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Identity Fluidity, Empowerment, and Engendered Poverty: Performing a Veteran-Latina-Online-Graduate Student

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IDENTITY FLUIDITY, EMPOWERMENT, AND ENGENDERED POVERTY:
PERFORMING A VETERAN-LATINA-ONLINE-GRADUATE STUDENT

A Dissertation

by

MARICELA BURNS

Submitted to the Graduate College of
The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley
In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2019

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

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PERFORMING A VETERAN-LATINA-ONLINE-GRADUATE STUDENT

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December 2019

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ABSTRACT

Burns, Maricela, Identity Fluidity, Empowerment, and Engendered Poverty: Performing a Veteran-Latina-Online-Graduate Student. Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), December, 2019, 183 pp., 16 figures, 138 references).

The goal of this project is to use critical race theory and gendered discourse to shed light on engendered poverty, cultural capital and resilience in efforts to identify how the American educational system affects marginalized groups when the systems of power and privilege were not created for them. It is through a poignant narrative of one of these students (myself) in the educational system that I reflect, recollect, write and interweave my lived curriculum with what the literature says about ethnic experiences like mine. The efforts here serve to analyze the processes of constructing and building social and gender identity through an inclusive, online environment composed of men, women, homosexual and heterosexual online students, all of whom share the online experience with myself in these virtual rooms of academia.

Through this research, I focus on how gender and identity are shaped within an online distance learning environment and how it translates to effective communication within an online classroom, specifically when it deals with how I lived the curriculum and understood my place in the system. I draw from Paulo Freire (1972, 1973) on constructivism and oppression of marginalized groups, Derrick Bell (1970) on Critical Race Theory, Pierre Bourdieu (1991) on cultural capital, and Peter Taubman (1979), Jacques Derrida (1967) and Jaques Daignault's (1992) aspects of the post-structural and de-construction text (discourses) respectively, to further

break down the duality between language within opposites. In this way, I was able to analyze the relevance of gender/identity, racial and gender divide (via microaggressions) as it relates to communication and negotiation within an asynchronous and synchronous online medium.

This autoethnographic work is based on a three-year-long exploration in the life of a post-9/11 veteran Latina doctoral student in the United States of America (USA)—navigating the systems of power and privilege in a 100% online setting. The reflective/poetic soliloquies and eventual screenplay denote the frustrations of marginalization through daily writings, journal reflections and screenplay delivery through an autoethnographic, and ethnographic qualitative method.

DEDICATION

The completion of my dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of my daughters, Alera Kathryn Burns and Lieselotte Violet Burns.

“Thank you for being patient, and kind with me throughout this process. Thank you for giving mommy the motivation to keep going—even when I thought I could not. Thank you for your endless love and support; we are truly blessed to have each other. I love you both more than you’ll ever know. *Ay, mi Chiquititas!* What can I say—we did it!”

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Special thanks go out to my loving mother Juanita Gonzalez-Davila who has helped me in the pursuit of my degree. My mother has never wavered in her support of me; she is the one person who loves me unconditionally. Mom, I know you always did what you could with what you had. I remember you reading *National Geographic* books to me in the years before I was to enter kindergarten. You sparked a fire in me to want to learn more about the world, and I will be eternally grateful to you for that. I also want to thank my daughters Alera and Lieselotte Burns for always providing me with the drive and motivation to keep going. These bundles of joy are my world and the reason why I continued to pursue an Ed.D.

Also, thank you to Dr. Miryam Espinosa-Dulanto, my dissertation advisor and chair, for never giving up and for fighting for my success as well. I appreciate our late night inspirational online talks through Zoom and getting to know you on a more personal level. To hear your own journey and plight is inspiring. I am grateful for your love, guidance and support throughout this enormous feat, while being the constant through it all. You made me passionate about performative art and autoethnographic writing. Because of that—here I am. A special thank you also goes out to Dr. Rene Corbeil, Dr. Laura Jewett, Dr. Karin A. Lewis, Dr. Reynaldo Ramirez Jr., and Dr. Ignacio E. Rodriguez, who have been a support system along the way; I appreciate you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER I: DEFINING THE SCREENPLAY AGENDA.....	1
The Work	6
Background of the Study	16
Critical Race Theory in an Online World	16
Defining the Project: Engendered Poverty and Resilience	22
Introduction to My Online World: (Techno-Social Capital in the Wake of Cultural Capital).....	23
Representation: Screenplay as Performative Art—What is Screenwriting per the Literature	26
Introduction of the Problem	27
Theatrical Framework	29
Methodology and Data Collection	38
Method of Delivery: An Arts Based Approach to Ethnographic Research (Screenplay)	42
Structure and Organization of a Screenplay Monologue (Development of the Screenplay)	43

Research Questions.....	45
Nature of the Study: Introduction to Screenplay as Performative Art.....	46
Assumptions and Limitations	46
Soliloquy #1: “Implications of Engendered Poverty; Female Head of Household and Government Assistance” by LATINA.....	47
Analyzing Soliloquy #1	57
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	61
Historical Overview: Critical Race Theory	62
Latina Experiences Within Critical Race Theory, Microaggressions, and Their Relationship to Cultural Capital	63
Identity Fluidity Bought with Capital	66
Sexuality, Gender, and Negotiation of Power Through Techno-Social Capital.....	67
Power in 100% Online Exclusive Higher Learning Institutions: Technology as Access.....	68
Construction of Knowledge for Adult Learners	73
Theory.....	74
Analysis.....	74
Evaluation	76
Connections.....	78
Resilience Amid Oppression.....	79
Soliloquy #2: “Navigating the Online Battlefield: From Soldier to Student #0161328” by LATINA.....	81
Analyzing Soliloquy #2	92
CHAPTER III: Methodology.....	94
Purpose of the Dissertation Research	94
Methodology.....	97
History of Autoethnography	97

Telling the Story	98
Research Design and Methods.....	100
Data Collection	102
Participant	103
Data Analysis Procedures	106
Coding the Data	109
Criteria/Purpose	111
Summary.....	112
Soliloquy #3: Never Good Enough.....	113
Analyzing Soliloquy #3: Latina’s Journey	114
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS/FINDINGS: THE SCREENPLAY—IDENTITY FLUIDITY, EMPOWERMENT, AND ENGENDERED POVERTY PERFORMING A VETERAN- LATINA-ONLINE GRADUATE STUDENT	118
Definition and Terms	118
The Screenplay: Identity Fluidity, Empowerment, and Engendered Poverty Performing a Veteran-Latina-Online Graduate Student / A New Autoethnographic Play Collected and Arranged by Maricela Burns.....	119
The School Raised Me: Engendered Poverty and the Construction of Knowledge in the Midst of No Familial Support and Abuse.....	120
Analyzing the Final Screenplay	157
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATION, IMPLICATIONS.....	162
Introduction.....	162
Revisions.....	165
The Conference.....	166
REFERENCES	168
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH	183

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Journal Entry. September 14, 2017	7
Figure 2. Latina’s Experience in an Online Classroom	13
Figure 3. Latina Soliloquy Inspired by James Baldwin.....	20
Figure 4. From Latina’s Rental Home	24
Figure 5. Journal Entry, October 5, 2017.....	44
Figure 6. Facebook Post. August 7, 2016	56
Figure 7. Email Exchange Between Latina and Professor.....	135
Figure 8. Email to Professor	136
Figure 9. Facebook Chat with Friend	137
Figure 10. Emails Between Latina and Billing Office.....	140
Figure 11. Facebook Post, September 14, 2017.....	143
Figure 12. Email to Curriculum Project Supervisor	151
Figure 13. Email to Mr. Pseudonym (Daughter’s Instructional Coordinator).....	153
Figure 14. Email to Daughter’s Language Arts Teacher	155
Figure 15. Email to Daughter’s Language Arts Teacher	155
Figure 16. Email to Daughter’s Principal and Language Art’s teacher	156

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING THE SCREENPLAY AGENDA

In attempting to accomplish this feat in developing the three soliloquies, and then the grand screenwriting script that ties together the soliloquies, it was important to explore how other dramatic autoethnographies/ethnographies formed and developed their own process. Mind you, this was not to be an extensive analysis of the body of their work, but to look at plot advancement, characterization, figurative language and other literary devices and structures of screenwriting that were used to deploy imagery in their sets and establish my scenes that would hopefully lead to thought provoking work. I come to this experience much like a quilter who uses layers of material to make a quilt. I interweave, i.e., blend facets of my various life experiences into a closely-knit research project. It is through my marginalized existence that I view my academic prowess and interpret my lived experience from the upbringings of engendered poverty. Perhaps I'd come away with some sort of cathartic understanding of situations such as mine. Yes, a patchwork quilt—colorful pieces recycled and stitched together into a work of art that also serves a practical purpose. Through this I ask an important question: Will screenwriting in monologue form be the process that will evoke further insight to this issue of engendered poverty, identity fluidity and finding my voice? I was looking to analyze other screenwriting plays to gather ideas on patterns of plot and look at various ways that a typical linear plot could also be dismantled to show the chaos that was my life throughout my upbringing and academic pursuits.

My central question is not my sole goal when looking at how resilience spared my life from the ghettos of public government assistance, but it is important to have zoned in on a method of delivery that would interest viewers to share in my experience in an innovative thought-provoking manner.

As ethnographers and other qualitative researchers become more interested in ethnographic performance there is a responsibility to this type of research, “Properly conceptualized, performance autoethnography becomes a civic, participatory, collaborative project. It turns researchers and subjects into coparticipants in a common moral project” (Denzin, 2003, p. 249).

Indeed, they express the ethnographic play as an open-ended performance, where the audience reflects and goes throughout that lived experience of the protagonist. According to Sheryl Cozart et al., ethnodramatist performances are described in the following way: “‘best understood as a dialogue in which performers and audience engage in an equal exchange’ (Cozart et al., 2003, p. 54) (Bakhtin, 1981, 1986; Conquergood, 1985; Mienczakowski, 2001), and that ‘Ideally, performance ethnography is a dialogic encounter in which all parties are willing to learn from each other’” (Cozart et al., 2003, p. 68). In addition, Goldstein (2002, p. 2) “‘encapsulates the views of many ethnodramatists when she asserts that for those whose work is based in educational contexts, the writing and presentation of an ethnographic performance has the potential to breakdown the “traditional boundaries that separate research, teaching and learning’” (Sallis, 2014, p. 316). Furthermore:

Autoethnography is 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 and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (Adams, Bocher, and Ellis, 2010)

Furthermore, the purpose of the study is to bring to my online educational experience my own schema, and in a qualitative way denote the ways in which I go about negotiating power and access within a virtual online environment. Since I am a 39-year-old veteran Latina doctoral online student, I pursued this research through this lens to gain further insight into the hidden curriculum that leads me (whether consciously or unconsciously) to negotiate power and access within a diverse online setting.

One aspect of my research's purpose is to identify if there is a correlation between a person's identity (specifically, gender of the feminine aspect) and academic success in an exclusively online setting. I take into consideration access, language, communication and negotiations of power within the predetermined gender and identity roles. This involves only me a veteran Latina doctoral student. I explore how I have been able to navigate through processes of building and negotiating social identity and femininity within an online environment, and still feel powerful within the confines of an online/inclusive community. This type of academic motivation involves interest-based motivators to perpetuate respectful learning, and to uncover how I as a Latina am building relationships with other students in the classroom that will help me be successful or not. Research will uncover how as a woman I am able to express my

...Sexuality using online technologies; connections between the "online" and "offline" worlds in terms of emotions as well as social and gender networks; and traditional values. This can be denoted through programs professors choose, such

as: Second Life (that indivertibly portray women in sexually deviant roles), and how young women negotiate and resist these. (Boonmongkon, Ojanen, Samakkeekarom, Samoh, Iamsilpa, Topananan, & Guadamuz, 2013)

Furthermore, my research questions focus on the process of negotiating power and attaining access within the frameworks of Critical Race Theory and Gender Theory in the wake of White privilege/colonialism.

I follow a basic research cycle from Leedy and Ormrod's *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (2016) to articulate the different steps in my research throughout my dissertation. In addition, my autoethnographic research has been guided by the following research objectives: First, to gain clarity of what I as a veteran Latina have experienced throughout my pursuit of higher education. Unfortunately, there are institutional inequities that exist in the online university experience. Since more and more universities are providing online options to attain doctoral degrees, there is a real value to this type of research.

Second, it is important to identify how I, as a veteran Latina, have navigated through an exclusively online classroom. As the sole participant and journal writer in this autoethnographic performative research, it is important to note that I am not alone in this journey. There are others like me going through similar university/online systematic oppressions. My hope is to shed light through my experiences, share my voice, and break the voiceless path.

Lastly, it is important to identify, highlight, and criticize the microaggressions that I, as a person of color, a woman raised in poverty, and a veteran of the Post-9/11 wars, has dealt with oppressive systems of dehumanization in higher education. With many obstacles in my way, "resilience" has become a point of interest for my research—searching for the possible why I've come this far. Resiliency defined as "the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful

adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (Masten, Best, and Garmezzy, 1990, p. 426). In my case, resilience and empowerment were key points in the process of finding voice.

It’s hard to understand power, when for so long I’ve been a victim to the lack of it.

As the largest growing minority group in the United States, Latinos play an integral part in America’s future. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population will more than double, from approximately 57 million in 2012 to approximately 129 million in 2060. Latinos are nearly one in four of the nation’s public K – 12 students and will account for 60 percent of the nation’s population growth between 2005 and 2050. Thus, the future of the nation is inextricably linked to the future of the Hispanic community. (White House Initiative, 2016, p. 8)

In addition,

As of 2015, only 23 percent of Hispanics age 25 and older had completed an associate degree or higher, compared with 43 percent of whites, 32 percent of blacks, and 60 percent of Asian Americans. In order to continue this trajectory of success, we must continue to work to close achievement and opportunity gaps and ensure that Hispanic children—and all children—receive a world-class education.

(White House Initiative, 2016, p. 8)

Moreover,

In the fall of 2009, experts anticipated that 460,000 US military veterans of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq (Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) would attend postsecondary educational institutions on the GI Bill. With the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which was introduced in

2009, there will likely be even more OEF/OIF veterans attending college in coming years. (Widome, Kehle, Carlson, Nelson, Gulden, and Lust, 2011, p. 387)

Therefore, it became clear to me that as a Latina, I mattered in the educational realm and as a veteran Latina attending a higher learning institution I mattered even more. The more I read the literature the more prepared I felt. I came to think that perhaps I could beat the academic odds that are against me—and wouldn't that be something...

The Work

My graduate chair said I had to write, to put all my thoughts online. To blog, to type, to write—to get it out. “You need material to start your auto-ethnographic journey,” she said. At that point, I hadn't realized just how far I'd come.

Before giving insight to what this journey entailed and would possibly mean to me, I had to realize that I was still in the process and that this was by design. So, I researched what an autoethnographic play could bring to the table and figured out that it could be cathartic and therapeutic to my person. However, it wasn't just to understand me, Maricela Burns, a woman that had been through so much, it was more to understand the systems that influenced my life, my identities and made me, like so many others, a product of the systems of oppression, and I was curious to figure out through the constant battles how I'd come this far. Because some fall through the cracks of the American dream, some keep trying to reach it even when the systems keep them at bay, and they only get so far. No, this screenplay was not just about me. As I did the work and researched the many components of curriculum discourse and Critical Race Theory and engendered poverty, I began to realize there was a lot of healing and moments of tears that would come at every corner. I wasn't sure at that point, but I felt that others had to feel similarly.

San Juana, my Mexican mother, lost her job because she stood up to her boss, another Mexican woman who kept picking on her. My mother was dealing with symptoms of what appeared to be a case of undiagnosed schizophrenia, but she was trying to provide for my two brothers and me. So just like that San Juana's boss fired her, and what that meant in the practical sense for us was that we weren't going to be able to continue to rent in Cattadori Court, so we'd have to move out. Mind you, Cattadori Court wasn't the best of places, but it was a house, albeit all 600 square feet of it. Unfortunately, it would have to be left behind just like all the other "homes/apartments" we'd had in my childhood.

With a looming eviction, we moved out and onto my grandmother's one small bedroom house in Nashwood Drive just up the way. I knew some of my aunts, uncles and their children already lived there, because they couldn't afford a place of their own either. I knew that my uncle liked to be gross and make fun of people, calling me names like '*marrana*' (female swine), because no one stopped him. I guess having to sleep on an upright couch in the living room every night made me an easy target. I knew that my aunt Karla was just the same, albeit a drug user (in fact, at that time it seemed like they were all fucked up on drugs) a raunchy woman who had punched me in the face, because I had accidentally stepped over the phone cord while she was on the line with one of the three fathers of her three children. Another aunt lived there too... and a repressed memory comes back. I recall I hadn't had anything to eat that day, and she was making sandwiches, even though I hadn't asked her for one, my hunger made me stare. I vividly remember her saying, "This is for my kids; *vete a la verga!* (Mexican expletive- meaning "Go to hell (but in a more forceful way)!")" These things stay with a person, but what I didn't realize at the impressionable age of 13, was that moving there would be the type of hell that would either destroy my spirit, make me hate the 'idea' of family forevermore, or that the experience would serve to haunt me into adulthood, and perhaps be a memory that would always tie me down to poverty and extreme dysfunction.

Would there ever be a way out? Even if I did leave that house of horrors, would I ever truly leave? San Juana was not able to move us out, and so that type of verbal abuse continued, and we stayed there for a couple more years. My brain stayed there for a couple of days. When confronted with crazy circumstances, what I did to survive was zone things out, go on autopilot... and so I tend to only remember bits and pieces of what has happened to me in my life- perhaps that's why it feels like my memory's shot. I do, however, remember joining every afterschool program that I could; I was a part of 9 different afterschool clubs that I could recall at one point. Decathlon, Odyssey of the Mind, Chess Club, Science Fair Club, Powderpuff football, Technology Club, Drama Club, University Interscholastic League (UIL), One Act Play, and so on, because I knew that at school, I could escape the abuse, the poverty, the injustice of it all, even if it was only temporary...

Figure 1. Journal Entry. September 14, 2017.

My autoethnography resulted in a reflective and often poetic monologue expressing the frustrations and triumphs of being on the margins of U.S. higher education. As recorded in my daily writings and rendered as both journal reflections and screenplay snapshots I invite the reader to get deeply engaged to be able to evoke the shared events. Indeed, "With ethnographic

performance, then, comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative” (Saldaña, 2005, p. 14).

According to Pendzik, Emunah, and Read Johnson,

Within the field of theatre, this impulse (to perform) has expressed itself in the emergence of what might be called self-referential or personal theatre—that is, theatre in which the content of the performance consists of material from the actual lives of the performers. This work can be loosely categorized into autobiographical forms (concerning the actor’s personal life) and autoethnographic forms (concerning the actor's ethnicity, class, gender, or social grouping). Within each of these can be differentiated nontherapeutic forms (where the aim is primarily artistic, educational, or advocacy), and therapeutic forms (where the aim is personal growth). (Pendzik, Emunah, & Read Johnson, 2016, p. 2)

A screenplay is a dramatic rendition of events that occur to show a progression of a plot. There is in my case a protagonist that fights to be heard, and others that are in my life for whatever reasons, and some that are there to try to keep me down.

I denote memories from 39 years of my gendered and acculturated existence while I navigated the online world of higher education, constructing knowledge from within a doctoral curriculum that at times feels more oppressive than liberating. I construct my knowledge from my experiences and from reflection of those experiences as a brown body, and an afterthought of the educational system because of that brown body. My stories, or rather stories like mine are not always available, so others may not know the struggles of what it is to try to succeed and have a

seat at the academic table, per se. Personal narratives provide a deeper understanding to the individual plights of marginalized people, and

Counternarratives insist on a recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color (Matsuda et.al., 1993) used to counteract the stories of the dominant group. Personal narratives and stories serve as valid empirical data to document inequity and discrimination and provides the voice of people of color that is required for a complete analysis of the educational system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Counterstorytelling is a tool employed to draw explicitly on experiential knowledge so that student voice can be a focus of this study. (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017, p. 288)

Many of the professors that provided the most forceful slights, i.e., microaggressions, within my online experience were not necessarily White, yet men and women within an American academic institution in places of power. I noticed their slights were more forceful towards myself and others of color, when compared to our White counterparts.

Indeed, one may look at “the purpose of acculturation for people of color within the context of White supremacist ideology, a “racial grammar” (Bonilla-Silva, 2012, p. 174) that makes White dominance over people of color almost unnoticed. For many people of color in the United States (e.g., African American, Asian American, Latinx, and Native American), “being acculturated within the larger White dominant geographic and historical context often entails laboring with the overwhelming pressure to accommodate White cultural expectations” (Liu et al., 2019, p.143).

In other words,

One possible outcome of acculturation, thus, requires people of color to perpetually be aware of White cultural norms and expectations and, of importance, to subscribe to them in order to fit in and to “take care of” White people’s feelings around race, ethnicity, and culture—all the while, people of color may be forfeiting their own psychological and emotional welfare (Holoien & Shelton, 2012), internalizing stereotypes and demeaning ideological systems (Cokley, 2002; Yip, 2016), and experiencing poor health (Chae et al., 2015). (Liu et al. 2019, p. 144)

Liu (2017) as cited in Liu et al. (2019), argued that people of color learn these cultural and social practices and continue to enact them so they may live and thrive in the United States; what they also may learn as part of this acculturative process is that the status for White people may be different from what it is for people of color. (Liu et al., 2019, p.144)

Therefore, one need not be White to subscribe to White cultural values, because acculturation affects “people of color who are born in the United States because they, too, must begin accommodating themselves to White culture from the day of their birth” (Liu et al., 2019, p.144).

I use Critical Race Theory (CRT), gender discourse to identify and highlight racial battle traumas of dehumanization, microaggressions in the curriculum hidden agenda, and my struggles with poverty in which I, a veteran Latina doctoral student has had to empower herself to acquire a formidable online voice and online presence in the current wake of White privilege and postcolonialism. I write and explore 3 autoethnographic soliloquies, written by myself, about the various issues associated with engendered poverty, identity fluidity and empowerment under the guise of Critical Race Theory, a term coined by Derrick Bell.

Moreover,

Critical race theory (CRT) initially emerged from the field of critical legal studies (Delgado, 1995; Matsuda et al., 1993). While the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of CRT are interdisciplinary, drawing on sociology, history, literary theory, and philosophy (Mackinnon 2002; Solórzano & Yosso 2002; Valdés, Culp, & Harris 2002), although they draw on critical, feminist, and queer studies and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), and since they support indigenous ways of knowing and understanding the world (Bernal, 2002), the guiding principle undergirding CRT that foregrounds the normalcy and permanence of racism (Bell, 1992). (Reynolds & Mayweather, 2017, p. 287)

In these dramatic screenplays I explore and analyze how I veteran Latina online doctoral student navigates through the systems of power and privilege within an exclusively online setting. I explore through three soliloquies, which include a collection of Facebook posts, letters, emails and journal writings from a span of three years that are all set to a monologue screenwriting format to explore my primary question: Will writing an autoethnographic screenplay give insight to the curricular issues of engendered poverty, identity fluidity and the struggles that I as a veteran Latina have had when returning to academia? I am exploring this central question by presenting these short soliloquies throughout the dissertation and shedding light about using one's fluid identities in a collegiate online environment. Then, I'm analyzing the soliloquies through the literature to identify the shortcomings in the American educational system due to the powerhouse of Critical Race Theory and how the system is set to keep marginalized people in their predetermined place. This work is based on a 3 year long auto-

ethnographic exploration of a veteran Latina doctoral student in the United States of America (USA) and my navigation through an inequitable system in academia within a 100% exclusive online setting. “Latina” in this context means: “Females of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or Spanish culture or origin” (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014, p. 13).

I explore the idea of resilience and how it has impacted my educational career, growing up in poverty and how that affected my life. I go back and forth within my online courses, trying to assert who I am to the people on the screen, realizing through the literature that cultural capital is a real thing, and that I need to use it effectively in the techno-social space, even though my upbringing left me feeling vulnerable to those in power. Trying to navigate through the course to gain clout in a group of highly educated men and woman of various socio-economic backgrounds would not be an easy feat. In my case, I’m a person with non-combat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) trying to figure out what is acceptable “talk” to display online while simultaneously being suspicious of those online.

Although being a Navy veteran of war had not been my only trauma in life, it was the most recent, and it was my identity. Additionally, I was trying to bridge the learning gaps from having served 4 ½ years in the military as a veteran of war and showing my face—filling out my computer screen—in the synchronous online environment, left me feeling exposed.

Zinger and Cohen (2010) cited Litz (2006) and Usher (2006),

“The wars being fought in Afghanistan and Iraq are the most sustained combat operations since the Vietnam War” (Litz, 2006). “Soldiers are exposed to multiple deployments and extended tours of duty and often pushed beyond their emotional and physical limits. The frequency and length of deployments increases soldiers' vulnerability to combat stress. Other factors affecting this vulnerability are related

to the unique circumstances of the war in Iraq which is characterized by unpredictability and no recognizable front line” (Usher, 2006). (Zinger & Cohen, 2010, p. 39)

Each time I’d have to log on proved to be a challenge.

FADE IN:

Grand Prairie, Texas– PROFESSOR’S online classroom. LATINA shows only half of her face to the rest of the class in the online Zoom session.

LATINA: I am a 37-year-old, 2nd generation Latina of Mexican/American descent. I do not solely define myself as Latina, nor do I necessarily feel close to my Latin culture, but when the world identifies me into its categorical box, powered by its hidden agenda, I am mostly that. I am also a veteran of war (having served in the United States Navy (USN) from May 2000 to November 2004 stationed in San Diego, California). I am a mother of two young girls, and an unhappy, reluctant wife to their father, a Gringo (White man) whose own ideologies, and failed attempts to dominate me throughout our 12 year on-and-off again courtship have also molded me in ways I am unsure of exactly. Also, I am a full-time 6th-8th grade English teacher.

[Everyone stays quiet. Awkward 10 second silence]

PROFESSOR: Welcome!

FADE OUT

Figure 2. Latina’s Experience in an Online Classroom.

The literature reveals connections between interaction and a sense of community within the missions and collegiate expectations for the advancement and success of the student body. But it lacks explicit guides and navigational tools to reach a sense of total community. For instance, identity, which plausibly and naturally emerges from any social exchange, is much less explored in online learning, and with the boom of online courses offered through universities and colleges alike, this has become a specific point of interest for me. Almost in every online class I attended, everyone had to show his/her face and tell people about oneself, those experiences that make us who we are, scars and all, only to appear on a screen that will be less forgiving than any words divulged. That is why, this online world of education does not feel safe at times—those

shouty capital letters people use to show they are in disagreement, and other forms of microaggressions that cut you off and attempt to silence you. I exist in a virtual space, where I am judged by what I look like, by how I sound, by what my backdrop looks like, by who decided to interrupt me while I'm in class (and if those people have enough clout to get others to shun me as well). This online educational world is a battlefield that is set and manipulated to keep people at bay, and I'd never truly know why I or anyone else in the class is attacked or not valued for our opinions/commentary, as people hold their own biases. So, some professors might not be sensitive to the journey I am on as a doctoral student, and, as I've found, peers care least about that plight. True, me being a veteran of war and having PTSD is not my professor's problem, so they may only see me act strangely on screen and shun me for it when I respond to a question, which happened.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which is an anxiety disorder that can result from exposure to physically harmful situations, is one of the most frequently occurring mental health problems among OEF/OIF veterans. The prevalence of a lifetime history of PTSD has been reported to be from 4 to 8% in general college student populations. (Widome et al., 2011, p. 388)

My online professors may think I'm this strange person who only wants to show half of her face, that sometimes covers her screen, or shows up with a wooden bed frame as her backdrop, because on some days I can't handle this negative synergy. Everything has a reason, in this case, dealing with depression and anxiety, being a mother, and a full-time educator, in addition to pursuing a doctoral degree, make me tired.

As the number of OEF/OIF veterans attending college increases, it will be crucial for college health service centers to be aware of the unique needs of students who

are combat veterans in order to best promote the health of their college community. (Widome et al., 2011, p. 391)

But until then, I must log on or I won't pass, and then my aunts and uncles would be right. I'm no one and I'd never amount to anything just like my mother.

Taubman pointed out that "for teachers, students often become the other" (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman, 1995, p. 479)," and that "teachers often act out the imaginary through transference" (Pinar et al., p. 479). A curricular trend seen in education is one which values certain pedagogies over others and then allows them to come into the classroom environment through the aims, processes, and selections of what the powers-that-be have set in place, which changes with time. For example, "These views are also echoed in the Delors Commission (1996) which asserted, "It is the teacher whose role can help immensely in the inculcation of values. And that teacher's great strength lies in the example they set, of curiosity, open mindedness, willingness to put their assumptions to test and to acknowledge mistakes, most of all, they must transmit a love of learning" (Baraiya, 2013, p. 8). I've been lucky to have some professors who embraced the Delors Commission proposals; however, I've had some professors that made me want to quit.

In one of the courses I took, the professor made me feel that if I said the wrong thing, he was going to come after me. The professor was male, and of a different race than my own. In one class, he asked what I believed to be a subjective question, with room for interpretation. This is how I saw the text, how I related to the text, and I'd speak, and he'd shake his head voraciously and shut me down in that authoritative way that only a professor could. Why does he have to shake his head that way? Am I so wrong that an online performance to display how wrong I am is needed? These types of actions, i.e. microaggressions, serve to intimidate, to silence. I didn't

connect to the text the way he did, and I quickly found out that disagreement was unacceptable. Either way, I got the message and I shut down for the rest of the class.

Background of the Study

Identity and Poverty

Drawing from Peter Taubman (1979) and Jaques Daignault's (1992) aspects of post-structural and deconstructive lens, I sought literature that aligned to my topic of this idea of school systems that serve to oppress already marginalized groups even further. In "Latinas in Cyberspace- Exploring Academic Persistence Among Latina Doctoral Students Within Exclusively Online Institutions" a dissertation authored by Lillian M. Huerta, her study makes light of the educational persistence among Latina doctoral online learners and how Latinas already have their own meta-narratives of wanting to succeed regardless of their impediments. This study uncovered per Perez-Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez and Solorzano (2006) that only 1 out of 100 Latinas pursue a doctoral degree. It really shed light on the resilience that Latinas have, regardless of those forces and societal structures that are in place to continue to oppress them.

