologies"—*testimonio* is about writing what we know best, "*familia, barrio*, life experiences" (Rendon, 2009, p. 3). Through *testimonio* pedagogy we are able to hear and read each other's stories through "voices, silences, bodies, and emotions and with the goal of achieving new *conocimientos*, or understandings" (Freire, 1973). *Testimonio* is deeply rooted in "raising critical consciousness or what Brazilian pedagogue Freire (1973) refers to as *conscientizac¸ao˜"* (Freire, 1973). This concept focuses on achieving an in-depth understanding of the world—"allowing for the perception and exposure of perceived social and political contradictions"—to become concretized in our classrooms (Freire, 1973). Critical

consciousness also includes "taking action against the oppressive elements that are illuminated by that understanding" (Freire, 1973). Unlike the more common training of researchers to produce unbiased knowledge, "*testimonio* challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance" (Freire, 1973).

Testimonio is both a product and a process (Burciaga, & Tavares, 2006). *Testimonio* as a methodology provides "modes of analysis that are collaborative and attentive to myriad ways of knowing and learning in our communities." It might also be attributed to the ways in which "*testimonios* align with a strong *feminista* tradition of theorizing from the brown female body, breaking silences, and bearing witness to both injustice and social change" (Anzaldua, 1990; Cruz, 2006; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983) (cited in Anzaldua, 1981). "*Testimonio* differs from oral history or autobiography in that it involves the participant in a critical reflection of their personal experience within particular sociopolitical realities" (Anzaldua, 1990; Cruz, 2006; Moraga & Anzaldua, 1983) (p. 357). That is, it links "the spoken word to social action and privileges the oral narrative of personal experience as a source of knowledge, empowerment, and political strategy for claiming rights and bringing about social change" (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997, p. 153). The methodological concerns of *testimonio* are often around "giving voice to silences, representing the other, reclaiming authority to narrate, and disentangling questions surrounding legitimate truth" (Benmayor, Torruellas, & Juarbe, 1997, p. 153). Translating *testimonios* from Spanish into English includes "translating culturally-specific knowledge that can shift meaning and reproduce negative connotations associated with gendered or racialized terms of endearment" (Flores Carmona, 2010). When translating, we become a sort of "interlocutor, a translator whose knowledge of English and Spanish becomes a filter to move

from one language to another and the knowledge of the languages might affect the *testimonies"* (Flores Carmona, 2010). In this act, the *testimonialista* is the holder of "knowledge thereby disrupting traditional academic ideals of who might be considered a producer of knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 2009).

Another type of *testimonio* scholarship that can raise different "methodological concerns is that in which the *testimonialista* is both researcher and participant where, for example, a formally educated Chicana/Latina documents her own collective story in or out of academia" (see Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2008; Flores Carmona, 2010; Hurtado, Hurtado, & Hurtado, 2008; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Russel y Rodrıguez, 2007; Turner, 2008). Bypassing the role of an interlocutor, these *testimonialistas* narrate their own stories and also "challenge dominant notions of who can construct knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 2009). They (re)claim *testimonio* as a text written by and for Latinas (or other marginalized groups) to theorize oppression, resistance, and subjectivity (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

There have been important discussions around the idea that "attaining a privileged status might remove one from the possibility of writing one's subaltern or marginalized life" (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011). We align with Delgado Bernal and Elenes (2011) and quote them at length to contend that "for most Chicana/Latina scholars and other scholars of color, group marginalization continues to exist in academia even when one holds a relatively privileged status" (Delgado Bernal & Elenes, 2011). Some scholars point to the idea that the very possibility of "writing one's life" (Beverley, 2005, p. 548) implies that the "narrator is no longer in the situation of marginality and subaltern that her narrative describes." If the narrator has attained the cultural status of an author (and generally speaking, middle or upper class status), she "has transitioned from the subaltern group identity to an individualized identity" (p.548). It is

argued that for most Chicana/Latina scholars this is not the case: A "group identity and group marginalization continues to exist in academia even when we have attained a relatively privileged status." (p. 111).

Norma Cantu (2012) "Getting There´ *Cuando No Hay Camino* [When There is No Path]: Paths to Discovery *Testimonios* by Chicanas in STEM" also employs "solidarity praxis as she uses *testimonio* theory to analyze the published *testimonios* of Chicanas in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields" (Cantur, 2012). She acknowledges how their *testimonios "*of challenge and triumph have the potential to motivate and inspire students who are struggling to continue their studies in STEM." Cantu (2012) delves deeper into the "systemic and structural elements that need to be in place so that all Chicanas/Latinas can successfully navigate the educational system in STEM areas, and translates these into policy" (Cantu, 2012). recommendations. Her work demonstrates the "pedagogical potential of *testimonios* at both an individual and systemic level" (p. 472).

"As researchers, we are constrained in research and scholarly production by mainstream terms as defined by librarians who may or may not understand the nuanced bilingual and bicultural use of a term such as *testimonios*" (Beverley, 2005, p. 548). They make clear that there is a "rich history of *testimonio* scholarship and that the educational teacher or scholar (with some effort) can unearth and draw upon this scholarship to employ *testimonio* as a methodological or pedagogical tool" (p.511).

"By examining their own memories, researchers arrived at the surface of qualitative research through self-discovery" (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011 p. 14). In science, ethnography explores a specific group of people. "Ethnography that derives from anthropology, became popular in the 1900's through the anthropologists' research that explored the life of exotic cultures"

(Malinovski, 1993). "The 21st century postmodernist world tried to accommodate multiple new realities, and accept as trustworthy viewpoints of people living in their own worlds" (Beverley, 2005). As ethnographers started to assume narrative approaches, they were" acknowledged as important contributors to the essence of the research" (Tirney & Lincoln, 1997). Van Maanen (1988) claims "ethnographies of any sort are always subject to multiple interpretations." (p.35). This is the reason why ethnographic researchers have become interested in phenomenology and hermeneutics (Maanen, 1988). Phenomenology questions and describes the experience a person encounters. It "does not construct a theory of explanation but offers insight" (Van Mamen, 1990). Hermeneutics research would ask the question: "What does this experience really mean? It is the study of interpreting meaning" (p. 76).

Finding My Voice

I have often heard educators talk about developing my own voice in my writing. I'm not sure I knew what they meant by that, or if I even had a voice. Throughout my academic career, I have written papers about topics which inspire me and those for which I feel strongly about. As a result, I have been able to identify my talents and those things I am most passionate about which rise out of a greater need in the world. "If I feel drawn by conscience to meet those needs, explains Covey, (2008) therein lies my voice, my calling, my soul's code" (Covey, 2008). As it turns out, everything I am, my education, my experiences (good and bad) have all played a role in developing my "voice."

Autoethnography has served as a platform to expand on my voice and offer a story with theoretical academic value. "Is there a place in autoethnography for those of us for whom the intellectual/academic voice is our natural voice while assuring that we are not denied that very same intellectual validity because we use our own experience as the location of analysis"

(Pathak, 2010)? I have intrinsically searched to find my voice, that which defines my passions and beliefs. Autoethnographic research has offered me a foundation on which to "dream, to write, to open my voice" (Pathak, 2010). bell hooks (1983) and her feminism discourse on the vision of inequality offers a simplistic definition of women's liberation which describes "how race, in conjunction with sexism, determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed" (hooks, 1983). I like many of my Mexican-American peers, grew up in two distinct worlds (Anzaldua, 1998).

One was my home life, where I felt safe to speak, to act, and to be myself. After I got home from school each day I would talk to my mother about my school day. She still recalls how exhausting it was to listen to me talk incessantly sitting at my designated eating place, the window, as I dipped my *tortilla* into my bowl of ranch style beans. These protective factors or elements within my environment helped me "foster the resilience I would need in my other world" (e.g.Garmezy, 1991; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982). In my outside world, it was quite a different story. Although I tried my best to adapt, I felt I never fit in. I never spoke in public for fear of being chastised (Spanish was not allowed in school or in public). Francisca Gonzalez (2010) posits that "to understand young Mexicanas' lives, it is essential to braid the academic with the cultural knowledge" (Villenas, 2013). Dolores Delgado-Bernal (1998) describes how a, "Chicana feminist epistemology exposing human relationship and experiences become agents of knowledge who participate in intellectual discourse that links experience, research, community, and social change" (Delgado Bernal, 1998). To this experience, Gonzalez adds, "active participant interaction and observations with the young *Mexicanas* was imperative in a complete transformation" (p.641)

Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (1991) describe how in Biblical history, "storytellers for oppressed groups told tales of hope and struggle" (Delgado & Stefancic (1991). Other storytellers have directed their attention to the oppressors, "reminding them of the day when they would be called to account" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1991) Stories perform multiple functions, allowing us to uncover a more layered reality than is immediately apparent; a refracted one that the legal system must confront. The centrality of narrative and storytelling in critical race approaches to educational research is consonant with Paulo Freire's (1995) view that changing language 'is part of the process of changing the world' (pp.67-68). The aesthetic and emotional dimensions in stories stimulate the imagination to inspire empathy to allow others to imagine the mind of the oppressed and to see the world through their eyes.

Racial and ethnic discrimination are a part of growing up as a minority in the United States. As such, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has proven to be an essential tool in examining how "socio temporal notions of race inform the naturalization of oppression and the normalization of racial inequality in public schools and society" (Ladson-Billings, 2005). It was this same fear of oppression and exploitation which guided Richard Rodriguez (1981) to reject his heritage. His vilified text *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1981) describes his condemnation of bilingual education and how this alienates him from his family (Rodriguez, 1981). His "metaphor of self" is rooted in his acquisition of a language and a universe of knowledge that can erase the marks of ethnicity (Paravisini-Gebert, 2014). His acceptance of this ideological construct, which assumes one single and elementary form of Americanness as a "transcendental truth," leads him to the assumption that to become "American" and enter the public sphere, he must cease to be "Mexican" (Rodriguez, 1981).

In contrast to Rodriguez's ideology, Delgado-Bernal's framework affords authors Milagros Castillo-Montoya and Maria E., Torres-Guzman a lens to explore the theoretical insights that arise from "having a second language in which to make and receive meaning, from contrasting the power of *consejos* with the constraints of academy, and from the cultural *va y ven* that define their lives" (Delgado Bernal,2001). Delgado Bernal (2001) tells us that she hopes that "current and future generations of Chicana scholar-activists continue to raise our voices… as we (re)construct the ways we hear, interpret, and learn from and within a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research" (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Scholars of color who have written critically about race feel there is an open space where they can speak freely, but they are often dismissed or punished for what they say. "Post-coloniality provides a space for a free exchange of ideas, it allows one to name the ontology, axiology, and methodology that shape one's voice" (Conquergood, 1985; Shome, 1996). Postcolonial autoethnography opens the door for more rigorous, critical positivistic scholarship. As autoethnographers, it is crucial that we produce both examples of rigorous autoethnography and methodological articulations of the value of autoethnography. By doing so we accomplish two things: "we create a body of literature that serves as a foundation for future scholarship and we disrupt the colonial mindset that method exists, without a need to articulate its roots, its assumptions, and its origins" (Feyerabend, 1993).

The methodology I have selected will guide my research to its final destination (Wilson, 2008). The strategies of inquiry build upon a methodology to fill in how I will arrive at the research destination. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) describe qualitative research as "multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. As the story of my life evolves throughout my research, I expect to remain open to any change and adaptation

(Wilson, 2008) that the situation requires. My research paradigm, as the source and owner of knowledge (Wilson, 2008) builds on a view of the world, in which the individual (myself) or object is the essential feature.

Data Collection and Analysis

In this autoethnographic study, I am the primary data source. The experiences of this study are recounted by "memory, self-observational (video tapes), self-reflective (journal writing), review of documents, and external data (other individual's recollection of events)" (Chang, 2008). The memory, self-observational and self-reflective data provide information about my lived experiences. The external data and review of documents will provide additional perspectives and contextual information as I write my research.

