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An Unspoken Story of Education: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Racism in Education

By

Elisa A. Perez-Garcia

A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

In

Communication Studies

Minnesota State University, Mankato.

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An Unspoken Story of Education: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Racism in Education

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	i
Abstract.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Purpose of Study.....	5
Review of Literature.....	5
Methods.....	16
The Unspoken Stories.....	19
Data Analysis.....	29
Results.....	29
Theme 1: Intersectionality.....	29
Theme 2: Privilege.....	33
Theme 3: Social Construction.....	38
Theme 4: Microaggression.....	43
Discussion.....	47
Directions for the Future.....	47
Implications.....	48
Limitations of the Study.....	51
Conclusion.....	52
References.....	53

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Abstract

Privilege is when one voice is the norm, but some children's voices are underheard within research. Extensive research has demonstrated that Hispanic face multiple barriers within the education system. This study examines how whiteness within the education system can impact a Hispanic student's perspective of the world. An autoethnographic approach is used to analyze five stories. A grounded theory approach identified emergent themes from the stories shared. The four themes that emerged among the stories were intersectionality, privilege, social construct, and microaggression. It demonstrated minority students' experiences and interactions could profoundly affect how they view their identity. There are measures educators can take to create an inclusive space for students.

Keywords: Education, autoethnography, microaggressions, intersectionality, whiteness

An Unspoken Story of Education: An Autoethnographic Exploration of Racism in Education

“Perhaps it’s just easier to smile and pretend everything is fine, rather than admit my heart’s a little swollen from experiencing race through the hallways of this school.”

My notebooks were the only place I felt safe pouring out my thoughts out without judging. From a young age, I [we] was [are] taught to only see the difference between students based upon their gender – what does it mean to be a boy and what does it mean to be a girl. As I grew older, I realized that gender was not the only thing that separated me from other students in my school; I felt the difference of my race. I noticed that there were people who did not like Hispanics. Hispanics were/are stereotyped as "bad people," and it felt as though all Hispanics are lumped into that category. There might be some Hispanics who made poor choices, these actions should not reflect upon the entire race. I just wanted people to see that I was different! I wasn’t going to drop out of school, get pregnant as a teenager, or fall into the negative stereotypes Hispanics are labeled in my hometown.

The negativity associated with being non-white, or different was due to systematic racism built into our education system. While I understood it felt bad to be labeled and lumped into negative categories based upon my race, my classmates did not understand that prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes infused within everyday interactions, often in subtle ways, left an impact on me and other Hispanic children in our school. Furthermore, it was not simply the individual acts of meanness I faced from my classmates that impacted my sense of self. The institutional practice of placing children who don’t speak English as a primary language automatically into English Language Learners (ELL) class also marked me as different – and not in a positive way.

I was only five years old when placed within the program. When the rest of my classmates had language arts, the teacher directed a couple of students to the door. It was a signal for those students to go to a different classroom. The classroom appeared as any other classroom in the building. Unlike other classrooms, this classroom is dedicated to language art. It wasn't until the third grade I noticed that people aren't always treated the same.

“Wait, why aren't I allowed to stay in the classroom with the rest of my classmates for language arts?”

I recognized the language arts curriculum for the ELL students wasn't the same as the material the rest of my peers received. Their spelling words appeared to be more challenging and reading at a higher level than most students within the program. I confronted the ELL teacher with the question: why are the ELL students not taught the same curriculum as my peers? The teacher gave me a puzzled look and pulled out a workbook titled spelling words for third graders. The response made me furious knowing that there was a difference between the curriculum taught in the classrooms. It was the turning point for me, I decided to work my hardest to prove capable of being taught the same things as other kids my age.

By the sixth grade, I was the only one in my ELL class that received straight A's on any assignment and test. The past few years, I proved to my parents capable of being placed with the rest of my classmates. A meeting was set up to complete the paperwork to release me from the ELL program. During the meeting, the ELL teacher was hesitant about the decision made by my family to remove me from the program, but it only fueled a fire in me to prove them wrong. The transition was difficult for me; it required a lot of late nights studying language art. It felt as if I was running in place to try to catch up to the rest of my classmates. Unlike other races, this race was going to be never ending trying to catch up.

By the time children are in middle school, they begin to recognize race. Children find themselves in a place where they want to be accepted by the popular kids. Unfortunately, these kids were the ones that would hurt me the most. They would make fun of Hispanics, crack jokes about immigrants crossing the border, and other horrible comments. When racist comments were made, I laughed along with them. I knew if I said anything, they would never let me into their friend group. Sadly, other children share similar experiences in school.

The year 2016 had been something my class anticipated to come; it meant the end of a chapter. It was the year we were going to graduate from high school. Many of my classmates had plans to embark on a new journey at college. Others planned to enroll in the military, and some decided to enter the workforce. There were mixed emotions; some were ready to get out of high school and see more of the world besides our little hometown. A few were nervous about what life had in store for them in the next chapter of their lives. Outside of our bubble, there was something big happening too.