The method used in Huerta's study was a phenomenological study that considered themes that allow for academic success that can be found within institutions of higher learning and doing an autoethnography I also looked for common themes within my journal writings.

Critical Race Theory in an Online World

To say that racism is a nonissue is to be blasphemous to a people's lived experience, and to tell those that are "other than White" that they've as much opportunity as their White counterparts, is to imply that people of color are somehow crazy and exaggerating their perils. The message they'd like to be spoon fed is, "Hey, things have changed in American society, and

you have a seat at the table, so quit whining!” Rather, it is to say blatantly that racism is a non-issue, that opportunities abound like they have not in the past, “so sit down and shut up!” Yet, this is all a way to further oppress a people, and make them feel less than human, because the blood of the American systems of power and privilege is not answerable to the other, the person of color is always an afterthought, if even a thought at all. That is why we have more people of color housed in jails today than attending graduate school, but CRT asserts that these systems of White privilege also critically affect White people, and they end up suffering from the racist systems themselves. After all, as history has shown—keeping people at bay for the sustained superiority of the opulent race may very well be the end goal, but the casualties of that war on people of color does affect all humanity in the end.

In thinking of Critical Race Theory, and how I’d be able to express the damage racism causes in a more authentic way, the electrifying work and opinions of James Baldwin come to mind. In a televised interview, James Baldwin (activist, poet and scholar) responds to Paul Weiss on the Dick Cavett show. Baldwin states, “I was discussing the difficulty—the obstacles, the very real danger of death thrown out by this society, when a negro—when a black man attempts to become a man.” Weiss then stated that he had more in common with Baldwin than he would “with a white man who’s against scholarship. And you have more in common with a white author (points to Baldwin) that you have with someone that’s against our literature. So why must we always concentrate on color, or religion or this or that—there are other ways of connecting men?” As he spoke, Weiss’s hands flailed in the air to show his disagreement in a dramatic fashion. Baldwin explained why he left for Paris in 1948 and relayed what he believed to be the inherently structured racist systems in America that kept and would certainly always keep America at the forefront of racism and social discord. Baldwin implied that racism is in the blood

running through the vessels of the American structured systems—that of the State, that keep White people in power. He understood this notion, and it was obvious in Baldwin’s interview that it affected him to the core.

Baldwin explained why he escaped America. “Particular social terror, which was not the paranoia of my own mind, but a real social danger visible in the face of every cop, every boss, everybody” (Norman, 2017). Baldwin was not generalizing and saying that everyone was racist. Baldwin instead delivered a soliloquy of felt helplessness to send his very clear message of what he had discovered about his worth in America. It had a feeling of dread, and indeed through the literature, I’ve come to learn that without hope we dwindle and perish. So, Baldwin moved to Paris to save himself from those real aggressions and strong systematic order of oppression that he’d come to live through and despise.

James Baldwin’s Soliloquy (from the Dick Cavett interview):

I don’t know what most white people in this country feel... but I can only conclude what they feel from the state of their institutions. I don’t know if white Christians hate Negroes or not, but I know we have a Christian church that is white and a Christian church that is black. I know, as Malcolm X once put it, the most segregated hour in American life is high noon on Sunday.

That says a great deal for me about a Christian nation. It means I can’t afford to trust most white Christians, and I certainly cannot trust the Christian church. I don’t know whether the labor unions and their bosses really hate me—that doesn’t matter—but I know I’m not in their union. I don’t know whether the real estate lobby has anything against black people, but I know the real estate lobby is keeping me in the ghetto. I don’t know if the board of education hates

black people, but I know the textbooks they give my children to read and the schools we have to go to.

“Now this is the evidence,” Baldwin said, his voice rising with indignation. “You want me to make an act of faith, risking myself, my wife, my woman, my sister, my children on some idealism which you assure me exists in America, which I have never seen.” (Norman, 2017)

Baldwin’s soliloquy moved me. It changed something in me that I could simply not find in the literature; it made me feel that explaining racism and declaring racist acts was not easy, comfortable or favorable to do, lest you be called paranoid, or worse. It was a feeling that these American systems in academia were strong and in a solid place to systematically tyrannize and enslave in a new kind of way, via microaggressions. Therefore, from hearing James Baldwin deliver his soliloquy of “felt helplessness,” I learned this powerful method would be the delivery I’d need for my dissertation writing. A soliloquy

... is a popular literary device often used in drama to reveal the innermost thoughts of a character. It is a great technique used to convey the progress of action of the play, by means of expressing a character’s thoughts about a certain character or past, present, or upcoming event, while talking to himself without acknowledging the presence of any other person. (Soliloquy, 2019)

Therefore, a soliloquy would be that tool in my dissertation for the reader/audience to begin to share, feel and hopefully understand the lived experience of the protagonist.

Microaggressions run rampant in my own online classroom experiences and interactions with collegiate faculty and staff, including student peers. Systematic racism and gender bias are a real thing, and one that has metamorphosed into a more creative way to display discord. Indeed,

“Microaggressions, as these academics describe them, are quiet, often unintended slights—racist or sexist—that make a person feel underestimated on the basis of their color or gender” (McWhorter, 2014). In turn, I related to Baldwin’s notions on race, not only because he was a great speaker, or that the logic he so eloquently parlayed made sense, but simply because I was feeling and have felt the oppressions in academia myself, times were I felt less than human when compared to others in the online setting. Therefore, I wrote a soliloquy in inspiration of his.

How do I know racism exists, I do not know that my professor is racist? I do not know that my online peers choose White people before me to be in their groups, because my brown face appears on the screen or my last name before marriage was Gonzalez, shouts who I am. There is no way to explicitly point a finger and crucify my professor or my peers for choosing white last names and white faces to be on their teams or giving bigger compliments to certain students and shunning me when I get a question wrong or when I overhelp my peers, so the professor knows I’m there. I cannot proclaim, “To you I am the outlier, because I am brown, because I am Latina, right? Is it because I am a woman that you think I am not capable of performing at the same level as a male counterpart?” I’d be labeled crazy myself. But what I do know is that the social, political and educational systems in America imply that I am not equal to my White counterparts through the microaggressions and institutional maladies that keep me at bay and are there to shut me down. It aches inside my heart to know that I am judged daily for something I cannot help. I cannot help being a Latina, and I will not apologize for being myself, a veteran, Latina wanting to better her life and attain a doctoral degree. This is my right! Why is it so hard for me to live my idea of the American dream? Well, one need only look at how student loans are becoming easier to attain, and how many students use those loans as a form of income because they live in poverty. Why have student loans been so easy for me to attain, when I’ve never had a mentor to tell me don’t get those student loans—I’m starting to believe that student loans are the modern-day systematic approach to continue the work of indentured servants.

Figure 3. Latina Soliloquy Inspired by James Baldwin.

According to the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) School of Public Affairs:

“CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. (UCLA School of Public Health, 2016, p. 1)

Furthermore, “Critical race theory writing, and lecturing is characterized by frequent use of the first person, storytelling, narrative, allegory, interdisciplinary treatment of law, and the unapologetic use of creativity” (Bell, 1995, p. 899). Indeed, Anzaldúa (1990) as cited in Cueva (2013) states that

Racism is especially rampant in places and people that produce knowledge... Racism sucks out the life blood from our bodies, our souls. As survivors of Racism, women-of-color suffer chronic stress and continual ‘post-traumatic stress syndrome’ (suffered by survivors of war)... The psychological effects of Racism have been greatly underestimated. Anzaldúa boldly argues that racism exists within educational systems and has psychological implications, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), that impact U.S. Women of Color’s bodies, minds, and spirits. (Cueva, 2013, p. 5)

Moreover, Cueva (2013) cited Tuong (2009) in that,

The psychological and physiological implications of racism and race-based distress for Students of Color pursuing doctoral study has also been documented

in Truong’s groundbreaking national case study published in 2010. Necessarily, the race-based trauma endured by U.S. Women of Color in the academy represents very real and detrimental psychological ramifications. (Cueva, 2013, p. 5-6)

But there I was, week after week, logging in to my online class, and after a while, social anxiety made me want to cover my face to those in the online meeting sessions, even if I was in the comfort of my own home. Indeed, “Continued race-based distress triggers racial battle fatigue through one’s ‘flight or fight’ psychological response system” (Cueva, 2013, p. 48). What made me stay, when everything in my body and mind was telling me to quit, take a semester off, or give up? There were days when I had completed all my work, but I simply didn’t want to log in to the classroom to be bashed again.

Nevertheless, I stayed. I realized there was power behind the multiplicity and fluidity of my identity/ies. I would negotiate what I wanted from each course, and through each course I could try to make my online professor truly see me. I decided early on that I would stay and fight, but at what price?

Defining the Project: Engendered Poverty & Resilience

As I wrote my journal entries, I understood that I could break them down into soliloquies, and then complete my work in Chapter 4 with the screenplay to bring all my soliloquies to full circle.

I woke up one morning, looked around and realized the poverty that was my life, living in a single parent home, alongside two younger half-brothers, roaches and misery, because no one had money to help uplift anyone else—was the thing nightmares are made

of. So, I looked around, cried, and broke down... I called a military recruiting agency that same day—because maybe they could save me.

Introduction to My Online World: (Techno-Social Capital in the Wake of Cultural Capital)

Paulo Freire's forward notations state that:

In fact, those who, in learning to read and write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Education is once again a subversive force. (Freire, 1972, p. 29)

The online classroom is not immune to the inequalities that can be found in the hidden agenda within USA curriculum. Furthermore, it is important to note that technology is being used to oppress through manipulation and repression, "the oppressed, as objects, as 'things,' have no purposes except those their oppressors prescribe for them" (Freire, 1972, p. 12).

It is that synergy of oppression, and political structures within the educational system that are designed to keep colonized people at bay. It is that systematic oppression via racism, engendered poverty and the struggle to attain a doctoral degree for marginalized groups that has forced veteran Latina doctoral students to be in a constant fight to be heard through their online courses. Furthermore, "Educational institutions promote the needs of the colonizer, ignoring, for the most part, the aspirations of the colonized" (Basu, 1989, p. 60).

Indeed, Solórzano (as cited in Cueva, 2013), "suggests that the new manifestations of racism are evident in racialized/gendered microaggressions within educational systems. Thus, the amorphous nature of race-based discrimination facilitates continued use against people of color to inflict fear, oppression, and domination" (p. 150). In addition, Buckingham (2008) stated that:

“the fluidity of identity, seeing it as almost infinitely negotiable, and in the process perhaps underestimates the continuing importance of routine and stability” (p. 2). Nevertheless, his general point is well taken: “‘identity’ only becomes an issue when it is threatened or contested in some way and needs to be explicitly asserted” (Buckingham, 2008, p. 2).

An online professor once became frustrated with me, and I wasn’t entirely sure why. I had been answering almost every question he asked to the class, while helping others in the classroom chat box as well. I guess it was my way to let him know I was present and knew the material. Toward the end of the class, I needed help identifying a pattern of numbers on the screen. He took that moment to question how I’d got this far in a doctoral program and did not know the information; mind you, he did this scolding in front of the other online students. I was in shock, spoke my peace, and then in tears, quickly logged off, leaving him in mid-sentence. “[University Professors] may tell you that you are not good enough to achieve your dreams, rather than working with you to improve your capacity to be a valued and productive member of the community” (Prescod-Weinstein, 2016). These microaggressions come with a hidden agenda. I found that in an online course, I’d have to find my voice, and assert my identity. I’d come too far to fold because the system was made to oppress some and not others. All my life I’d been oppressed, I knew this space too well, and I would fight to stay in the game.

LATINA (from behind her closet door): It's a shame that the civilian world will never truly understand the camaraderie and bonds that we formed while being active members of war. Only if lived would one be able to grasp the depths of what we were truly responsible for during the aftermath of 9/11, the uncertainty of the unknown, and those fearless faces we'd had to put on as we walked by each other through the small hallways and berthing spaces, on a daily basis, not knowing what each second would bring... and for that, we are forever bound, my strong Stennis sailors. At one point, 101 days straight out to sea without seeing land, and we were grateful and proud to sign our lives away. Worrying about falling off the ship, battle stations, snap back, looming dowels, middle of the night general quarters, chemical warfare, freezing midnight watch outside the bridge, the blue Pacific Ocean's mysterious calling, whales, dolphins and submarines appearing sporadically, and evading trouble in foreign ports, but loving every port.

Whatever branch of service, we are all truly unique, one and all! Therefore, next time you even think of underestimating any one of us...
DON'T! We're much stronger than you can imagine.

Figure 4. From Latina's Rental Home.

Hence, through cultural capital one can assert their identity. Unlike the wars I had left behind, Post-9/11, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), I could have never imagined that these online systematic attacks on my worth would prove to be more taxing on my soul. I had returned from war, only to realize others saw me differently. The way I spoke, and how I thought was different. It had to be. Unfortunately, I quickly discovered that much gets lost in translation when communicating with classmates and professors alike. Alliances form, and people choose who they prefer on their teams. When it came to group work, sometimes the right profile picture was good enough to show you belonged, here a white last name was enough for clout. If you were White, you were a commodity, but if you had an accent you probably didn't know as much.

According to Bourdieu (cited in Krishna, 2017) cultural capital is “the social assets of a person (education, intellect, style of speech and dress, etc.) that promote social mobility in a stratified society” (p. 13). Indeed, democratic ideals, as a purposive ethical framework to education, should guide educational decisions within education and not in the form of schooling practices. Such standards can be seen through an ideological framework that has no bias on class systems or other economical subsets, but instead on social constructs of educational discourse and democratic liberties. It makes sense that an online class would at the very least attempt to reach out to minorities such as myself, in its attempts to not polarize me any further. Since, at least in theory, technology and online educational environments have leveled the playing field. Moreover, Okan (2007), citing Feenberg (2017) states that, “Because technology is neutral and it is used as a means to an end, the only rational stance is to employ it to solve any problems,

regardless of the cost to the environment, culture, or human beings” (p. 1). However, having taken part in online classrooms I now realize that an online education may not be as different as a traditional face-to-face classroom, because we meet via mediums such as: Google Hangout, Zoom, to name a few, so people are able to see you and form their perceptions of you as a person, based on gender, race, military status (if that is divulged) and whatever other biases people may have against you.

Representation: Screenplay as Performative Art—

What is Screenwriting per the Literature?

I conducted a performative art compilation to display the research as performance. With the information collected, I crafted a script, in which I conducted a monologue screenplay using a screenwriting structure to denote the narrative of my autoethnography.

According to Batty and McAulay (2016):

Screenwriting is an emerging research practice within the academy, whereby the act of writing a screenplay is understood as a form of research. The resulting "academic screenplay" or associated screenplay work functions as both a method of research inquiry and also a research artifact, valuing screenwriting as a way to generate and disseminate new knowledge and—crucially—new ways of practicing.” (p. 1)

My screenplay showcased the many identities that I as a Latina experience in my pursuit of an Ed.D. In the monologue, all the said “identities” appear—almost like split personalities in a constant struggle to be heard.

I began to look at my familial situation, growing up in poverty as an illness, one I was committed to eradicating. Education became the subversive force. I didn’t want to live in

poverty, and it became clear to me that the schooling system had raised me, and that there was a way out through education. Perhaps the reason I was pursuing a doctoral degree. Freire (1972) states the following:

Reflection upon situationality is reflection about the very condition of existence: critical thinking by means of which people discover each other to be “in a situation.” Only as this situation ceases to present itself as a dense, enveloping reality or a tormenting blind alley, and they can come to perceive it as an objective-problematic situation—only then can commitment exist. (p. 109)

Students begin to understand what society values regarding what they're tasked to learn, but most importantly, if they are intuitive enough, they start to see what the state thinks of them. However, when it comes to online learning, it is important to look at the concept of techno-social capital, which comes from Bourdieu's (1991) ideas about symbolic capital.

According to Bourdieu, linguistic signs are “goods destined to be given a price by powers capable of providing ‘credit’” (p. 77). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1991) points out that:

Even the most minor exchanges, such as conversations between friends are influenced by how talk will be perceived by others. Therefore, people turn to a linguistic habitus that provides a practical orientation towards what is acceptable to say. To maximize linguistic profits, speakers will engage in a kind of self-censorship that influences what it will be possible or not possible to say. (p. 77)

Introduction of the Problem

In knowing, we know, so we can't go back to unknowing. Freire's practice of conscientization, or critical consciousness obliges us to recognize this awareness, i.e. awakening to social inequality and how that directly aligns to educational opportunity and knowledge

making. “If students are not able to transform their lived experiences into knowledge and to use the already acquired knowledge as a process to unveil new knowledge, they will never be able to participate rigorously in a dialogue as a process of learning and knowing” (Freire, p.19), which makes people vulnerable to a continued system of oppression.

A concern here is understanding this constant trauma of identifying one’s place in the world based on the social construct of race. As people of color live their lives, they come away with a social experience that is their own yet shared with such a defining intersectionality of injustice and poverty. Education has the power to circumvent a class system of parameters that lead a society to choose what is valued and what is not. Therefore, knowledge making is a social dilemma, and at the very least a personal call of action for those involved in educational reform and policy making.

Through education, a group of people can divide and conquer; and it is that mentality that seeks to further marginalize and exploit minoritized groups of people—in efforts to not just survive, but to thrive above the rest. Race is the criteria set to divide and keep the majority from the minority opulent, and with that keep people in poverty due to the restrictions of access. In doing so, so does the superficial crown of whiteness continue to reign and be the law of the land that chooses who has value and who doesn’t. However, from that understanding people can awaken, and learn ways to place value into their own ethnic groups and set the stage to speak- and be heard through things such as: cultural capital and online opportunities that tend to level the playing field. With this idea in mind of having the ability to participate and be heard, it is important to consider:

The struggle for humanization, for the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men and women as persons would be meaningless. This

struggle is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. (Freire, p.44)

In a way by using a computer as the medium to get an education, one could re-humanize themselves, in an oppressive educational structure, and have access to knowledge where they might not have had it before.

School is a systematic oppressor that further highlights the injustices of poverty and societies, but as technology grows, people who wouldn't have necessarily had the ability to attend a university, due to displacement or financial reasons may now be able to do so. It renders those in the black hole of poverty paralyzed for the beginning of their education as elementary, middle school and high school students, with realities such a zoning, among other state laws set to keep students and their families at bay, the ability to participate. With these systematic schooling structures students are being victimized every day, as they are victims of their parents' current socioeconomic status, living in neighborhoods that are not as favorable, bleeding into schools that are not as favorable and keeping the pendulum always swinging in the same direction with little to no room for error. If there is a glimmer of hope, this research hopes to uncover it.

Theatrical Framework

In addition to gender and sexual identity, Taubman studied “opposing discourses,” and found reasons for “both optimism and despair.” On the one hand, he suggested, they have de-centered “man” and made him an “other.” They have made speak—the silent center of heterosexual maleness which has historically organized the “Other” around itself. They have created a space which can be articulated without historically oppressed figures, so there is a

continual opening for a positive construction of woman, men, lesbians, homosexuals, and sexuality. On the other hand, Taubman worried; there are dangers inherent in anchoring any new discourse in reified or essentialist figures (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman, 1995, p. 453). While deconstruction “incorporates the insights of deconstruction in its equation of reality with language, in its attacks of origin, totalities, universals, and meta-narratives, in its claims about the ways power functions, and its claims that structures—so central to structuralism—are never closed systems,” and most notably, “deconstruction is an instance of post-structuralism” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 465), such meta-narratives must be investigated to note any despairing ideologies, or hopeless norms that women face within an online setting. Meta-narratives such as meanings, language and political structures are often hidden within text.

Cherryholmes on Foucault and Derrida as cited in Pinar et al. (1995):

“Derrida shows that meanings are dispersed and deferred and that rhetorical claims often diverge from logical argument. Meanings are in constant play—the structure is illusionary, because it is a product of history and power (Foucault) and is analytically unstable” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 47). (Pinar et al., 1995, p.488).

Therefore, “poststructuralism shows meanings to be shifting, receding, fractures, incomplete, dispersed, and deferred” (Cherryholmes, 1988, p. 61). So, it is within this poststructuralism and deconstruction lens via Daignault’s (1992) perspective view that I tackle my research problem; keeping meaning making and identity in mind when seeking out these meta-narratives, which often delegate gender and sexual inequality. As Daignault (1992) observes, “method is singular and definite: THE way; manner is singular but indefinite: A way. Curriculum translation is always plural: WAYS; neither definite nor indefinite” (p. 200). Indeed, “Curriculum needs to be

(re)invented as it happens in each pedagogical moment. Curriculum is also becoming Other” (Masny & Waterhouse, 2016, p. 301).

To me engendered poverty was a special point of interest, because my mother was the patriarchal figure in our small family. She is 5’2”, small and unassuming. San Juana is her name and although she knows English well, she is not completely aware of this American culture. She is humble, she is meek, and she gets stepped on a lot.

Pinar et al. cited Descombes (1980) and Said (1990b),

“Originally a Heideggerian concept, deconstruction was elaborated by Derrida into a rigorous method of analysis. It came to achieve a distinct identity as a theory of philosophical discourse,” (Descombes, 1980, p. 451) “and a form of commentary” (Said, 1990, p. 451). It is often construed as one among many methods of analyses within poststructuralism and is thus often subsumed in the term poststructuralist. (Pinar, et al., 1995, p. 457)

Whereas through a postmodern lens, we see a paradigm shift as we use technology to elevate our educational pursuits, of which touches on the virtualness that an online intangible setting delivers but is even more so set through language and meaning making (due to its intangible nature). In addition,

In its very name poststructuralism reveals its ties to structuralism, and indeed poststructuralism is a response to those theories which purported to discover invariant structures in society, the human psyche, consciousness, history and culture. Poststructuralism, then is both an assault on structuralism and also an outgrowth of it. (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 457)

Therefore, to analyze how females negotiate through their gender and sexual identities within an online environment, it is critical to understand the structures their roles play within these online environments. Their roles do not begin when they turn on their computers and begin to participate, if they grew up in an unstable household like I did, filled with abuse, and insecurity, greed, and hatred—what fighting chance do they have to not over react when something doesn't go their way within the confines of the virtual classroom? Being female to me was not just about my sexuality. It was about all the pressures that society has pressed down upon my soul. I am female, and that means that bias from others exists there, and I'd have to find ways to keep it at bay, either through how I spoke to my professor or to my classmates.

Due to this we focus on “language in terms of discourse, or discursive systems” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 457). Pinar et al. cited Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), Norris (1982), Caws (1988) in that

Saussure argued that languages are systems of signs which consist of a signifier and a signified. The signifier is the sound or spoken word and secondarily its written representation. The signified is the concept which the signifier signifies. Note that the signified is not an object or external referent. The relationship between the signifier and the signified are culturally determined, but it is also arbitrary. Saussure suggested that what makes it possible for a relatively small number of “linguistic elements to signify a vast repertoire of negotiable meanings” (Norris, 1982, p. 25) is difference... “Meaning is generated not by correspondence between words and things or an intrinsic or necessary correspondence between signifier and signified, but by the signs and the signifier's relationship to and difference from other signs and signifiers” (Caws,

1988). Moreover, often the relationships Saussure found in language were dualisms or binary opposites (such as male/female, up/down, light/dark, absence/presence), and these were construed as foundational structures that helped determine or constitute difference and thus meaning. (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 458)

Therefore, communication is critical to identity. Indeed,

With our ongoing reliance on an increasingly irrelevant system and without the acknowledgement that pedagogies of relations are central to communication to meaning and sense making, school relies on habitual or obfuscating discourses. [After all] the goal of education in a living democracy is to provide the means but which diverse people experience and seek continuing growth. (Noddings, 2009)

This leads back to my research objectives, which will further investigate how “the other” is able to construct his or her identity within the virtual confines of an online modality. This will be researched by interpreting qualitative data that will investigate the following three variables: interaction, sense of community and identity formation. In order to investigate how identity translates through distance learning and within the curriculum, I look through a poststructuralist lens, and define what structuralism is according to Culler (1976) who suggests that any attempt at definition would lead to despair, most scholars agree that it is a method of analysis and a philosophical orientation which privileges structures, systems, or sets of relations over the specific phenomena which emerge in, are constituted by, and derive their identity from those structures and sets of relations (Norris, C., 1991; Cherryholmes, 1988; Martusewicz, 1988, Eagleton, 1983). So then, why is identity important in learning? Human beings learn more effectively when our learning is tied to emotion. Furthermore, teachers can help students learn by

further nurturing student identities through their curriculum and instruction. In addition, consideration will be given to the relevance of creating an online identity, in which my internet persona translates to my social identity. Within our current internet revolution, we know that a person's identity can often be made up and not at all theirs by nature, i.e. deceptive in nature. This is a challenge that may present itself within the study but can lead to further research.

To attempt to understand how distance learning (DL) and identity are intertwined, I first define DL, and identity in the way it will be referred to when conducting my research. Distance learning is defined by the California Distance Learning Project (CDLP) as

an instructional delivery system that connects learners with educational resources.

DL provides educational access to learners not enrolled in educational institutions and can augment the learning opportunities of current students. The implementation of DL is a process that uses available resources and will evolve to incorporate emerging technologies (East Side Union High School District, n.d.).

Furthermore, through DL there are many factors to bear in mind. Specifically, when it comes to facilitating a collaborative learning environment for individual students who, through this process, come with or form their own identity through and by this technological medium. It's imperative that a student's identity, within a distance learning community (specifically, at the collegiate level), can mold and work effectively within their curricular framework so that they can be successful, regardless of their identity. While bearing this in mind, I investigated how our identity transcends or evolves within an online environment, when it comes to choosing teams, or working effectively with others (once in those teams), or when dealing with student/teacher relationships and knowledge acquisition. Furthermore,

Taubman mapped the ways gender and sexuality had been historically constructed, focusing particularly on the ways twentieth century psychoanalytic and medial discourses constituted the figures of “woman” and the “homosexual,” and gender and sexuality, particularly in their notions of sex roles and androgyny that were oppressive, even dangerous. Therefore, Taubman saw the role of the teacher (which is even more alienated in an online setting) as “we see the stereoscopic image of the teachers sequestered in their rooms acting out the imaginary behind another image of teachers unable to articulate their view in any meaningful way, behind finally a last image of teachers shaping their own submerged practice in the language of information conveyance or transmission—that is the public language of the school” (1990, p. 124). (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 478).

Why is this important? Well, Taubman pointed out “teachers often act out the imaginary through transference” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 479).

Moreover, “Transference, first described by Sigmund Freud, is a phenomenon in psychotherapy in which there is an unconscious redirection of feelings from one person to another” (Vollmer, 2010). If the teacher is having negative feelings towards a student (due to whatever bias) and then transfers those feelings on to the student—that is obviously not good.

Therefore, my research considered three socio-emotional aspects of the online environment: identity, online interaction, and the formation of identity. How does one through identity building create this online interaction and circumvent bias? In the intangible social space of the virtual classroom, students come together to learn through dialogic, often asynchronous, exchanges. This creates distinctive learning environments where learning goals, interpersonal

relationships and emotions are no less important because of their virtualness, and for which traditional face-to-face pedagogies are not neatly transferable. At this point some clarification of what constitutes participation and interaction is necessary. “The terms both suggest some kind of reciprocal action and are often used interchangeably in the literature, however there are some nuanced differences which might be amplified in the context of online learning,” (Delahunty, Verenikina & Jones, 2014, p. 2). Therefore, an educational setting should be a place where students learn through reaching their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a term coined by Lev Semenovich Vygotsky (1978), which is defined as “the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peer” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Since it is more difficult to gauge ZPD in an online setting—therefore, my dissertation bears in mind time and place behaviors that could be denoted for a more effective and overall safe/comfortable online learning experience- especially when dealing with ailments like PTSD, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety and depression. Further, how does identity, and people’s life experiences and the emotions that those bring help them learn within these 100% online environments and throughout their educational pursuits when so much is going against them?

My rationale for the research design was to conduct an autoethnographic screenplay concerned with contemporary phenomena that will follow myself as I navigate through the systems of higher education while attending an exclusively online environment. I conducted an autoethnography, stemming from an epistemological view and deliver said data within a performative art screenplay as the delivery source of my dissertation in Chapter IV. The

autoethnography was conducted following methods suggested by Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) in their *Handbook of Autoethnography* and lasted 3 years.

It was important for me to collect data on finding out if a Latina veteran's doctoral online experience led to effective negotiating of power and access using my own cultural capital as a veteran, a Latina, a doctoral student or summoning the likes of all three identities with this notion of fluid identities to gain clout in my online classrooms. I wanted to know if some of my identities overpowered others and gave me more clout. If so, why would that be the case? I wanted to look at whether the Latina's cultural customs diminish online in the presence of being a veteran, i.e. having been government property at one point, and suffering from PTSD and other physical/mental disorders due to being a veteran (as these are common issues that veterans face). The reason that I looked at cultural capital is because it was important to understand what negotiating forces does being a Latina have in an online setting. Does being a minoritized group benefit a Latina when it comes to negotiating presence, in the eyes of "White guilt?" Another factor of this research involved economic capital. Does receiving the GI Bill in its various forms (Montgomery GI Bill, Post-9/11 GI Bill, and in states like Texas the Hazlewood Act) motivate Latinas to continue to pursue a doctoral degree? Is that the driving force behind being a doctoral student (cognitive dissonance)?

For example,

Professor Richard Delgado, a well-known critical race theorist, believes the shift may be caused by "cognitive dissonance": At first, the white professor feels good about hiring the minority. It shows how liberal the white is, and the minority is assumed to want nothing more than to scrape by in the rarefied world they both inhabit. But the minority does not just scrape by, is not eternally

grateful, and indeed starts to surpass the white professor. This is disturbing; things weren't meant to go that way. The strain between former belief and current reality is reduced by reinterpreting the current reality. The minority has a fatal flaw. Pass it on. (Bell, 1995, p. 896-897)

These are all the predominant approaches and rationale behind what makes up my research design. At times I felt that I could never be better than my White counterparts, but inside I had my own metanarrative that perhaps I could be better, that perhaps I was better, and it scared me. I'd have to navigate through the online world to show that I was capable and worthy through things such as cultural capital- while being cautious to not overstep the predetermined racial lines of this invisible battlefield.