Autoethnography "utilizes data about self and its context to gain an understanding of the connectivity between self and others within the same context" (Ngunjiri Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). Autoethnography cannot merely focus on self, rather it is a "study of self as the principal focus within the context of culture" (Chang, 2008). By using narrative to reflect on social encounters, I will gain insight into my identity development as a female Latina.

Journal Writing

As I began the process of journaling I found myself immersed in a sea of memories and events. I wrote stories and more stories of my childhood as I remembered it. This process produced "the kind of self-understanding that lies at the intersection of biography and society: self-knowledge that comes from understanding our personal lives, identities, and feelings as deeply connected to and in large part constituted by—and in turn helping constitute—the sociocultural contexts in which we live" (Anderson, 2006). I spent countless hours perusing old photographs which aided in the recollection of my lived experiences. This brought back lived

emotions which I never knew existed. I decided to include the events in my life that I found to be most impactful in shaping my social identity. I chose to weave various experiences together using myself as primary character and narrator. As I set off on my writing journey, I expected the process to flow smoothly and coherently. However, the writing process was difficult and filled with extreme emotion and nostalgia. It generated confusion and sadness. The tone of my writing conveys a feeling about my life and "experiences that could evoke empathy and provide the reader with an indirect experience upon encounter with my writing" (Lincoln, 1993). Understanding how identity construction took place in my life and how this made me feel helpless about the change I could not impose upon my past, I was forced to embrace my present.

Photographs

Choosing to include photographic data in my study, I will select photographs for data purposes only. These visual elements serve to evoke emotion and will help me construct a more meaningful narrative of my experiences. For me, it is essential to include pictures in this study because "photographs provide artistic representations that can be used to make meaning" (Albers & Harste, 2007). The road to making meaning from what exists within the data sets will be an ongoing task that will require stepping outside of the personal and viewing data as a researcher. Albers and Harste (2007) asserts that "design choices are deliberate vehicles for making meaning and communications: I will use photographs as visual texts from which to learn and to frame creative elements of data generated during this process" (Albers & Harste, 2007). Photograph choices will be deliberate since I am aware that my visual texts may be analyzed by the readers of my study. I am also aware that pictures have the potential to communicate messages about my social identity (Albers & Harste, 2007).

My data collection, analysis, and interpretation progression will take place as follows: (1) I will create a list of social encounters that I readily recall as important with respect to race, racism, and gender in my life; (2) I will continue journaling about each event, but will choose only the most relevant for this study; (3) I will peruse photographs and consider which ones will aid in supporting my inquiry; (4) I will conduct interviews with administrative leaders who have found themselves in similar situations.

Quality Issues

When approaching research from an autoethnographic approach, one must contend with issues of quality rather than concern ourselves with validity. Feldman (2003) purported that the word quality applies to "narratives of studying ourselves," but we must be careful when presenting findings so that studies resonate with truth to the reader. I evaluated my personal reasons for choosing stories and visuals that were part of this study. I had to ask myself if I was "silencing or privileging anyone" as a result of my decision (Hart, 2002). As researcher, I am aware that my choice will shape the outcome of this study and telling of my story. My story was told from several perspectives. I both created and evaluated the data. My hope is that readers will gain an understanding about the influence of society on a female Latina's search for self -identity.

Feldman (2003) suggests that "to strengthen the rigor and validity of an autoethnographic study, four criteria must be adhered to: (a) provide clear and detailed descriptions of how data is collected and what counts as data, (b) provide clear and precise descriptions of how the representation of data is constructed, (c) provide multiple sources of data, and (d) provide evidence that the research produced change and added value to the body of knowledge for the profession" (p.26). Reed-Danahay (1997) posits that autoethnography is "more authentic than

straight ethnography because the voice of the insider is believed to be more accurate than that of the outsider." (p.26). Autoethnography "analyzes culture, behavior, and human interaction and enables the researcher to create an objective understanding as both informed insider and analyst outsider" (Cunningham & Jones 2005).

Theoretical Framework: The Concept of Resiliency

In our contemporary society, there are structures and norms that encourage people to be "copers" or "survivors" rather than "choosers" or agents." (Brown; Kulig, 1996, 1997). The link between the two phases of the process is in part contingent upon a learning process in the community that includes the "residents' knowledge of their own history, their ability to transform how they understand things and their ability to develop better or different strategies" (Brown; Kulig, 1996, 1997). This means that an approach to resiliency can be tied to an interest in social change. If resiliency is defined as something that has moral import, then we have a basis against which we might assess the forces that limit the capacity of persons to be agents of change, not merely survivors.

Transient Resiliency- The Earlier Years

Growing up in a highly mobile family in the 1970's was difficult for an elementary age female Latina. My family emigrated from Mexico in 1970, no one in our family spoke English, at least not enough English to allow us to travel throughout the United States in search of agricultural work to help sustain our family. My oldest brother had learned a little English in *La Secundaria* in Mexico. This is equivalent to a high school education. My dad had traveled to Chicago, Illinois with his siblings in the 1960's to work in the fields as a migrant laborer. As a result, he had picked up a little English. According to the National Center for Farmworker Health of the 72% foreign born farmworkers 27 percent could speak English "a little." (National

Center for Farmworker Health, 2016). With this limited means of communication, our family decides to embark on the first of many trips throughout the United States as migrant farmworkers.

Bedford, Kentucky was our first destination. The older siblings and parents worked picking strawberries while the younger kids attended school. And so, the saga of our experiences begins. Back in 1970, there were few brown migrant farmworkers, especially in Kentucky. My brother and I were the only two students of color in our school. I was in 1st grade and my brother was in kinder. But because this was summer school, children of various ages were grouped together in the same classroom. On our first day of school, the teacher gives us all a blank sheet of paper and asks us to write our name on it. I sensed my brother, who was seated behind me, started getting nervous as he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Nanita, Nanita, (this was the nickname he had given me) *yo no se escribir*." "I don't know how to write." I asked him to hand his paper to me under the desk where the teacher couldn't see. He did so. I wrote his name on it and I handed it back to him. And so, we began to develop the resiliency we would need in the years to come. Resiliency has been defined as an "adaptive and coping trait that forms and hones positive character skills and has been attributed to a person's ability to overcome adversity" (Gupton & Slick, 1996; Janas, 2002; Richardson, 2002; Werner & Smith, 1982; Whatley, 1999).

As I continue with my educational and personal journey, I am making the move toward meaning that characterized as "sweeping, durable turbulent and consequential." (Geertz, 1995, p. 115) I am hoping that by offering my research story, people can situate themselves in my place (Jackson, 1995). As an ordinary person, I offer my struggles as I cope with the contingencies of lived experiences- replete with characters, scenes, plots, and dialogue. The journey from

defeatism to resiliency inspired this inquiry. By engaging in writing inquiry and visual inquiry I have collected feelings, memories, and experiences. Part of this inquiry looks at a time when my perspective was clouded with pessimism and doubt; however, it is written at a time when I have a strong sense of self and purpose.

Most of us think of resilience as the ability to bend but not break, bounce back, and perhaps even grow in the face of adverse life experiences. "Determinants of resilience include a host of biological, psychological, social and cultural factors that interact with one another to determine how one responds to stressful experiences" (Southwick, Bonanno, & Yehuda, 2014).

Transient Resiliency-The Later Years, Breaking Away

As a young adult, my life was anything but ordinary. I got married at the age of 18 while still I high school senior. With 3 months left to graduate from high school, I decided to drop out of school and I went to live in Mexico with my in-laws. As a female Hispanic, I had become part of the grim statistic which reports that "Hispanic girls have a higher high school dropout rate than girls in other racial or ethnic groups, (Romo & Falbo, 1996) and are the least likely to earn a college degree." My parents were devastated that their daughter who seemed to be well adjusted academically had thrown it all away. They spoke to my high school counselor and other administrators, but I was determined to do things my way. The inevitable cycle would continue. My husband and I joined my family, travelling and working as migrant farmworkers for several years.

The ranchers for whom we worked were typically good people. The rancher's wife offered us ceramic classes after we were done working in the fields. One day, while working on decorating our ceramic pieces, a family member approached me seemingly angry and perturbed. I asked her what was wrong. She stated, "I overheard the White lady on the phone and she said

she was working with the 'Mexican' girls." I looked at her confused. I didn't understand what had her so upset. She added, "Can you believe she called us the 'Mexican girls'?" I smiled, looked at her and said, "That's what we are. We're Mexican girls." This was the moment I realized I would not let myself feel victimized because of who I was, but I would rather become a 'chooser' and an 'agent' of change. I would break away from others' perceptions of me as a Mexican-American individual (Brown; Kulig, 1996, 1997).

Resiliency has also been seen as providing opportunities to change traumas into triumph (Fine, 1991). As a member of a marginalized community, I traversed through the American educational system inhabiting multiple identities (Anzaldua, 2005) to survive the often subtle, racial microagressions (Yosso, 2005) I was subjected to on a daily basis. In *Borderlands: Psychic, Sexual, Political, Geographic* Gloria Anzaldua (1987) explains that 'Borderlands' are physically present when two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. Identifying oppressive attitudes and actions by individuals was imperative to my survival.

The Resiliency Model serves as a useful tool in enlisting self-critique as it invites "a rewriting of the self and the social." (Hughes, 2008). Being resilient is not automatic. It is a process by which I have learned to cope and move past negative experiences. In the paradigm for Everyday Resilience Model Dr. Angela Smith discusses the 4 phases of resilience. "Phase 1 is Survival, where we experience biological, body related sensations from the stress caused by the adversity. Phase 2 is Adaptation, where we begin to rewire our brains by learning new skills and taking some responsibility. Phase 3 is Recovery, where we continue brain changing efforts by practicing new habits, learning better social skills and working with the reality of the situation

rather than the hurt or injustice the adversity caused us. At this stage, empathy is critical in distinguishing what is called the Resilience Point, where our path of resilience directs more toward Phase 4 Growth. In Growth, we are thriving and flourishing through mindfulness" (Smith, 2013). When we have successfully rewired our brains from the experience of adversity we have the ability to understand a deeper perspective and awareness of lessons the adversity has helped us gain (Patterson, Goens and Reed, 2009).