It marked a significant year in history too. It was a presidential election year. The nation watched as candidates went head-to-head at debates to gain the votes of Americans. It created a divide among the nation; one of the political candidates expressed homophobia and racist comments on their campaign tour. There were people from my classmates, members of my community, or someone I saw on a regular basis who agreed with the candidate's comments. I didn't expect this from our country. I decided to take matters into my own hands and do my civil duty to vote on election day. It was my first time participating in a presidential election. I felt confident in my ballot and knew the candidate would win.

When I watched the results come in was scary. My heart was racing. The next morning, I woke up to the news that Trump had won - it crushed my heart. There was a chance families

could be torn apart, the LGBTQ community get oppressed through policies, or see a wall get built to stop immigrants from coming to the country. Felt as if the nation had taken a step back in history. In my lifetime, I witnessed our first African American President, the first Hispanic woman on the Supreme Court, and the LBGT community receiving the right to legally get married.

My entire life, I had kept a secret from the world. When asked about my parent's legal status, I responded by saying they have a visa or avoid the question. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but this didn't seem fair.

My parents came to the United States with a visa. They weren't criminals; for me, they are the ones that will always have my back no matter what happens. When I have a bad day and needed to cry, they were there to make me feel better. Or when I receive an award, they are the ones in the audience who clap the loudest when my name was announced. In a blink of an eye, I could no longer have them by my side. It is a scary thought that one day would arrive from school and they wouldn't be there anymore.

Both my brother and I are young adults, but we still need our parents here. For any individual asked to take the role of being an independent adult can come with challenges. It requires one to take on the responsibility of working, being a full-time school, health coverage, and on top of that paying bills. My parents would miss out on all our milestones. Unfortunately, not everyone understands the perspective of a first-generation immigrant. The outside world assumes they are bad people. It made it difficult to tell anyone our family secret. Once introduced to the subject of whiteness, I found it easier to share my experience of race allowing me a voice to express the inequalities viewed through my positionality among the world.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to explore my experiences from education that constructed my social world. While other researchers have explored whiteness and black/brownness in the classroom, there is a lack of research reflecting on Hispanic experiences in the system of education. I argue researchers need to better understand the connection between students' experiences in the education system that shape their knowledge. The following research question was posed:

RQ1: How can whiteness within the education system impact a Hispanic student's perspective of the world?

Review of Literature

Parents of children are unaware of the structure of education results in some students falling behind. The student's experiences related to the inequalities among the education are uncertain as a lens, this investigation seeks to shed light on it. In the following section, the literature review will focus on race, race in the classroom, ELL in the classroom, Hispanic students, whiteness, and whiteness in the classroom.

Race

Race is a complex idea embedded within education. One's race can also dictate their basic rights to resources, education, expectations, and privileges (Davis, 2007). Most people associate the term race with the color of one's skin. Allen (2010) states, "race as an aspect of identity based on physiological known as phenotypes" (p. 66). The phenotypes include features such as skin color, hair texture, the structure of eyes, the shape of lips, body type, and facial features. People use one's phenotypes to assign an individual to a racial category (Allen, 2010). However, there is scientific evidence that demonstrates genetically there is nothing that separates

individuals from one another. In 1973, the first exposure evidence that race is not a biological category came from anthropologist George J. Armelagos (Halley et al., 2011). For several years, there were false scientific studies that demonstrated whites are elites to other races. Halley et al. (2011) notes:

Galton like many British and British American elites, believe that people understood to be of other racial groups-including Jews, the Irish, Italians, and people from Africa, Asia, and the Americans -presented a threat to the best, purest, smartest, strongest, and most civilized races – primarily themselves, the British. (p. 36)

The results demonstrated breeding could be systematically managed to ensure the British race is elite from others. Another study published in 1905 by Alfred Binet, a psychologist, measures intelligence levels (Halley et al., 2011). However, the issue with most intelligence tests is they are problematic. The eugenicists viewed intelligence as an inherited characteristic. Halley et al. (2011) state many of the inequalities within society are traced back to racist ideology.

The studies attempted to separate individuals based on the race. Halley et al. (2011) notes, “race exists as a social and political understanding of humans that attempts to assign individuals into distinct groups in a way that systematically benefits some-whites-while limiting opportunities for others-people of color” (p. 7). The concept of race has been socially constructed on a belief white supremacy is at the top of the racial hierarchy.

To this today, race continues to be an important aspect of social identity in the United States. From 1870 to 1933, Native American children were forced to attend boarding school to assimilate with the dominant (Allen, 2010). School administrators changed children’s names, cut their hair, and stripped them from their native tongue. In 1877, Jim Crow treated Blacks as second-class (Allen, 2010). Black children who attended crumbling schools, their teachers were

low-paid and inferior textbooks. Embedded among all these events is racism. The concept of racism can be a conscious or unconscious act. Allen (2010) notes, “racism can arise from individual behaviors, as well as from institutional or cooperative policies” (p. 77). Race is a complex concept embedded in one’s surroundings.