Key terms: identity, power, access, Critical Race Theory, engendered poverty, veteran.

Methodology and Data Collection

I collected my performative art compilation via journal writings, blogs, online posts, and people's reactions to my posts—to display the research as performance, in which I look at Critical Race Theory, economic factors, and cultural capital that would help to assert a student's online presence. For this study, cultural capital is defined as

the social awareness, skills and connections that serve as assets for groups and individuals in maintaining social status or attaining social mobility (which can include things like education, family connections, and awareness of social rituals) which are things that tend to be deficient in the poor people of this country, and unfortunately for Veterans this tends to be the rule more than the exception. (TEDx Talks, 2014, 3:08)

The main objective of this study is to evaluate my own graduate level online classes and discover how a female student's identity (gender and sexual identity) affect her success through

communication and structure through self-monitoring and by comparing the findings with another research on the same topic.

Information was obtained from peer reviewed articles, books, and journals from The University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) online library, and from various online sources, as part of my doctoral online courses and personal investigation into my research topic. I enrolled into the following courses within a 5 year span of which provided me insight into that online world: Advanced Curriculum, Qualitative Research, Theories and Practices in Effective Online Pedagogy, Advanced Curriculum, Adult Learning Strategies, Quantitative Research, Advanced Instructional Design, Advanced Sociocultural Inquiry Education, Theory & Practice of Online Pedagogy, Mentoring, Induction & Professional Development, Advanced Qualitative Research, Course Management/Instructional Systems K-16, Advanced Application of Human Development & Cognition, Research Methods & Design, Evaluation and Assessment in Instructional Technology, Trends in Educational Technology K-16, Equity, Inclusion & Diversity, including numerous dissertation courses.

Further insight was gained from the materials section within my Learning Management System (LMS) (Blackboard) through the courses I'd enrolled in and completed. In addition, my exploration of the online learning environments and their impact on individual identities was a place of interest for me, since that was how I'd chosen to conveniently pursue my doctorate. Additionally, I drew from my own interest of how people's identity is defined and refined through asynchronous and synchronous settings. Moreover, how the online efforts placed in the perpetuation or faltering of online school systems is destructive to marginalized individuals even in a virtual setting.

The methods of my data collection are as follows: the way that the data was obtained for this methodological research project is that I collected my own journal entries, personal “memories/experiences, and/or print and digital artifacts such as diaries, social media, email correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p. 377). I collected as much diverse data as possible to get a better understanding of what a veteran Latina doctoral student, such as myself, must through to both show and keep presence.

The purpose of using this modality was to showcase the data by screenplay, in this case monologue, is to bring out emotion in the reader/audience. This will hopefully evoke a deeper understanding of the Latina veteran doctoral student. I must wear a lot of hats, play a lot of roles and be here and there, all the while possibly fighting through disabilities of the mind, such as PTSD, OCD, anxiety, and depression—among other common ailments in the veteran community, especially those that have served in war, such as myself. Through real time theatrics, the analytical findings for my topic will uncover the inclusion or lack thereof of Latina veteran doctoral student who attend Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). There have been times when I attend Zoom sessions, when I don’t like to show my face. I understand that this helps other students see me, but in a way, this too makes me stand out. I feel much more comfortable showing half my face and have noticed that other veterans within the class are not fans of showing their face either. Two fellow veterans, in one of my doctoral online courses, like to wait for daylight to subside during our evening classes, so that they are left in the dark and all we hear are their voices. This is interesting to me, because it speaks to similarities of cultural capital within the veteran community.

The idea behind using ethno-dramas is to tell of this marginalized lived experience through my own voice and via personal narratives—as performance art. My aim is to showcase a

student's assertion of cultural capital as I navigate through an unjust system in academia. Another point of interest is to explore whether my brown body would not be that point of contention being enrolled within a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), of which UTRGV purports to be—and therefore, in theory should be free of these inequities?

Furthermore, “With ethnographic performance, then, comes the responsibility to create an entertainingly informative experience for an audience, one that is aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative (Saldana, 2005, p.14),” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p. 377). Once I collected the journals and writings that I did, I began to compile the work for my dissertation and outline my screenplay. I divided the work into 3 soliloquies and a final screenplay and looked for common themes across texts to be able to analyze my work with the literature. By synthesizing the empirical data, I was able to find commonalities between my lived experience and from others like me.

Participant: I am the sole participant and I kept daily journals via Google Drive/Google Docs.

Research Positionality: Veteran Latina online doctoral students are few and far between. There should be more veteran Latina students within higher education doctoral programs, especially due to financial backing, online access. I noticed that conducting a screenplay is an option within art-based research, and it wasn't really tied down to a systematic way of doing things, so I found that appealing.

Setting: UTRGV is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), having qualified to be considered this—since it serves 96% Hispanic students in and out of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, through a traditional face-to-face environment and via the expansion of their 100% online programs. Furthermore, UTRGV's main campus is in Edinburg, Texas, and there

are also campuses in each of the major metropolitan areas of Brownsville, Edinburg, Harlingen, and McAllen, as well as having a presence in South Padre Island, Texas. My study focused on my own experience as a doctoral online student.

My concentration focus is on Post-9/11 veterans, as this is a generational study. I was interested in finding out if having received veteran educational funding perpetuated my pursuit of a doctoral degree and helped me continue, even when times were difficult due to the financial backing.

Method of Delivery: An Arts Based Approach to Ethnographic Research (Screenplay)

Veterans that attend higher learning institutions are voicing their feelings of alienation when attending higher learning institutions. For example, Christopher Webb (2014) conducted a TED Talk in which he stated,

At UNC Asheville, North Carolina's public liberal arts institution, there's a demographic of students, a minority whose presence is increasing in our classrooms every academic year, and what would you say if I told you that right here where the vision segment of our mission statement reads, "UNC Asheville students, within a diverse and inclusive community, experience liberal arts education at its best." The members of this group (veterans) are using terms like do not belong, out of place, not at home, unwelcomed, and discriminated to describe their experience in education... In fact, it's difficult to get an exact number, because a comprehensive study hasn't been done. But among the individual institutions that have looked at this, it appears that less than 50% of veterans who begin college with the GI-Bill graduate. (TEDx Talks, 2014, 0:22)

Facebook and Twitter, to name a couple, are online social media network options that certain professors and students use to communicate with each other outside of the classroom.

These are all online mediums in which I, a veteran Latina doctoral student, can connect and reach out to those I attend online school with. I may not be in the same city as the students from the lower Rio Grande Valley (RGV) or those that attend UTRGV in other cities/states (such as I in Grand Prairie, Texas); however, I can learn about the students in my class, and read about their life experiences by catching up on their social media accounts. This allows for a more inclusive classroom for people that participate in those types of empirical social environments and becomes a formative way to collect additional data. Furthermore, the:

Dramatization of fieldwork offers the qualitative researcher a more intriguing way to approach the analysis and interpretation of empirical materials. Rather than relying on standard methods such as coding or even more recent methods such as narrative inquiry, the adaptation of data into play script representation provides a creative outlet for capturing the human dimensions of inquiry. (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p. 379)

Through the dramatization of fieldwork—the transcripts from the fieldwork and their acting out provide a deeper consideration to the voices of the veteran Latina doctoral student. My screenplay would be a more conversational approach to the empirical material and allow “scholarly discourse to be pushed aside to communicate both the everyday and exceptional through more authentic, accessible language” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2017, p. 379).

Structure and Organization of a Screenplay Monologue (Development of the Screenplay)

The screenplay follows a similar format to another screenplay structure of *Writing Ethnography: Processes of Collecting and Arranging Ethnographic Plays*, a dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School University of Missouri—Columbia by Brock Leslie Fisher, MA, in December 2004.

In addition, it is important to note that, many times, gender and sex are referenced interchangeably; however, the two are distinct facets of identity that can be analyzed independently in efforts to gather data on the power structure found within an online postmodern educational system. For example,

In general terms, "sex" refers to the biological differences between males and females, such as the genitalia and genetic differences. "Gender" is more difficult to define, but it can refer to the role of a male or female in society, known as a gender role, or an individual's concept of themselves, or gender identity. (Newman, 2018)

Therefore, the two identifying factors do not always correspond to each other, although they are often confused to be one and the same. That is why it is important to directly separate or cross reference the distinctions when applicable, in order to bring a better understanding of identity as it relates and translates within a virtual setting. For the purpose of my study, it was important to understand how female identity affects communication and successful online outcomes using language, as women are enrolling in higher education courses at a higher rate than men, yet females may not necessarily have the structures in place to lead to effective online negotiation and ultimate knowledge transfer within those mediums. So, an impending judgment and assertion of access is essential to gauge throughout the literature, in efforts to delineate any injustices found within these postmodern asynchronous and synchronous online systems. In addition, women are graduating at much faster rates than men from college, yet there is still a power struggle that women face within these educational online structures.

INT. LATINA'S RENTAL HOME – DAY

FADE IN:

LATINA (writing her journal entry in bed—barely able to keep her eyes open)

I remember I was in elementary school and my teacher told my mother that I was smart. She asked my mother if she'd allow me to take the Gifted and Talented (GT) examination, and that if I passed, I'd qualify for their advanced program for higher order thinkers in the first grade. I remember having to wake up early to take that exam, I think it was in the Summer, and I know we must have walked there, since my mother didn't know how to drive and was too scared to learn after having crashed into a garage door. I faintly remember having to wait outside of a parking lot and remember seeing another Latino student from my kindergarten class there too. Anyway, to make a long story short, I passed the GT examination. So that next academic school year, I was placed in GT, i.e., the Galaxy Program. Looking back through the years, I know that this program shifted the direction in my life, I mean it had to. It put me in classes with other students that seemed to care about their education, with teachers that seemed to go the extra mile, and that probably made a huge difference in how I'd approach my future and educational career. (End Entry)

Figure 5. Journal Entry, October 5, 2017.

Mexican American, i.e. Latino students must deal with fitting into an educational system that is never truly theirs, and in turn are spoon fed this half-truth that they are a part of a shared learning experience. However, I don't want to believe this to be my truth, or else all hope is lost and that would be detrimental. Instead, as a veteran Latina online doctoral student my fluid identities have served to empower me, because I have more than one identity to assert myself in an online doctoral program. If I couldn't find resilience through one identity, I'd reach inward and try to find my place in the system through another, which is ultimately what I do. I was never meant to shake the system, just find easier ways to digest it, and through the literature to find out how the system works. The end goal is receiving my Ed.D., and not just to survive, but to thrive as an emerging scholar, to bring that catharsis to those like me, and beyond.

Research Questions

1. What have I experienced throughout my pursuit of higher education?
2. How did I (a veteran Latina doctoral student) navigate through an exclusively online classroom?
3. How was I able to circumvent micro-aggressions in oppressive systems of education?

Nature of the Study: Introduction to Screenplay as Performative Art

Lee (2016) cited Williams (2013), Dancyger and Rush (2007):

Paul Williams suggests that in an academic context, “narrative fiction in some way should perform the function of interrogating important academic issues and problems” (2013, p. 250). The added challenge for researching screenwriters is the notion of what Dancyger and Rush call “the effaced narrator” (2007, p. 36). As they explain, “In a novel we expect to find a narrator, a voice that speaks directly to us [but in] films there is no overt narrator” (Dancyger and Rush 2007, 36) and it is for this reason that guidelines for screenwriting practice insist upon, as Batty puts it, “the invisible hand of the screenwriter (Batty, 2015, p. 8)”. In other words, if the screenplay were to articulate the research, it cannot necessarily rely on the authorial voice of the researcher to do so, at least, not within industrial conventions. (Lee, 2016, p. 88)

Assumptions and Limitations

The discrepancies I see across studies are that many of them are focused on certain minority groups that are not exactly conducive to my own study on the Latina experience. These limitations may result from preferential studies based on a minority group preferring one’s own ethnicity for research study and the lower numbers of Latinas pursuing higher educational degrees. In addition, other limitations of this aspect may result from demographic factors, or issues of access.

While it is widely acknowledged that interaction increases the potential for knowledge-building and learning how to be a better human being through the curriculum is one that we as learners must identify. The literature indicates that this will be enhanced when opportunities

encouraging students' emergent identities are embedded into the curriculum, and only then can we begin to question ourselves and make the learning our own.

Soliloquy #1: "Implications of engendered poverty; Female Head of Household and Government Assistance" by LATINA

[The author is alone with a heavy heart; she sits center stage looking out blankly. The lights dim, but for the audience—her face is bright.]

LATINA: If I talk to myself, does that mean that I'm crazy? The playwright would decide his delivery—to embark on a transient back and forth with himself, with the audience, with his mind... with his demons or include others to join and partake in this symbiotic cesspool of educational misunderstandings and outright oppressive bullshit, because here the end goal is not too clear. Yet, it never is for a woman like me... for women like me... (she recalls)

Latino shoes, open ripped out soles, working on their own land—give back the careers you took from us, those backs that you stepped on—give me the career you killed before I had a chance to get it!

Why is it that every teacher of the month does not look like me, and I noticed that all the shit talkers went up on that bulletin board; why does this school glorify them? This country has a history of glorifying those that have plumaged and pillaged—those who have stolen from others to see their name in lights, and the rest of us have had to work three times as hard to attempt to get a seat at the table.

Racism hurts the majority too, not just the minorities who's back this country has been made with. "The wholesale shipment of jobs out of the country, the wholesale importation of legal and illegal aliens, the downsizing, the automation—the response to all that is well it must be affirmative action, and people buy it" (Jones, 1992).

[The lights dim, and Latina puts her hands—on top of her head in mid thought...].

This whole Summer I worked on curriculum writing, work for someone else—what I should have been working on was my dissertation. I was “replaced” by someone else. Funny how that works out. I am more interested in showing how a Latina who grew up with government assistance, through the welfare system, with food stamps that provided me my nourishment—that were never enough, through the garage sales that would give me the clothes on my back and through the transient life of living from apartment to apartment to apartment and so on was able to keep going. Life experiences were not much—the schools and the books I would read there were my escape to begin to understand the outside world—the possibilities of hope. To understand that I could be more in life was priceless.

[Latina is reflecting her thoughts aloud as she writes in her journal.]

Wednesday, September 11, 2018. Of all this writing for this research, I’m physically sick thinking of having to keep working on it, and right now the payout is nonexistent. A coworker asked bluntly, “What are you going to do with a doctoral degree anyway?” I lose motivation, not seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. This process has been a dark abyss, with breadcrumbs thrown my way here and there, but mostly dark. Does anybody ever get to say that, or are we supposed to be perfect beings, always on our A-game? If I’m to be honest, I don’t have my shit together and not much love to go around to feed anyone, let alone myself and you need fuel to finish this shit; it’s a work of grit. Well, the Navy did a great job at harvesting grit, but also sucking the second part of my life away, mind you nothing was more life sucking than that first life sucking experience—growing up in Brownsville, Texas with verbal abuse, poverty and homelessness, yea, that would probably take the cake. But leaving the military with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), OCD, anxiety and depression from a non-combat medical

condition that was aggravated while in service was not what I signed up for, yet here I am living with all those things. How am I even functioning? Oh, yea—I'm on meds. But I'm starting to crack. My dissertation chair sees it, but she stays steady hand motivating, she reassures, "this isn't easy, but it can be done."

[LATINA has a tear quickly stream down her face and she wipes it away as soon as she feels it.]

Her presence makes me feel that I am not alone for at least that 1-2 hour meeting. She shares some of her own struggles and it keeps me going for a few more weeks—I smile and log off each time—hoping that each time she will understand me a little more... when I can't give my all, when I feel like I can't keep living. I've learned it is not anyone's problem, but my own. This is my story and resilience is the only thing that shall see me through. I was honorably discharged from the military on November 2004 in San Diego, California. I didn't really think of possible negative residuals upon my exit of service, the only thing I was thinking of was getting away from my White drug addicted boyfriend. Not for me, but for him. He was a wonderful man; we could have made a life together... but for those pesky drugs. I would have stayed with him, but having come back from a deployment, he was affected by the strong grip of drug addiction, and I had to move on for his sake and mine. I learned that 12 months away from someone while fighting an invisible war aboard a nuclear aircraft carrier not only does something to you, but something to them too. I knew back then that school was the answer. If I left him, a man that had means, I would have to start from scratch. I hadn't saved a dime. I was never taught that was a thing to do. My mom lived paycheck to paycheck or welfare check to welfare check. I was focused on a paycheck too, on a way to see the world and not have to pay for it, and at every port I spent it all. Stupid, shameless, immature. I had a place to lay my head on the ship, even

though it was with 50 women as messed up in the head as me. I say that because many were cruel, not all, but many were. You must think a lot of people that join the military come from similar socioeconomic backgrounds as myself, and you'd be correct. I kept my pain inside, and some saw that as weakness, but I fought back in my own way. I wasn't as foolish as they'd perceive me, but the disdain was real.

[LATINA's face quickly angers and she hits the wall.]

Abuse comes in many forms. Some comes to us; some we take in and some we dish out. Now at 38 years of age, I find that I continue the abuse on myself—in different forms in my life—occasionally becoming so ill that I must take sick days from work—no water just Red Bulls (the ones I became addicted to when I was in the military), and anxiety medication to keep me semi-normal, every morning same routine, so I won't appear to be mean, so I can at least force a smile and appear semi-normal—when I know that these people are probably uglier inside than they pretend to be. Because just like in the military they show me disdain—not all, but some. That's how I function nowadays. This lack of care is familiar and it's sadly warm to be in this chaotic state—it's all that I know still to this day... all that I know, and it started with my mother, my head of household, growing up in South Texas who was to lay the foundation of what "normal" should be. Who my father is, I have no idea... after years of trying to investigate it out of her, I don't think she knows who he is either? Men. At least I married one and had two kids by him. Lately, I've told my husband almost every day, "you must be very careful and stop messing with me, because all of you depend on me and I'm losing it! It's too much stress and if I break, I will quit it all and this family will suffer from that (since I make the most money)!" He doesn't care, in fact he admitted to a friend of mine that he plays psychological games on me. As soldiers in combat, we knew who our enemy was. As a mother, wife, teacher, and student—my

enemy it seems is in all those people. So, there are many days towards the end of this journey, where I am so close yet so far... and I don't trust that I will be able to complete my dissertation, because people like to fuck with me and keep me down. There must be something wrong with me. I never left the war, it's manifested into civilian life, into my marriage, into my job, into my academic career. I must take my medication and then I feel a little more motivated. I can do this, and I keep going, but damn my mind's playing tricks on me.

[LATINA gets into the bathtub and turns on the hot water. She dares use her computer when the tub is half filled and begins to type.]

September 12th, 2018 Wednesday @ 11:00 p.m. Google Drive—I mean it's one thing to get your words down on paper, and yet a totally different thing to type them in Google Docs. Ugh, technology has come a very long way and my professor can go into Google Drive and see how long I've stayed on the platform, as I document my past, the things that I've gone through, and am still going through—because for me school hasn't ended—it is a lifestyle choice, or rather all these student loans I don't want to pay back—yes, those keep me here as well. Google Drive itself is unforgiving; every second spent on this thing can be traced. Thank you, technology, for being so disloyal. Google Docs doesn't care that I have no time to journal every day, and it will rat me out in a heartbeat!

My distinguished chair—she can look at how long I've taken to write the things that I'm trying to forget. It's difficult when I don't want to remember any of it. The past is supposed to be the past for a reason. I was subliminally taught to sweep things under the rug. My mother was the best at that. Everything was the devil. Don't do this, don't do that or you're going to hell. The Catholic Church was her way to keep us scared. Well, hell was not where I wanted to end up... and so she kept me and my two brothers at bay for a while—until I lost my virginity despite her

at the adult age of 19. And I lost it to a complete asshole that didn't give two shits about me. Just because I wanted to lose it... no other reason. Yes, I'll take that memory and sweep it back under the rug once more.

In fact, this 'sweep-it-underneath-the-rug' strategy has probably been the reason I've got this far successfully and unsuccessfully. I'm a doctoral student, but I question if I even belong here. Besides myself, there are no veteran Latina doctoral students in my online courses. So, the others always look at me weird, and I've been told some think I think too highly of myself. But they're wrong it's quite the opposite. I'm working on it. When I'm not aimlessly staring off into space or covering half my face—I try to get some work done, try to think back to what got me here—a Latina lost in an increasingly more racist America, among bigots, racists, and xenophobes. I was born here—but they don't know that I have all the features of a well-made Mexican. I try to forget the brutality of poverty, those beginning years—not like the *Wonder Years* I'd watch on television—not even close—living with roaches as roommates and searching for food but falling short some days and having to eat a ground beef burger and homemade potatoes that my mom placed into McDonald's refurbished containers. Why was I so unappreciative, at least my mother tried? She really did.

I remember that she signed up for financial aid. She was wearing a long gray trench coat, it was raining outside, and she was determined to make something happen for our family.

Some months passed by, and she would bring home some relics of things she had been able to accomplish in college, and I was proud. Not so much because I even knew what the possibility of her graduating college would mean to our family, but because she was receiving financial aid—and that was helping us out with groceries. She once brought home a clay mold of the Egyptian Nefertiti that she had done in art class. It was a carving that she was so proud of. It

had her name engraved on it on the back, and the date in which she made it. It was rather heavy, and she showed it to us and placed it in the living room. It was to me a glimpse of the abilities that my mother had, and she wanted to show it off to her children—look what I did, look what I can do. Some more months went by, and it became apparent to me at that early age that college wasn't for everybody. San Juana said she was not going to attend college anymore and that the math course that she had enrolled in was just too hard... too difficult for her to get a passing grade. You need to pass math to move on. When that first semester was over, my mother had failed every single one of the 4 classes she had enrolled in, and that meant no more financial aid. I know financial aid is not supposed to be a career, but for us—for a bit there—it kind of was her career, because at that time it was an income. When I think back to this memory—what sticks out in my mind is mother telling us goodbye, wearing her *Inspector Gadget* trench coat and walking towards the bus stop in the rain, as we looked out the window not totally sure we knew what college was. She had done that every day, until she failed out that semester. That experience could have stopped me from having a desire to attend college. But as I grew older, I could see that my mother had an undiagnosed learning disability. Things are not simple for her to do, and she doesn't learn or retain information easily. As a teacher I would say that she would be on my radar for someone that would be labeled learning disabled and would need special accommodations. I know for a fact that was not provided to her in college.

Those whys and the hows of how I got this far, does anybody really care to know? Somewhere, someone like me has struggled too. I guess it's important to investigate how I got this far, because I'm not the only Latina that grew up in poverty, in the abuse of extended family, and who attempted to escape the chaos by enrolling into the military. I've always been trying to

find a way out... hmm. Therefore, I need to journal. Eureka! I was always trying to find a way out.

I still don't think I went far enough though. Everywhere I turn there I am, a lost puppy—they call me gullible, that's never seemed to have left me. I've been told that it looks like I don't love myself. What's that supposed to look like? I found love wherever I could. It wasn't like it was given to me freely. Everything I've ever done has been a battle. I'm tired.

Will this doctorate degree even mean anything? They say it's the highest point of education that you can reach... but I see the work that my chair and other professors are still busy doing... and they never stop—education never ends and maybe that's by design, a simple way to survive from our own lives. Something we may all have in common—we are crazy—who puts themselves through all this torture?

Wednesday, September 13th, 2018. I'm only a semester away from graduating and only a dissertation away from not having to blow my brains out... no not in the literal terms although many before me have—just in the... can I have my life back terms. I keep putting ABD on everything that involves my signature—from my emails at work, to my Twitter account—ABD means “all but dissertation” and that's how close I am to getting my doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Educational Technology... all but dissertation to getting my doctorate... all—but yet, not quite. How embarrassing to have gone this far and have not got far enough. The story can't end here. I wouldn't be able to handle that. Something inside of me is screaming keep going, even though logistically I am super aware that I have no time to get this done. But I can't fall for that truth.

I have a whole entire bound book of all the work that I've done in this Cohort 8, and yet it's not enough to get me through, to get others to believe in me. I think some have lost the

faith... and that's the last thing I need right now; yet, I feel it. In the past, I've had so many not believe in me, not because I couldn't do it, but because I was not worthy of being human to them. In my own extended family, I was a person that could be messed with. "You are ugly, your mouth protrudes, you look like a monkey because your mouth protrudes"... damn, that was family that said things like that to me. So, growing up they left me feeling like I always had something to prove. Isn't it enough that I am human; I mean something! I have value.

I can't have my professors stop believing in me either—they're all I have left. I don't have any relationships with my extended family, some cousins are on Facebook—but that's not real, and some cousins won't even accept my friend requests. My two brothers and I don't speak often, if at all anymore. I'm alone really. I have my own family now, but as I've been pursuing this degree it's been a lonely ride. While on this ride, they've grown—sometimes I look at my oldest daughter and wonder where the years went, and she doesn't really look for me in my room anymore... because that's where I spend most my days. My youngest just turned five years old, and I remember starting the doctoral program after she was born. It was my way to take it to the end.

I know, I know—it's important to write down the struggles that I as a veteran Latina have faced—I need to force myself to remember why this is important to me, and then recap what exactly got me to this point—because I am not alone in this struggle. There is a tremendous value to this research and through the type of dramatic monologue that I plan to use in my autoethnographic screenplay... maybe it can be of some service within the educational realm.

[LATINA then gets on Facebook and begins to pour her heart out to the people that are on her friends list—knowing that this online world has separated her from what true friendship is—still she lets it out.]

Up and down roller coaster—can I please get off (because I'm about to throw up)? "What did you say? It never stops!" What?!? I can feel my guts in my throat; that can't be normal. Do you have no empathy—you monster? I keep looking down... do these people even know what's happening to me right now? My f***** heart is about to explode; I feel an elephant stomping the sh** out of my chest! I gasp for air—but the air hates me suddenly. What did I do to you "Air?!?" Provide me of your life saving oxygen—you schadenfreude element from hell! I've been on this ride since 1980, my eyes were obviously closed back then, because this journey didn't seem to bother me—I guess what they say is true—ignorance is bliss. Ha! But now for whatever reason... I see it all—and I don't want to! At least give me the option to unsee! If we have free will, then why did you put me on this f***** ride? The stars I see on this ghastly night have been dead since eternity, but I can still see them. My life already ended I'm sure... somewhere a star can still see me too. What kind of torturous fiend would allow us to suffer in the flesh, and void our souls of life—but keep our heart beating? We are still living and every nerve in my body is on edge... why do you build me up, then let me go down this monstrous contraption? Is it fun from your vantage point to see me squirm? What kind of fiend would allow us to suffer in the flesh knowing that when the roller coaster does finally stop- we will parish fools and return to the dust we were spawned from? Was I just here to be mocked? Oh, wait am I now your enemy because I question your reasoning for tempting me onto this roller coaster? Am I an enemy now because you called me over, when I was just a little soul crawling to your arms and you said, "It's time to go." Will I rot for thinking and feeling like this is some b*****? Hmm... this roller coaster doesn't have many passengers on it anymore. But it keeps going at the same predictable rate—and I feel like I'm about to pass out. Well, maybe then I can find some solace... some peace? The sun is beginning to rise in the east, and I do not pass out after all. Instead, it begins to rain, and my tears are camouflaged by the droplets—again no one will know... and it's all by design—keep your feelings hidden... you will be alright. Why am I still on this treacherous roller coaster?!? Do you even hear me?!? I know! I'll just jump off—nothing is greater than mental freedom, because the lie they keep feeding us... is that we have "free will"—but those dead stars that we can still see at night prove to me otherwise. Just like me, still present even though they are dead inside, forced to be seen against their will. I wonder if I'll hit the ground standing—having taken back my life on my own terms, or was I supposed to be driven to madness to think that jumping would keep me alive and sane—when death is inevitable? I stay seated because I don't know the answer to the question. All I know is that I don't know anything... I'm just an empty vessel along for the ride.

Figure 6. Facebook Post. August 7, 2016.

Hmm, not that many people liked it or commented on it. I thought it was good. I guess people can't appreciate real feelings. I wrote that poem right before I had to finish an assignment for Dr. Perez. What is wrong with me? I must keep going I have two kids to feed, and a sickly mother to take care of, and a narcissistic husband who likes to win all the time.

Analyzing Soliloquy #1

Setting(s) throughout the plot

Brownsville, Texas, and Irving, Texas.

Character analysis

Latina—reflecting on who she is in this world, how others see her in this state of being—where here the setting greatly influences the plot. Growing up in the United States of America where racism is rampant, and she is marginalized.

Latina provides poetic discourse and, in her reverie, expresses just how unequal this country is. She tells the story of how she was let go at her job, the extra job she had to help supplement and pay the bills because her husband had no job. It was that job—they took away. A White woman took that job from her and gave it to women that looked like her, but not before they used her time to get the format and structure to her curriculum writing down. She expresses how she felt used and yet when they told her they would not need her anymore she was subservient and let it be. She knew that not all battles could be met with a fight, and some she'd have to retrieve from for her sanity for her continuance. Still those experiences served to let her know just who she was and what others thought her worth was. It made her sad that life had to be this way and she'd cry to herself because that's the only person that cared to hear it.

Latina grew up reading books voraciously, and in them she found that she could be someone—she'd escape into their chapters and it gave her hope that one day she would be someone.

Her journal was another way of expressing herself and getting her thoughts out on paper, and she'd write and let her feelings take over. It was a way to see where she was in a point in time.

Latina reflects on how much work and time she has given to writing her dissertation and has moments in which she questions if it is even worth it. All this pain that you'd have to endure and things you'd have to give up—for what?

She's starting to see her health decline and with that comes less motivation to do much else. This is when she realizes everything has a time stamp—and she wonders just how much more does she have left to give. The walls are closing in and writing her dissertation might just be the last hurrah. She has been taking medication for her mental duress and realizes that she has become completely dependent on them, and that is why she has kept going at times. Latina realizes that her dissertation chair has become a great solid structure of light in her life. Even when she knows that she does not look her best, or maybe so overcome with life that she doesn't make much sense her chair believes in her and that's enough to keep her going. Here this professor has someone taken her under her wing from beyond the screen and she feels vibrant for that hour or two. She hears her professor's voice and it calms her madness—she just might get this thing done.