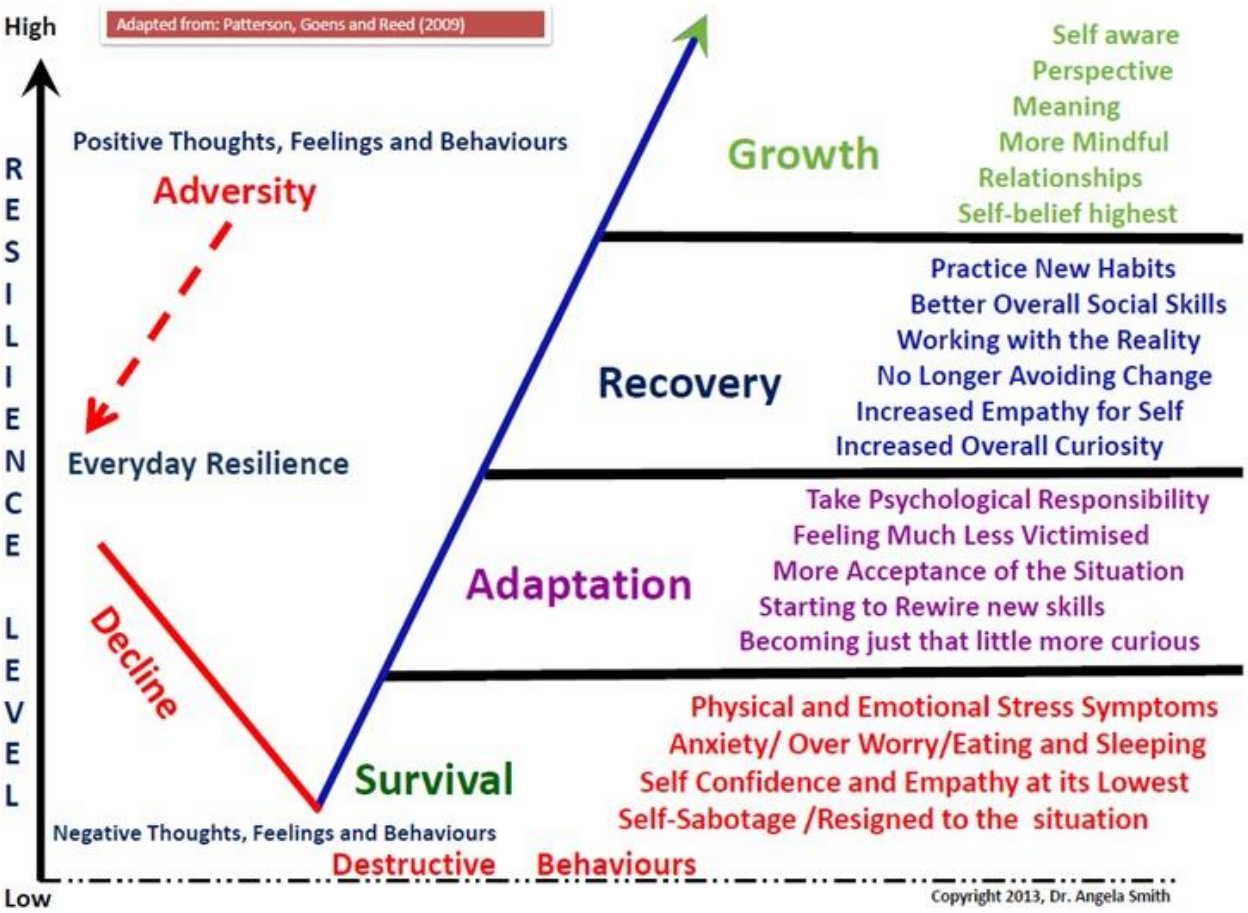

Figure 3: Resiliency Model

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As a naïve seven-year-old, I viewed everything through magical rose colored glasses. My imagination, however inquisitive it was, could not fathom how my perfect world could somehow collide with a world of hate, racism, and oppression (Freire, 1973). At a time when most children begin to construct their identity, I was challenged with finding my identity and my sense of belonging (Anzaldua, 1998). Although separated by distinct stories, this chapter intends to shed light on the issues, events, and oppressive struggles which have been a part of my life (Freire, 1973). In this study, I share the stories of my life which have prepared me for the unforeseen events which have brought to light the beauty and the ugliness of people.

The polarizing effect of autoethnography has allowed me to present this self -narration as a research process to convey sensitive issues and inner-most thoughts as a window through which the "external world is understood" (Ellis, 2009). As I tell the story about my life, my narrative becomes a means of knowing, and a way of telling about the social world (Bochner, 1994; Bruner, 1986, 1990; Sarbin, 1986). The telling of my life events, as temporally unfolding narratives, are descriptions of a research text understood as "act of meaning", and, as Bruner (1990) suggested, it's precisely the work of storytelling.

Vignette # 1 - Emergence

In 1971, I traveled with my family to Homestead, Florida. Because the peak season for picking tomatoes was in the fall, my family arrived to "el campo" sometime around October. Because our family was so grateful to have a means to support the family, we often disregarded or were completely ambivalent to what Rothenberg (2000) discusses as "health hazardous conditions, such as the absence of drinking water, hand washing facilities and toilets" (p. 351). Rothenberg (2000) adds that" hired migrant farmworkers are unprotected by federal regulations for field of sanitation" (p. 351). "El campo" consisted of many identical small, wooden frame homes arranged in rows. I'm not sure exactly why it was called, "el campo." This place seemed more like a concentration camp for the Mexican-American migrant farmworkers It is argued that for many (mostly white) city leaders and residents, the construction of urban farmworker housing represented a racialized and spatial transgression that undermined the normalized geography of farmworker invisibility — the labor camp (Nelson, 2008). But as a young child I failed to see how adults' fight for social justice was also my fight (Solorzano, & Yosso, 2002b). I wore rose colored glasses and relished from all the experiences I was having. The knowledge I had accumulated as a member of a migrant family would eventually allow me to build a bridge between home and school (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). Ladies dressed in traditional nun attire arrived to "el campo" every so often to deliver boxes filled with donated clothes and toys for all the children. These were exciting moments for me as a child. I remember eagerly waiting for the nuns to arrive so I could be the first one to start digging through the boxes. As I unraveled the items in the box, I had also begun to unravel my life as an oppressed female Latina

(Delgado-Bernal, 1997). The stories I share are my own, these are stories of migrant & schooling experiences (Chavez, 2012). Medical assistance was also provided to anyone who needed it (Grey, 1993). A van arrived every week or so to take migrant farmworkers to the local clinic.

One particular day after working in the fields, my mother arrived and said she needed to go to the clinic. She asked me to get ready because I would be joining her. I don't know why my mother decided to take me with her instead of one of my siblings. Perhaps it was "my high level of enthusiasm and passion for engaging in outside activities" (Ladson-Billings, 1995 p. 76). Of course, I was excited to get out of the house I quickly looked for something to wear. I decided to wear a green and white outfit. It was a green skirt with pleats and a white & green blouse. I remember this outfit distinctly because it was bought for me by La Joya School district. As a first grader, entering into a United States school, someone must have seen the need my family was in. As a member of a farm working family Rothenberg, (2000) explains, "these families are in dire need of financial assistance" (p. 351). These families, including mine, "made less than $7,500 a year, far below the U.S. poverty level" (Romanowski, 2010). I was selected, along with two other students, as a student in need of financial assistance. I found out later when I became a teacher that these vouchers were only given to students that were poor. It was funny, but I never considered myself poor. Several teachers took us shopping for clothes (I don't remember where). They asked us to select what we wanted, and I selected this green and white outfit. I loved it so much that I wore it every chance I had.

The van taking us to the clinic which addressed the health needs of migrant farmworkers arrived on time (Betchel, Shepherd, & Rogers, 2010). My mother and I got on it. When we arrived at the clinic, my mother quickly noticed that the receptionist who would be collecting her

information was a black lady who, according to my mom, spoke only English. My mother began to worry because she only spoke Spanish. I quickly came to my mom's rescue and told her, "*No se mortifique, yo le ayudo."* "Don't worry. I will help you." When it was my mom's turn to be checked in, I walked next to my mom toward the lady. I stood on my toes leaning on the lady's desk. I wanted her to know that I would be translating for my mother. "How does a young child like myself interpret words I don't know in either language, while knowing at the same time that my mother is relying on my tongue and on what I can do with the words given to me" (Castaneda, 1998) (p. 341)? The lady began filling out the paperwork. She asked my mom, "Name?" which I quickly translated for my mother, "*Nombre*? My mom gave the lady her name. The next question was "Age?" I asked my mom in Spanish, "*Su edad*?" Throughout this exchange, I noticed the black lady had a smile on her face. After several questions, which I successfully translated, the lady asked my mom, "Address?" I turned to my mom visibly concerned and told her, "*Yo no se lo que es eso".* I was so worried and I asked the lady to explain what this was. She stated, "where you live", where you get your mail." As the lady spoke I immediately translated the information for my mother (Casteneda, 1998). My mom figured out what the lady was asking and asked out loud, "*la direccion*?" The lady responded with a smile, "Yes, *direccion*." "What cultural and linguistic rites are these in which a parent relies on a child's tongue" (p. 430)?

As I reflect on this experience, I realize how this marked the beginning of my lived experiences and my struggles as a Latina, a migrant farmworker, a young mother, a college student, a cancer patient, and an educational leader. These experiences taught me to be resilient and not crumble down when faced with adversity. The lessons I learned in the home (Delgado-Bernal, 2001) helped give me the strength to withstand the acts of micro-aggression (Yosso,

2005) encountered because of my Latina heritage and Spanish background. In his autobiography of *A Boy's Acculturation* , *Barrio Boy: The Story* (1971), Ernesto Galarza reveals "translating as empowering" (p. 6). For Galarza," translating was a powerful, positive, and valuable skill that he first developed as a child translator, a skill he honed and applied to spoken, to written, and to cultural texts throughout his adult life as a scholar, a labor organizer, and a tireless advocate for economic and social justice" (p. 6). Although my family still laughs at the audacity with which I stood next to my mother intending to translate even though I had been in a US school less than a year, I felt as though it was an act of bravery and heroism (Trueba, 1999). I was the hero to my mom at that particular moment.

Vignette # 2 - Translator

"*Andale, vamos con el viejo para que me traduzcas,*" yelled my dad at my older siblings. This conversation was normal in our household. My dad, who spoke limited English, always recruited one of his kids to assist him whenever he needed to engage in a conversation with a *"gringo"*. Castaneda (1998) "*Language and other lethal weapons: Cultural politics and the rite of children as translators of culture*," discusses how the children of migrant parents are often given the huge responsibility of translating for them (p. 430). Like always, all my older siblings pretended not to hear him, walked away, or just refused to assist him. I knew my parents trusted that all their children were receiving a good education. Delgado-Gaitan, (1992) argues that the "emotional support parents provide their children encourages them to value education" (p. 298). However, I was the one who always ended up being the "official" translator. This time it was especially difficult to translate for my dad because he was in a bad mood. The *"viejo"* as my dad called all our bosses, was the rancher who owned the land and had hired us to hoe sugar beets throughout the summer. He had taken more than two weeks to pay us

after the work had already been completed. I was too young to refuse to translate because my dad would force me to do it. I still remember walking barefoot from our little house toward the front of the ranch with my father pushing me all the way there. How was I, as a 12- year-old expected to negotiate the culture I must translate for my father- "a culture that had violated and assaulted, our families, and our communities with their assumptions and attitudes about us, as well as our language" (Castaneda, 1998)?

When we arrived at the *"viejo's"* house we immediately noticed he was having a party. My dad pushed me toward one of the guests. I asked him, "Can you please call Mr. Bob?" He walked inside the house and a few minutes later, Mr. Bob appeared and asked us if we needed something. My dad tells me, *"Dile que cuando piensa pagarnos"* I ask Bob, "My dad wants to know when you are going to pay us?" Bob responds, "I can pay you tomorrow" (Castaneda, 1998). I tell my dad, *"Dice que nos puede pagar manana*," My dad starts to get visibly upset at this time. He says, *"Dile que ya terminamos el trabajo hace dos semanas y todavia estamos esperando que nos pague y no nos vamos de aqui sin que nos pague ahora."* My dad says "We finished the work two weeks ago, and we're not leaving until you pay us tonight." I could tell my dad was tired of the abuse and micro-aggressions we suffered because of our place in society (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002b). Schmidt-Camacho (2008) discusses how "Mexican migrants have been locked into an economy that has exploited their labor for more than 100 years" (p. 81). I was so nervous and couldn't look Mr. Bob in the face. I was glad when, after a few agonizing minutes, he finally agrees to pay us.

Before he walks inside, he begins to make mental notes of how much he owes us. He verbally states the amount we were to get paid per acre, and the amount of acres we had completed. He calls out the total number he owes our family. During this time, I am translating

for my dad. As we make sense of the structural and personal relations that affect migrant workers and their families, it becomes very clear that the impact of "being migrant" is accompanied by significant social and economic hardship (Garza, Trueba, & Reyes, 2004). I noticed my dad walking toward a tree branch and pulling one off the tree. He walks back toward us and begins making his own calculations using the tree branch and the ground. When the problem was written on the ground he explains, *"Esta es la cantidad que el dijo que nos iba a pagar por acre, y esta es la cantidad de acres que completamos. Nos debe esta cantidad. Dile que no soy "pendejo," yo se mis cuentas."* I looked at my dad in astonishment. Did he really want me to translate the last part (Castaneda, 1998)? I quickly translated what my dad had written on the ground. "My dad says this amount is what you said you would pay us per acre and this is the amount of acres we completed." Bob smiled when he saw my dad was accurate with his calculations. I decided not to translate the last part my dad mentioned. According Daniel Rothenberg (2000) "Farm workers commonly suffer abuses that would be inconceivable in other industries. They are threatened, cheated out of their wages, housed and transported in dangerous conditions" (p. 87). I was thankful to have a father who was courageous enough to fight for our family's hard earned wages.

This interaction made me see my dad so differently. This was a man who had no more than a 3rd grade education, but yet valued education for his children (Solorzano, & Yosso, 2002b). At this moment, my dad had fought for his family and his family's hard work. I was impressed that someone with such a limited formal education had had the courage and fortitude to confront what was obviously an oppressive situation (Freire, 1973). Guajardo & Guajardo (2016) write about "La Universidad de la Vida" as a way to honor their dad and the experiences "life" had taught him (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2016). I too, felt at this moment that my father had

not only waged a war against our oppressive nature, (Freire, 1973) but he had allowed me to make sense of my world and my identity as a Mexican-American farm worker.

Vignette # 3 - Responsibilities

*"Cierra bien la puerta," "*Make sure you lock the doors", my mom would yell at me at 4 a.m. before they left every morning to work in the tomato fields which were two hours away. We lived in the Everglades trailer park in Florida City, Florida. "Although migrant farmworkers help fuel the economy, says Roman & Carrol (2003), they are not always provided adequate housing" (p. 56). Our living conditions in this mobile home park were livable in spite of the amount of family members who lived inside. After exiting the mobile home, everyone would board the pick-up truck the family owned every morning. I could hear my dad yelling at my siblings, "*Apurense, ya tenemos que irnos*" Hurry, we have to go now. After all the vehicle doors were closed shut, I would hear them drive away. After all the adults were gone, there was darkness and silence.

The park consisted of about 200 mobile homes which housed primarily seasonal migrant farm working families. But this didn't matter, because at that time of the morning, we were all alone. My younger siblings and I, ranging in ages 3 to 12, stayed at home by ourselves until it was time to go to school. Dangers lurked all around us. My parents were well aware of the sacrifices they were making. Several times a week, rapes and assaults were reported from other families living in this mobile home park (Roman & Carroll, 2003). According to the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data analyses, (1) "approximately 1.3 million crimes known to the police in 2008 were committed against children under age 18, (2) approximately 25% of these victims were under age 12" (FBI National Incident Based Reporting System, 2013).

Leaving the children behind every day to go work must have been very difficult for my parents. Magaña & Hovey (2003) identify stressors that affect migrant farmworkers. These stressors, such as "rigid work demands" and "poor housing conditions" were significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety (p. 78). "Low family income/living in poverty" was significantly associated with depression (Romanowski, 2010). In addition, our schooling was often interrupted because of the family's high mobility. "This interruption in education according to Romanowski (2010) and the inability of schools to understand our culture and meet our needs slowly deplete a child's perseverance toward graduation and play a major role in migrant students' dropping out of school" (p. 45).

My responsibilities were to make sure my youngest sister, who was three years old, was fed and changed. I prepared her bag and made sure she was ready to be dropped off at a lady's house in the same mobile park who took care of her during the day. I also had to make sure my two younger brothers were up and ready for school every morning. Once everything was ready I would run inside to get ready for school myself. One of my brothers carried my sister's bag, I carried my sister, and after locking the door, we walked toward the bus stop at the front of the mobile park. But before getting there, we would make a quick stop to drop off my sister at the sitter's house. All this happened before we even got to school.

On our first day of school, my responsibilities continued. I had to go to the front office to enroll my younger siblings and myself. After enrolling my siblings, I would walk them to their classrooms and made sure they knew to look for me after school. Dr. Tanya (2017) explains how parents may "burden children with too many responsibilities-an unfair number of chores, excess hours of taking care of younger siblings or a too rigorous schedule after school" (p. 76). In my case, it was an expectation and a responsibility I took very seriously

Before reporting to my assigned classroom, I usually said a little prayer. This year was no different. I said an "Our Father" before I stepped foot into my classroom. I introduced myself, "Good morning, my name is Adriana Flores, and I'm a new student from Texas." The male teacher, who was busy at a corner with some students, pointed at the library area and told me, "There's some Spanish books in the library area. Go ahead and read one." I told him, "But, I know how to read English." He just looked at me and then looked away. Becerra (2012) argues, "White teachers don't understand Latino culture"; and "Latino parents neglect to push their kids to work hard" (p. 860). Neither one of these was my case. The teacher was Latino and my parents always stressed the importance of education. However, "schools are often too quick to label Latino students" (p. 860). I don't know how I felt at the time. I stood looking at him before I actually sat down at the library area. The rest of my day was uneventful.

When it was time to go home, I would run to pick up my brothers in their classrooms. After getting off the bus, we would stop at the sitter's house to pick up my sister, then we would walk toward our house where we'd spend the rest of the afternoon & evening. We ate cereal every day, did our homework and watched TV until about 8 or 9 p.m. when the family finally came home. Our favorite shows were Gilligan's Island, The Brady Bunch, and Casper the Friendly Ghost. I tried to keep my siblings entertained, especially when it got dark at night. In *Cesar Chavez and the Life of a Migrant Farmworker* (2012) migrant student, Iselda discusses how the responsibilities of working in the fields, babysitting, and attending school can be overwhelming for a young child.

These adult responsibilities at such an early age forced me to become resilient and responsible (Delgado, R. 1999). Children of migrant families often find themselves in situations that are out of their control, which was my case. The sacrifices my family made during the farm

working days resemble those sacrifices made by thousands of families throughout the United States each year.

Vignette # 4 - Resistance

During my junior year in high school my family decided to stay in Wahpeton North Dakota to assist with the harvesting of the sugar beets, the crop that we worked on every summer. The world of migrant farmworkers is a complex social and economic system, a network of intertwined lives, showing how all Americans are bound to the struggles and contributions of our nation's farm laborers (Rothenberg, 2000). In September, the weather started to become too cold and icy. We were not accustomed to this kind of weather. We didn't have appropriate jackets to protect us from the bitter winter. I often wore several sweaters layered over each other to protect me from the cold weather. The most vivid memory I had of this winter was being so cold. On the first day of school I had to go to the front office and submit my enrollment papers. While walking toward the front office, my younger brother and I witnessed so many white students lined up against both walls staring at these "two brown bodies", (Chavez, 2012) and how this draws attention to my "marginal position inside dominant structures of education" (p. 338). We didn't know why they were there, or what they were waiting for. We were completely unfamiliar with the process this school used for enrollment (Romanowski, 2010). When we arrived at the office, we were quickly greeted by Mr. Williamson, our summer school principal. It turned out he was also our high school's assistant principal. Our family was familiar with Mr. Williamson because he had been one of the few people who had been so committed to helping us. His friendly face and jovial personality made him an approachable person always willing to help Mexican-American families with whatever

was needed. So, imagine our surprise when we walked into the front office and we heard him say, "Good morning Flores kids." It was so great to see his familiar face.

He quickly began assisting the secretaries in getting our class schedules ready. I was signed up for Algebra II, Typing, English III, Band, and my first period was office duties. In this early morning class my duties included handing out tardy slips to students who arrived late, picking up attendance records from every classroom and other office duties. One day when I was picking up the attendance records, a male teacher calls me into his class and asks, "You're that Spanish girl everyone is talking about, right?" I told him, "I'm Mexican" (Solorzano, 1997). He and all the students in his class looked at me very confused. I felt as though I was inhabiting a completely different world. Anzaldua, (1987) refers to this space as the "Borderland" or the ability to "inhabit multiple selves without feeling incoherent" (p. 67). I explained to them that being Spanish meant you were from Spain. Being Mexican meant you were from Mexico, but Mexicans also spoke Spanish. I believe my explanation only served to confuse them even more. If epistemology is defined as the study of knowledge, whose knowledge and whose ways of knowing are more privileged in schools (Delgado-Bernal, 1998)? As the school year progressed, there were several incidents which also questioned my belonging at this particular school (Yosso, 1995).

The band director was an older man. He was so kind and always so careful not to say or do anything that sounded racist (Solorzano, Ceja, Yosso, 2000). He asked me about my musical ability and wanted to know what chair I played back in Texas. Students in band are assigned to first, second, third chair and so on based on criteria used by the band director. It could be the performance on a small musical piece, and at times they use this as an assessment. If students were able to perform satisfactorily in the presence of all other band students, students are

shuffled around from first chair to last chair according to their performance. I was immediately assigned to 2nd chair after performing for the band director. I made many friends while I was in band. I even participated in a parade that school year.

My typing teacher and my Algebra II teacher were both somewhat passive aggressive. They tolerated my presence in their classrooms, but with a pinch of disdain. My typing teacher just ignored me every day during her class. "If you need help," she usually announced, "raise your hand, and I will come to you." I raised my hand, at times, all period long, she never came near me. By this time, I had grown accustomed to these "subtle acts of microaggression" (Yosso, 2005). I had to figure things out on my own. My Algebra teacher was a little bit more discreet in his treatment of me. We received homework assignment immediately on the first day of school. The teacher would review the assignment the following day. He usually asked for volunteers to solve the equations. I told him I was interested in solving the problem. He looked at me very confused, and said, "Okay" but I could sense a tone of disbelief. Miguel Ceja (2004) cites how organizational obstacles, such as bad experiences with teachers translate into low academic achievement for Hispanic students (p. 56). I solved the problem, and after looking at it, the teacher stated, "Wow, I didn't think someone like you knew how to solve these problems." His face showed an embarrassment. I could tell it was a slip up. I looked at him and he knew I understood what he meant. This was the typical deficit thinking perceptions Valencia & Solorzano, (1997) discuss which takes the position that minority students are responsible for their lack of academic progress (p. 671).

My English teacher was very comical and joked around with the students often. I wasn't one she joked with though. I sat by myself toward the right side of the classroom next to many empty desks. This didn't bother me. My parents had provided me with a strong emotional

support that, according to Delgado-Gaitan (1992) encouraged me to value my education. All the "cool" kids sat at the center toward the back of the room. They never did anything except joke and play. These were all the football players and cheerleaders who didn't seem to think the rules applied to them. I was always quiet and did my work. I submitted my homework assignments every day, but I never received feedback from the teacher.

On my last day at this school, I went to each of my classes to collect my grades for the semester. When I arrived with my English teacher the students were loud and boisterous like always. The teacher struggled, but was able to pull out all my graded assignments. She placed them on her desk while she used her calculator to average out my final grade. When she finally finished, she looked at me astonished, stood next to her desk, clapped her hands as she announced, "Students, listen up." It took a while for the students to finally settle down. To my amazement, she stated, "Can you all believe that the Spanish girl has a higher average than most of you in English class" (Yosso, 2005)? She added, "You all should be ashamed of yourselves." It took me years to realize that this was NOT a compliment. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) have documented how high school students employ strategies of resistance against educational inequality (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). This type of educator attitude toward minority students is an example of Valenzuela's (1999) "subtractive schooling mentality" where educators, instead of building on students' strengths, diminish their academic efforts (p. 98).

When I became a teacher I, tried to be cognizant about the types of comments we sometimes make as educators that break a student's self-esteem and self-identity (Delgado-Gaitan, C. 1992). Migrant students who travel from state to state every year are especially susceptible to mistreatment and discrimination by educators (Romanowski, 2010). Like myself,

too many Mexican-American migrant students do not complete their high school education (Schhneider & Stevenson, 1999; Solorzano & Yosso 2002b) because of educators who seek to denigrate and humiliate them.