Latina has scrambled thoughts and out of nowhere she starts talking about a different subject. She begins to reflect on the love of her life. How he became addicted to drugs and she had to leave him. She strongly believes that life would have been better had she stayed by his side. This shows that Latina is very focused on her past and the what ifs. Focusing on your past is not a good thing to do sometimes, but Latina can't help it. Her present and future seem bleak. She realizes that she is poor, not even when she went away to the military did she think of saving her money. She could have, but she didn't—she wasn't taught to. It was part of her paradigm, and that was starting to scare her to the core. Every morning she must get up and go to work and put on a happy face—even though inside everyday she's slowly dying and lately it seems like

that process has been speeding up for her. It's scary and she doesn't feel strong enough to face another day, but she does and not everyone at work buys into this fake healthy facade. She's beginning to crack at the seams.

Latina begins to realize that her life was meant to go bad because her mother didn't have her life together and so she never had a good example of what normal should be like. So, when she got out of the military and returned home, she was desperate to make a family. But it seems that even that marriage she got into had psychosocial abuse, and abuse seemed to be something she could never escape. If someone wasn't abusing her, she was abusing herself. She knew some things she'd never escape, but she would try.

Every time that Latina gets on Google Docs, she realizes that her work is being traced and that technology has come a long way. It makes her paranoid that she is being judged by her words, and that her words are so dark. She realizes that her single mother's way of keeping her at bay, was to scare her and her brothers into submission, and it worked—but it also made her rebel when she came of age. When she lost her virginity, it was like a sacrilegious way of beginning her journey into the military. It was a way of saying goodbye to her mother's strong grip on her life.

Latina remembers that when her mother had decided to go to college, she was young but noticed that her mother applied for financial aid. She saw that suddenly her mother had enough money to buy food and she began to equate college with money. Unfortunately, Latina's mother had a learning disability and would never pass college—she flunked out, and just like that, there went the possibility to get out of their mess. Writing has become a way for Latina to escape her life, and she realizes that she has power and can use education to find a way out of her mess if she can ever escape All but Dissertation (ABD) purgatory. Latina is mentally and physically

tired of the rat race she has put herself on, and she begins to realize that her decisions are what have taken her to where she is now. She must complete her dissertation and get on with her life.

Conclusion

Latina is a product of her environment, but when it comes to education she seems to continue, even in the face of adversity. That is resilience at its best.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Online education has provided access to students that might not otherwise be able to continue the pursuit of a higher education degree, even up to the pursuit of a doctoral online degree. In order to explore the way in which technology has leveled the educational playing field of the economically disadvantaged, when compared to economically advantaged students in the pursuit of similar online degrees within accredited universities it is important to look at “the one.” The lens that I looked through when conducting my autoethnographic research—is one of being a veteran, Latina, doctoral student who currently attends an exclusively online university within a distance learning environment. The cultural phenomena I researched dealt with how through poverty, I as a marginalized Latina, could find the resilience to continue forth within my education, even if perhaps my cultural identity may by design hinder that process due to micro-aggressive actions from the schooling environment. The relationship between “online higher education access” and “Latina doctoral students” is placed into perspective when I realize that a report called “Fulfilling America’s Future: Latinas in the U.S.” showed that “Latinas have the lowest percentage of graduate degrees compared to all women of other non-Hispanic racial groups combined” (Gandara, 2015). In 2013, just 4 percent of Latinas had completed a master’s degree or higher by age 29 compared to nearly 5 percent of black, 11 percent of white, and 22 percent of Asian women. A decade earlier less than 2 percent of Latinas held a graduate degree,

so, this represents more than a doubling of graduate degree holders. However, as with bachelor's degrees, this progress has not been sufficient to close the significant gaps between Latinas and other women (Gandara, p. 10)". I am a part of that Latina population that is reaching for higher education, and so I conducted an autoethnography screenplay see how I got this far.

Historical Overview: Critical Race Theory

There are systems in place that continue to oppress the Latina and make the attainment of a doctoral degree more difficult than it might be to attain when compared to their White counterparts, and that is why I look at CRT and how one can attempt to navigate through the system of power and privilege within an American educational institution.

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, p. 70). CRT was specifically explored through the investigation of being brown and enrolled in a doctorate program.

According to Cueva, CRT

"challenges the dominant discourse of race and racism, as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups in education. Critical Race Theory consists of the following five tenets: 1) centralizes race, racism, and additional intersectionality's in the analysis; 2) provides an interdisciplinary framework; 3) centers the lived experiences of people of color in the analysis; 4) challenges traditional ideologies and dominant discourses; 5) moves us beyond rhetoric and offers a grounded approach linked to advocacy." (Cueva, 2013, p. 13)

Latina Experiences Within Critical Race Theory, Microaggressions and Their Relationship to Cultural Capital

According to Daniel Solórzano, as cited in Cueva (2013),

“Racial microaggressions are a form of systematic racism used to keep racialized communities in subordinate positions. Racial microaggressions emerge through:

1) subtle verbal and nonverbal assaults directed toward people of color, often carried out automatically or unconsciously; 2) layered assaults, based on an individual’s race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, immigration status, accent, surname, or phenotypes, and 3) cumulative emotional racial assaults taking a psychological or physiological toll on people of color within predominantly white universities (1998, 121–136).” (Cueva, p. 144).

In the article “Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth,” Tara J. Yosso from the University of California looked at how cultural wealth could be a way to acquire gains within an educational system. Through cultural capital, which is also investigated in my dissertation, I began to look at the advantages of using my ethnicity as an advantage rather than a disadvantage that gave me clout in an online classroom as is mentioned in the literature. There are strengths in communities of color, and those it helps raise.

If we as marginalized groups bring our own methodologies, i.e. experiences and knowledge of culture, then we too can play in the field of knowledge and thus hold cultural capital. Cultural capital was typically seen as the upper hand of the White man, but when we access our own theories of knowledge, then we construct new playing fields that allow for new knowledge to enter the pre-existing playing field.

This interpretation demonstrates Anzaldúa's point:

“If we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvi). Indeed, if some knowledges have been used to silence, marginalize and render people of color invisible, then “outsider” knowledges (Hill Collins, 1986), mestiza knowledges (Anzaldúa, 1987) and transgressive knowledges (Hooks, 1994) can value the presence and voices of people of color, and can re-envision the margins as places empowered by transformative resistance” (Hooks, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1997; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001). Critical Race Theory listens to DuBois’ racial insight and offers a response to Anzaldúa’s theoretical challenge. (Yosso, 2005, p. 70)

In “The Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools” by Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006), she speaks on the surface complexities of the achievement gap as not a racial achievement gap, but rather an educative debt. Minorities have been placed into a subgroup within a shared society, which already marks them inferior because of financial access like student loans and or government assistance. Ladson-Billings stated, “One of the most common phrases in today’s educational literature is the ‘achievement gap...’ According to the National Governor’s Association, the achievement gap is a matter of race and class. Across the U.S., a gap in academic achievement persists between minority and disadvantaged students and their white counterparts.” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3)

As a Latina there are very few of us attaining a doctoral degree and even less veteran Latinas doing so. Furthermore,

Data from the Coleman Report (1966) and Jenck's well known work (1972) suggest that the achievement gap between Black and White children increases with time in school. African American students score over White students in both first and twelfth grade, but the gap in twelfth grade is substantially wider than in first, suggestive of the intensification of differential outcomes by actions and activities within the school itself... [therefore,]... something goes on within the school itself that inhibits achievement of poor children and/ or children of color (with the exception of children of specific Asian descent (Lee, 2005)... [Basically,] Blacks and Whites don't experience school similarly. (Tozer, Gallegos, Henry, Greiner & Price, 2011, p.17)

In addition, in a comparable case study, educational scholars Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) propose and assert the term racial battle fatigue (RBF), arguing that RBF is manifested through the people of color's prolonged exposure to racism in predominantly white institutions through psychological and physiological effects. They argue that continued raced-based distress trigger RBF through one's "flight or fight" psychological response system. RBF is believed to affect one's psychological and physiological state, activated and thus heightened through continuous exposure to racial microaggressions in predominantly white institutions. (Smith et al., 2007).

Cueva (2013) mentioned Smith et al. (2007):

For example, Smith conducted a study on African American men at Harvard University, paying close attention to the implications of racism for this group of racialized men. The study reveals very serious findings: African American men that were subjected to prolonged racism also developed racial battle fatigue. In accordance with this study, some of the symptoms of RBF include elevated blood

pressure, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, acute stress, rapid heart palpitations, nausea, and insomnia. These conditions activate the human response system, and if unchecked can lead to a collapsed psychological state or chronic conditions that debilitate one's health and quality of life. (Cueva, 2013, p. 25)

This is similar to what veterans' experience when in combat, and therefore aligned with my focus of being a veteran attempting to gain control of my learning environment, even when it is difficult to do so.

Identity Fluidity Bought with Capital

So why would someone who can barely make ends meet at home, pursue higher education in the first place? This led me to look at the different types of capital. The literature points to various types of cultural capital (embodied, objectified, and institutionalized), and focuses on its sub-categories within cultural capital such as: linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistant capital that can assist Latina online students when aiming to be successful throughout my pursuits of higher education. In other words, by being fluid in how I use my identities I could successfully navigate the inherently racist online learning space. I would be able to purchase my voice through capital.

Therefore, this idea of being fluid in one's identity and having the ability to jump over cultural barriers is an interesting concept for me, because for Latina's poverty is a barrier that may stop them from reaching their academic potential, and that is a formidable obstacle. For example,

While the latest poverty rates among Hispanics are a historic low, Hispanics continue to be overrepresented among the population in poverty. They made up

18.3 percent of the total population in 2017 but accounted for 27.2 percent of the population in poverty. (Edwards, 2019, par. 2)

Sexuality, Gender and Negotiation of Power Through Techno-Social Capital

Is being a woman important to pursuing a doctoral degree, when the data shows that in 2014, “Women earned the majority of doctoral degrees for the 6th straight year and outnumber men in grad school 136 to 100” (Perry, 2015).

The literature points to social identity and sexuality as a way to barter clout in an online classroom. In the article “She Met Her (Boy)friend Online: Negotiating Gender Identity and Sexuality Among Young Thai Women in Online Space,” women were interviewed over how they could navigate through processes of building and negotiating social identity and femininity within an online environment, and still feel powerful within the confines of an online/inclusive community. The research uncovered that women are able to express their

sexuality using online technologies; connections between the online and offline worlds in terms of emotions as well as social and sexual networks; and traditional values regarding female sexuality reproduced through online media, ex. such as programs professors choose, such as Second Life—[that indivertibly portray women in sexually deviant roles], and how young women negotiate and resist these. (Boonmongkon, et al., 2013)

Gender takes a formidable role when it comes to gaining access to certain teammates if they feel more comfortable talking to females rather than males, or heterosexual rather than homosexual students and vice versa. I found that in some cases, and with some men, being a woman helped me gain clout.

Power in 100% Online Exclusive Higher Learning Institutions: Technology as Access

My focus is on how online education provides hope through access and the pursuit of equity via cultural capital (a CRT concept), in that

The incorporation of technology such as the internet in education can be a period of struggle or, from an instrumental point of view, as a means to an end; technology is neutral which implies four points (Feenberg, 1991): (1) Technology is indifferent to the ends it can be used to attain. (2) Technology is not concerned with the politics of societies whether of list or socialist cultures, (3) The rational nature of technology is the cause of technology's neutrality and the universal truth it symbolizes. This allows people to believe that because a technology works in one culture, it will work in all cultures, and (4) Because technology is neutral and is used as a means to an end, the only rational stance is to employ it to solve any problem, regardless of the cost to the environment, culture, or human beings.

(Pizarro, 2010, p. 5-6)

Therefore, understanding how technology can be positively used to guide educational access gives me, a veteran Latina doctoral student—that hope that online learning can provide higher education to those that might lack the time to pursue higher education. This can be a result of familial guilt, and/or questioning—am I enough, do I know enough to be in the same playing field as more affluent degree seekers?

Being a veteran Latina doctoral online student is a fluid identity that allows me to interchange among subgroups to show diverse presence. Various studies are compared in my investigation of these overlapping concepts, and I looked at what the research shows about online higher learning institutions, and how Latinas are accomplishing success via higher

education via doctoral programs. I looked at studies from electronic databases looking for the following keywords: social presence, communication, computer-mediated communication, computers, distance education, cultural phenomena, familial guilt, screenplay, autoethnography, storytelling, adult learning, personalities, Critical Race Theory, racial battle fatigue, online learning environment, learner identity, asynchronous discussion forums, anonymity, technology fluency, digital citizenship, social network sites, social identity, femininity, online, online learning, educators, and distance learning.

It's critical to analyze how technology affects learning in our democratic society. Computers have become common place and exceedingly schools are taking education online to service those with computer access. People from all walks of life are attempting to enroll in higher learning institutions for a variety of reasons, such as: to enhance their knowledge base, earn more money in their respective fields, and/or not limited to attaining a viable degree of their choice, and Latinas are no different in those aims. Many courses are now being offered online, and increasingly students pursuing higher education degrees are registering in 100% online courses, either because of familial time constraints, or convenience. Due to this, it is important to examine how marginalized groups are faring in these types of learning environments, and how far they are willing to go in their pursuit of higher education. Regardless of race, the opportunity to become an online student is attainable, yet unfortunately, not always equitable so many may choose to stop at a bachelor's degree. Still other minorities may break the mold and reach for a doctoral degree.

My research is based on my own experiences within an online course, and how I, as a heterosexual female, often feel alienated within the confines of an online class. In the past I have been grouped with a diverse group of both males and females, and communication was difficult,

as much appeared to be lost in translation. I, by nature, am a hermit, but when it comes to my workplace environment, I have an alpha personality, and am always trying to find strategies to mesh with other students in my online community. Before my research I had given little thought to how our identities play a role within the power struggle of a collaborative online group. Indeed, the literature states that creating a sound social space which perpetuates the interaction necessary to sustain it is possible through collaborative group work. Further, this lends itself well to enhancing work and social relationships leading to an affinity together as a community of learners. (Kirschner et al., 2004; Hull and Saxon, 2009)

If authentic problem-solving tasks are used, the need to interact contributes to a sense of achieving shared goals, which can contribute to group relationships and cohesiveness as learners involve themselves in the co-construction process. Indeed, the functional role of collaborative talk can stimulate extended interaction creating a more cohesive group who have shared responsibility for the outcomes (Kirschner et al., 2004; Yeh, 2010), and does not require grading to sustain it. Furthermore, voluntary participation in online group work was investigated by Brindley, Walti and Blaschke (2009) in a longitudinal three-year study. Online discussion postings were collected from over 15 cohorts during this time, with two of these being ungraded. Due to the collaborative nature of group work, the authors found that

Numerous decisions need to be made around how to incorporate discussion into the natural flow of the online class with consideration of the purpose of discussion, its integration into learning aims and activities, the dynamics and size of the group, the likelihood of diversity in languages, cultural values, time zones, as well as the role of the educator in managing, sustaining and supporting students through discussion, to name a few. Another salient point is that when interaction rests solely in one's 'performances' in

the asynchronous communications, meanings then are totally committed to this modality, rather than distributed over a number of different forms of communicating. This is perhaps a paradox of online discussion, in that there is potential both to create knowledge, and misunderstanding. (Delahunty, J., Verenikina, I., and Jones, P., 2014)

This topic was of interest to me since I have taken online courses ever since 2008, through the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) and have had successful outcomes in them grade-wise, but not so much within the power struggle of the course. However, I do find the online-learning world experience to be much more suitable for my busy lifestyle, and so for that convenience will always choose it over traditional face-to-face classroom settings.

Furthermore,

“As social beings the socio-emotional desire to belong is a fundamental human need (Maslow, 1968) and has been seen historically through geographically defined communities. In recent years however, the boundaries defining ‘community’ have shifted dramatically, with ease of travel and communications technology making it possible for communities to develop beyond time, space or the physical proximity of its members” (Rovai, Wighting and Lucking, 2004). By no longer needing a physical locality to exist, the emergence of online contexts has redefined traditional notions of community by making it accessible to a diverse and widely distributed membership, in which it becomes the shared interests that denote the community (Mercer, 2000; also see for example Perrotta, 2006). Without the restrictions of physical or geographical location, community becomes “what people do together” rather than “where or through what means” (Rovai, 2002a, p. 4). (Delahunty, J., Verenikina, I., and Jones, P., 2014).

Therefore,

To ensure a focused review of the literature the following questions were proposed: (1) What is the role of interaction in online learning? (2) What fosters or inhibits community building in online learning? (3) What affordances do interaction and sense of community give to identity formation and how might this explain sense of belonging/isolation in online higher education learning contexts? Preliminary literature searches established that community, or “sense of community” is closely connected to interaction and participation. (Delahunty, J., Verenikina, I., and Jones, P., 2014)

I do believe that the review of the literature is effective to fulfill my own objectives, because it sets out to “encourage informed teaching strategies, with particular focus on higher education contexts, this review seeks to raise awareness and stimulate further exploration into a currently under researched facet of online learning (Delahunty, J., Verenikina, I., and Jones, P., 2014)”.

Furthermore,

Although a substantial amount of individual and occasionally idiosyncratic behavior was evident in the behavior of the online group; the early analysis of the research findings suggests that the activities of the group appear to influence the formation cultural identity. The respondents commented the “supportive” nature of the group and the willingness of group members to “communicate and to exchange ideas.” Inevitably, some felt that face-to-face contact would have engendered a greater sense of belonging and group identity, but there was an overall feeling that the participants were aware of belonging to a tangible and

interactive online group. Evidence from the responses also suggested that group members were aware that the norms, values and affective dispositions of the various group members worked to constitute conformity and to regulate patterns of behavior within the group. (Gale, K., Wheeler, S., and Kelly, P. (2007)

Therefore, there appears to be hope that no matter what the identity of a person is, conformity would allow for a regulation of norms and thus effective knowledge acquisition. Still, the often-hidden obstacles of identity and the power struggles of female negotiations (within an online setting) make for a practical mode of inquiry that would be developed within my dissertation.

Construction of Knowledge for Adult Learners

In *Learning in Adulthood—A Comprehensive Guide* (3rd ed.), written by Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa M. Baumgartner (2007), “the reader is exposed to Part Three’s “Newer Approaches to Adult Learning,” in which one must delve in further to the more complex adult learning mediums, such as the non-cognitive dimensions of learning, incorporating postmodernism techniques and rethinking those traditional understandings of the diverse facets of adult learning minds. This sector of non-cognitive dimensions of learning is varied and “encompasses embodied, spiritual and narrative or “storied” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 187) techniques that lead to knowledge acquisition. Yet, the extent to which knowledge is attained, in the adult mind, is bridged by both experiential doing and other less tangible narratives (that still run the gamut of this discourse). We could see the body itself as the vehicle that delivers messages to the brain, and thus learning takes place, otherwise known as “somatic or embodied learning” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 187). For example, “[L]earning in the experience is immediate, physical, and emotional. It is, as Siegesmund (2004, p. 80) writes, “a felt reaction

of rightness within an experience.” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 192).” In other words, our senses can teach us an abundance of what life is—but to what degree can a more abstract sense of “spirituality” teach a human being?

Theory

The spiritual aspect and presence of learning is elusive to the eye, yet ever present in the learning process. It directly, and indirectly coincides with somatic learning, yet fleshes out through “music, art, imagery, symbols, and rituals and overlaps or intersects with the other (aforementioned) three dimensions” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 195). Such on-site spiritual moments lead to emotional reverie, of which garner direct correlations to “the human body being at and ‘intersection of culture and cognition,’ in which, ‘the human body is at once an object of culture and is [the] subject of cognition’” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 196).

Furthermore, “Tisdell’s definition of spirituality is derived from a study of 31 higher and adult educators specifically engaged in anti-oppression pedagogy (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 200),” and although the definition is broad, one thing is for certain: spirituality is not religion. Adults learn through the physical and metaphysical world, and so educators must accommodate, i.e. differentiate their lessons for their adult learners—all the while bearing in mind those learning frameworks. We are no longer in an era of lecture, students staring intently, nodding their heads yes or no as lessons go forth—instead, pedagogy has transcended to validate other avenues of learning, and diverse learning approaches.

Analysis

Further, “using teaching strategies across cultural borders, such as: service-learning opportunities, engaged dialogue about current issues, and problem posing techniques—along with the cultural imagination such as: sharing personal cultural symbols and others can bring

about transformation” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 206). Ultimately, when it comes to the learning process, transformation within the student is an aim. Undoubtedly, meaning making stratifies our levels of learning, and understanding when contrasted to others. Although, spirituality and meaning making are a logical hypothesis to how adult learners learn, “future research and theory building in this area (and what it looks like in the classroom)” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 207), is ongoing.

Important to note, narrative learning is pivotal to adult learning and even more so to young learners as they exercise those neurological pathways towards memory retention. The literature points out an interesting dichotomy between narratives as “cultural, familial, individual (Keen and Valley-Fox, 1989) and organizational” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 208), of which subjugates narratives by hierarchal type. For example,

...family narratives embrace certain values and beliefs, customs, roles, and rituals.

Who were the heroes of the family, whose stories are told with pride across the years? And for the villains, and black sheep, whose crimes... [are] only suggested or whispered? Individual narratives are how we store your lives. (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 209)

Although this is only one example of narrative types, it leads to the understanding of the many faces of narratives in adult learning. Furthermore, there is also learning and knowing: non-Western perspectives that deal with similar discourse. Particularly, because

that Western notions of adult learning dominate is evidenced by the use of Western textbooks, journals, and conference proceedings and academic adult education programs not only in North America, but in Asia and Africa. In

addition, the curriculum that international students studying graduate programs in North America is, of course, primarily Western. (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 218)

However, being able to study other ways of learning is crucial to the understanding and acceptance of other cultures and frames of thinking. Furthermore, common themes such as race, class, and gender in adult learning are often underrepresented. For example,

“While discussions of race focus primarily on African Americans, it should be noted that people other than white European Americans are also marginalized in our society. Native Americans, Hispanics, and Asian-Americans all must grapple with discrimination and oppression based solely on their not being part of the white mainstream” (Lee and Johnson-Bailey, 2004). Moreover, racism is expressed in attitudes, behaviors, and its institutions. (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 243)

Evaluation

In conclusion, these newer approaches of adult learning are ways of dealing with a diverse student body and having them brought to light in this manor leads to further insight on the topic (of which could benefit or innovate adult learning). In their work, Merriam et al. (2007) have “sketch[ed] the outlines, nam[ed] some of the main concepts and players and drawing from the work of colleagues in adult education, show how this perspective is shaping our understanding of adult learning and adult education practice” (p. 268). Then, by way of explaining the barriers of true knowledge equality,

Their first theme—race, class, and gender—leads to the second theme, of the intersections of race, class, and gender affect the distribution of resources and power so that some groups in our society are privileged and some are oppressed.

The third theme, knowledge and truth consider the nature and construction of knowledge as it relates to learning. (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 269)

Therefore, through constructivism, instructional technologies are guiding instruction through attribution. Where the instructional technologies are student centered and driven by hypermedia and multimedia. Furthermore,

along with the increased use of such educational technologies came the emphasis on problem-solving. This is particularly constructivist in theory, and though positive aspects of behaviorism in learning have been identified, there has been a major shift toward more Constructivist learning situations involving problem-solving (Sutton, 2003). The main argument is that learners actively construct their own knowledge based on their own experiences. (Ebert, 2013)

The current trend in constructivist approach is

to switch our attention from the design of software packages (which act solely as storehouses of information) to an interactive problem-based environment in which the student assumes the key. With this profile in place, the learning task can be tailored to the student's capabilities rather than the student having to fit in with the software designer's generalized understanding of how learning should take place. The creation of these rich learning environments will also have to ensure that texts, reference sources, multimedia and communication facilities are fully integrated. (Shield, 2000)

Students are put in real world scenarios and they learn by constructing their own knowledge.

Connections

I've chosen to do an autoethnographic screenplay that will allow me to delve into a theatrical perception of the lived experience of myself a veteran Latina doctoral student that is exclusively attending an online university. Furthermore, a drama is a way of conceptualizing a lived experience from an ethnographic perspective and taking that social aspect that exists within an online environment. I believe this will allow me to see how students learn, and how they use social and cultural capital to be heard. The screenplay gives further insight as to how this instructional technology trend evokes this constructivist theory and plays an active role in the learning process, combining the experimental component of learning through experience. The gumption here was to look at how well the inclusivity of a 100% online course or courses allow for the negotiation of power and access for a veteran Latina doctoral student, as they are triple minoritized; first being a veteran, second a Latina, and third an online doctoral student. There are many dynamics that play a role in how one negotiates power and access via an exclusively online institution, and the instructional delivery is critical. In my case, UTRGV uses the Learning Management System (LMS) Blackboard Collaborate, and certain astute professors use outside meeting sources such as Zoom, or Google Hangouts whereas students and teachers can clearly see each other in a live meeting. After all, online learning allows for a modern management of access in education. Furthermore, social media applications such as the use of Facebook is an option that certain professors and students use to communicate with each other outside of the classroom, and therefore another part of the instructional technology trend in external modalities. These are all mediums in which I as a veteran Latina doctoral student can connect and reach out to those I go to school with, and continue to learn from those experiences i.e., their stories, and then bring them back to my online courses.

Resilience Amid Oppression

Dennis Heaton did a research study on resilience and how “10 Latino/a students in Southern View School District, a school district in the state of Utah (Heaton, 2013, p. iii),” were able to succeed among systematic oppressive forces within a school environment. He looked at their strengths and weaknesses within the academic setting and spoke to the students and their parents. The data collected from the interviews uncovered that the student’s resilience came from various sources, including those people that they relied on in life, whether it be a family member or someone outside of that familial environment. Critical Race Theory and resilience theory was used to analyze the data through “resistance and resilience resistance (Heaton, 2013, p. iii)”.

In addition,

The work revealed that the successful Latino/a students accessed the protective factors of personal strengths and environmental resources to remain resilient and achieve in school. It was also discovered that the students’ success was also a form of resistance that was explained using the constructs of conformist resistance and resilient resistance. The student success was revealed to resist oppression and remain in the educational pipeline. It was also discovered that student, parent, and school participants had adopted a colorblind ideology that assumed equal opportunity was available to all without regard to race. These observations led to the conclusion that the school system and the students of color it served would benefit from direct discussion of White privilege and what it means to be of a non-White racial group. The recommendation was that the school should adopt a systematic model of social justice education that could help more student access

protective factors and facilitate critical conversations about race. (Heaton, 2013, p. iii-iv)

Growing up in an almost 100% Hispanic city of Brownsville, Texas, I did not see an immediate need for the educational environment to show me what White privilege was. I only felt that once I was an educator within a school system in a bigger city, Dallas, Texas. Rather, this idea of “colorism” was more real within my own family and or the outside world, i.e., my small city of Brownsville, Texas, which because I was poor, and we did not have a car or financial means, was the only world I knew until I joined the military in May 2000. The lighter skinned Latina girls seemed to be the teachers’ pets and the girls the boys wanted. I remained relatively unimportant until high school, when my face became a lighter shade for some reason, and I began to join after school clubs and got to go places, cities over to compete. To me White privilege at that time was more about colorism and economic barriers from being born into engendered poverty and hoping not to continue that cycle. I didn’t know much, but I knew I wanted more. Although due to where I grew up in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV) where Whites were not the prevalent race and it was almost all Hispanic, other variants of what others might coin White privilege did exist. I felt other variants of White privilege in the eyes of the adults around me that had more life experiences than me at that point. They couldn’t hide it in their microaggressions, nor could the children that would tease me for having secondhand shoes and clothes. I learned to shield myself by closing myself off and not talking to others, which still negatively affects me to this day. At that very young age, and with that understanding of who I was in the world, I learned to protect myself and resist oppression. As a youth, education was always the answer. It was the only stable thing in my life at that point, and I would use it to my advantage.

Soliloquy #2: “Navigating the Online Battlefield: From Soldier to Student #0161328”

by LATINA

[LATINA takes the stage, and she looks sad. Her face and spirits are down, and she is trying to keep others from seeing it. But can't.]

FADE IN

LATINA: Being depressed is not for the faint of heart; it's like a death. The inability to do things although you want to do things, the inability to think—to think logically to feel anything but the darkest and deepest and the worst of everything and everyone. Right now, I'm in the middle of a depression where all I want to do is stay asleep and not wake up—because there I feel that I have control. Nobody understands, and maybe they're not meant to. It's difficult having to work when people come walking through the door and I'm trying to get work done. These inconsiderate people are my family and speaking of them in this way makes me feel that I don't deserve them. They'd be better off without me. That is what PTSD does. It makes you angry all the time, at even the closest people to you. It must be hard living with me. But they don't understand, and they never will. Instead, they badger me constantly and give me nothing but grief in return. What is wrong with me? Everything. I'm supposed to complete my dissertation and be successful in college when there are so many factors weighing me down, especially my mind.

Three days ago, I received a necklace urn with some ashes containing a part of the body of Melvin Stern. He was someone that I had met in San Diego, California, when I was 22 years old, he was 26 at the time, and I was in awe of him. I met him while I was in the military, however he wasn't a military man. In fact, he was rich. His parents were millionaires and still are to this day, and I was carried away by the glitz and glamour of his lifestyle, and the magic of

who he was in that lifestyle. He was a god to me and perhaps that perception of him was our downfall. My objective to join the military was to get out of poverty, perhaps that's why I was so enamored by the idea of him. He was a strong man, a father figure that I did not have and never had. Indeed, everything about him screamed success. Meanwhile, I admired this idea of family when we'd go to Cicero, Illinois to meet up with his family—that is where he was born and raised, and they'd all gather and for a moment I could imagine I was a part of them, and it felt good.

When I was with Melvin, I learned many things as a young impressionable poor girl might. He was the first one read my writings and told me that I was a very talented writer.