Vignette # 5 - Mentor

"What about you? Why aren't you looking for classes?" I looked up at Irene Garcia, principal at Memorial Elementary school in La Joya, Texas where I had worked as a counselor's clerk for the past two years. Del Campo, Del Campo, & Del Campo (2009) stress that "Hispanic women find personal fulfillment in tending to family as their number one priority" (p. 784). In a way, this was my case. I had no intentions of furthering my education. She stood at the corner of the office watching all the other clerks as they discussed which university classes they would be signing up for in the fall semester. Since I had dropped out of school several months before graduating, I had quickly enrolled in classes with the High School Equivalency Program (HEP) at University of Texas Pan American who assists migrant students such as myself complete their high school education. I had already made one bad decision by dropping out of high school. I did not want to become another statistic. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that "32.4% Hispanic students dropped out of high school in 2016." (p. 89). "This rate is higher than both White and Black students' dropout rate combined" (p. 89). I received my GED within one week after enrolling in the courses, I attended a vocational school soon after and received a certificate for Medical/Office Specialist. Although I knew, as Becerra (2012) explains, that "a college degree is essential in securing a decent standard of living," I felt I was set with this job (p. 90). As a student educated in the Rio Grande Valley, I felt I didn't possess the *ganas* to pursue a college degree (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). Plus, I didn't feel that high school had adequately prepared me for college. Teachers had not challenged me to think critically (Cabrera,

Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). Most assignments required minimum reading skills and rote memorization. How could I possibly gain access and succeed in college with such minimum thinking and learning skills (Perez, & McDonough, 2008). I knew that this was the mentality of everyone in my family and most everyone in my neighborhood (Del Campo, Del Campo, & Del Campo, 2009). I turned to her and stated very confidently, "Oh, I already graduated from Business school, I'm done with school, plus I'm married, and no, college is out of the question". I spoke as I continued typing at my desk. I saw her grab an extra newspaper listing of all the classes. She walked over to me and handed it to me.

She stated, "Que married ni que nada. You will sign up for classes because you are going to college. "Traditional mentoring," argues Mendez-Morse (2004) "consists of a person in a position of power that can teach, encourage, and facilitate the advancement of a protégé (p. 87). She was determined to push me to go to college. Mrs. Garcia continued to serve as my mentor when I became assistant superintendent in the school district. Her guidance has helped me maneuver difficult situations. "If I have to go talk to your husband," she declared, "I will." "He will let you go." I tried explaining to her that my husband would never keep me from going to school, but she wouldn't hear any more excuses from me. Not only did my husband not try to keep me from going to school, but he became my greatest supporter. Gandara (1982) "*Passing through the eye of the needle: High-achieving Chicanas*," discusses how "women who have succeeded have relied on the emotional support of their families" (Gandara, 1982) (p. 760). He took care of my two little girls while I attended school in the evenings. Without his support, I never would've made it as far as I have (p. 760). But at that moment, I was so afraid of this woman that I decided to do as she said. I signed up for 12 college hours the fall of 1985, I

continued working full time, and I had a one-year-old baby and was pregnant with my second child.

My life was quite difficult during this time. After several months, I decided to quit my job with the school district and go to school full time. By this time, I had started to develop an appreciation for the value of a college education (Mendez-Morse, 2004). When I told Mrs. Garcia that I would be quitting my job, she wished me luck and told me that when I was ready to start teaching, she would give me my first teaching job. Going to school had given me a purpose. I didn't know it at the time, but my life was about to change drastically (Solorzano, & Yosso 2002b) as I would begin to construct knowledge upon a critical awareness.

Three years later, I stopped at a convenient store on my way to school and I bumped into Irene Garcia. She asked me, "Are you done with college?" I told her, "No". She then asked me, "How many college hours do you have?" I told her I had 91. She told me, "Well, then, you can start teaching under the emergency certification." According to the Texas Administrative Code, under this type of certification, an individual can only hold the position for three years. If the teachers wish to remain in the same position, she or he must earn a permanent certification by meeting the normal requirements. Do you want to start teaching?" I was dumbfounded. Everything was happening so fast. All I could manage to say was, "I guess." The following day, while I was at work (I worked at an unemployment office at the time) my boss comes out of his office and asks me, "Do you know an Irene Garcia?' I said, "Yes." He says, "She's on the phone. She says for me to let you go to La Joya Human Resource department and sign your contract with Macario Garza, the Human Resource Director. She says that everything is set and you will have a teaching job for this fall. This lady was so outstanding. She had followed through on her

promise to give me my first teaching job. The fall of 1988 I started teaching 5th grade at Kika de la Garza elementary at La Joya School district where Irene Garcia was my principal.

Many of us are fortunate enough to find someone along the way who will push us to do things we never thought were possible. I often wonder how my life would have turned out if Irene Garcia hadn't pushed me to sign up for those first college classes (Mendez-Morse, 2004). "Adults play a key role in increasing student academic motivation" (Ceja, 2004; Perez & McDonough, 2008) (p. 80). Would I have done it on my own? Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung (2007) state that "Latinos/as are more likely than students of any other racial/ethnic group to be the first in their family to attend college (p. 358). This became true in my case. Of course, I had many concerns about my ability to navigate through college without the necessary academic tools. I had no one in my family who had traveled this course and who I could lean on. But in spite of all my tribulations, I'm here now, almost at the finish line and about to complete my dissertation for my doctorate degree.

Vignette # 6 - Discrimination

September 19, 1985 was my first day as a university student. I had enrolled for 15 college hours. Because I had a young child and a second one on the way, I was more determined to complete my education and I had developed the *ganas* to pursue my dream of providing a better life for my children. (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). It was difficult to fulfill my duties as a wife, mother, and student. Financially, it was difficult as well. My husband continued working earning minimum wage and I supplemented his salary by applying for financial aid. Times were difficult, but we made it work.

During my first few semesters I navigated the university educational pipeline alone (Chavez, 2012). At the end of my second semester I bumped into an old acquaintance who

became my best friend and we traveled the educational journey together. We even started carpooling to school in order to save money. We took most of our classes together and shared our troubles and struggles. After we became friends, my load of problems and issues didn't seem so bad. We often fought together against discriminatory and/or inappropriate comments made against us by college professors. (Calderon, Delgado-Bernal, Perez Huber, Malagon, & Velez, 2012). Being together made us stronger.

Such was the case in a required undergraduate class I was enrolled in. This class consisted primarily of class discussions on pertinent political issues. One day while guiding a classroom discussion on politics, the professor calls me to the front of the class. I was surprised as I didn't know what this was about. The professor states, "Just stand there." I stood at the front of the classroom visibly confused. He then calls a white female student to come and stand next to me. He then asks the class, "Now, look at both of these ladies. No one could ever confuse her (me) for an American, right?" He added, "She looks very ethnic." Delgado, (1999) states that, teachers' perceptions of Latino students significantly impacts their academic and social success or failure. The students all started laughing after this assault on my identity as a Latina (Yosso, 2005). The discussion continued, but to this day, I don't remember what was discussed. I wanted to scream at him and tell him that his responsibility as a professor was not to demean and belittle students because they looked different. I wanted him to know that his behavior was inappropriate and condescending (Becerra, 2012). But I did none of those things. I quietly walked back to my seat. I felt my face burn with humiliation and anger. Espinoza (1990) describes the use of masks to understand how Latina females resist acts of racism in the academy and how these lead toward self-empowerment.

He was the professor, and there wasn't much I could do about it (Freire, 1973). When class was over and as I was walking out, the professor stops me at the door, still smirking and says, "I'm sorry for using you as an example in class. But, honestly, it's your fault for using that Mexican dress." I didn't respond to his apology. I looked at him and walked out (Elenes, Gonzalez, Delgado Bernal, & Villenes, 2001).

My friend Martha and I were frequently confronted with insensitive comments by university professors who sought to discriminate against us (Yosso, 2005) because we were female, Hispanic, young mothers, and high school dropouts (hooks, 1990). Educators instinctively assumed that because of who we were and where we came from we would not make it at the university level (Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). This type of belief only gave me more fuel to continue and prove to everyone that I was capable of graduating and succeeding. Many educators still believe that because you are an immigrant that was raised in poverty, you are automatically destined to fail.

Racial discrimination against Latinos existed way before I was born, and it continues to exist today. Although many of us continue to fight against social injustices and oppression, much remains to be done (Freire, 1973). The contributions to Hispanic scholars continues to impact the world of academia. Many of these scholars have intended to change the way people of color are viewed. I, like many other migrant, immigrant, females have been viewed as incapable of succeeding academically or professionally (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). I hold true to my fundamental belief that my strengthened self-identity has allowed me to succeed and push through every racial, sexist, and legal barrier imposed by a hegemonic society (Aguirre, 2006).

Vignette # 7 - Conflict

The life of an educational leader is filled with many challenges. My life wasn't any different. As a student, I often wore a mask, (Espinoza, 1990) to disguise my internal struggle with the need to seek change in relation to racism. The struggles I faced as a young migrant student and throughout my life, always feeling like an outsider seemed to escalate as I became a professional (Delgado, & Stephancic, 1992). I haven't always been at the right place at the right time. I've made headlines on more than one occasion. I remember always fighting for some cause. Anyone who knows me knows about my involvement in politics. This involvement became more pronounced in 2006 when I was principal at Patricio Perez Elementary at La Joya School district. Ball (1987) defines micropolitics as the "strategic use of power by individuals and groups in an organization to achieve a preferred outcome" (p.7). I had worked as a principal at this school for three years when I, along with four other principals were targeted for political reasons. I fought against this injustice and filed a lawsuit against the school district. An agreement was reached when we went to court in May 10, 2006 and I was offered a contract with the school district. I felt this was necessary in order to survive what Lindle (1994) describes as the 'micro-politics' in the organization (p.76). Incidents such as this has tested my resiliency and ability to cope with difficult situations.

My involvement in politics continued throughout my professional career. In *Dancing With Bigotry,* Macedo and Bartolomé (1999) use examples from the" mass media, popular culture, and politics to illustrate the larger situations facing educators and how this type of argument is both ignored in much of the academic research and rhetoric" (p. 67). By 2012, I was assistant superintendent for human resources and student services at the school

district. Although Hernandez & Murakami (2016) stress the importance of providing social and academic support to teachers, families, and especially students of color, administrator's own experiences still reflect less documented histories and contributions because of "challenges related to racial identity, racism, sexism, and other historically marginalizing emblems of identity, often invisible in the school leadership research and practice" (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016).

Unfortunately, 2012 was also the year I was diagnosed with cancer. In November of 2012, the school district held board elections which changed the composition of the board. hooks (1990) "examines the way in which postmodernist discourse has opened up a theoretical terrain where 'difference and Otherness' can be considered legitimate issues in the academy (p. 2). The board which had supported me were now out. As with every other organization, the rumor mill began moving fast. I heard of a possible reassignment within the school district. I waited to see what would happen.

During this wait and see time, my health was slowly deteriorating. After being diagnosed with cancer January of 2012, I had become aware that the criteria CRAB (C=calcium [elevated], R=Renal failure, A=anemia, & B=Bone lesions) was utilized for identification and progression of the disease (Rajkumar, 2014). I had become significantly anemic during this very difficult time and it was difficult for me to walk into my office without exerting undue pressure on my heart. In spite of my debilitating health, I made it to work every day and complied with all my duties as assistant superintendent (Townsend, 1990).