Then September 11th, 2001, happened. The New York City Twin Towers were attacked and blown up; it seemed the whole country was under attack. I was stationed on a nuclear aircraft carrier and was told that our deployment would be more than the typical six-month deployment. My command had no idea when we'd be back. In fact, at one point we were out to sea for 121 days straight without even so much as seeing an inkling of land. It was during that time that Melvin wrote me a letter, it was during that time when I fell gravely ill with my intestinal malrotation on the ship, and I thought I would die. Melvin tried to calm my wrecked nerves and told me to take care of myself. "Don't worry, just get yourself better. When you return, we will live our lives, and everything will be great—we will be rich beyond our wildest dreams and we will have our own family."

Crazy thing is, I never once thought about having a child with Melvin, and I don't know exactly why. Now looking back, I see many reasons why he and I could never be, and a million reasons why I probably didn't. At that time being so young and having experienced a real war, I

believe the focus was on getting out of the military after my 4 years were over, but I ended up staying in for four and a half years.

Melvin had graduated from a prestigious school in Illinois with a degree in English Literature, and he was well-versed in writing and could read and analyze the best writers out there. I remember having long conversations with him, and he'd divulge that his dream was to perhaps one day become a university professor. He explained to me that when he got his bachelor's degree, he was happy to give it to his mother. It was his way of saying, "here you go, I'm done; and this is what you paid for." I knew then that if I ever would receive a degree—that I would keep it for myself, and that was a huge distinction between Melvin and me. Melvin's family was always there for him and even though they struggled in the beginning to get to the success they have now, they were very close as a family. I felt that in my own family there was a huge disconnect, having never met my father and the secrecy that went along with that. You see I never met my father because my mother never told him I was born. There is a lot of secrecy in how and why I came to be, my mother's first born and she with no means to take care of me. The story bothers me to this day.

My relationship with my mother is not good at times, because I blame her for my shortcomings and even though I understand they are my own, it is easy to lash out at a woman who has not been 100% up front with me and therefore has hindered the full development of my familial identity. I do not know my father nor the supposed three daughters he had before I was born. I do not know anything from that side of his family. I am a broken woman, and that story is what I bring to the table when showing my face to my online classroom. It's difficult to hide broken.

I remember the day like it was yesterday, August 2013. I was pregnant with Violet; my second child and I received an email from an old friend of Melvin. She had been trying to contact me and she remembered that I had sent an email to Melvin when I had lost so much weight back in 2009. I remember he was all about me being skinny and so I'd sent him a picture of myself showing him what I looked like and he had forwarded that to her. He was so proud of how I stayed in shape even after all these years of us not being together and even after having a child with Hunter my present husband at the time. During the time I had sent that picture Hunter and I were not together he had left me for someone else, so I'd reconnected with Melvin through the phone and had planned to come and visit him in San Diego. I had fallen in love with that city, with the life I'd lived there with him. I'd been stationed in Coronado Island, and he lived in Hillcrest just up the way. So anyway, Linda remembered that Melvin had sent her an email that I'd sent him back in 2009, and due to that correspondence, she retrieved the email and contacted me. Linda said she hoped everything was going well for me, among hastily mentioning some other things and would I please call her at the number that she provided. As soon as I receive that email, I knew something was wrong. I made sure to be alone when I called her, I went into my closet in the darkness of it all—there I sat, and I called her. She was outside a supermarket parking lot with her husband and children. Her husband had taken their children inside and she stayed in the car to talk to me. Linda began to divulge some information to me about Melvin—how he'd recently been bitten by a recluse spider and had never been the same after that. According to her, Melvin got an infection from the recluse's bite and she believed that due to that he had fallen off the wagon. In efforts to try to make himself better from his illness and injury he'd resorted to his old ways. Linda's voice got sadder in tone and she told me that Melvin had committed suicide. My heart immediately sank, and I was in shock, but I didn't ever think

that what she was about to tell me next would ever be the demise of Melvin. I thought perhaps he'd been in a terrible accident or had died from a drug overdose. His inability to stop using drugs had been the reason why I'd left him. I later found out Melvin was dealing with bipolar disorder and had been seeing a psychiatrist. He had been attempting to help himself by seeking treatment and support through Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to try to help himself get out of his addiction. I never expected to hear that Melvin had decided to jump off a bridge. Linda explained that Melvin took his car up to a 100-foot bridge, and parked his car, turning the hazard lights on and wrote a note that simply said, "Sorry." We lost him that afternoon—just simply jumped off a hundred feet from the highway onto the ground, not even into water—and even though that wouldn't make a difference that high off the ground—it was crazy to think he ended it all so violently. After having told me how he died, Linda was short in conversation. When I tried to get more information and talk to her, she'd shut me down. I wanted to know more, but again felt as vulnerable as I had in San Diego... like I wasn't good enough to know it all. But I understand. Everybody loved Melvin and felt that perhaps they needed to protect him even after his death.

For me it was especially difficult, because a part of me so desperately wanted to be successful and push myself in school even through my trials and tribulations. I wanted to reach for a master's degree and so I would end up graduating a year after Melvin's death with my master's degree in educational technology. He wanted to go back to school and get his master's degree—and in a strange way I felt I had got it for him. After hearing of Melvin's death, I just wanted to keep going—I've always just done things maybe not for myself but for others. Or maybe I've done things because I heard it was important to do them from people around me. But truthfully, I don't know exactly what Latina *really* wants. I never really do. And that's also affected me in my relationships with people and how I relate to others in an online classroom.

Life hasn't matured me in fact it's kept me at a standstill in the pain, the pain that my mother and her mother had to go through. It seems there is a rite of passage for the poor too. Even though I've been able to acquire multiple degrees and things of that nature, I'm always fighting the depression from the life that I had before. It is with these barriers that I construct my knowledge and through these narratives that I learn. Haphazardly—but I learn.

[Latina lays down in her dark room and begins to write.] FADE OUT.

October 17th, 2017- 7:30 p.m.- I love my daughter Katie; I buy her things I can't afford. But she gets on my nerves sometimes because she doesn't listen to me. My husband is a brute. He yells at her a lot because she doesn't listen. But I still love him, I guess; I mean I married the guy. I guess no one in this claustrophobic apartment listens to me. I'm just the fat girl sitting on the couch since summer vacation started typing research papers and literature reviews into the world and nobody cares. Too many people unwilling to listen, too many living in a two-bedroom sardine apartment. How can I negotiate power and access in an online setting when I can't even do it in my own house? Shut up everybody; I need to study! Shut up everybody; I need to think! Shut up everybody; I need to breathe!

FADE IN. Latina is getting ready to go online.

LATINA: I never forget. Melvin was the one in the top picture who had the grey shirt on. The two guys to either side of him are his brothers, his nephew is also pictured—the one who he left all his assets to. His mom is in the center, and his brother on the right. His parents are literally millionaires—I guess money doesn't buy happiness after all.

Ugh, it's time to go online and attend a class. I'm sooo tired.

Hunter be quiet I'm in class! I'm in fucking class! Sshh! "Hello, everyone."

I decided to read the rollercoaster poem I'd written to the faces on the screen. Wait a second—stupid guy implied I was bipolar because of that poem? This class is all about autoethnographic interpretation! I thought this was a safe space—netiquette, netiquette—I suppose I'm not safe anywhere. I guess he doesn't like for a woman to put him in his place... look at his face now... he looks pissed. I don't care what he said truly. I've been called worse. I've hurt other people worse too. This was nothing. I'll be fine, he'll be fine. I always am... or am I? What does this idiot even know? I've seen countless quacks in my days after the Navy and they've never even thrown out that word, "bipolar." I have anxiety yes, but I am functioning... well, at least I get my work done? Anxiety and depressive disorder... yup that's all I have. Whatever... whatever, out of my head guy I don't even care to address anymore.

God, I have a feeling this year I'm going to mess up and get fired at work. Okay, I have scattered thoughts due to my hectic life—but that doesn't make me bipolar you idiot! That's just how my mind thinks. Gosh, I have so much anger, but I'm truly harmless. Doesn't everyone think this way at times? I'm sure many people think this way, but I'm just not afraid to say what's on my mind anymore. Right? Maybe not, maybe it's only me. I'm just messed up. Great. Ugh, I don't want to write negative things, but it seems that's all I've got for now. How will I survive another day like this? It's getting harder each day... and then somehow, I do survive. Oh, yea—I've got to write something for a class. Ugh, and ugh. I've got to take a shower... ugh—maybe I'll wait until tomorrow—yea—tomorrow... tomorrow. Me being Latina and negotiating power is it really that important? How I'm this far up in my educational career and thought to be "amazing" at my job is way beyond me. I don't get it. I'm truly a disaster! But I must keep going... I have five mouths to feed. Four of which are a bottomless pit if you ask me.

Maybe this picture will make everyone think I'm normal and have value... because I married a White guy whose grandmother came straight from Germany. Wow, my head is warped... (an example of me attempting to negotiate power and access online—to be “worthy” and not to be the monster I consider myself to be). Gosh, White girls are so pretty. Thank God my daughters are at least half-White...

Yea, I'll even go so far as to make my husband's photo my profile picture. I'm sure someone will like it and take me seriously. Oh, look only two likes. Lucas is an old childhood friend of my brother whom I don't even really know—and Diana is my husband's half-sister. Interesting. No one from my work liked it.

Right before I went to the Navy, I begged my aunt to take me across the Mexican American border to try to find signs of a father I've never met. He didn't even know I was born, or that my mother was expecting a child that was his... or so the story goes. Manuel Guillen? Have you seen him? Do you know a man named Manuel Guillen? He had 4 daughters before he met my mother. Also, he was staying with his aunt named Angela—but he was originally from Victoria, Mexico... and that's where his daughters lived with their mother. He was studying Chemistry... do you know him? “No.” “No.” “No.” “No.” “No.” “No.” Oh, the *colonias* have changed you say? So, you don't know any Guillens? Could I have been fed a false name by my mother.

I want to be a winner.

I don't really care... why are people picking fights with me?

I can't breathe in this online class! I haven't gotten off this couch the entire Summer. I feel my thighs rubbing together... *squish, man I'm fat. Work starts soon, and everyone is going

to see my stress under my eyes and now on my body. At least last year it was just under my eyes, now it's going to be harder to hide. "Oh, look—it's *Bad Santa!* Finally!"

Latina lays down and begins to write in her journal:

September 15, 2018- 8:16 p.m.- Looking back—my mom really kept me, and my two younger brothers sheltered from the rest of the world. She was very religious, and we didn't have a father figure at home. Therefore, the only influences that I saw around were my aunts and uncles and the things that they believed in were chalupa, drinking, drugging, saying bad words and garage sales. And it was in one of those garage sales where my mom bought me the tackle box that I took to school one day and got made fun of. Or maybe my resilience to keep going came from the time a school peer made fun of my generic brand shoes. He was wearing *Nike*® shoes and he thought it would be a great idea to make fun of me in front of everyone and say, "You must be so poor, you have ugly shoes, and my dad always buys me *Nikes*." I remember his name to this day—Raul.

The thing is I never really felt poor until people started telling me that I was.

But I do remember that some days all there was to eat was beans. And they weren't the good beans—sometimes my mom re-cooked refrigerated beans and they looked like dog food. Mind you, I've never had dog food but the way that it looked was like dog food.

Or maybe my drive came from my mom trying to scare us into submission so that we wouldn't stray from her being so overprotective and trying to keep us in line. She would always threaten us that if we didn't listen to her that she was going to tell her sister, my aunt Laura, on us, and then we would get in trouble. I guess she had no power in our household. Not sure what that was all about? I still don't understand why she would use that tactic against us. It just made me see her as a weak person that could not handle her own life.

Or maybe my resilience came from not knowing who my father was. I can't say it was something that was always on my mind, but I think that it would have helped to have had more money in the family—another income to supplement the things that I didn't have and also to give me more life experiences like that kid that went fishing with his dad—or Raul whose dad always got him *Nikes*.

Because when I think of it now, I think what was lacking in my life was diverse and positive life experiences. Perhaps that is why I gravitated towards school. Perhaps that is why I gravitated towards books. In a book you can escape from your own reality, and in a book one can be anywhere and be anything. Maybe that's why I like to read so much, and why I was able to keep up in class all those years. Books have always been my way out and school seemed to be the vehicle to get me through the hard days. It's not like I thought of it that way when I was younger, but I guess I would use school to get out of poverty. It was like a haven away from the deprivation. A place that had air conditioning—at school I had fresh meals, breakfast and lunch and if I stayed after school, I would get a snack. I also had many teachers and I believe that seeing their personalities—which were far different from my mother's and my apathetic aunts and uncles—began to show me in life what role models are. True role models of what strong men and women who careers looked like and what they admired and valued in life. Unlike my aunts and uncles, they weren't cussing every five minutes and they had nice cars. They dressed professionally, and they didn't seem as stressed out as my family did. Perhaps my resilience and my passion for continuing education came from the schooling system, and everything that was in it.

September 16, 2018- 9:35 p.m.- Today was an especially hard day, I had a lot of things to do at a school training that I had to attend and something about my personality rubbed the trainer

the wrong way—maybe because now I'm just brash perhaps the military made me that way. My voice is monotone and sometimes, I'm just inappropriate. I remember when I came back from the military and I was attending the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) in a traditional face-to-face scenario the brick and mortar type and I saw an old classmate who I didn't necessarily care for back in the day, but to whom I had spoken to before. She and I talked about how we both joined the military after high school, and I noticed that she had matured from when I last saw her, or at least it seemed so. Later that semester I saw a male friend from high school who knew both of us and he said that the girl I had spoken to recognized that I had changed, but not in a good way. She mentioned to him that I was different, by strongly insinuating that something was off in me. It felt like it was her way of expressing that I could possibly be crazy where that having join the military had affected me mentally. Consequently, I've accomplished so much since that conversation with that insignificant person, and I've had to prove myself more to myself than to anyone else. And I've been glad to do so. However, it has affected me—how could it not—the military becomes ingrained in you even after you leave. When you become a veteran, you are attached to that military mindset and we are brothers and sisters because we shared a commonality—we were once government property. Many people who join the military do not come from riches—in fact just like me—they join the military to escape poverty. Many were not educated and didn't have drive. I can say one thing about myself when I joined, I was dedicated. Back then, I weighed 166 pounds and was 33% body fat on the borderline of not being able to join because I was obese, but the military recruiting officer let me through because he wanted more bodies to take to Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) in San Antonio, Texas to join. I don't think I lost much weight, but I got just underneath to be able to get in. When I was in boot camp part of me feared the whole experience, and I felt lost many times, like

I had made a mistake, but I always tried to erase those thoughts for my mind and focus on what was in front of me. Bootcamp was a daily trauma—we were subjected to the breakdown of our brains, because that's what the military does to recruits in boot camp—they are supposed to break you down and build you back up. So, if that pig-nosed girl thought I was different, she was right. The old Latina was gone, and I was glad that I was different. I didn't like how things were before I joined the military—I had been treated less than by those people, not by my immediate family, but my extended family and I had always blocked them out so it wouldn't affect me and it didn't. The military gave me an escape and I was okay with that. I didn't mind being different when I got out; I used the GI Bill and went to the Veterans Upward Bound there at the University of Texas at Brownsville in my home city, and I asked for assistance to apply for the GI Bill and financial aid. I began classes and had extra money to support myself and help my mom and brothers at the time. I was still not good with money (to this day I feel like I'm still not good with it) and I wonder if I will ever be good with money. But I'm not poor anymore or in poverty; I am able to provide for my daughters and for myself like my mom wasn't able to do for me. The military and my education allotted me the flexibility to grow, to experience and to not be afraid to venture forth. And for that I will be forever grateful.

Analyzing Soliloquy #2

Setting(s) throughout the plot: Brownsville, Texas; Great Lakes, Illinois; San Diego, California; Irving, Texas.

Character Analysis: Latina grew up poor, with no father figure. Mother has a learning disability and mental ailment. Melvin grew up poor but had a close family. Parents were very intelligent and made a million-dollar business. Hunter grew up with not knowing who his father was. His mother was a drug addict and welfare mother. He would later meet his father's side of

the family and they would eventually choose to not be a part of his life. Brother 1 never met his father either and joined the military seven years after Latina. Brother 2 is unmarried and lives in filth and is okay with it. He met his father in middle school and his father did not want him.

Latina's mother is unmarried, impoverished.

Conclusion: Latina is a product of her environment, but when it comes to education, she seems to continue, even in the face of adversity.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Online access to higher education has paved the way for more students to be able to continue in their collegiate pursuits. With more schools providing the opportunity to take online courses for doctoral degrees, and veterans having educational funds to take higher ed courses, the demand for such programs is obvious. But having access to higher education doesn't necessarily equate to having an equitable education and being oppressed within those online environments is a real thing for certain groups of people. Through microaggressions, students are reminded that pursuing a doctoral degree will be challenging and that their marginalized existence will be tested by professors and students alike. Being a veteran Latina doctoral online student and having to figure out ways around obstacles within those online environments, would prove taxing and it was important for me to find out how resilience and being fluid with my multiple identities had seen me through. I would use my understanding of cultural capital to show or push my worth onto others.

Purpose of the Dissertation Research

I wondered would screenwriting in monologue form be the process that could evoke further insight to this issue of engendered poverty, identity fluidity and finding my voice? The purpose of this narrative study was to explore the use of technology as the medium to look at and reflect on the social injustice in education that may or may not exist within the hidden

curriculum of a learning environment, and the implications of access for a Latina student from a lived and shared experience.

I used autoethnography, using a screenplay as the form of delivery as my methodology, and explored the literature that coincides with this type of research to bring forth an understanding of my experience as a veteran Latina online doctoral student. The research denoted a personal account of a veteran Latina navigating through an online environment through the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) located in Brownsville, Texas. I attend this university online and reside in Grand Prairie, Texas, in Dallas County.

It takes a lot to be me a 39-year-old woman with a lot going on in her life, struggling to reach that final academic degree that could make me feel like I am someone. But I know I'm not alone in these thoughts, and so I examine my position as an online student identifying and reflecting on the problems I faced, of which might allow others in similar situations to understand their own journey. I'm human, and there are women that look like me, that must have similar life experiences. Those that are still in that fight, wondering the same things I did. Will I ever get this feat accomplished? This life has been full of twists and turns, and the ride is not over yet.

Therefore, examining the self through an autoethnographic lens can provide insight to the oppressive nature of the online schooling system. I came to this dissertation writing process much like a lost puppy trying to find adventure in the unknown. Lost, but hopeful that within the literature I could somehow decode all of these years of suffering and come to some type of conclusion as to why women like me, people of the same color as me, veterans like me suffer and struggle to find their way, to be heard and valued among the noise of societal standards. I questioned if through the research process I'd find answers to all the questions I had amassed in

this dissertation journey. I learned that answers would not be easy to attain, nor guaranteed and that I'd have to dispel my own assumptions as I took into consideration the experiences that I'd had throughout my educational pursuits. I hoped that by choosing to write a qualitative autoethnographic dissertation and by researching the theoretical frameworks that I chose early on that I could somehow delve into the silent world of the resilient minority race. I hoped that being a veteran Latina student would not detour me from being successful in attaining a doctoral degree. I discovered early on that by exploring the oppressive forces that exist in an online classroom that I could use my identities to my advantage and stay and fight.

I wanted to denote if my virtual identity would surpass my own predisposed physical worth and the many cultural generalizations already harbored in my mind about who deserves to be a doctoral student. In efforts to do this, I believed that it was important to investigate identity. I explore through qualitative research.

Dethloff (2005) stated,

Qualitative research is an umbrella term that covers several forms of inquiry where the researcher is studying a social context, while causing as little disruption as possible in the natural setting (Eaton, 2002; Merriam, 1998). Advancing to the borders of qualitative research is the methodology of autoethnography.

Autoethnography is a qualitative genre of research where the researcher describes his or her personal experience within a social context... (Dethloff, 2005, p. 56)

Therefore, when attempting to align with the critical multicultural education framework as part of the bases for developing web-based education programs, the concept of identity is very important to outline and discuss as part of the curriculum design and pedagogy of an online

course. We are teaching real people out there, and they are not objects of study (Pizarro, 2010, p. 218).

We come to this learning experience as humans first and then learning subjects. In other words, who I am, and what I identify as is more important than what is being thrown my way. In other words, “A study that discounts the role of the researcher in the process is not providing a holistic view of the subculture studied. We must embrace the biases of the researcher to develop a much richer understanding of the context studied” (Dethloff, 2005, p.57).

Methodology

It was important to harbor my voice throughout the autoethnographic process and use my experiences as the data for the research itself. The screenplay will act as the artifact that is produced to showcase the data discovered and delineate any societal issues that should be identified naturally in the text through the screenwriter’s writing style and use of literary elements and screenwriting structure. In this way, the readers of the screenplay will be able to empathize with the protagonist. Here I am adding the human perspective to the invaluable research. Through this the audience can come along on the journey and begin to understand the path that some people face when reaching for higher education, specifically a doctoral degree. The personal accounts of the lived experience help the reader make meaning. In that sense we can begin to understand one another. We do not all experience this world in the same way and that is why this type of research has value.

History of Autoethnography

According to Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2010),

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand

cultural experience (ethno). (Ellis, 2004; Holman Jones, 2005). 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. (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2010, p. 1).

“A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010, p. 1). Narrative accounts were important to understand situations and personal experiences of people. In this way a different perspective to a situation could be given. In other words, without personal accounts of one’s lived experience, an unclear or ambiguous picture of a situation could not be fully understood. Therefore, it is one thing to collect data about veteran doctoral online student success and quite another to denote the journey that the student had to navigate through to get to this point in higher education.

Telling the Story

My concentration focus was on myself, a Post-9/11 veteran and is a generational study because I am a part of that subgroup.

Researchers must be adept at identifying pertinent details, introspection, descriptive and compelling writing, and confronting things about themselves that may be less than flattering. Also, the researcher must handle the vulnerability of revealing oneself to a greater audience. (Dethloff, 2005, p. 63)

When outlining and then writing this autoethnography there were many times when I felt that writing on certain subjects was too intrusive. I felt extremely vulnerable and struggled with deciding if key material should be put into the dissertation after all. I answered and reflected over open-ended questions in scheduled meetings and in live recorded classroom sessions. I was

interested in finding out if having received veteran educational funding had perpetuated my pursuit of a doctoral degree and if that had been the main reason why a person like me who had grown up in poverty was still going to school. I created a screenplay to report on the lived experience of a veteran Latina doctoral student that is exclusively attending a university online in an HSI. In addition, I looked at research that could assist me in the process. For example, Lange's study (2003) combined ethnographic theories with micro-analyses of conversation, this study addressed vital anthropological and socio-linguistic questions.

Then, the focus of Huerta's study (2011) focused on the following guiding research questions: "What and how do institutional and non-institutional factors influence the educational persistence of Latina online doctoral learners?" (Huerta, 2011, p. ii). In addition, the literature findings expressed that

Institutional support given by faculty, peers, staff, and administration played a significant role in the academic persistence of Latina online doctoral students. The findings also indicated that non-institutional factors, such as family members and the external community played a significant role in the academic persistence of Latina online doctoral learners. (Huerta, 2011, p. ii)

Furthermore, "The findings of this study provided implications for further research into the phenomenon of academic persistence among online Latina doctoral learners" (Huerta, 2011, p. ii).

So, an impending judgment and assertion of power is essential to gauge throughout the literature, to delineate any injustices found within these postmodern exclusive online systems. As noted in Stanley, 1993, and as cited in Dethloff (2005), "Because people do not accumulate their

experience in a social vacuum, autoethnography is not limited to just the study of one individual” (Dethloff, 2005, p. 63).

Research Design and Methods

There are not many veteran Latina online doctoral students, so it was important for me to research through this perspective to gain knowledge as to what it took for me to get to this point. My rationale for the research design was concerned with contemporary phenomena as I followed myself on my journey to navigate through the academic systems of inequity while attending an exclusively online environment and what it was like to be always in that space. The study followed methods suggested by Jones, Adams and Ellis’s *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2013) and lasted three years.

A point of interest to me was continuing my education through the university where I lived most of my life—Brownsville, Texas—but of which I had to leave because I couldn’t find a teaching position there. I looked at my own obstacles in attending an online school through a university that is promoted as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). I assumed that because UTRGV is considered an HSI, that I would not be oppressed, and it would be easier to navigate and pass my classes at a university that was not only familiar, homegrown but advertised to serve people like me.

A Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) is defined as an institution of higher education that

- is an eligible institution; and
- has an enrollment of undergraduate full-time equivalent students that is at least 25 percent Hispanic students at the end of the award year immediately preceding the date of application. (White House, n.d.)

UTRGV is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), having qualified to be considered this since it serves 96% Hispanic students in and out of the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, through a traditional face-to-face environment and via the expansion of their 100% online programs. Furthermore, UTRGV'S main campus is in Edinburg, Texas, and there are also campuses in each of the major metropolitan areas of Brownsville, Harlingen, and McAllen, as well as having a presence in South Padre Island, Texas. My study focused on my experience as a doctoral online student through UTRGV, and because my frameworks were on gender discourse and Critical Race Theory my assumptions of the benefits of attending an HSI would be sadly dismantled in certain aspects. Professors were not all brown skin like me, and students were not all Hispanic, especially not when reaching for a doctoral degree. UTRGV has grown tremendously in recent years and with their online degree expansion initiatives they are providing online degrees and, therefore, access to students of every gender and race.

In addition, it is important to note that veterans who have been honorably discharged and meet federally determined criteria qualify for GI Bill educational benefits. Veteran Latina students who enrolled in Texas also have the Hazlewood Act, which affords them free college up to 150 credit hours. Most recently veterans are now using the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which provides them with more educational and housing benefits to assist them in their educational journey. These monetized benefits help motivate veterans to attend college, and in many cases, serve as a buffer for other outside living expenses. In the past, I have used all three benefits, and now only use the Hazlewood to supplement my educational doctoral costs. In many circumstances, money becomes a huge motivator for veterans to continue with their schooling and allows a different type of monetary access that other students might not be able to attain. This is an advantage.

Still, there are not many veteran Latina doctoral students enrolled in higher education, even though there are many veterans Latinas out of the military.

Initially, I wanted to research a group of Latinas and had placed want ads in veteran Facebook groups, as well as making my own veteran groups for this purpose. However, no luck. I was surprised that there weren't high number of veteran Latinas that were attempting to join my Facebook group. Scary, but not shocking.

Ultimately, my data came from my experiences—from my lived curriculum, which I used to articulate my findings in this qualitative autoethnographic study. Because I was the only veteran Latina in the cohort, the topic was more interesting to me. I kept thinking—what was the disconnect? Where were the others?

Data Collection

Data was collected via a daily journal of my online experience. I looked at social opportunities and classroom situations that left me feeling oppressed and or moments of success to showcase resilience. If possible, I made sure to have my professors and fellow peers from my online courses on Facebook to extend my understanding of this process, and to rehumanize the professor in my eyes. I found that most professors accepted my Facebook requests, although some did not. I found this to be interesting since most of my chairs did. I wondered if Facebook was there way to rehumanize themselves, because as professors they held enough insight to understand that many times the student/teacher relationship is broken and often professors become the other.

With this understanding in mind, I began to look for innovative and more modern ways of approaching this research. There are many types of ways to collect data in an

autoethnography, but I found that my journal writing led to a soliloquy style that could lead up to an eventual screenplay.

Feldman (2003) as referenced in Dethloff (2005) outlines the process of data collection:

(1) Provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work. (2) Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data. What specifics about the data led us to make this assumption? (3) Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self-study. (4) Provide evidence that the research changed or evolved the educator and summarize its value to the profession. This can convince readers of the study's significance and validity. (Dethloff, 2005, p. 27-28)

At first coming up with a topic for my dissertation was difficult, but UTRGV professors have written their courses to make it easier to write the chapters throughout one's program of study. It really helped to talk out possible research topics and research questions and then receive personal feedback from my advisor, other professors and subsequently my committee chair. Their invaluable knowledge helped fine tune the research topic as they pointed out that there would be much value to this type of research. I made my decision on who I wanted my chair to be and received insight into what this autoethnographic process would entail. In my dissertation courses, my chair motivated me, laughed and cried with me. She seemed to understand my plight and as we got to know each other, I found many similarities in her own Latina journey.

Participant

As a Latina, I come to this online experience with the hope that I could negotiate power and access within a 100% online setting effectively enough to form an understanding of the lack

of empathy/supports in the online curriculum. I used social media platforms like Facebook to let out some of my frustrations and Google Docs to journal. The participant is myself, and how I communicated and navigated through my online doctoral community (including speaking and corresponding with professors and fellow peers).

A narrative journal denoted my own lived experiences through my online interactions with each student within my virtual class (and outside of it) and I delved into the other side of curriculum—how I came to the learning experience and, therefore, took in the knowledge spewed at me. Some of my interactions with certain professors were documented, especially those that denoted pivotal moments that could have negatively affected my pursuits in the cohort. In this process, I had many questions for my study, which were investigated in my soliloquies and screenplay to give light to real issues facing minority veteran woman like me. I wrote and focused on how the problems in my life related to the chosen theoretical frameworks. I thought that perhaps through the process of writing I'd be able to reach some catharsis as to why I'd got this far.

So, I began to gather data for my dissertation and actively took account to the importance of journaling for that collection of the data. I was told that my lived experience was not limited to the college experience, but to all the experiences that had brought me to the pursuit of a doctoral degree. I documented my upbringing, and what I remembered about my schooling experience leading up to and including college life. I wrote as often as I could through Google Docs and invited my committee chair to read my entries at her request. I learned quickly on that choosing the right committee chair would make or break this entire experience and would be one of the main reasons I would reach this final pinnacle of educative success. I wrote about professor and student interactions with various people of color and White people in my

classrooms. I wrote about attending online Zoom sessions where I had to show my face and online sessions through Blackboard where I didn't have to show my face if I didn't want to. I recalled personal phone calls where certain professors reached out to congratulate me for passing my comprehensive exams and to make me aware of certain shortcomings. Thankfully, I was blessed in many aspects and subsequently oppressed in many others.