The day finally came in February of 2013. I received a phone call from my attorney. He called and asked me how I was doing in my doctoral classes. I thought this was a strange conversation, but I listened on. He then stated, "How would you like to have all the time in the

world to work on your doctoral classes?" he added, "Plus, how would you like to have some money too?" This was micropolitics at work. Micropolitics (Blasé, 1995) is a fundamental dimension of school change in general and, as such, a chief target of most approaches to school restructuring. Now he had my attention. He continued, "The school district is willing to pay you to take some time off." At first the idea sounded awesome. But when we started ironing out all the details, I realized I would end up losing so much more than just my job. I was given a few days to think about it. Negotiations continued between my attorney and the school district. This "emerging micropolitics of education and policy-analysis according to Malen (1995) cultural and feminist studies are being synthesized at local, national, and state levels of the United States" (p. 86). I finally agreed to be paid one hundred-fifty thousand dollars. My last day with the school district was February 13, 2013. I was also paid for the sick leave days I had accumulated in my 28 years with the school district. I had been saving them in case I ever needed them for an emergency. The hardest part was doing away with my life insurance. With the cancer diagnosis, it became impossible to get life insurance with any other company. This is something I struggle with to this day.

Educators have often expressed that "Politics should have NO influence on education." Unfortunately, educational leaders and school administrators "find themselves in a continually contentious arena and vie for ways of balancing, directing, controlling, manipulating, managing and surviving their edgy environments" (Ball, 1987; Blasé, 1986, 1989, 1991; Lindle, 1994; Malen 1995; Townsend, 1990).

In hindsight, I realize I made the right decision. As a product of this school district, I had fulfilled my oath to serve my community and my people for 28 years. I have no regrets. I worked unselfishly each and every day to make a difference in students' lives (Blasé, 1991). A

true testament to my legacy are the stories I hear from parents and ex-students whom I have served throughout the years.

Vignette # 8 - Gratitude

As I write about my life, I am writing about something much greater than myself. The fantasies that had sustained me through elementary school began to dwindle as I grew older and understood about discrimination, rejection, and isolation. Adams (2015) shows people, like myself "in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles" (p. 12). As I seek to make sense of my life, I realize that every experience I've had, and every relationship I've built through the course of my life has taught me a lesson, and for that, I am grateful.

Orson F. Whitney (2016) states, "No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility" (p. 86). At times, when I have let pride and arrogance steer me away from the most important things in life; love, faith, and patience, a bitter twist of fate arrives to remind me that I'm not invincible. This humility has allowed me to approach each chapter of my life "with a pure heart, and a more charitable spirit" (p. 86).

My school years, although turbulent and painful, taught me so much about myself as an individual. My interest in the teachings of the bible began at a very early age. At the age of eleven, my local church was in need of lecturers. I became a lecturer and walked two miles to church every Sunday. I was very involved with our church throughout my elementary and high school years, I even participated in several plays. In the evenings, on a selected day of the week, our church held bible readings at a community members' house. I remember riding my bike to these bible readings and listening intently at the discussions that took place. I'm sure people

wondered why I would show up by myself. I strongly believe that it was my faith in God that allowed me to withstand the racism, innuendos, and discrimination I faced as a student in the public schools and university. It was also that same faith in God which carried me through the cancer diagnosis and subsequent transplant and difficult treatments.

At a time when I felt I was on top of the world, I was diagnosed with cancer. I had acquired a top level administrative position at the school district, I had continued with my doctoral classes as scheduled, and everything seemed to be flowing "viento en popa" as they say in my neighborhood. But, for a moment, I had to be reminded that I was not in control. Although I had made plans for my immediate and long term future, I didn't plan for the struggles I would endure as a cancer patient. If there's a time when a person feels closer to God, it's during a moment like this. Ellis, (1995) and Lee (2010) speak of how "lived experiences" are emotional phenomena that display vulnerability in the face of grief (Ellis, 1995; Lee, 2010). I had never prayed so much as when I was about to undergo my stem cell transplant. I prayed that the doctors treating me had made an "A" in all their school courses. I prayed that my doctors were brilliant. But most importantly, I prayed that God would guide these doctors to make the right decisions for me. It's at these low points in our lives that God reminds us that we are nothing without him. As I continue to live my life as a cancer survivor, I am thankful for the second chance I've been given to live my life.

Throughout my life, I have learned not to take anything or anyone for granted. As a researcher, I "acknowledge and value my relationships with others" (Adams, 2006 p. 12). I have also learned to develop a deep appreciation for who I am. I no longer feel diminished because of who I am or where I come from. I have learned that events or traumas do not define me as a human being. What defines me is what I have decided to do with those experiences. I am

offering my story, "a story of struggles of an ordinary person, like myself coping with difficult contingencies of lived experiences" (Geertz, 1973 p. 77) and how these research stories can be used to help others (Ellis, Kiesinger, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997). It's with humility and gratitude that I continue to make meaning of my life.

Summary

As I conclude this chapter, I am reminded of something a professor once said, "Everyone has a story." Even though some researchers still assume that "research can be done from a neutral, impersonal, and objective stance (Atkinson, 1997; Buzard, 2003; Delamont, 2009), most now recognize that such an assumption is not conceivable" (Bochner, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Rorty, 1982). We as individuals, for the most part, determine the plot and the characters of our story. However, the events we encounter are extrinsic in nature and out of our control. Everyone faces difficult moments in life, although they vary in degree of severity. As I analyze other people's lives; close relatives, friends and some acquaintances, I realize not everyone's struggles have been divided evenly. As they say in my barrio, "*Unos nacen con estrella, y otros nacen estrellados*." You would think that I would include myself in the latter group. I don't. At the age of 53, I have realized that every struggle that I have had has been a blessing disguised as a struggle. Wonderful lessons have emerged from every difficult situation I have encountered.

When we resist a situation, we are declaring our inconformity with the status quo. As a migrant Latina, I have had others' ideologies imposed upon me by a dominant society. I have not always publicly and openly opposed these, but I have learned to observe, analyze, and desist, if necessary. My migrant years were instrumental in preparing me to recognize, decipher, and "confront issues of racism and racial intolerance" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). The situations I encountered in my earlier years laid the foundation for a future of hope and

optimism. The stories I have shared in the previous vignettes demonstrate how my life has not been just about me. My family, mentors, and friends have been a critical part of my evolution from a young migrant student to an educational professional. Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, (2011) state that "Autoethnography seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (p. 11). The personal experiences I have shared illustrate how I, as an individual, am capable of holding a different assumption about the world (Ellis, 1995).

When I was a little girl I had a small picture frame with a quote on it hanging on the wall next to my bed. When we traveled from state to state, I always took it with me and I read it often. It said, "Though you travel the world over to find happiness, if you don't carry it with you, you will find it not." This sums up my life story. Although my story has been about survival, discrimination, and adversities, I always carried my light of hope which has carried me through life. There have been many lessons that have been learned throughout my journey, lessons on triumph, determination, sacrifice, and love. However, as the famous Greek philosopher Plato said, "The learning and knowledge that we have is, at the most, but little compared with that of which we are ignorant." There are still lessons to be learned. My journey has just begun.

CHAPTER V

THE JOURNEY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine if critical self-reflection was crucial in allowing me to develop a deeper level of understanding about myself as an educational leader. As a first generation, Latina, migrant, high school dropout, I was destined to fail according to research (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Saenz (2007) claimed that "first generation students tend to have lower educational aspirations than non-first-generation students" (p. 80), and Cornelius-White, Garza, and Hoey (2004) state that "academic achievement is influenced by familial factors" (Cornelius-White, Garza, & Hoey, 2004 p. 54). The cards had been stacked up against me since the day I was born. Being born in Mexico, in a large family whose primary language was Spanish, placed me at a disadvantage with other children my age. But, as Delgado-Bernal (2001) contends, this need not be a disadvantage, because as a young child, I employed pedagogies of the home as "the communication, practices and learning that strengthened my ability to understand my daily experiences" (p. 240), including those of "sexism and racial microaggressions" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000 p. 76).

Had my father not had the foresight to bring his family to United States when I was a young child and encouraged all his kids to obtain their U.S. citizenship by the age of 18, my life would have turned out completely different. Once in the United States, my life was anything but ordinary. I was now a recent immigrant student who was unfamiliar with American culture and

language. As a young Mexican-American child, my "worldview was different from the school's understanding of success and communication due to cultural deprivation" (Valencia, 1997; Donato, 1997; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Lopez, 2003; Flores, 2005) (p. 750).. In addition, as a migrant student, I was forced to go to different schools every year. This made it difficult for me to keep up with my schoolwork. As I have examined the events in my life, I have sought to arrive at an understanding with the aid of my research questions, which have guided my study.

- What factors influenced me, a Mexican-American female student to succeed in an educational environment in spite of the obstacles and challenges I encountered?
- What assets in my life contributed to my success & resiliency as a female Mexican-American in a leadership position?

Methods and Procedures

Autoethnography was the ideal methodological tool for me because it provided me with a venue to express my feelings, my thoughts, and my experiences in my own words**.** Autoethnography is an approach that has acknowledged subjectivity and emotionality of myself as a researcher. Through this layered account, I have been able to utilize "reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection" (Ellis, 1991) to "invoke" readers to enter into my "emergent experience" of doing and writing research (Rambo, 2005). Writing my personal stories has been therapeutic for me as I have attempted to make sense of my life and my experiences (Kiesinger, 2002; Poulos, 2008). This methodological tool has allowed me, as a researcher to "raise consciousness and promote cultural change" (Ellis, 2002b; Goodall, 2006) (p. 65). This self-analysis allowed me to "tell my story, which would have otherwise remained untold" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010) (p. 70). Until I began writing my dissertation, I was unaware of the extensive amount of literature available on autoethnography. As I continued reading literature

by Bochner, Ellis, and Adams, who offer their perspective on this qualitative method to conduct research, my interest in autoethnography continued to grow. Minerva Chavez (2012) discusses about writing and views about her Chicana presence inside dominant structures. In "*Autoethnography: a Chicana's Methodological Research Tool: The Role of Storytelling for Those Who Have No Choice but to do Critical Race Theory*," Chavez's views mirror my own when she states, "I have found that when I write, I am unable and unwilling to create the traditional 'academic distance' between the papers I produce and the voices of my educational experiences" (p. 338). Funny story, every time I'd share my personal struggles and life story with close friends, they would always suggest that I write a book about my life. Then autoethnography came along and gave me that opportunity.

This extensive research project has allowed me to think critically about my life and try to make sense of my experiences and my life. As Ellis (2004) states, "Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants, enter the author's world and use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives" (Ellis, 2004) p. 12). As an autoethnographer, I interviewed cultural members (Berry, 2005; Nicholas, 2004), I analyzed artifacts such as clothing and architecture (Borchard, 1998), and texts such as books, movies, and photographs (Goodall, 2006; Neuman, 1999; Thomas, 2010). Reviewing pictures from my migrant and younger years really helped refresh my memory and allowed me to analyze my experiences and compare and contrast them against existing research (Ronai, 1995, 1996). Albers & Harste, 2007) explain how "photographs provide artistic representation and can help provide meaning" (p. 98).

The person who was most helpful in helping with my quest for information has been my mother. At age 83, I was, and still am impressed, with her ability to recall dates, cities, events, and her children's ages at the time of certain events. Much like Sofia Villenas (2005) who describes her mother as a powerful influence while she lived between two cultures as a Latina immigrant, so too, was my mother a pillar of strength for all her children, helping us adjust to our new world. Similarly, the Hurtado sisters (2007) in *Tres Hermanas (Three sisters): A model of relational achievement*, explain how Latina mothers display pride in their ability to raise children in a new community in the United States. They attribute their" educationally vibrant and stimulating childhood" to their mother and her ability to empower her children (p. 230). Consequently, my mother also taught my siblings and me that "knowledge is not only found in books, but also in conversations, touch, taste, dialogue, and exploration. She also believed knowledge is to be respected and shared" (p. 90).