At first, I'd journal on specific days and when I could, but as my committee chair pointed out, I'd "need a lot of data to make this autoethnographic process work." So, as the first year progressed, I began to journal as soon as I could and when an event in my classroom occurred. In this way the information would be most raw. I kept hearing her words, "Don't wait to edit; just write." And I did, and it was in those times that I was seeing the connections as to why I had gotten this far in my educational pursuits. I was beginning to see a picture of all that I had gone through and was still going through and understanding that it was all by design. The system itself was rigged, but I was still in it—and that was important to note. My journal entries would go back and forth in time, because as a disabled veteran suffering from PTSD, OCD, anxiety and depression—my thoughts were formulated this way. I reflected on the themes that popped out of my writings and could see an outline behind my words that would lead to my eventual screenplay. The journal writing read like soliloquies and so I decided to write soliloquies that would lead to the screenplay focused on the online experience within a doctoral program.

During the process of writing my dissertation, I began to have many medical issues and personal struggles with my family, including my husband, my daughters and my mother. Financial and work-related issues due to medical issues were also a huge problem in completing my dissertation. I found that what my committee chair said about the dissertation process was true, "The dissertation process is a lonely process. Take care of yourself; *cuidate*." I'd find some

solace in looking at the doctoral program's Curriculum and Instruction (C and I) Facebook page that would showcase students that had met the mark and were now doctors with their Ed.D. That page was interesting because it often had articles about pushing through and valuable insight into the percentages of people that never meet the criteria of receiving a doctorate. Those that stay in All but Dissertation (ABD) purgatory, and I'd once been proud to put ABD behind my name at work, but as the semesters progressed and I still didn't defend my dissertation the ABD acronym was like the *Scarlet Letter* of my life.

Data Analysis Procedures

I wrote soliloquies throughout my dissertation at the end of the chapters and then analyzed the characters and my lived experience through my college, work and family life. I used Facebook to connect with my professors and was able to feel connected to some of them through this social medium.

The analysis of data begins the moment the researcher perceives the information.

In an autoethnography the analysis of data is an ongoing event, developing and crystallizing over time. With each re-reading of my personal reflexive journal, each examination of a written artifact, and with further introspection and self-analysis, the process and clarity of the research is enriched. (Dethloff, 2005, p. 68)

Within a web-based educational program, students participate in socially active forums such as discussion boards, and further parley in class discussions among other socially identifying societies within an educational technology component, i.e., learning management system (LMS) medium. Students are urged to participate to receive a grade, so that their instructor knows their understanding of the material covered within the class and its outside scope of it (when assigned). Therefore, besides the human desire to be heard, there is still that

extrinsic motivator to participate or end up facing a lower grade or risk forming a less than desirable identity of one's own astuteness or lack thereof among classmates or worse the professor. As a veteran, I do feel a pressure to not mess up and so I wrote about that pressure. In fact, I find it quite hard to connect with people in my everyday life, and that doesn't change much in an online class. It was important to analyze each soliloquy with these events and finally to analyze the screenplay. Indeed, "The gathering and analysis of data go hand-in-hand as theories and themes emerge during the study" (Skinner, Edwards, & Corbett, 2015, p. 173).

"In this type of diversified learning environment, we must prepare students to face a challenging society—of which regardless of their distinct lived experiences, they will share together. In other words, schools must make children ready through 'socialization'" (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 19). "In the end this shows that 'personality traits, rather than skills, are the determinant of labor market success'" (Bowles & Gintis, 2002, p. 2). Therefore, I worried that my being Latina born to a poor single mother may have already sealed my fate and I would reflect on that in my journal writing and then analyze that introspection. It is through that introspection, self-discovery and self-awareness that I'd be able to analyze my situation throughout my lived experience.

Per the literature, "quality online learning fosters dialogue, social presence, interaction, collaboration and understanding among different stakeholders across limits and social localization in this positive discourse of technology learning anything and anywhere" (Pizarro, 2010, p. 117). If the creators of an online classroom can create these types of interactional opportunities within their course, then Latina students such as myself may yet have a chance. I would analyze my educational experiences and make meaning out of those experiences through

themes. If I could identify patterns and themes from my lived experience, then I'd be able to analyze why I was experiencing oppressive forces.

For Latinas, to understand access, we need to know how it intersects with one's own academic identity, looking at it from an online world which may seem surreal. Does the layer of my own subjectivity connect with the other online students, as it compares to the world in a face-to-face traditional classroom?

My research was collected from heterogeneous data—text, audio visual data, etc.—and through social forums. The study focused on opportunities for creating dialogues and using netiquette to negotiate power within online environments such as Zoom and Blackboard.

My research questions focused on the process of negotiating power and attaining access within the frameworks of gender theory, and Critical Race Theory in the wake of White privilege. The questions were explored within the soliloquies and subsequent screenplay. They are as follows:

1. What have I experienced throughout my pursuit of higher education?
2. How did I (a veteran Latina doctoral student) navigate through an exclusively online classroom?
3. How was I able to circumvent micro-aggressions in oppressive systems of education?

These questions led me to make various soliloquies to process the various situations that had been dramatic in my life and had hindered me, but also propelled me further. Due to this, I decided to use a style inspired by Brock Leslie Fisher's dissertation (2004) *Writing Ethnography: Process of Collecting and Arranging Ethnographic Plays*, in which each chapter has a soliloquy. So, I broke down each chapter with what needed to be discussed in my autoethnography. According to Patten (2004) as cited in Dethloff (2005),

autobiographical accounts and comparable research have been classified under a variety of names. Similar classifications include terms such as: personal narratives, complete member research, personal ethnography, literary tales, lived experience, critical autobiography, self-ethnography, ethnographic memoir, narrative ethnography, and native ethnography, as well as many others (Patten, 2004). (Dethloff, 2005, p. 56)

Coding the Data

At the end of certain chapters, I wrote a soliloquy that would read like the thoughts in my busy trauma-ridden mind in fragments of thoughts and snippets of life events that all came together like a collage. I attempted to paint a picture of the events that had tried to bring me down, but only served to make me that much stronger. I figured that in my lived experience I could come to some self-awareness of what had made me continue in my educational pursuits. I wasn't sure why I'd made it this far in my educational pursuits, but I knew that a failing marriage, economic issues, taking care of my elderly mother and mothering my children were keeping me from reaching that final goal of writing the dissertation and getting it out there. I had all these ideas and I had the journaling down. I had started that process about 3 years ago, journaling and writing down all that was going on and reflected on my past. I began to write about life in Brownsville, Texas, and how that was a tough time because my family and I were poor. There was verbal abuse from my mother's side of the family towards my brothers and me, and because my mom suffered from a learning disability, it was difficult to talk to her and have her advocate for us. But I knew she still loved us very much. All the reflecting that I had to do in this process began to wear at me. I began to despise my aunts and uncles and even took them off Facebook. Before this process I had no issue with them. Little did I know that by going through

this process, I'd end up deciding to never speak to those family members that had hurt me in the past. This dissertation research took a lot out of me—psychologically, financially, emotionally, physically—and I spent a lot of time on it.

As a Latina there are many things stacked against me, like people's hidden and sometimes not so hidden perceptions of me. I knew that even within the college experience itself, life was not equal to minorities. But thankfully the hardships I'd faced with professors, with economic setbacks, with my own self-hatred, abuse, and with mental anguish from having served in a war would give me those experiences to decode in the dissertation.

I chose to write a screenplay to express my lived experience for many reasons. I've always considered myself an artistic person, and through the literature I've learned that a screenplay can evoke emotion and bring the audience to a deeper understanding of the protagonist's plight.

I created a performative piece, a compilation of soliloquies and a final screenplay to present the reader with my struggles as a veteran of war and a woman of color.

Screenwriting is an emerging research practice within the academy, whereby the act of writing a screenplay is understood as a form of research. The resulting "academic screenplay" or associated screenplay work functions as both a method of research enquiry and also a research artefact, valuing screenwriting as a way to generate and disseminate new knowledge and, crucially, new ways of practicing.

(Batty and McAulay, 2016, abstract)

I conducted a performative art compilation to display the research as performance, in which I also looked at economic resources and cultural capital. For this study, cultural capital is defined as

the social awareness, skills and connections that serve as assets for groups and individuals in maintaining social status or attaining social mobility (which can include things like education, family connections, and awareness of social rituals) which are things that tend to be deficient in the poor people of this country, and unfortunately for veterans this tends to be the rule more than the exception. (TedX Talks, 2014, 3:08)

In addition,

Through practice-led research (e.g. Nelson 2013) or research-led practice (e.g. Smith and Dean 2009), screenwriting becomes a way of generating and disseminating new knowledge; and, crucially, a way of generating new ways of practicing, usually evidenced by reflections on the process of writing the screenplay and/or by the screenplay itself. Reflective practice enables research to become explicit and communicable to an audience outside of the practitioner's own domain (i.e. the self). Where a screenplay embodies or "performs" research (see Haseman 2006), research and knowledge may be implicit, and so what becomes a significant issue for the academy is how that knowledge can be explicated for a wider community of scholars and/or practitioners (see Gibson 2010). (Batty & McAulay, 2016, abstract)

Criteria/Purpose

My study looked at the following themes:

- financial influence (economic)
- Critical Race Theory (in relation to cultural capital)
- gender based guided questions (Latina)

- motivations for higher educational pursuits
- audio/video classroom interactions (I'd prefer to attend a classroom that the student is in and have access to recorded sessions if possible).
- qualitative data research methods (autoethnographic, and ethnography via an ethno-drama with an art-based approach to ethnographic action research via a screenplay).
- field observation notes
- soliloquy analysis.

Summary

I chose to do an ethno-drama that allowed me to delve into a theatrical perception of the lived experience of a Latina veteran doctoral student that is exclusively attending a university online and considered this topic of inclusivity in Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). An autoethnography is a way of conceptualizing a lived experience from an autobiographical perspective and taking that social aspect that exists within an online environment. I believed this would allow me to see how students learn, and how they use social and cultural capital to be heard, if at all.

Furthermore, an autoethnography was a way of conceptualizing a lived experience, and taking that social aspect that exists in an online environment as truth, to look at the bigger constructs of the human condition, and then adding characterization, plot, setting, figurative language and all things stylistic that are involved in a narrative via a written screenplay monologue. The gumption here was to look at how well the inclusivity of a 100% online course or courses allow for the negotiation of power and access for a Latina veteran doctoral student, as I am triple minoritized—first being a veteran, second a Latina, and third a doctoral student.

Ultimately, I found that there are many dynamics that play a role in how one negotiates power and access via an exclusively online institution.

Soliloquy #3: Never Good Enough

[Latina sits back on her couch, closes her eyes and begins to reflect on her life.]

Looking back, it seems that I was just never good enough.

This process brought out many memories that I'd chosen to forget. I used to sing when I was 14 years old at talent shows, because an aunt of mine heard my voice and decided to take me under her wing. There I began to learn the ways of the not so forgiving world in those seedy nightclubs that I was too young to be in, but since I was the talent and dressed older, I'd get in and no one would complain. If I was belting out Tejano music to the drunken men and women on the dance floor, I was okay. I hated the secondhand smoke, the old men that would come and ask me to dance when I was on break, and my uncle who began to show jealousy towards me because my aunt was spending too much time with me. I learned very early on that something was wrong with me, because she wanted me to watch my weight, to not talk to boys at school, to not hang out with friends, to practice every day so that maybe I had a chance to become a famous singer, and she'd charge my poor mother for every ride and every time she'd help me. My brothers began to despise that what little money we had was going to me. I went along with this grooming process because it was an escape, but deep down inside the most thing I enjoyed was eating at restaurants with my aunt—doing things my mother could never afford. She was so meticulous, even down to the nail polish color I wore. Through it all, no one asked me what I wanted. Long after my professional singing career ended at the age of 19, and long after I came back from war at the age of 25, my aunt tried to motivate me to get back into singing professionally. I wanted nothing to do with it. I didn't even want to move back to Brownsville,

my hometown, but after the military I didn't have enough money to stay in San Diego. I was set up for failure since the beginning—having a mother that was poor made me susceptible to the horrible consequences of not having someone to really hear me out. A loved one like a mother who would listen and care unlike anyone else. Indeed, the reflection on my economic and minority status was not meant to get me far, but I wrote about these experiences in my dissertation because they molded me. I found that through the screenwriting process, I could try to get the reader to perhaps feel the ups and downs of the struggle and maybe understanding could come from that. END SCENE.

Analyzing Soliloquy #3: Latina's Journey

Latina feels that she is and will never be good enough. She has to struggle in life and battle through the systems of power and privilege that are not just confined to school, but also her societal limitations as a mother, a teacher, a wife and how that all transfers to the online classroom as she reaches for her doctoral degree. She's had to navigate her way through the unrelenting noise of being poor, being told what to do and where she should go in life. This noise began when she was a child, being born to a mother with a learning disability who could not communicate with her in the way an intelligible mother could, and instead of providing experiences for her by taking her out of the house, she kept her and her siblings inside scared of the world and of what bad things could happen if they didn't listen. Latina's mother was this way, because she herself feared getting hurt. Latina had no father and her mother was the patriarchal figure in the household, so it was difficult for her to understand who she was in society. Latina had no one to talk to, to bounce ideas off of. In fact, her mother had limited capabilities and due to her learning disability and her own life experiences could only engage with her in a very childlike state. In turn, what this did was lead Latina to really depend on the

schooling system to raise her and this made her devote herself to the things that others wanted her to do. For example, once Latina's aunt heard Latina's voice, she saw it as an opportunity to manage her and perhaps live vicariously through her since Latina's aunt had wanted to be a famous singer at one point. Latina seemed to only like singing because it was a way for her to go out to restaurants and see things she'd not normally see if she was in her mother's household. Her mother did not drive; she was too scared to drive. Latina's mother did not have money and her mother feared life so much because she had been hurt herself that she kept all her children secluded.

In writing the soliloquy, I kept thinking about why it was so important to understand the lived experience of women of poverty, and that of a woman of color—and even those that grow up with parents with mental illness. It affects a child's psyche and stays with them even until adulthood—inevitably affecting their relationships with others, themselves and how they see the world. And Latina's mind she would never be enough, because she was never given the opportunity as a child. As she went through the schooling system she began to read voraciously and found out that there was another world out there. Opportunities for people like her did exist, but they were difficult to get because so many things were made to oppress her and keep her at bay. Latina learned that she would have to make her own opportunities, because the opportunities were not easily presented. So many times, she longed to be in a White family—because when she saw White families on television, they seemed happy.

Ultimately, in adulthood, Latina ended up never fully understanding who she was, and the educational world seemed to be an escape to the poverty and fog that the military had left her in. She got out of the military and went directly to school, even though perhaps her mind wasn't fully invested in what the outcome of that education would lead her to.

Latina continues her fight and keeps going even when it means that she is affecting herself negatively, to the point of being ill. Sometimes people listen and sometimes they don't, and when they don't, it hurts. Her PTSD and the anger that it brings ensures that she will never forget.

Latina is left wondering why she must always fight, and other women don't. She wonders why White women live such a carefree life, and she blames her mother for the situations she put her in growing up. If her mother had had her shit together, life would have been easier.

Even though Latina was able to take online classes at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, she was not comfortable among her peers and most especially her professors who seemed to have had a great life story. She felt even through the computer screen that they judged her and on several occasions by affirmation of that very thing they had. She was different, she would always be different, and that was by design. People like her were not meant to be successful and as she climbed through the ranks of education attempting to get her doctoral degree, she was starting to realize the closer she got to the top of the mountain the harder people tried to push her down. It's like they were saying, "What are you doing up here? You don't belong here."

It felt like when people congratulated her, deep down inside they did not want her to be successful. Their actions in the classroom showed otherwise; Latina had to fight these sometimes-invisible battles to make sure that her voice was not drowned out by the people that had more clout than her within the online classroom environment. Some professors didn't want to take her on and be her chair. She knew there were valid excuses for some of them. For others perhaps they just didn't believe she could accomplish the goal. Sometimes her voice was loud, and she noticed that it was in those times that she was able to get the professor's attention, but not in a good way. Just like when she was performing on stage—as a teenage girl, dressed up

like an adult woman to entice the audience—what she was really wanting was that next meal at a restaurant. Latina was hungry to succeed, but deep down inside she felt that she would never be good enough, because she had never been good enough up to this point.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS/FINDINGS: THE SCREENPLAY—IDENTITY FLUIDITY, EMPOWERMENT, AND ENGENDERED POVERTY PERFORMING A VETERAN-LATINA-ONLINE GRADUATE STUDENT

Definition and Terms

Cultural capital: “the social assets of a person (education, intellect, style of speech and dress, etc.) that promote social mobility in a stratified society” (Bourdieu, cited in Krishna, 2017, p. 13).

Familial capital: “explores this idea that refers to that cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2002, cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 79).

The Screenplay: Identity Fluidity, Empowerment, and Engendered Poverty

Performing a Veteran-Latina-Online Graduate Student

A New Autoethnographic Play

Collected and Arranged by Maricela Burns

About This Play

My name is Maricela Burns, and I am a doctoral student finishing up my Ed.D. through the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). I journaled and blogged through technological mediums such as: Facebook, Google Drive via Google Docs, and even used paper and pencil to write a collection of entries that served as recollections of the educational and familial journey that I had experienced while pursuing my various college degrees and up to my doctorate. This screenplay is a performative piece that is arranged as a monologue with the narrator as the protagonist and speaker—simply named LATINA. She is a figure that transcends boundaries and is expected to embody more than just the confines of her own story. She will take the reader on a journey of what it took to get to where she is today. She will delve into the brutal side of poverty, tap into the psychoanalytical parts of what it means to have to fend for oneself, and how education became her way out, even when the educational realm was not necessarily designed for people like her. The protagonist LATINA is the one acting out each character's part, and through that shared voice the characterization development of those involved is understood. It is through that back and forth dialogue, set by the monologue itself, that the protagonist takes on the voices of the characters and acts them out on stage, as only she can explain the depths of her journey. She realizes that she is not alone. Still she struggles to survive and to endure the many forces that attempt to oppress her. I wove this play in such a way that through the protagonist, critical educational discourse and the inequalities in the educational

system are apparent, ever present and dehumanizing, but not the driving force of the screenplay. Rather resilience, identity fluidity and engendered poverty are the highlights and main stays that the protagonist will have to be very aware of in order to not lose themselves in a system that was meant to divide.

This work is based on a three year-long auto-ethnographic exploration of a veteran Latina doctoral student in the United States of America (USA) and her navigation through the systems of power and privilege in a 100% exclusive online setting.

Characters: (in order of when they are referenced in the screenplay): San Juana, Elida, Davila, Latina Burns, Carmen, Adelia, Kid on the Bus, Narrator, Hunter, Vickie, Mr. Flinch, Carter Melendez, Dr. Whungo, Rogelio Guillen, Tracey, Department Chair, Stan Hung, Lisa M., Laura, Manuel Guillen, Ricardo Duarte, Dr. Resendez, Mrs. Garza, Mary, Katie, Liesel, Grace, Gregory Richardson, Mr. Pseudonym, Ms. Inconsiderate, Mrs. Belum, Mel Kinson, Kelly F., Ms. Gears, Ms. Julie Principal

Settings: Online; Brownsville, Texas; Grand Prairie, Texas; Seguin, Texas

Common Themes: Navigation of power; economic uncertainty; military hope, veteran of war (residual casualty—PTSD and disability); losing my religion/marriage hell; teaching to make a way.

The School Raised Me:

Engendered Poverty and the Construction of Knowledge

in the Midst of No Familial Support and Abuse

Act One

September 14th, 1998— (Time: approximately 2:30 pm)

[San Juana follows her coworkers and is ready to put the palms and wrap the trees. Her boss follows her looking at her with anger.]

ELIDA: I wasn't done talking to you! *Estúpida*, pick that plant up!

[San Juana looks at her coworkers as they turn away—no one having her back. San Juana gets up the nerve to speak and looks directly into the eyes of Elida.]

SAN JUANA: You dropped... you dropped it on purpose; so, so, so you pick it up.

[In the three years that San Juana had worked at Robinson Nursery she had never stood up to Elida; no one had.]

ELIDA (CONT'D): Well, then pick your shit up from the front office locker and get the fuck out of here!

[San Juana began to walk towards the Robinson exit gate and knew that she wasn't going to be able to pay next month's rent. As tears ran down her eyes, she made her way to her nearby rental home, her three children were still at school which allowed her the time she needed to cry before she'd have to face them. As a single mother of three children—the weight of the world was on her shoulders. She decided to call her mother and beg her to let her live in her house. The next month the children and San Juana were moved into her mother's home—where 3 other families—all children of Davila already lived in the small one-bedroom house made of wood.]

END SCENE.

[Latina (13 years old) looks through the crack of her grandmother's room. There Carmen was preparing ham sandwiches for her two children. Latina hadn't eaten in two days, so she stared.]

CARMEN: What are you looking at? Stupid kid. *No te voy ha dar nimadre!* Get the fuck out of here! Go!

[Latina became frightened, because she couldn't understand her aunt's unkind words towards her, and she saw so much hatred in her eyes. She ran into the living room and accidentally stepped on the telephone cord. The cord popped out of the wall socket. A loud scream was heard in the living room.]

ADELIA: *Que chingada madra!* Who the fuck disconnected the telephone line?

[Adelia went running after Latina with crazed eyes. She kept sniffing as she ran towards Latina attempting to catch her. White powder falling down her nostrils. Latina screams.]

LATINA: No, leave me alone!

ADELIA (CONT'D): I was talking to Adan's father in San Marcos on a long-distance call! Fuck you; *pinche babosa!* Fuck you!

[With a closed fist, Adelia punches Latina in the face. Latina couldn't believe what had happened. She didn't cry. That was the first and last time she would ever be physically abused.]
END SCENE.

[The following week Latina gets on the bus. Her mom had purchased a box for her crayons and other school supplies from a nearby garage sale.]

KID ON THE BUS: Why are you bringing a tackle box to school?

LATINA: A tackle box? What is a tackle box? My mom got me this for my crayons.

[The little boy begins to laugh at Latina.]

KID ON THE BUS: My dad takes me fishing every weekend. That's a tackle box; get closer to it and smell it. I bet it smells like fish! I bet you smell like fish!

[Latina put her head down in shame, as she heard the young boy's mocking laughter. At that moment she realized she was different, and not in a good way.] END SCENE.

[39-year-old Latina is sitting down talking to her psychiatrist. The walls are pale brown, and she is looking pensively through the woman in front of her.]

LATINA: I guess if I think back to what happened in my life to get me to where I am now, there were indeed many pivotal points where school saved me. For example, having to walk to school every day could have provided the drive to understand the importance of school in my psyche. My mom would wake us up in the morning—she had the most annoying voice, yelling “Get up! Get up!” she’d say and to this day her voice is like nails on a chalkboard. She would open the *colcha* curtains and scream “*Levantense! Levantense*; it's time to go to school!”

Interlude

NARRATOR: The year is 2025 and Latina the professor, walks into her lecture hall sharing her laptop case and takes a deep breath—she puts the case down, and tells herself that she will be able to get through the lesson. She must be able to reach down within herself to teach these graduate students the things that she had to learn the hard way. They are not aware that at one point she was almost going to drop out of college and her life would have been that much different. She was ready to explain to them how the systems of inequality exist to oppress minorities such as herself, and minorities such as them. She silently looks around—brown faces looking back at her, some stuck like zombies looking at their computer screens—oblivious to her presence in the room, and she feels nauseous with a strong need to get her experience out. Latina wants them to have a fighting chance at life in America, one that took her many decades to even begin to understand. And since knowledge is power, deciding to become a college professor for Latina would be the vehicle to get her own voice out there—so she knew that on her first day on the job she would share her life from the lens of Critical Race Theory, engendered poverty, and identity fluidity. Still she must be able to relay to them that she made it this far, a veteran of war,

and because of resilience, and grit it was important to give them insight into the system that she knew too well. In her 8 years of teaching in public school education, Latina knew that many teachers share this need to relay to their students that they can do it—they can be successful! But for Latina this unjust journey has been a struggle, and with her decision to pursue a doctoral degree, the journey became her life's work. As she took a deep breath, she realized that what she had been through could not have been in vain. Through her own graduate studies, she was able to find her own voice and begin to understand the injustices of the schooling system and simultaneously understand that the school had raised her too. That understanding was powerful and perhaps many students weren't aware that this was the case for them as well.

But with that, she understands that today's lesson is about putting herself in the limelight, being vulnerable, inviting her students to share this lived experience and have them see it through her eyes, and hope that her story will make them understand that either they will stay in the educational battlefield and fight to be heard, and fight to graduate, and fight to show people that they are human and have value, or they will fail to grasp these critical concepts and lose the war. Latina is 5'6", not too short for an American female of Hispanic ethnicity. She is a mother of two daughters (12 and 19 years old now) and a workaholic. Latina has PTSD, OCD, anxiety, and depression. Latina is now a single mother; during a nasty separation and divorce from Hunter, her Gringo narcissistic ex-husband, she had regained her voice and power. Through all of that, she stood there with her unassuming teacher coat jacket and glasses looking at the students, wondering if they were ready to take it all in. Would they be accepting of her? Would they believe that stories like hers happen all the time within the American educational world? Latina was ready to provide needed insight to her life and would do it through the lens of Critical Race Theory, engendered poverty, identity fluidity and all the issues that being a veteran of war

had left upon her. Latina decides right then and there that she will tell all of these college aged students of hers... just how it all came to be, how she was able to continue her education online and attend the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and prove that she had what it took to have a seat at the table and stand before them an accomplished lecturer. It would not be an easy task, when everything in her body and mind told her she'd never get this far and wouldn't be able to tell her story. It took understanding how the educational system truly works to finally reach catharsis and let go of the shame that one feels when they are living in brown skin. How could she relay to them how others will attempt to stop you through microaggressions? It was through those reflective experiences that Latina gained her voice and was able to learn about cultural capital and techno social capital (when she finally transitioned to a 100% asynchronous online environment). These were the things that empowered her; these were the things that gave her the ability to pull through. Latina took a deep breath and opened her mouth to speak. [END INTERLUDE]

Act Two

LATINA: I'm here for a reason, and you students need to know what it was that got me here. Not for me, but for you. [She takes a deep breath, looks around the lecture hall, and can't help but smile.] Right now, as you sit there staring at me, some of you glaring at your computer screens—perhaps trying to avoid making eye contact, or maybe you're just bored... I'd like to challenge you to get out of that funk, because as you sit here—right now there are systems in place that define who you are, whether you have value enough to pass this course within this institution—and categorize your self-worth by the letter grade you get—until the day you hopefully graduate. You are but a number in a rat race that is called life and some of you have less capital than your White counterparts. This idea of earning a degree in an equal playing field

is just smoke and mirrors—and if you believe all this to be true, then hope is lost, and I'd be a terrible teacher to make that my agenda. Instead, I want you to come with me on a journey that I took so long ago and try to empathize with the protagonist. As humans, if we place ourselves in the position of others, then they are not the other. They become human and we can begin to care about their plight.

[Student raises her hand]

LATINA (CONT'D.): I know Vickie, you have a question. You want to know if this is going to relate to the curriculum, right?

[Vickie nods her head up and down]

LATINA: This is the curriculum—the harsh and unrelenting realities of a lived curriculum. Let's start here—I've had to learn the hard way. I rode the bus, and when I didn't have enough bus fare money and I couldn't get to college—I had to drop classes, so I wouldn't get F's. I had to join the military, because I owed student loans and couldn't go back to school until I paid them. Don't you think it's crazy that the government is allowing students to take as many student loans as possible without having their credit checked? What does that do to a young brown female that grew up in poverty when she figures out that you can keep taking out student loans and just pay them later? Here I am enrolled in a doctoral program and now owe so much in student loans, with interest, and on a teacher salary. But I had no money, so I had to take the loans and live off them. No one in my immediate family had any money; no one in my extended family had any money. This idea of family was elusive anyway, especially when one is poor, and your own family wants to see you fail because they have failed in their miserable lives.

LATINA (CONT'D.): But Vickie—I am here to tell you, that you can't fail—I won't let you; in fact, today I come with a very specific agenda. I will help you understand my own struggles as a veteran of war, a Latina growing up in a single parent home, in poverty and physical and verbal abuse from not my mother who suffered from a learning disability—but from her brothers, sisters, and my grandmother who took advantage of our living with them and saw my brothers and I as an easy target to reign down their verbal abuse upon. Perhaps you may, Vickie, also be trying to find your own voice in a doctoral program and finding out that the system was not built to pacify people like me or you. Empathy is not necessarily found in the schooling system, especially not in graduate level courses. But today I will guide you—I will mold you, and I will be that teacher that through the incorporation of theory and the sharing of my own autoethnography—will attempt to evoke empathy and most importantly provide hope to those of you that, like me, may not feel they belong. Once again, education is a subversive force, but when you learn the rules of the game and how the system works, you will be able to navigate through the systems that the state has set in place, in efforts to be successful in your own right.

[One by one the students close their laptops and begin to really listen. Latina opens to the class about her first experiences in college and her first experience with racism at the college level in Austin, Texas.]

LATINA: Growing up in South Texas, value education could be the programs that were directly tied to wanting to pull my family from poverty. In my case, mostly trying to save myself first. I can't say that I knew college was the end goal, because I never once heard my mother saying that I would go to college. I didn't really think that was a thing that I could do. I started feeling that college was a probable next step for me at Gladys Porter High School, where counselors, and other fellow students began to talk about what college they were going to go to.

Some wanted to go to the University of Texas at Austin, others to Texas A & M, while others had bigger dreams and would apply to Yale University or New York State. I was a Valley girl, a Latina from *el Valle*—but the population in my small town was 97% Hispanic at the time, and so if they felt they could go, then maybe I could too. So, I remember in my senior year of high school Mr. Flinch told us to start applying to universities and motivated us to get it done. I applied to the University of Texas at Brownsville (now the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley) and the school that I really wanted to go to because there was a boy I had dated my junior year who was currently going there... the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin). At that point, I had never really thought of moving out of Brownsville, but I was quickly noticing that I was motivated by others and what they wanted. Almost like I really had no idea what I wanted to do for myself. Probably that was due to being sheltered all my life and my mom not having money or a car to take us places. It was perhaps those lack of experiences that made me clueless and gullible in these respects. But whatever the case—perhaps, that had to do with not really having a person to mentor me and/or a father. Since my mother had suffered with her issues growing up, and rarely told me she loved me—although she was a great mother, I felt the strong need to connect to others. Anyone. I remember that I got accepted to UT Austin on a provisional basis because my Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) was a 900 something. The boy that I was chasing had been automatically accepted to UT Austin at the time because he had scored above a 1300 and was granted automatic admittance. So that summer of 1999, before I graduated high school, I had already moved into Kinsolving dormitory at UT Austin. That summer both men and women were housed in the same building but on opposite ends. I had to come back to walk my high school graduation with the rest of my friends. It was a time of discovery, a time to leave the nest, a time to find who I was to the rest of the world, and

what I quickly found out was that some people would never see me as human. My first experience at UT Austin was a harrowing one. I remember being sad while I was there, because I sometimes didn't have money for food, and so I'd take some of my suitemates microwaveable pizza rolls—because at times I didn't have anything to eat, or if I did her food was better. I thought it was okay to do that, because she would borrow my CD player and use it to hear music without asking. During that time, I remember, “*Give it to You,*” by Jordan Knight and “*Say My Name*” by Destiny's Child playing from my dorm room. We had a mini fridge and even though the space was so small it felt like a mansion to me. Attending UT Austin was great when it came to the food department. I had a prepaid food card that had been filled with money funded from my financial aid grants and loans that I would use to go down to the chow hall and it was a buffet of wonderful food. I was so happy to eat and eat I did. Sadness set in as I started gaining weight and I began to sleep in when I should have been in class. I thought it was cool that students sometimes went to class in their pajamas. UT Austin was a culture shock for a Latina that had been sheltered all her life. My suitemate was from a nearby small town close to Austin; she was from Round Rock, Texas and she had short blond hair. I'll never forget her; she was White and gorgeous and well off. I remember being so happy that I'd have a friend to help me navigate my way through the dormitory, but also at UT Austin. Instead what I got was a suitemate who was racist and classist. How do I know? Sometimes you just feel it and it's hard to describe. However, as I mentioned, she would borrow my things and I'd take some of hers. Although borrowing became skewed between us, I guess. Her clothes were expensive looking and really didn't fit me, since she was skinny. However, one day she wasn't in the room and I was going to hang out with a new friend I had made, Carter Melendez. He was a Hispanic freshman like me who was trying his hardest to pass the provisional program, so he could stay in Austin. Part of

me already knew that I wasn't going to make it. Still, he had a car and tried to help me be social and less awkward. Because my suitemate borrowed my things, I decided one day to ask her to borrow an outfit from her. She literally looked me up and down, and instead of just saying no, she said, "Ew" with the biggest look of disgust on her face. I don't know if she was racist, but I know that sometimes when I went down to eat in the chow hall she'd be hanging out with only White people from the dormitory. No brown faces in her clan, and the best way that I could describe her is that she was just a mean girl. So, one day Carter and I were to hang out, and I found myself taking a purple shirt from my roommate's closet. I didn't wash it when I came back. I probably didn't like her at that point either. The next day, she yelled at me and accused me of using her shirt and I told her she'd used my things without asking too. She continued her faces of disgust and so I left the room. Coming from a 97% Hispanic town to a very diverse college institution meant there would be a lot of learning curves for me. I remember feeling less than human in how she looked at me and talked about me to others when I'd pass by her. One night something just made me head for her toothbrush and clean the mirror with it. I'd had my first lesson on microaggressions 101. Gross, I know. But gross, too, is when someone hates you just because of your race. That summer of '99 I had to drop 2 courses, Math and Biology, even though the school had tutors available to help, math had never been my strong suit, and so I never really found out what I got on my last math exam, but I didn't feel comfortable enough to allow the grade to post, and so I went straight to their registrar's office and dropped both subjects, in lieu of receiving possible F's. That summer we were supposed to take 4 major subjects. I passed Psychology and English, so I was able to take those credits with me to the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB). When I attempted to enroll at UTB, they explained to me that I wouldn't be able to enroll because when I withdrew from those two courses at UT

Austin, I'd have to pay back a certain part of my financial aid, which totaled about \$1,800. I did not have those funds, and if I returned to my mother's housing authority shack with no job, I'd never be able to save up money with no education and a minimum wage job in Brownsville. Any money I'd make I'd have to use it to survive. So, I went to speak to a financial aid coordinator and asked her if there was any chance that I'd be able to have that debt forgiven. She said, "No, but I'll get back to you on that." To my surprise, I heard word from the financial advisor, and she told me that UTB would use a grant that would pay for that balance that I owed financial aid and get me back into school. Due to UTB I was able to return to school. Unfortunately, that happiness did not last long. My intentions were great—but I couldn't get to school on some days. I didn't have a car, and classes weren't located as close as they had been in Austin. At UT Austin I felt the synergy of the campus throughout the city and not just the school. They had a very inclusive university that extended to the city itself. Living back in Brownsville I'd need a car or a bus ride to get to school. Sad, but sometimes I didn't have money for the bus. I remember being so embarrassed having to wait for the bus and having cars pass by and people just staring—watching me waiting for the bus. I know when I'd see people waiting for the bus, I'd feel bad for them; I was sure they were looking at me the same way. So eventually, I just couldn't pay the bus on some days or I couldn't catch rides to school enough days to be able to pass the courses. Also, I was having a problem understanding just how to pass a college course. It took me a while to understand that if I just wrote everything that the instructor said in class, then I'd be able to pass my exams. But that came with time. Surprisingly, most professors didn't test you on the textbook in college. They tested you on what they'd covered in class. So, there I was going in circles trying to figure out why I wasn't passing, over studying and not getting anywhere because I couldn't get to class on most days. It was a vicious cycle. By the end of April 2000, I found

myself yet again at the registrar's office this time dropping all my classes to avoid getting F's. I knew that I wouldn't be able to pay back the financial aid that had been loaned to me and that I'd have to pay, so I was in a dreadful state to becoming the loser all my extended family hoped I'd be—just like them. But I wouldn't give them or anyone the satisfaction of that. That is when the thought of joining the military came to mind. I'd always been a free spirit, but the military had never been an out, until then... when financially it was the only out.

Interlude/Theme 1: Navigation of Power

NARRATOR: Paulo Freire (1972) forward notations state that:

In fact, those who, in learning to read and write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social situation in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Education is once again a subversive force.” (p. 29)

The online classroom is not immune to the inequalities that can be found in the hidden agenda within the American curriculum. Furthermore, it is important to note that, technology is being used to oppress through manipulation and repression, “the oppressed, as objects, as ‘things,’ have no purposes except those their oppressors prescribe for them” (Freire, 1972, p. 12).

It is that synergy of oppression, and political structures within the educational system that are designed to keep colonized people at bay. It is that systematic oppression via racism, engendered poverty and the struggle to attain a doctoral degree for marginalized groups that has forced veteran Latina doctoral students to be in a constant fight to be heard through their online courses. Furthermore, "Educational institutions promote the needs of the colonizer, ignoring, for the most part, the aspirations of the colonized” (Basu, 1989, p. 60).

Indeed, Solórzano (as cited in Cueva, 2013), suggests that the new manifestations of racism are evident in racialized/gendered microaggressions within educational systems. Thus, the amorphous nature of race-based discrimination facilitates continued use against people of color to inflict fear, oppression, and domination” (p. 150). In addition, Buckingham (2008) stated that: “the fluidity of identity, seeing it as almost infinitely negotiable, and in the process perhaps underestimates the continuing importance of routine and stability” (p. 2). Nevertheless, his general point is well taken: “identity” only becomes an issue when it is threatened or contested in some way and needs to be explicitly asserted” (Buckingham, 2008, p. 2).

[Latina looks up to her class and she feels a knot in her throat, but gulps to hold the tears from coming out. She takes a deep breath and continues her lesson.] [END INTERLUDE]

Act 2, Continued

LATINA: An online professor once became frustrated with me, and I wasn’t entirely sure why. I had been answering almost every question he asked to the class, while helping others in the classroom chat box as well. I guess it was my way to let him know I was present and knew the material. Towards the end of the class, I needed help identifying a pattern of numbers on the screen. He took that moment to question how I’d got this far in a doctoral program and could not locate a number on the screen filled with randomized numbers; mind you, he did this scolding in front of the other online students. I was in shock, spoke my piece, and then in tears, quickly logged off, leaving him in mid-sentence. “[University professors] may tell you that you are not good enough to achieve your dreams, rather than working with you to improve your capacity to be a valued and productive member of the community” (Prescod-Weinstein, 2016). These microaggressions come with a hidden agenda. I found that in an online course, I’d have to find my voice, and assert my identity. I’d come too far to fold because the system was made to

oppress some and not others. All my life I'd been oppressed. I knew this space too well, and I would fight to stay in the game.

Hence, through cultural capital one can assert their identity. Unlike the wars I had left behind, Post-9/11 Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), I could have never imagined that these online systematic attacks on my worth would prove to be more taxing on my soul. I had returned from war, only to realize others saw me differently. The way I spoke, and how I thought was different. It had to be. Unfortunately, I quickly discovered that much gets lost in translation when communicating with classmates and professors alike. Alliances form, and people choose who they prefer on their teams. When it came to group work, sometimes the right profile picture was good enough to show you belonged—here a White last name was enough for clout. It seemed that if you were White, you were a commodity, but if you had an accent or a brown body you probably didn't know as much.

According to Bourdieu (cited in Krishna, 2017) cultural capital is “the social assets of a person (education, intellect, style of speech and dress, etc.) that promote social mobility in a stratified society” (p. 13). Indeed, democratic ideals, as a purposive ethical framework to education, should guide educational decisions within education and not in the form of schooling practices. Such standards can be seen through an ideological framework that has no bias on class systems or other economical subsets, but instead on social constructs of educational discourse and democratic liberties. It makes sense that an online class would at the very least attempt to reach out to minorities such as myself, in its attempts to not polarize me any further. Since—at least in theory, technology and online educational environments have leveled the playing field. Moreover, Feenberg (1991), as cited in Okan (2007), states that “technology is viewed as a means to an end; technology is neutral” and that therefore, “the only rational stance is to employ

it to solve any problems, regardless of the cost to the environment, culture, or human beings ” (Okan, 2007, p.1). However, having taken part in online classrooms, I now realize that an online education may not be as different as a traditional face-to-face classroom, because we meet via mediums such as Google Hangouts and Zoom, so people are able to see you and form their perceptions of you as a person, based on gender, race, military status (if that is divulged) and whatever other biases people may have against you.

Interlude

latinaburns@utrgv.edu to roglioguillen@utrgv.edu

Sunday, February 19, 2017 at 12:16 PM

Subject: EDFR 8800-90- Dr. Whungo’s course

Hello Dr. Guillen,

I’m really thinking of dropping Dr. Whungo’s class EDFR-8800-90L, and I have never dropped a course in the doctorate program. He does not provide feedback and on my last assignment I got a 0 of 4 possible points. I am really frustrated because; 1- I don’t understand him, 2- He appears to be confused in class, 3- When he returns assignments, he doesn’t provide me feedback, 4- I don’t understand his English, and his logic is not expressed clearly in class.

Anyways, I really need help. Will this course be offered in the summer by another professor—not him? Also, what are my options here?

Respectfully,
Latina Burns

roglioguillen@utrgv.edu to latinaburns@utrgv.edu

Sun, Feb 29, 2017, 1:37 pm

Subject: RE: EDFR 8800-90- Dr. Whungo’s course

Hi Latina,

Generally, the 8000-level research courses are only offered once per year. If you drop it now, we do not see it again until Spring 2018. If you are getting close to the end of your degree plan, dropping this course may slow you down, especially when approaching the Comprehensive Exam and Dissertation Courses, which can’t be started until you complete all the research and C and I courses.

Before you drop the course, I recommend that you reach out to Dr. Whungo for assistance. If you share your concerns with him, I’m sure he will help you.

Thanks,

Rogelio

latinaburns@utrgv.edu to rogelioguillen@utrgv.edu

Sunday, February 19, 2017, 3:48 PM

Subject: Re: EDFR 8300-90- Dr. Whungo's course

Thank you, Dr. Guillen, so much.

Dr. Whungo did call me about an hour or so ago to see about assignment #3. He said he will help me to try to understand it. I look forward to getting feedback from him, because my grades are very important to me—especially since I've given so much to this program, and I'm sooo close to the end.

You are an amazing professor, I just wanted you to know that.

Thank you for always being there for me and helping me get excited about this program of study; I really do enjoy it, and I appreciate you more than you know!

Very respectfully,
Latina Burns, M. Ed.

rogelioguillen@utrgv.edu to latinaburns@utrgv.edu

Monday, February 20, 2017, 9:20 am

Subject: RE: EDFR 8300-90- Dr. Whungo's course

Latina,

Thank you for the kind words. We live to serve! 😊

Thanks,

Rogelio

Figure 7. Email Exchange Between Latina and professor.

[Latina sits down in her room and can't take the pressure anymore. She pops in two

Clonazepam and logs in to her email account again.]

latinaburns@utrgv.edu to whungo@utrgv.edu, cc: deptchair@utrgv.edu,

drtracey@utrgv.edu

Sunday, February 20, 2017 at 9:47 PM

Subject: Comment after class

High Priority

Dr. Whungo,

After today's class, while I stayed to seek assistance for Assignment 3—I am now left concerned over the statement that you made about me during our recorded session, in regard to me not being worthy or deserving of receiving my Ed D., because I sought your assistance for Random Sampling Assignment #3, and had difficulty understanding your instructions in class. You are belittling me with such a statement and leaving me wondering what your intentions are in assisting me in this class from here on out.

I have come very far, through UTB and now UTRGV to feel that things are now going in a different direction. I have cc'd Dr. Tracey in this email, because I am at a loss of what you found to be a lack of effort, when I am very active in class, ask for your assistance in various emails, and help other students (as can be seen in the recorded session chats). I have turned in all my assignments, sought clarification with you after class, have been working to understand assignment 3 and worked vigorously today on making sure assignment 4 was good to go. I want to excel and exceed expectations, but your level of decorum towards me in particular—is discomfoting. Please advise.

Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Latina Burns

Figure 8. Email to Professor.

Act 2, Continued

[Latina logs into Facebook and begins a conversation with Stan Hung on February 20th, 2017 at 10:24 p.m.]

LATINA: I'm having real issues understanding Dr. Whungo. He doesn't seem to like me. In class today, he seemed to come after me, and I don't know why. I'm not late on any assignments and I was helping the other students online. I even used the chat box to give other students insight into questions that they were having. I can tell that others are really struggling to understand randomization. Do you have any insight that you can provide? Every time I ask him for the best way to find numbers to randomize, I can't understand him, and I feel that he just dismisses me. I don't know if the issue is a cultural barrier, maybe he just doesn't like me because I'm a woman... I don't know what his deal is.

STAN HUNG: First, a randomizer will give you all the wrong answers. You do not need to use a randomizer for this assignment. It's only going to confuse you more. Have you tried talking to him about what happened in class today?

LATINA: Yea, I did. I stayed after to talk to him and waited until the end. Some students were still online, when he started trying to help me. He told me to look for specific numbers on the computer screen and they were difficult to locate. I was already confused, but something so simple as finding numbers became difficult to do—because he was pushing me to find them and when I couldn't he made that comment, "I don't know how you got this far in this program if you don't know how to randomize." Ugh, I'm just so mad! How dare he attack me like that in front of other students? I've worked so hard and I'm not going to allow this man to bring me down.

STAN HUNG: So, what did you tell him?

LATINA: I started crying, told him how he was making me feel with his statement, and logged off—leaving him in mid-sentence. I just couldn't take it anymore. He's a jerk—or maybe I just suck and he's right. Ugh! Sorry, I've got a lot going on. I did send an email to the department and my committee chair to ask for Dr. Whungo to help me. I even sought the help of my academic advisor asking him if it was possible to drop Whungo's class. His accent is difficult to understand and well our communication hasn't been the best.

STAN HUNG: Wait, what? You sent an email to who? The entire department, the people he works with?! Are you nuts?

LATINA: Yea, I guess so. But I didn't know what else to do! I had to do something. Once my advisor told me that if I dropped his course, I would have to wait almost another year to take it again that would mess up my degree plan. Why can't I do something like that? What is so wrong in keeping everyone in the Curriculum and Instruction department in the loop? Isn't my success their success? I was just asking for help. He didn't seem so willing to help.

STAN HUNG: Well, I hope you know what you've done could be potential career suicide. No one does that, and if they do—we never hear from them again.

[Latina feels her heart sink to her stomach, but she shrugs off the pain.]

LATINA: Stop being so overly dramatic Hung. Thank you for your advice, but I need this course and that man's comment told me what he really thought about me. I had to do what I had to do.

STAN HUNG: Cool. Well, good luck with your assignment.

LATINA: Thanks.

Figure 9. Facebook Chat with Friend.

[Latina logs off Facebook with tears in her eyes. She puts her head down into her arms and relives that moment once again.] [END SCENE.]

Act 2, Continued, sometime later

[Latina is talking to Dr. Whungo, Associate Professor in the World Department of Teaching and Learning College of Education and P-16 Integration, via the internet.]

DR. WHUNGO: It is nice to hear that you are working hard on your courses and assignments. I am also happy to see that you noticed that there are different learning strategies in different courses. Of course, I am happy to assist you in your assignments.

I can try Zoom. Currently, I do not have access to it, so I would need to set it up. We will find a different time to discuss assignment 3 and other requirement tasks.

LATINA: First, thank you for reaching out to me. I appreciate your acknowledgement of the situation and could possibly see how it might have been a misunderstanding of some sort. I want to assure you that I have all intentions to pass your class, and successfully move on to the next semester. I did take a Quantitative Research course through UTRGV (quite a while ago), where the terminology rather than the application was the biggest focus, and so getting assistance from you would be much appreciated.

I only have about a year or so left, and my dissertation classes are looming ahead, so it is imperative for me to do well. Perhaps, it is quite difficult to get the full picture of the student experience via Blackboard Collaborate. May I suggest that we meet via Zoom to discuss assignment #3, and further discuss this situation, so that it can be left behind us. I feel that this will make me feel more secure in your class and provide for a better professor/student relationship overall. I really want to understand the content and can turn in said assignment, considering the university's supportive redo policy to turn in assignments. I know as you mentioned I will not have problems finishing this course, which is a reason I reach out to you for assistance towards a successful process.

DR. WHUNGO: I believe that we had a misunderstanding. It is possible that the quality of online communications is not as good due to poor internet connection. There were moments where I could not hear you well and may have spoken louder to make sure that you could hear me well. I was respectful during our session and I was active in guiding you through the assignment. I think that you are working very hard and that we had a good discussion. I agree that you have made a lot of progress with this course so far and certainly you have been active in

this class. Furthermore, I don't think that you will have problems finishing this course. I spent extra time with a few students who had questions about assignment #3, and you were one of these students. I understand if you were feeling discouraged, but I think that with your continued hard work, you should be successful in completing this course here and others into the future. If you feel that there are other ways in which I can help you in this course, please let me know.

Interlude/Theme 2: Economic Uncertainty

[Latina is incurring a lot of late charges when paying her household bills and having a lot of financial issues at home. So, she logs into her school account and notices that she is still being charged in district fees. However, she lives out of district and attends school online. She does what she always knows how to do which is to write and use her voice to be heard.]

latinaburns@utrgv.edu to billing@utrgv.edu

Monday, October 22, 2018, 12:05 pm

Subject: Fwd: I am an online 'Out of District' student in need of validation as such...

Hello,

I'm emailing a complaint about the student billing department to include Lisa, because I've been requesting since August with student billing and have spoken to Lisa through emails to try to resolve this issue.

I have other emails of back and forth messages—but this is the one I'm sending my complaint on. I'm hoping to find resolve to the issue in the forwarded messages below. We are now almost November and this issue has not been resolved.

Please help and read the back and forth messages below—I am an out of district student and strongly feel at this point—that I'm getting the run-around.

I'm trying to be refunded the fees that were charged to me since I have been verified by my professor as an out-of-district student. I've lived in Dallas County since 2011. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Latina Burns

FWD:

billing@utrgv.edu to latinaburns@utrgv.edu, cc: srights@utrgv.edu

Monday, October 22nd, 2018, 2:27 pm

SAS-Lisa B. <billing@utrgv.edu> wrote:

Hello Latina,

As explained before, your class for this semester was listed as on campus. For that reason, we must send your request for Distance Learning Exemption for approval. Unfortunately, I do not have access to grant these waivers.

I will forward your email to my supervisor so that she can investigate this delay.

Regards,
Lisa

latinaburns@utrgv.edu to billing@utrgv.edu, cc: srights@utrgv.edu

Monday, October 22nd, 2018, 3:25 pm

Lisa M.,

As can be seen in the emails that were sent, i.e. paper trail—I have done all that was asked of me by you, even contacting my professor to confirm, and you said, and I quote, "We will process the Distance Learning Exemption as soon as possible (date: Sept. 11th)."

Please do not undermine the emails that were forwarded in my complaint to Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR) with your apathetic comments. I am looking for resolve.

Your response today after my sent complaint to SRR "As explained before, your class for this semester was listed as on campus," is ridiculous as that fact was already established when I asked my professor to reach out to you to confirm Out-of-District status.

On Sept. 11th you stated—"As of today, this request has not been approved. I will inquire on a status and update you as soon as possible."

At this point, your comments are insulting (SRR please read all forwarded emails on this issue), and escalating the issue—there is no empathy, follow through or immediacy to help students. We are coming up on 3 months with the same issue not resolved.

All messages can be seen, and I did all what was asked of me by you. For once put yourself in the student's shoes, because that is what UTRGV is about "students."

I work, and it's ridiculous that I must go back and forth with you on an issue that you said would be resolved months ago. Do your job and follow through!

I've done my due diligence and followed up and still months later you have not helped me.

Again, this issue has been ongoing for months, and there is still no resolve. So now, yes, I am in my right to file a formal online complaint. I included you out of respect—not for more excuses.

Please let me know again for the fifth time, when I will receive my funds. Thanks!

Regards,
Latina Burns

Figure 10. Emails Between Latina & Billing Office.

Act 2, Continued

NARRATOR: Latina realizes that she is always fighting in her life and it gets her feeling depressed. Why is life so difficult for her?

[Latina passes around her journal writings to her students in her college course. They begin to read the passages in them.]

November 3, 2017- Friday- 6pm. As I get older, I have a lot of things that I want to improve on myself. I say “on” because they’re all mostly cosmetic changes I’d like to accomplish, a sort of way to erase who I am and what others have, so savagely, put me down for. My upper lip sticks out, rather it protrudes and growing up, I always had a problem with how it stuck out, because to me it looks vulgar, like an ape, or sexually perverse in a way. I often think that my facial structure is like that of an ape, or a Neanderthal, especially my profile, and I didn’t see it as a problem until my viciously unrelenting aunts and uncles began to make fun of me for it. Growing up around them, I don’t know why I didn’t take their comments or threats as severe abuse, but they were obviously that, and in retrospect therefore I will always hate them and could care less if they passed. They could very well be the reason why I carry such hate in my heart to this day, and such deep anger. I wonder now were they only that way to me and my 2 half siblings (Michael and Daniel), because they were evil, and that evil would surface and project towards the weakest link—my mother and her brood? Where they that way, because poverty caused them to lash out at the weakest of the bunch, and since my mother was the only one without a husband, and had suffered with instability, and it left her without a man in her life—was she just the punching bag when things went wrong for them. I’ve never seen myself as weak, but to them it was evident that we as a family were.

Although, I’ve never talked to my other cousins about how they were treated—I don’t think they had to endure these types of vicious attacks from our aunts and uncles, because they had a father to keep them safe, to forge some type of stability, if you could call stability in poverty a reality. From very early on, my family dynamic, not having a father, and having two

half-brothers, who also didn't know their fathers, left a stigma on who we were within that evil Gonzalez family. My mom, and my two younger half-brothers were targets to my extended family's lashings out when things were just too much to handle in Poor-ville.

In fact, my aunt Laura told me, right before I headed to boot camp, that my mother had been raped and that I might be a product of that. This year... after all these years of me never forgetting that, I asked her again about that story and she “conveniently” said... “I believe she was raped, but you were not a product from that rape.” These Gonzalez women don't know the pain their ignorance and lack of empathy causes others. At the time I really didn't think that was her story to tell—especially when years later she'd change it again.

Before I left to Great Lakes, Illinois to begin boot camp back in May of 2000, my aunt Laura and I had traveled into Matamoros and she'd parked her car on some street in some ‘*colonia*’. Laura said she remembered my mother requesting to be dropped off at a house my ‘supposed’ father was living at with his aunt. My father was originally from Ciudad Victoria in the State of Tamaulipas located in Northeast Mexico. If indeed Manuel Guillen is my father, I have never met him, and he doesn't even know I exist. So, at 19 years old with my future military life calling my name—since I'd already signed, I think my aunt wanted to throw me a bone as I moved on to the next chapter of my life and see if we could find this elusive “Manuel Guillen.”

Interlude/Theme 3: Military Hope

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Then again it never really is. You wake up one morning, you look around and realize the poverty that is your life, living in a single parent home, alongside two younger half-brothers, roaches and misery, because no one has money to help uplift anyone else, are the things that nightmares are made of. Still, you are a Latina, only 18 years of age, trying to get by in college and in life, realizing you're horribly failing at both. Little do you know at this point that these types of statistics are commonplace for people like yourself. So, what do you do?

You look around, you cry, you break down, and you call a military recruiting agency, because maybe they can help save you...
or at the very least visiting them would give you something to do on a Friday, an existential release, i.e., a temporary bandage over your marginalized reality.
By now the clock is ticking, you've come of age; the time has come to react, to take control of the reigns that someone else held control over for so long.
As your tears flow, you realize you're trying to solve a puzzle, collecting pieces to determine how to escape this labyrinth, all the while fighting between the self, and what society values. Is there ever truly a way out?

Figure 11. Facebook Post, September 14, 2017.

Journal Entry. Tuesday, October 3, 2017. I feel that I stopped maturing after high school, but others wouldn't know that exactly. You see, I'm pursuing a doctoral degree and well, that wouldn't make sense. Right? In fact, the last time I felt to be my most "present-self" was at the age of eighteen. After that I sort of lost something in me. Joining the military at 19 years of age probably didn't help either. At that moment when I was coming into adulthood. I signed the papers (and basically, gave my life over to a "greater cause") as I became government property and was forced to take on a new identity. It would be that change that would shift the entire course of my life, and in turn write the next chapter of my life. It was at that vulnerable moment, having come from extreme poverty and a disjointed family upbringing—having never met my father and he never even knowing I existed (as the story goes) would push me further away from maturing fully. I held a lot of disdain from what I thought was an inept mother, and I began to rot from the inside, because I didn't get a chance to be "normal." I missed out on a lot of the things that all children need in order to grow sound and well rounded. I remember like it was yesterday though... like a bad omen, being a little girl in Mrs. Garza's elementary choir—singing... "If you are pessimistic, leave out the door." As instructed, our little index fingers pointed towards the cafeteria exit, as parents and staff members alike enjoyed our structured performance. For some reason, those words stayed in my brain... they say emotion, tied to schooling leads to

remembrance. Boy, do I remember singing that exact phrase; I should've been pointing at myself... those words would forever serve to haunt me.

Act 2, Continued/Theme 4: Veteran of War. Residual Casualty, Disability

LATINA: I am a 2nd generation Latina of Mexican/American descent. My last name now is Burns, but before marriage I was a Gonzalez, which will forever be a reminder of my roots and *cultura*. I am 37 years of age and a veteran of war, having served in the United States Navy during Post-9/11 OEF and OIF. I am a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister, a teacher, and a student.

Yes, I joined the military to defend my country, but mostly to escape the poverty that was my life at that time. The black pit of hopelessness was with me when I went to San Antonio, Texas to the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) for the first time but did not sign. The trip back home was uncomfortable with a noticeably upset recruitment officer driving newly enlisted Navy men, and myself—still a civilian back to Brownsville. Upon my return, it only took a day to look around our temporary living space, the black and white TV housed on the floor, those old blankets that were our makeshift curtains, and to look at my mother's helpless face once more all helped me to realize it was now or never. It was never my dream to sign my life away for others to make do with it as they pleased. However, like the play I had starred in during 6th grade *The Pirates of Penzance*, I'd be Frederic—born in leap year—tied to a ship to ride out my debt and be used. In turn, I could hopefully escape poverty, or trade it for opportunity—for hope. Those days in my life are bittersweet—if only school had provided me with more resources to be better equipped to excel and to thrive when poor. Or maybe the school system did know my destiny; my senior year in high school military recruitment officers were

allowed into our Title 1 campus. The military had never once crossed my mind as a child or as an adolescent—that is until the month I joined.

Journal Entry. Saturday, October 27, 2018. What's wrong with me? Why is everything in my life becoming more difficult? I'm aging badly lately I see it in my face. My joints are really hurting, and I have a foggy brain. Recently I began to feel tingling in my extremities and insomnia has taken over my life. I'm getting scared... what's happening to me?

Act 2, Continued/Theme 5: Losing my Religion/Marriage Hell

Journal Entry. Thursday, October 12, 2017. I couldn't wait to leave work and go home to organize my house. Most days that's all I ever think of... but then the time comes, and I finally get home and that's no longer a priority, because everything just seems too overwhelming to even know where to start. Katie's piano teacher, Grace, texted me some bible scriptures reminding me why I shouldn't give my husband a second chance. Oh, yes, I need these reminders time and again because when life gets hard in my separated state, I tend to think that somehow bringing him back will fix things right up. How strange how quickly I conveniently forget how horrible things were when he was here.

Journal Entry. Friday, October 5, 2018. Almost to Seguin, Texas, to meet a family Hunter has never known. Through Katie's DNA, I helped him find his father's family and I'm glad he will now have closure. It's been 37 years in the making for this man, and for anyone who has never met their father—because their father never knew they existed... it's a tough situation to live with. As for me, I've never met my own father either, so I can empathize with Hunter. And even though Hunter's father passed away, there is still family to meet. I've got to be here for him in this life altering moment, because it also affects my daughters.