I have also relied on my own recollection of events for most of my study with an intent to "raise consciousness and promote cultural change" (Ellis, 2002b; Goodall, 2006), and give people a voice that, before writing, they may not have felt they had (Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002). I have also utilized layered accounts to focus on my experiences alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature. As I have reflected on the use of vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection, Ellis, (1991) explains, "this is a way to 'invoke' readers to enter into the 'emergent experience' (p. 11), of doing and writing research" (Ronai, 1992, p.123).

Major Findings

As I have written about all the events which have significantly impacted my life, I discovered that I'm not alone in my struggles. My first finding pertains to my struggles as a migrant farmworker. Through reflexive ethnography I can situate myself in a continuum of

changes which have occurred in my life (Ellis, 2004, p.50), as a result of my migrant experiences. As I extract the bits and pieces of memory I have about my struggles as a Mexican-American female migrant student, I realize, educators, including those in leadership positions did not take an active role in identifying my needs as a student of color. Although I consider it an advantage that I now have the tools to use and the experiences to create new knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 2006), I've often wondered how different my life would have turned out if I had effective educators who nurtured and encouraged the potential in me.

Research demonstrates how "migrant families continue with their struggles related to inappropriate living conditions and facilities, (Rothenberg, 2000) health issues, language barriers, and discrimination**."** An article by Castaneda**,** A. (1998) explains how migrant parents use their children to translate for them because they are unable to speak or understand the English language (Castaneda, 1998). Vignettes #1 & #2 (Emergence & Translator) in chapter 4 are examples of how this was a reality in my family. Similarly, Galarza (1971) *An autobiography of a Boy's Acculturation, Barrio Boy: The Story.* writes about his experiences as a translator when he was a migrant child. This has helped me understand that migrant families will do whatever is needed in order to survive. Consequently, many of these children develop critical learning skills, which allows them to achieve success in other areas of their lives. Such is the case of Ernesto Galarza (1971) who describes translating as an "empowering skill which he later utilized as an advocate for economic and social justice" (p. 43).

My second finding is the ongoing issue of discrimination. "Autoethnography, as a research methodology for the marginalized" (Macedo, Dendrinos, and Gounari, 2003), has enhanced my understanding of the deep and systemic discrimination which occurs in our schools. School leaders need to develop a critical lens to identify and fix the educational

inequities which continue to impact student achievement. It is important to point out that discrimination is not necessarily relegated to migrant students. Anyone anywhere can be subjected to discrimination. It is also possible to experience discrimination here in the Rio Grande Valley as well. This discrimination need not be due to race, it could also be because of gender, political affiliation, immigration status, or even skin color of members from the same race. There are a multitude of reasons for discrimination and oppression. Paolo Freire (1970) outlines the relations, which exist between oppressor and oppressed. For example: "Any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression". And also: "One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is prescription. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness." This '*praxis*' links the work of critical reflection on the situation of oppression with action, which changes that situation in a concrete, objectively verifiable way (Freire, 1970). According to Freire (1970), merely interpreting the world is not enough, the point is to change it.

Scholars such as Yosso,Delgado-Bernal, Villalpando, & Solorzano (2001) have extended an ongoing discourse about the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation (Yosso, Delgado Bernal, Villalpando, & Solorzano, 2001). As a working class Chicana first-generation college student with a Ph.D, Minerva Chavez (2012) wonders how "an anomaly, such as herself can conduct educational research. As such, she has broken through the barriers of invisibility and oppression" (p. 338). There have been many Latino/a researchers and scholars who, through (CRT) Critical

Race Theory, continue to address and challenge the impact this has had on educational achievement of Latina students (Yosso, Delgado-Bernal, Villalpando, & Solorzano, 2001).

My third finding is the deficit thinking mentality, which still seeps into students' space in many of our classrooms. As a young Latina educator in the Rio Grande Valley there were many challenges to overcome. Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, (2012) discuss the difficulties Mexican-American students face as they try to graduate from high school. However, many of these students' struggles begin in the early elementary grades when, because of their low socio-economic status, lack of English language skills, and recent immigrant status, are labeled by teachers who are unable or unwilling to deal with such students (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). Unfortunately, many educators, including in the Rio Grande Valley still operate with the deficit thinking mentality, which posits (Valencia, & Solorzano, 1997) that parents are to blame for their children's lack of academic achievement. "The academic potential of Mexican-American students is diminished when educators hold low expectations of minority students" (p.73). One of my goals in earning a doctoral degree is to help develop knowledge that would create a more equitable educational system.

I realize that my entire life has been guided by a deficit thinking mentality. I have chosen to write from my epistemological perspective, from someone who has "traditionally been excluded, silenced, or otherwise oppressed in our schools and society" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) (p. 62). The challenges have arisen in public education today because, traditionally, the practices and policies of public schools (including institutions of higher education) "have enacted the cultural values, norms, and otherwise privileged White (Cuádraz, 1997), male (Solórzano, & Ornelas, 2002).), and middle and upper class students" (Gandara, 1995). Those who advocate and insist on established forms of doing and writing research are advocating a White, masculine,

heterosexual, middle/upper-classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective (p. 43). Autoethnography, on the other hand, has "expanded and opened up a wider lens on the world, avoiding rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research" (Adams, 2005; Wood, 2009).

An eye-opening discovery for me was how students in "*Ganas: From the individual to the community, and potential for improving college going in the 'land that Texas forgot"* Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz (2012) indicated how they did not receive the guidance they needed from their teachers and counselors to help them get into college. They stated teachers were too busy preparing them for State Standardized Assessments and they neglected to enrich their lessons with critical thinking skills to ensure they experienced success in their college entrance exams. They stated counselors were too overwhelmed servicing too many students that they were unable to guide them through the application process (p. 78). As a teacher and administrator at the elementary level, the concern of spending too much time on Standardized testing and in the process, neglecting crucial core subject areas was discussed on numerous occasions. However, I didn't realize high school students would be able to identify these as critical reasons for their lack of college level preparedness.

The fourth and final finding is the resilience I acquired, as a result of every struggle I was exposed to, including the diagnosis of cancer. When I began writing this dissertation, I was unaware that this process would be therapeutic for me, (Ellis, Bochner, & Adams, 2011) or that it would motivate me to promote cultural change in order to help others. Cancer has touched almost all of us. I have shared how this disease marked a turning point in my life as an educational leader exposing a vulnerable self (Behar, 1997) in the process. Throughout my journey, I learned that my time was a valued treasure. After the diagnosis, my time was, and continues to be, consumed with doctors' visits, exams, and follow up treatments. My life will

forever be changed because of this disease. The resilience I gained as a result of utilizing critical self-reflection (Ellis, 2004) was instrumental in helping me deal with, and cope with the uncertainties of the disease and life. Because autoethnography has allowed me to center my study on my own experiences (Chavez, 2012), I intend to use these experiences to contribute to the body of knowledge on this topic and to help other educational leaders who find themselves in a similar situation.

Discussion

As I prepare for this discussion, I reflect on my research questions. Question #1 states: *What factors influenced me, a Mexican-American female student to succeed in an educational environment in spite of the obstacles and challenges I encountered?* There have been many factors which contributed to my academic and social success. I refer to Delgado Bernal (2001) *Living and learning pedagogies of the home: The mestiza consciousness of Chicana students* as I speak of the strong familial support I had throughout my school years and how this became instrumental in shielding me from outside external forces who at times, sought to disparage me as a student of color (Solorzano, & Yosso, (2002b). Experiences such as the time when I was in first grade and was sent to the principal's office because I refused to apologize to a student who I had slapped because he took my hat away taught me early on about "my marginal position inside dominant structures of education" (Chavez, 2012). My refusal to apologize had not been due to a rebellion in me, I had no idea what "apologize" meant. I now understand what Freire (1970) meant when he wrote that "revolutionary (not reactionary) teachers, establish a permanent relationship with students from subordinated cultures and languages" (Freire, 1970). My teachers had failed to establish a relationship with me. Similarly, Shannon (1995) argues that teachers who "reach beyond the hegemony of English and the constraints of institutional

structures are able to achieve a transformation in their diverse classrooms" (Shannon, 1995) (p. 56).

As an immigrant student who was unable to communicate effectively in English, I can relate to Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* where I was forced to inhabit "multiple identities" in order to survive (p. 76). While most students my age were busy playing American games such as Red Rover, which I was completely unfamiliar with, I was busy strategizing a way not to get caught speaking Spanish (it was punishable at my school). I quickly arrived at a solution which worked for most of my elementary school years. I decided not to speak during the time I was at school throughout my elementary years for fear of being punished. Chavez (2012) explains how "exploring the development of particular identities may help inform research in understanding how Latinas/os and other marginalized students of color experience educational institutions to acquire more specific knowledge of their academic successes and failure" (p. 338). I was still learning at school, but no one knew how much because no one took the time to understand my needs as recent immigrant student.

"In moving from silence to debate, I, like many other Chicanas, have interrogated schemas of knowledge and social power" (Gonzalez, 2010) (p. 78). I grew up very aware of the multiple forces at work in Chicana/o school failure (Pizarro, 1998). I realized that dropping out of high school was a step backwards in my educational journey, much to my parents' chagrin. At this time of my life, like Francisca Gonzalez (2001), I had begun to shift my focus from a deficit view to a formation of achievement. I began to imagine myself like the "*pensadoras"* who were "active thinkers who build on their cultural foundations to form identities and integrities" (p. 78). After feeling ashamed to speak my native language for so many years, I soon began to appreciate

and use my strong Spanish background as I continued with my educational journey (Chavez, 2012). My success has relied mainly on my ability to "braid my multiple identities, culture, policy, as young Mexicanas and be able to weave together personal and public worlds" (Gonzalez, 2010) (p. 78).

There were many educators who also contributed to my educational success as a Mexican-American female student. Jennifer Ayala, (2007) points out that educators have the capacity to bring the strengths of our biculturality, code-switching skills and other multiplicities acquired from the families and communities. As a young Mexican-American migrant student, this form of "bridge-work" (p. 301) "which integrates our different selves, fulfilling a sense of connection" was instrumental in helping me overcome institutional cultures and practices. Similarly, Delgado Bernal (2007) uses the idea rooted in the concept of *trenza* to overcome fragmentation. She explains that the strands of the *trenza* bring together strands of hair and weaves them in such a way that the strands come together to become something new. The braiding together of my personal, professional, and communal identity have become stronger and more complete (Delgado Bernal, 2007). This would not have been possible without the aid of educators who took an active role in providing me with the tools I would need to succeed.

My second research question addresses issues related to my life as an educational leader. *How is resiliency important for a female Mexican-American in a leadership position?*

There were many challenges for me as a female Mexican-American educational leader. Hernandez & Murakami (2016) examines some of the "difficulties for Latina/o leaders, including the lack of growth in the administrative K-12 administrative ranks, sexism, and a marginalizing of identity" (Hernandez & Murakami, 2016). How did I develop my own identity as an administrative leader? I found that it was imperative for me to develop positive working

relationships with colleagues who were working in the same position as myself because we all faced similar challenges. This type of camaraderie helped us rely on each other during difficult times. Once I was on the job, I realized I could not do it alone. I needed the support of others if I was to succeed.

Most useful to me was the use of my strong sense of Mexican identity in establishing language interactions with students and parents. Promoting the value of these interactions, explains Hernandez & Murakami (2016), helps "link to cultural identity with students, staff and the community" (p. 681). I can relate to Magdaleno (2009) who offers that "the presence of a Mexican-American educational leader serves to contend against a history of low expectations" (p. 910). As an administrative leader, I always viewed my role as one of a huge responsibility for future generations. As such, I expected for staff members to emulate my actions which I modeled with the intent of transmitting the same expectations. The challenges I faced as an educational leader helped me to discover the resiliency within me.