Life is too short to hold on to anger, pain and to allow ego to get the best of you. It's a bittersweet day, because Gregory Barker (Hunter's father) passed from a massive heart attack in 2009 (about nine years ago), and even though he will never know he bore a son—his father's family will soon meet Gregory's boy. A shift will now open in Hunter's life and hopefully make him understand this concept of the importance of family, which could benefit my children and me. It's been difficult to live with an alcoholic who only thinks of himself. Today, he will finally meet his grandmother (unfortunately his grandfather James passed this summer). He will meet his aunts, uncles, and a cousin. Perhaps this could make Hunter finally see where he is lacking as the man and father figure in our home. Our girls are in the car excited that they will finally get to meet their great grandmother, and other family members. Did I mention they have horses and a farm? Sweet. Hunter declares that he will be changing his last name to Barker. This is a blessing and a clear affirmation that God takes care of his children no matter what. Really, it's a bittersweet day for us all. As God's children, he will always provide those opportunities to make us whole. Congratulations, Hunter Burns and the Barker troop; you have found each other!

Journal Entry. Monday, October 22, 2018. I'm not in the military anymore—yet I expect civilian people to have respect and treat me with dignity. I expect them to get things done and follow through—but each time I expect something to happen it doesn't happen. Being out of the military, at least for me—has been difficult to adjust to. It's like trying to fit a square peg into a circular cut out—not going to happen.

Journal Entry. Thursday, October 25, 2018. I found his family and he won't even clean my fucking car! Worthless.

Journal Entry. Friday, October 26, 2018. This month my check is a lot. It will contain my last curriculum writing pay... together with my regular base pay I should make about \$5,600.

Then, at the end of the month my husband gets paid too. He half quit his day job and now works moving furniture with Bellhops full time... it's like the Uber of moving furniture. There are so many things I want to write here, but that would make me too vulnerable. I wonder how much in an autoethnography is too much. Maybe I'll just stop here for tonight... this process is so overwhelming.

Act 2, Continued/Theme 6: Teaching to Make a Way

Journal Entry. Friday, October 12, 2018. So yesterday I lost one of my jobs. I am a curriculum writer for the district, and I'd been doing that for three years now. Suddenly, the school district decides to implement a new curriculum and do away with the old one. I was asked to join the new team with an old colleague of mine as the head person in charge. While in the new team I experienced many ups and downs. Some teachers quit, others felt they were pushed to resign, others stayed on and tried to conquer the momentous feat of trying to provide a curriculum with the 'understanding by design' model. Just another fad curriculum like all the rest that come and go I presume. But basically, it feels like we are teaching for the test. We look at the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and this is how it works:

1. Our Scope and Sequence curricular mapping is dictated by the amount of questions per the TEKS standards that will be on the State of Texas Academic Achievement and Readiness (STAAR) exam. We look at what TEKS are the ones that have the higher amount of questions on the STAAR exam and based off that information we build our curriculum with 'the end in mind.' Then, we strategize what types of questions might be asked on the STAAR examination, and from that we decide what specific essential TEKS will be placed into the curriculum map per each six weeks. We join our selected essential TEKS with those that support them in order to create our lessons—focusing on the verbs used within the standards. We look at how those verbs

are ranked in the new Bloom's taxonomy, so that we can effectively teach it to our students and use that to guide our lessons. In addition, we make sure to look at the vertical alignment between 6th, 7th and 8th grade, to ensure we are building on our student's schema. We determine the vertical connections from prior, current and future grade level TEKS. We look at the process TEKS, as well as the ELPS to ensure that our English Language Learners (ELL) students are being supported throughout the curriculum as well.

2. If the map incorporates the use of instructional technology or interactive technology to enhance learning outcomes. Our curricular map incorporates the use of instructional technology as a resource, but not the end all to the lesson; in other words, it's a means to our overall aim. We make sure to make 'suggestions' for teachers to use certain technology applications throughout our learning framework model. We have recently made a huge push for using Google Classroom in each classroom, especially since our schools are not 1:1 with technology—but that will soon change. Google Classroom has been a great way to continue teaching our students within a blended classroom model, and it has really enhanced learning outcomes.

3. Strengths (what is working well). I believe what is working well for us, is that our Scope and Sequence is based on ensuring that all the essential TEKS are being taught by priority basis. Although we do teach all TEKS, we spiral them in as appropriate with certain TEKS having priority over others. Although, it is important to us to introduce, teach and have our students master the most important essential TEKS that they are going to be tested on the most for STAAR, we make sure to enrich our lessons with those that support our essential ones. Although this may sound like teaching to the test, it really ensures that students are not being left behind, and that we are preparing them for what is expected of them.

4. Gaps in the curriculum. The gaps in the learning are more situational depending on how the curriculum itself is written by the curriculum writers. If the curriculum writers are not able to make effective lessons and ensure that all students are being targeted within their learning experiences—via our learning framework model, then that can lead to gaps in the learning. The way that the curriculum is planned out is crucial to closing gaps in the curriculum.

5. Areas for needed refinement. Some areas for needed refinement is ensuring that the teachers are going back and revisiting the TEKS that students have not mastered through the curriculum. We need to implement more time for students to be retaught and reassessed. Also, we need to really focus on effectively scaffolding the TEKS into the curriculum.

I defined each part of what we must do, which makes sense—but what are we telling our students is important in life? They work so hard throughout the academic school year just to be gauged by a test.

Ugh, I have a hard time with this lately.

Especially now that I lost my side job with the school district as a curriculum writer, because I myself just didn't cut it.

I feel like things are beginning to unravel. I was able to complete my work on time, by the deadline—but it wasn't enough for the person in charge.

I put many things aside to ensure that I completed the curriculum as they wanted it—with fidelity, but in the end, it proved to be too much. I let other things go because too many responsibilities were on my plate. Yet still I wasn't a quitter.

When the curriculum project supervisor emailed me and told me she'd be replacing me—I felt it was coming because the person that was cc'd in the email was my friend and she began to be distant. Which of course is not a friend. It's an illusion in this dog-eat-dog world.

Unfortunately, this feels like another abuse to my spirit, as my replacement looked more like her than me...

All I could respond to her was:

Latina to Jenny
cc: fake@middleschool.edu
Monday, November 12, 2018 5:37 PM

Subject: RE: Curriculum

Jenny,
I appreciate the opportunity to have served in our ELAR curriculum team. Thank you for that opportunity; have a good day.

Respectfully,
Latina Burns

Figure 12. Email to Curriculum Project Supervisor.

So, it's finally kicking in that losing this job will cost me an additional \$1,500 every other month—before taxes. That was a good chunk of change to go out and spend on stupidities. I don't save money... never have. What is wrong with me?

LATINA: My principal came in today. He is a nice man with a wonderful spirit. But he could tell that something was off. He walked around the room and looked at student notebooks—as proof we were working and that we had done 'genuinely' good work. My learning target was on the board as it should be. My students were actively engaged working on Achieve 3000 (a program that helps to improve student literacy). But since I teach 6th, 7th, and 8th grade—all my learning targets are different for the day, and that is how it's supposed to be by design—which drives me bonkers! This year requires just too much work. With someone struggling with physical and mental illness I feel that every new thing that I must do is like running a marathon—difficult and unwanted. But I understand that this is what I must do. It hurts my soul profoundly to know that I

am trying to keep up with it all and have noticed that it's getting more challenging, almost impossible to do it all. Unfortunately, things are starting to crack. Still I try.

I began to cry; I couldn't help it the tears rolled out. My principal looked at me with a perplexity I can't quite describe, and as I type this I begin to cry again. It just hits me like a ton of bricks, and I can't control the raw emotion—I CAN'T DO IT ALL! I told him—you know I'm not doing curriculum writing anymore. He said, "Yes, I believe you told me." But I know someone had already told him. So, this means—it's true, word gets around fast. I was just dismissed yesterday, and my principal already knows. I began to give him an explanation and ended with... "It's just too much—and perhaps now I can focus more on my dissertation and getting my doctorate."

I could see he felt concerned for me, like he genuinely cares about his teachers and didn't want me to feel bad. He said— "You're an amazing teacher, we all know you work hard. What I'm focusing on is that the students are engaged and that we're following the new curriculum." He said he noticed that I only had Achieve 3000 scheduled for my 6th graders for that day. I explained to him that we are behind because as he knows I teach students that are new to the country and many of which do not know how to speak, read or write in English. In fact, just yesterday I got a student from Iran who speaks Arabic. The gig is hard. But I could do it—just need some flexibility.

My principal said— 'Don't worry; you will catch up. It is important to me that the students understand the concepts. Hopefully, if you know those expectations you don't have to worry so much about the pacing guide. You're doing fine and hopefully, that is a weight lifted off your shoulder.' Reality sets in—I wish I hadn't cried in front of him. I hate feeling vulnerable in front of people, but lately it seems that that's all I do. I'm a mess.

However, in retrospect, I do feel better now. It's great to know that I can now solely focus on my dissertation writing and logging in my journal. I am slowly learning that we can't do it all. I already saw the frays when my daughter's teachers were emailing me that she was failing and wasn't attending tutoring—yet here I was being duped even by my own daughter, a 6th grader that she was not taking the bus, because she was supposedly attending tutoring. At first, I particularly disliked her math teacher, but then ended up finding out the whole school did not have my daughter's best interest at heart. So, I knew I had to put everything in the backburner and begin to focus on Katie and her success. My dissertation timeline was being pushed back yet again; however, since then, my daughter has been able to pick up her grades in all other contents—except math. I don't want her to avoid going to math class because she thinks her teacher is mean to her. I wrote an email as follows:

From Latina to Mr. Pseudonym
Friday, October 19, 11:25 AM
Subject: Daughter

Mr. Pseudonym,

For some reason—Ms. Inconsiderate did not cc—me in the email that my husband sent both of us. So, my husband forwarded me the email—which does not streamline the process, as I also need to know what the response is as it was cc-ed to me as well.

Now, as parents our concern is that we have been under the impression that Katie has been staying after school for tutoring—because I myself have had to stay at work longer to be able to pick her up at 5 pm. Again, having spoken to Katie—my husband and I sense a **STRONG** 'hesitation from her to attend Ms. Inconsiderate's tutoring.'

I am a teacher and am currently at work—my husband and I are requesting that he meet with Ms. Inconsiderate, the dean of instruction and Mrs. Belum—because this is now getting out of hand. Katie has been able to pick up all her grades in every class—except math.

My concern is that Katie is not being positively motivated in Ms. Inconsiderate's classroom. Katie has spoken about the class being rushed and not enough time to ask questions. According to my daughter, Ms. Inconsiderate's tone is harsh specifically towards her and unprofessional. When Katie asked to go to the restroom one day—she told Katie (paraphrased) 'You can go—but we will not stop for you.' Ms. Inconsiderate said this in front of the entire class. Katie doesn't

need to be ridiculed in front of her other peers in this way, because that will further make her uncomfortable in her classroom. Among the fact that Ms. Inconsiderate has spoken to Katie rather harshly as has been documented in our emails when Katie told her she'd be attending tutoring and Ms. Inconsiderate replied and I paraphrase— “With the way your grades are going you need to be in tutoring every day,” and when Ms. Inconsiderate made it her mission to go and tell Katie she would not be able to participate in her theater strand because she was failing, Katie sensed a tone of happiness to deliver such news—especially since I'm not sure why she was the one to go and tell her that in the first place. The tone was harsh, and in my opinion as an educator not one that reassures the student that the teacher is willing to help, or that she even cares about the student's success. The way Katie took it is now obvious, because she tries to avoid Ms. Inconsiderate at all cost. I do not want Ms. Inconsiderate coming after my daughter, because these are all our parental insights into why Katie may not want to attend math tutoring at this point.

This is a huge issue for me, because every day I pick up Katie between 5-5:30 pm because she is tutoring with her various 6th grade teachers. As I mentioned before, I do not want her to dislike/hate math, because once you do not like a subject it is difficult to get the student back. The last email that Ms. Inconsiderate sent my husband (the one I was deliberately not cc-ed in) was rather condescending in saying, "I cannot predict what she will make on that assessment, so it is impossible for me to say whether she will pass this 1st nine weeks. Any average in the 70's could go either way depending on the outcome of her assessment." No empathy. No help at all. For students that are struggling with math—what hope does waiting to add a major exam at the end that could possibly fail her bring to a student. If Katie has only attended Ms. Inconsiderate's tutoring only on October 4th (as Ms. Inconsiderate verified), and she knew our expectations, and Katie's grades were of concern—then why did Ms. Inconsiderate not contact us to let us know that Katie was avoiding her math tutoring?

Ms. Inconsiderate went on to say that “The next 9 weeks is the hardest in math due to all concepts will be new to the student.” The implication to us as parents is that she does not inherently believe that all students can learn. There has not been one positive thing that I have heard from this teacher, about my daughter—which gives me insight into how Katie might be feeling in her presence.

My husband and I are requesting a meeting with Mrs. Inconsiderate today, the dean of instruction and Ms. Principal to discuss this issue. Again, my husband will be the one in attendance, because I am at work.

We've been doing our part to get Katie where she is now, but Ms. Inconsiderate's class is our concern for the issues mentioned above.

Please let us know what time Katie's father—Hunter Burns can come to meet with you today and all requested parties.

Thank you.

Respectfully,
Latina ABD, M. Ed.

Figure 13. Email to Mr. Pseudonym (Daughter's Instructional Coordinator).

At that point, it was important to contact the language arts teacher via email.

From Latina to Ms. Kinson
Mon, September 10, 2018, 2:16 PM
Subject: Daughter

Good afternoon Ms. Kinson,

Katie has always scored very high in all her English Language Arts and Reading classes and got close to being commended on last year's Reading STAAR exam. So, I am highly perplexed as to why she is not turning in her assignments and currently has a grade of a 41% in your class—and am wondering if perhaps she's not understanding the content in your class?

Katie knows that this is highly unacceptable. From what I understand there is also time during her 1st period class to catch up on assignments (but you can correct me on this). Her father and I remind her to do her homework and will continue to do so.

Are any of her homework assignments perhaps also accessible through a technology medium like "Google Classroom" where you can invite parents to see student assignments/expectations/deliverables?

I would like her to stay for tutoring with you so that she can receive any assistance that she may need—if she's just not understanding the content... please provide us/and her with your tutoring times for that.

For now, some of her electronic devices will be confiscated on our part. She will only have access to her computer to do homework.

Please know that you can contact us at any time, because our expectation is that she passes each one of her classes. Again, Katie has always been at the top of her class in Reading and Writing... so we expect her to turn this around—it takes a village.

Thank you.
Respectfully,
Mrs. Latina Burns, ABD, M. Ed.

Figure 14. Email to Daughter's Language Arts Teacher.

Then, when I didn't get a response, I wrote back:

From Latina to Ms. Kinson
Tuesday, September 18, 2018, 3:54 PM
Subject: RE: Daughter

Hello Ms. Kinson,

Hope you're having a great day. I have not received a response to the email I sent September 11th, 2018. Could you please respond? I had several questions on there that were of importance. Also, how is Katie doing now? Thank you in advance.

Respectfully,
Ms. Latina Burns, ABD, M. Ed.

Figure 15. Email to Daughter's Language Arts Teacher.

Then, I got mad.

From Latina to Ms. Principal, Ms. Kinson
cc: wayward38dbb@gmail.com

Tuesday, September 18, 2018, 4:15 PM
Subject: Daughter Katie

Hello Ms. Julie Principal,

Hope you're having a great day. I am the parent of 6th grade student Katie. I have sent various emails requesting assistance from Ms. Kinson (as can be seen below) and have not heard back regarding assistance/clarification due to vague or non-response on her part. At this point, I have already had Katie attend tutoring but had some other pressing questions left for Ms. Kinson to answer. As you can understand as a parent to a new student at your campus, I really want my daughter to be successful. From the parent orientation I attended there at your school—I assumed that parent/teacher communication would be important. Instead of answering my last two emails—where I had to reinforce the importance of her response to my academic questions/concerns (because I want to make sure my daughter passes her class with high marks)—today she sends me an email that my daughter sent her where my daughter is asking about an assignment she is unsure needs to be turned in. I'm pretty upset over this at this point, because I now, after having received no response, feel this to be a passive aggressive move on Ms. Kinson's part. I am still left with no answers to the last two emails I sent her below. I was holding out hope this teacher would be professional and respond, but instead I get a forwarded email of my daughter's question to her and have not received responses to my emails with academic questions/concerns that I sent back on September 11th and September 16th. As you know we are now September 18th and I do not want my daughter to fail. I cc-ed Katie's father in this email as well. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Mrs. Latina Burns, ABD, M. Ed.

Figure 16. Email to Daughter's Principal and Language Arts Teacher.

In response, the principal herself wrote a passive aggressive email letting me know “all her teachers are amazing!”

END SCENE.

LATINA: As you can see, I’ve been busy. Life comes... apparently, I’m the nucleus of this family, and the responsibility is becoming difficult for me. Especially with my health conditions—topped off with the increasing needs of my family. I’ve recently had to go to many Veteran Association (VA) medical appointments, and I find out I have fibromyalgia. I knew I had tingling in my extremities. The doctor said I don't have rheumatoid which is what I thought I had at first. Instead I was diagnosed with fibromyalgia and neuropathy. My eyes are also starting to get blurry. What is happening to me? How can I do it all?

You know I’ve found out that when your health is failing you, the motivation to do anything goes with it too. My doctor told me that my fibromyalgia is related to my PTSD and due to lack of sleep—apparently, it’s a psychological disorder too. I tell my husband that I don’t want to let anyone down, but it’s difficult to do it all—especially with only a few hours of sleep each night. This is my biggest struggle. Life gets in the way, but I must keep going, and I do.

END OF SCREENPLAY

Analyzing the Final Screenplay

Character Analysis

Latina: She is finding out what society thinks about her in her life experiences, and it is not an easy thing to understand. She has lived a difficult life and it seems that it is only getting worse. She must figure out a way to hold it all together amid adversity and still reach to achieve a doctoral degree.

Hunter: is a menacing force that seeks to shut down Latina's possibility, such is the case with narcissistic men like him. Latina found his family, but he is ungrateful as always and chooses to appease his wanting of power rather than help his family. He is a very selfish man. He is in a marriage where the roles are reversed, and Latina makes the money.

Latina's Mother: Unmarried, impoverished.

Conclusion: Latina uses her writing skills to help her navigate through the ups and downs of her educational career. She is stuck in a world where she continues to fight to be heard. It wears on her body and mind and appears to have real health risks associated with it.

Setting

I collected journal entries from mostly within my house. I was going through many emotions during this time, mostly negative. Most of the setting of my screenplay is in my house: 1642 Fort Drive, Grand Prairie, Texas 75051. I also was able to log in to my online graduate courses from the comfort of my own home.

Analysis

I was the sole character in this screenplay monologue. I had to adapt to my changing environment, my hardships and all the things that come with reflecting about my life. This was a cathartic experience that I learned would be able to identify flaws in the American education system.

The Show: The screenplay does not actually get performed, but it is the culmination of the three soliloquies that were introduced in the first three chapters to assist in the progression of the plot. The soliloquy was a way to reflect on my innermost thoughts as soliloquies do and understand the components of what I was thinking during the dissertation process to finally arrive to the screenplay. Those reflections allowed me to delve into the dichotomies of being a full-time

mother of two daughters, a wife, and an online doctoral student and examine my thought process to get to reach clarity in this type of writing process.

My screenplay showcased the many identities that I as a Latina experienced in my pursuit of an Ed.D. In the monologue, all the said “identities” appear as near split personalities in a constant struggle to be heard and have a seat at the table.

I began to look at my familial situation, growing up in poverty, as an illness, one I was committed to eradicating and, with that, the passion for performative art grew. Once again, at least for me, the power of education became a subversive force. I didn’t want to live in poverty, and it became clear to me that the schooling system had raised me, and there was a way out through education. Perhaps this is the reason I decided to pursue a doctoral degree and take that five-year long journey of many ups and downs.

I exist in an unforgiving online world.

Indeed,

"Taubman pointed out that for teachers, students often act out the imaginary through transference. Following Feldman (1982) application of Lacan to pedagogy, he suggested that for new teachers the student often becomes the Other, or the screen onto which are projected the unconscious emotions and images whose origin is the initial relationship with the one in whose gaze they became teachers." (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 479)

A curricular trend seen in education is one which values certain pedagogies over others and then allows them to come into the classroom environment through the aims, processes, and selections of what the powers-that-be have set in place, which changes with time.

Even though I was fed up with my ‘situation’... I stayed. I realized there was power behind the multiplicity and fluidity of my identities. I would negotiate what I wanted from each

course, and through each course I could try to make my online professor truly see me. I decided early on that I would stay and fight, but at what price?

Curricular opportunities in education are often dictated by economic advances, attitudes and societal norms that predicate how educational structures will take shape, and that can help engage marginalized groups to go beyond preset limits.

Fields develop over time and specific ideas develop about what constitutes the appropriate ideas, and the appropriate problems for students of the field to study. Traditions develop, including conventional notions of what ideas are important, which problems theoretical and practical, are worth working on. (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman, 1995, p. 4)

Moreover,

The curriculum as the realization of philosophy, the development of aims and processes, and the selection of worthwhile knowledge is an expression of educational policy, and is directly interlinked with the state, the political and normative composition of the educational system. In this case, curricula have been used as a means of social, economic, cultural control and development, and as a mechanism for the reproduction and generation of norms and ideologies. (Koutselini, 1997, p. 87-88)

Therefore, government educational policy will inevitably shift curricular aims, and means affecting how society relates to the world, and what will become of that society through predetermined aims we see this through value education. This trend attempts to target interest driven learning by modeling for students how students should act in society through universal beliefs of this idea of moral good. Moreover, there must be validity to what is important to move

a society to greater purpose, shifting this paradigm in time; as aims and perspectives change, society will take on a metamorphosis by the interest driven curriculum. Educators target student interest and teach them what is right and what is wrong through value education initiatives that center around the student. Students will take initiative if their curricular endeavors are focused on interest driven learning, because they will feel that the education is more tailored to their own desires and pursuits of learning.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Going through the process of writing an autoethnographic screenplay proved challenging. I had a responsibility to establish validity, ethics, and the presentation of a said research. It would need to align with the theoretical frameworks I had decided to work with early on, and still deliver a voice of authenticity in the form of a screenplay monologue. It was important to denote Critical Race Theory and how I had managed to show a formidable presence in my schooling to eventually become a teacher and professional within the educational field, and ultimately a researcher in my graduate courses and all the while seeking the highest level of education—the attainment of a doctorate in my field, Curriculum and Instruction, with an emphasis in Educational Technology. During the arduous process, I went through vigorous writing stages of self-doubt, experienced writers block, wasn't quite sure if I should add certain lived experiences in the online arena—even though they had happened. Who might I offend, and who could have the power to stop this dissertation from getting published? But ultimately it was my story to tell. I had to come away with some type of catharsis in the writing—to at least be able to symbolize and metaphorically begin to understand who I was in higher education. I always had the end goal in mind as I sat late nights pondering over what would be significant enough to write about. I was going through a difficult marital relationship and had been dealing with it since our first daughter was born. Unfortunately, things got worse as the years went by, adding to it his

alcoholism, and the consequences of this addiction as they reflected on our family. Through this dissertation process, I began to understand why people do what they do and that empowered me even in my marriage to say— “Enough is enough!” And it worked, and he left, and I found new inspiration and for a moment in time, I began to write again and began to think that I’d finish. That’s how I came to the dissertation writing process... like broken glass—shattered into a million pieces in tears trying to find each piece and seeing if I could in between tears and angst attempt to put it back together. During that time, I lost friends because they saw me in need, and they felt superior to me. I began to align those experiences with what I’d been through not only growing up without a father in a single parent home where you have half-brothers and not much else—but also through the experiences at the collegiate level. It was not until I had gone through this process that I really began to see just how far I’d come, but I still felt negative forces; I steadily began to understand or at least have an inkling as to why those forces were trying to bring me down. Some say that ignorance is bliss, but I say that understanding brings peace. It is that resilient spirit I have come to know that brings me to my feet and keeps me there, even though life is still hard for a woman of color like myself.

I wrote my 3 soliloquies and the eventual screenplay that would speak on the realities that exist within an online classroom environment to try to shed some light as to what happens in these virtual rooms. In this final chapter I focused on how I came to the process itself—that logic of how I came to the revision, editing and the reading of my screenplay. I had to understand all that being a Latina was for me, and how I was seen in certain settings. I had to understand how my perception of how people saw me dictated how I navigated through my online courses. Through this process, I realized it would be important to read my dissertation to someone that was not of my same ethnicity, and I chose Grace, a White 62-year-old family friend. I read parts

of my dissertation to her and if she cried, I knew she was understanding the plight of a Latina. So, with that, I knew I was on the right track. She helped motivate me to continue to write. In addition, I would send a chapter at a time to my dissertation chair and I'd receive feedback to ensure that I'd be able to be coherent and organized in my dissertation. By that point I'd written so much that it was hard to edit and revise anything anymore. I became sick of the process and she'd help me with her clear vision, to weed out things that I couldn't see that I'd already said before. She'd guide the process and still believe in me enough to let me do this thing on my own. This belief in me allowed me the ability to dissect the soliloquies and really see what was important to build a plot with an exposition, rising action, conflicts, climax, falling action and the final denouement. I'd receive her cuts and would be so grateful, because I just couldn't see this dissertation even one more day without feeling sick. I had gotten so far and just couldn't finish it with all that life brings spinning around in my head and not letting up. The inability to complete my work even though I was so close had become a sign of what I was concurrently living through in my life at the time. I was lost and I had to find myself, and she'd ask me in emails and text messages if I was okay, and how were the girls, because by this point, she knew me, and she wanted me to know that she "saw me."

The difficult part of writing an autoethnography is that there is no set way of coming to the research, and by writing various soliloquies, I could build up to the eventual screenplay and give my audience a chance to empathize with my plight as a marginalized human being trying to succeed when the state wants to continue to oppress people like me. Here I am a veteran of war, a doctoral student ravaged from the remnants of having served in the military and almost dying onboard the ship from a medical issue, and how could I make this all happen. Finally, this led to the eventual screenplay and I went into the particulars of how I was able to navigate and

circumvent obstacles in that world. From the feedback that I received from our family friend and my chair, I was able to go back and revise my writings, to turn around and not only make my experiences more coherent, but to actually see something of viable research in the writings and display the importance of those injustices that had taken place. By organizing and revising in this way, I was able to structure and restructure what I was trying to say. The screenplay would eventually tell of my online experience and why it happened the way it did. Attending an online school does not make you free of racism and gendered oppression—if anything, I found it leaves ambiguity and a way to oppress people in ways such as: sending emails denying any wrongdoing, ignoring netiquette and reminding people of color that we are different.

Revisions

I worried that my lived experience was not altruistic enough, that it would bother people who made me feel those experiences either in my personal life or through my college life. I knew that I had to protect people's identity, because I'd have to censor those people that had put me there in the first place. But if I had it in writing and if it was recorded then why couldn't I just use it? After all, these things were said to me, these experiences were in turn mine, there were no mere allegations—I had evidence.

I had to be ethical, so I changed people's names—in fact, giving them strange names at times because I didn't know exactly what name I wanted to use to immortalize them in writing. Still I hope that they would respect the process, and not feel that I was attacking them in any way, but that how I came to this learning experience would be an important research artifact for future generations navigating through similar things as myself.

The Conference

If I would have presented this screenplay at my dissertation defense conference (as a full-on play) it would have had an intense feel. I think a theatrical performance would lead the audience to be empathetic to the protagonist's journey, which in part is important because it can strike up crucial conversations of educational and societal issues that affect students in academia.

I defended my dissertation October 29, 2019 on a Tuesday and that day my life's work was laid out for all 3 committee members to see and question diverse aspects of my dissertation and the process itself.

After I had defended my dissertation and been questioned for hours—the board members respectfully asked me to leave the conference room, as they voted on whether I'd soon be Dr. Burns or not. When I came back into the room, I saw their smiles and for a moment I let myself feel.

I came, I saw, and I conquered—and from that instant I knew I deserved to pass, and it turns out—I had! Everything I had gone through in my life for one moment in time had not all been in vein. One of the committee members on my board later sent an email that made me cry. Her words proved to me that this type of study is important, even if it meant that I'd be exposed. I knew my research would help others and that was the overarching aim for me.

“Dear LATINA,

Thank you. Your dissertation is powerful—we *see* you. We *hear* you.

Your work is significant, not only for Latinas, but for a much broader audience, particularly faculty in higher education.

You share your journey *and* you courageously bring the reader *into* and along with you.

We live storied lives, and your story resonates deeply. It is compelling.

You blend the traditional structure of the dissertation with your creative and unique approach beautifully, compellingly.

I love your metaphor of the patchwork quilt—colorful pieces recycled and stitched together into a work of art that concurrently serves a practical purpose.

Your dissertation is both eloquent and gritty. Illuminating.

I sincerely hope you pursue a faculty position in academe. Your voice is needed; your experience invaluable. We need you, and students need you (Committee Member 3).”

It had all come full circle for me, that little girl who never gave up, who had little—but indeed had a lot to offer. Her life was affirmed. I realized that I had come very far, and that even through the obstacles and injustices of the world... people can always find a way.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Maricela Burns (maricelaburns1980@gmail.com) is a native of Brownsville, Texas, currently living and working in the Dallas area as an English Language Arts and Reading (ELAR)/English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. She has prior experience as an ELAR teacher at Title I schools, has been an English department head, elementary interventionist and has written curricula for middle grades ELAR/ESL programs, as well as being certified as a generalist teacher. Maricela is certified to teach in both Texas and California.

Dr. Burns is a published author, having contributed to *Critical Intersections in Contemporary Curriculum and Pedagogy* (Calderon-Berman, Espinosa-Dulanto, & Jewett, 2018). She has presented her research on curriculum at Louisiana State University (2013) and St. John's University (2017).

Prior to beginning her career in education, Dr. Burns served in the United States Navy from 2000 to 2004, including during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Dr. Burns earned an Associate of Language Arts in 2006, a Bachelor of Arts in Language Arts—English in 2010, and a Master of Education in Educational Technology in 2014, all from the University of Texas at Brownsville. The culmination of her academic career came with her earning a Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Education Technology from the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2019.