The discussion of cancer is not an easy one. As an educational leader, I had to face this diagnosis under a microscope. While most people were sympathetic, I was unable to grieve the loss of my health comfortably. I don't want to sound ungrateful. I was truly thankful that so many people were praying for me and my recovery. I was distraught and I needed some me time. Moadel-Robblee, (2006) explains that "around 40% of those living with cancer experience significant emotional distress" (p. 56). There were many moments that I wished I had a remote control and I could place my life on pause until I could regain my composure. Unfortunately, life doesn't work that way. The following day after finding out about my diagnosis, with a heavy heart, I was back at work visiting campus principals to review their evaluations. The first principal I visited that morning was keenly perceptive and knew something was wrong. I shared

a little with him. He was empathetic and understanding. He didn't ask much; he just listened. As I write about these experiences and how they relate to educational research, I realize that like myself, many educators nationwide have also been affected with this disease. This has not been only my battle, but for many years, it has been the battle of many educators.

Conclusions

Given that this type of dissertation has given me the flexibility to engage my readers with the use of dialogue and emotionality, I have concluded that, as Ellis & Bochner (2000) in order to "produce a meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, it was imperative to sensitize readers to the issues of identity politics in order to empathize with people who are different from us" (p. 15). In chapter one, I explain how this dissertation is a critical self-reflection of life altering circumstances which have impacted my life. The diagnosis of cancer marked a turning point in my life. Prior to the diagnosis of cancer, I discuss crucial events leading up to this event.

As a recent immigrant student, I experienced the same difficulties encountered by millions of immigrants who come to the United States every year. As I reviewed literature about the struggles of migrant farmworkers, I have realized that, many others have had the same struggles, however not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to disclose and document their experiences and the effect these have had in their lives. By writing about my struggles, I offer a "voice to those who have no voice" (Ngunjiri, Hernandez & Chang, 2010). As an advocate for migrant farmworkers, I expect that my story will shed some light on the issues migrant farmworkers deal with every day. This is very personal in my life because I still have family members who travel as farmworkers every year and are exposed to discrimination and oppression by a dominant society.

Of all the groups living in poverty, the "migrant farmworkers suffer the greatest socioeconomic deprivation" (Rothenberg, 2000) (p. 78). My family traveled from state to state with the expectation that the crops would be good for the season. When the crops were over in Michigan, we would travel to Minnesota to continue hoeing sugar beets. Bad working conditions were also a significant part of the work we did. As migrant farmworkers, we were tired, uneducated, hungry and sick. However, our contributions and sacrifices were much greater than most other peoples'. The migratory experience left our family and many other migrant farm working families "vulnerable to exploitation, low wages, and wretched working conditions" (p. 78). The extent of the damages caused by this type of working conditions can last a lifetime.

As I continued on my journey through the educational pipeline, I was exposed to a "deficit thinking mentality" which affected how I viewed myself as a Mexican-American student (Chavez, 2012). Developing a strong identity is important for all children, however, I felt I was always cast aside because educators in the United States didn't believe in my capacity to learn and comprehend. One thing they didn't understand was that I wasn't mentally challenged, I just wasn't literate in English. Whenever teachers looked at me with pity because they thought I was slow, I wanted to yell at them and tell them that I never went to kinder, but went straight into first grade at the age of 4 in Mexico. Like Gloria Anzaldua (1987), I took pride in challenging teachers' negative stereotypes of me (Anzaldua, 1987). I wanted to tell them that I knew how to read and write by the age of 4, and that in Mexico, I had had supportive teachers who cared about my learning. I wanted them to allow me to show them how much I knew, but I wasn't allowed to speak Spanish, so, they erroneously concluded that I didn't know anything. Unfortunately, many of our children are still exposed to this type of defective mentality.

At the University level, I attended The University of Texas Pan American, which is mostly comprised of Mexican-American students; this truly helped me build a more positive self-esteem. I pursued a bachelor's degree with a major in Spanish. Although I had had negative experiences in other classes, my experiences while working on my Spanish major were incredibly rewarding (Perez, & McDonough, 2008). I was finally able to work with the Spanish language that I had rejected for so many years. In some of my literature classes, I was expected to write essays and read literature in Spanish, and analyze selections by many popular authors. Throughout this time, I developed a deeper appreciation for my culture and language. I was no longer ashamed to be referred to as a Mexican-American student. It took many years for me to begin to dismantle the deficit thinking mentality about myself as a Mexican-American female.

Consequently, Critical Race Theory (CRT) has been an integral part of my existence. In "Critical Race Theory: An Introduction," Delgado & Stefancic (2006) utilize an example of a student in a 4th grade classroom who raises her hand repeatedly; the teacher either recognizes her or does not (p. 123). This was the case with me. In Vignette #4, chapter 4 (Resistance) I explain my personal struggle with a typing teacher who refused to acknowledge my need for assistance in my typing class. My life was mired by many of these "subtle acts of microaggression," (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000) (p. 465), which were not always "micro" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006). Although many people today believe racism is declining, Delgado & Stefancic (2006) argue that "racism continues to disrupt the lives of people of color in high level society jobs, even judges" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006) (p. 96).

Much has been written about "The Glass Ceiling" and the amount of opportunities that are neglected to women because of their gender. Feminists such as Delgado Bernal, Gloria Anzaldua, and Kimberle Crenshaw have written about this phenomenon as it affects all women

nationwide. As a first generation, Mexican-American female seeking to advance in a male-dominated world, my struggle was unequivocally difficult. I had to "inhabit multiple identities to (Anzaldua, 2005) understand that movement between these worlds" (identities) was necessary for my cultural and political survival. Females in leadership roles must employ resiliency strategies to survive a male- dominated environment. Although, Acker (1990), discusses that "women remain underrepresented in top leadership positions" (p. 453), Mendez-Morse (2014) argues that "women, especially Latinas, have made great strides in breaking through the glass ceiling" (p. 78).

As I prepare to write some concluding statements about my dissertation, I sit, recollect and gather my experiences, both good and bad, to make sense of everything that has transpired in my life. It is impossible to write in a few sentences every event and experience I have lived. Therefore, I will share an overview of the lessons life has taught me about my life as an immigrant, a migrant student, a college student, an educational leader and a cancer patient. I believe that my lived experiences "shape, inform and disrupt theories about race and gender and in utilizing myself as text I have engaged in a meaningful, rigorous analysis" (Pathak, 2010) (p. 876).

The authentic stories I have shared in this study have permitted me to analyze and examine my life from other perspectives (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Although my experiences have taught me about racism, sexism, oppression, discrimination, and educational inequities, I have also learned about tolerance, resistance, resiliency, and compassion which have strengthened my belief in myself and my self-identity. I firmly believe that every experience I have lived has taught me important lessons which will enable me to become a better human being. I have intentionally worked to turn every experience and every piece of knowledge I have

acquired into a positive transformation in myself to serve others as an educational leader. This process, according to Gonzalez & Padilla (2007) is a knowledge about myself that I have acquired organically. It is not just a lesson to remember, it is a lesson to live by. I have concluded that, by immersing myself in literature related to my life experiences, I have gained a deeper understanding about myself through the utilization of critical self-reflection (Gonzalez & Padilla, 2007).

Recommendations and Implications

The implications for this study are far reaching. I was interested in conducting this study because I realize much remains to be done to improve the lives and living conditions of migrant farmworkers. Although farmworkers do rely on some of the provisions of the federal Fair Labor Standards Act ("FLSA") and the Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act ("AWPA") to "provide minimum levels of worker protections, employment abuses in agriculture are not addressed because farm work is not covered by many important labor protections enjoyed by most other workers in this country" (Migrant and Seasonal Agricultural Worker Protection Act, 2013). Legislation should include coverage for migrant farmworker by the National Labor Relations Act with additional favorable rights as well as "workman's compensation laws, unemployment compensation, insurance laws, social security codes must be enforced to improve the conditions of housing provided to migrant families" (National Labor Relations Act, 2005). In addition, policymakers should make every effort to make real changes in society and society's laws and attitudes. In the words of a migrant farmworker, "Those who are in power should help the powerless." An extensive amount of work still needs to be done to improve the lives of all migrant farmworkers.

It is also imperative that the issues racism, sexism, oppression, and discrimination be addressed as critical barriers which affect students and minorities throughout the United States. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was enacted to protect the civil rights of these individuals and protect them against acts of discrimination. However, scholars continue to engage in ongoing debates about these issues. Racial microaggressions, or unconscious and subtle forms of racism, though pervasive, are seldom investigated (Delgado & Stefancic, 1992; Johnson, 1988; Lawrence, 1987; Solorzano, 1998).

My recommendation is that we continue to develop an awareness among educators about the consequences of racial discrimination against students of color and the impact this has on their educational achievement. Educational statistics demonstrate that nationally, "only 45% of Chicanas/os have attended four-years of high school or more, in contrast to 83% of non-Latina/o Whites. Similarly, just 6% of Chicanas/os have acquired at least a baccalaureate degree, in comparison to 23% of Whites" (Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) have developed a working definition of critical race theory in education to develop a "theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and pedagogical strategy" that accounts for the role of race and racism in U.S. education that also works toward the "elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating other forms of subordination such as gender, class, and sexual orientation" (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993) (p. 73).

What is our commitment as educators to social justice? Solorzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) indicate that a" critical race theory in education challenges us to envision social justice as the struggle to eliminate racism and other forms of subordination" while empowering groups that have been subordinated (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) (p. 67). In addition, Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, & Solórzano, (2001) contend that "oppressed individuals who are

at the margins have utilized counterstorytelling as a tool to expose, analyze, and challenge the stories of racial privilege" (p. 42). "Counterstorytelling can shatter complacency and challenge the dominant discourse on race, and further the struggle on racial reform" (p. 42). As a category of critical race theory, critical race feminist theory "puts power relations at the center of the discourse on gender, race, class, and all forms of social oppression" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Adding the layer of gender to the issues of racial discrimination only exacerbates matters more. Kimberle Crenshaw (1993) uses the concept of intersectionality to denote "the ways in which gender and race intersect." The politicization of women of color in the work force has been a topic of much debate. The embrace of identity politics, Crenshaw (1993) explains, has been in tension with conceptions of social justice. "Race, gender, and other identity categories are most often treated intrinsically as negative frameworks in which social power works to exclude or marginalize those who are different" (p. 87). Contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider intersectionality identities, such as women of color (Crenshaw, 1993).

The contribution of many Hispanic scholars who have written about the struggle of minority students in education have made a difference for many Mexican-American students like myself, however much remains to be done to improve the lives of ALL students. Scholars such as Valencia, R. & Solorzano, D. (1997) who write about "contemporary deficit thinking" (p. 86), and Valenzuela, (1999) in "subtractive schooling" (p. 89) demonstrates how much remains to be done to improve the mentality and attitudes of educators and our dominant society as it relates to racism and discrimination.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Adriana Flores-Villarreal who resides at 221 Salinas Drive Sullivan City, Texas, 78595, graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1990 with a Major in Spanish and a Minor in English. In 1992, she obtained her Teacher Certification (PK-6) through a Teacher Certification Program. Mrs. Flores-Villarreal earned a Master of Education Degree in Educational Administration in 1996. In May of 2017 she obtained her Doctoral Degree in Education. All degrees were obtained at The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, formerly The University of Texas - Pan American.

Adriana Flores-Villarreal worked at La Joya School District for 28 years. She worked as a counselor's clerk from 1983 to 1985. In 1988, she was hired at Kika de la Garza Elementary as a 5th grade teacher. She worked as a classroom teacher from 1988 to 1999. In the years 2000 to 2003, Mrs. Flores-Villarreal worked as an assistant principal at Henry B. Gonzalez Elementary at La Joya School District. She served as a campus principal in two different schools, Patricio Perez Elementary and William J. Clinton Elementary from 2003 to 2009. In 2009, Mrs. Flores-Villarreal served her alma mater as a Human Resource Director. Adriana Flores-Villarreal served La Joya School District as Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Student Services from 2010 to 2013.