Race in the Classroom

One of the many institutions affected by race is within schools. Children are sometimes discriminated against or picked on due to their race. Davis (2007) notes, “the power dynamics of racism profoundly shape the relationship between races and individual racial identity construction” (p. 209). It leaves an impression on children and constructs their view of the world. A study conducted examined the important roles, schools, teachers, and classrooms have on students developing positive racial identities. Davis (2007) mentions schools function as a laboratory to teach students how to interact with other races. Schools are supposed to be a safe space for all students to have conversations about race without being influenced by stereotypes that exist outside of the classroom. To create a safe place the study recommends teachers need to create an environment that welcomes students to discuss race issues (Davis, 2007). Therefore, it creates a space for teachers and students to learn from each other’s racial identities.

When an instructor is a person of color, it also creates some tension. Mazzei (2011) notes, “they have lived most of their lives in a white world where race has not been part of their own identification of self and where, if race was spoken of in reference to others, was an uncomfortable topic” (p. 659). When people are faced with the subject of race, it makes those individuals who are considered a part of the dominant group uncomfortable. Mazzei (2011) conducted a study to explore how desire functions to produce silence and productively understood. It recognizes if white teachers continue to deny whiteness, they will continue to see

students of color as other (Mazzei, 2011). The same trend is found among white students too. Mazzei (2011) attributed silence to fear. Individual's part of the dominant group fear saying something wrong and possibly offending the marginalized individuals.

However, one must not minimize the subject of racism. Muñoz and Maldonado (2012) state minimizing racism only helps maintain racial inequalities within the United States. Therefore, we must not silence these minority groups. Bell and Golombisky (2004) note, "gender, sex, race, class, and culture not only invite different kinds of performances of voice and silence but also force interpretations of voice and silence differentially" (p. 324). By allowing students a place to share their stories, it will help others learn from them. Doing so will require the classroom to be a space where difference is embraced rather than shut down.

ELL in the Classroom

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) created attention among the growing population of English Language Learners (ELLs) in schools across the nation (Bratt, 2008). The ELL program is a form to disaggregate minority students. Wassell et al. (2017) define ELL students as students in U.S. schools that show a differing level of English proficiency. The school is required to report yearly progress for ELL students. According to Bratt (2008), students must show growth in English proficiency, reading, and math tests to ensure they are taught by highly qualified teachers. Although the program is intended to close the gap between minority students, but it has only created a larger one. Solari et al. (2014) note, "the performance gap between ELL and non-ELL students is significant and persistent nationwide, with particular discrepancies in literacy achievement" (p. 329). Rather than separating students by their race, the education system segregates students using their home language. Children are in the ELL program from early

elementary school and only a small portion are above the proficient on reading assessments (Solari et al., 2014).

NCLB led to another issue for school districts. The schools were accused of failing to provide appropriate language instructions for students to the establish curriculum (Vasquez Heilig & Holme, 2013). Language barriers can make it difficult for the family to be involved to support the student's aspirations. Wassell et al. (2017) note, "the complexity around family involvement has encouraged a gap between rhetoric and reality" (p. 1234). The schools have also neglected to consider students' cultural backgrounds and other factors that impact the family (Wassell et al., 2017). Vasquez Heilig and Holme (2013) indicated ELL students in the state of Texas experience high levels of segregation in schools by race, poverty, and language. Rather than closing the gap, it created segregation between students.

ELL programs receive their funding through federal funding, but it depends on the number of students enrolled. Schools' primary source of funding is received through allocation based on property wealth (Contreras & Fujimoto, 2019). However, it wasn't until *William v. State of California* to help address the disparities in low-income communities. Contreras and Fujimoto (2019) note, "[*William v. State of California*] is considered a landmark case on behalf of low-income, diverse students that raised the status of education as a civil right in the state" (p. 210). Sparks (2011) notes, "Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides grants to states and districts to support programs to help English-learners gain proficiency in the language, as well as to help immigrant students transition into American schools" (para. 3). Students must complete an assessment test made up of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. To receive the funding, the school must follow the rules to qualify for grants. The Education Department is allowed to use census or state data to identify the number of students in the ELL

program (Sparks, 2011). The funding is intended to provide extra resources for those students in need of it.

Hispanic Students

As the United States becomes more diverse, the largest population is Latinos. Jiménez-Castellanos et al. (2019) state, “the 10 states with the largest population increases from 2000 to 2010 have a booming Latinx population” (p. 115). According to American Community Survey (ACS) defined an individual who identifies as Hispanic, or Latino as those whose origin Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, or any other Spanish speaking country (*English learner students who are Hispanic/Latino: fast facts 2 of 2*, 2015). The white population will soon be decreasing, as the nonwhite population will increase significantly. This trend is carried forward within schools too.

Hispanic students are placed into one of two categories when enrolled at school. English learners fall between the ages of 5 to 18, live in a home where English is not the primary language, and report speaking English well (*English learner students who are Hispanic/Latino: fast facts 2 of 2*, 2015). Students placed as English proficient. These students are between the ages of 5 to 18 and report speaking English very well (*English learner students who are Hispanic/Latino: fast facts 2 of 2*, 2015). There are 1.3 million English Learner students enrolled within the state of California, which makes about 22 percent of their students (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2019). The majority of the English Learner students live at or below the poverty level (*English learner students who are Hispanic/Latino: fast facts 2 of 2*, 2015). Based on students’ qualifications they are targeted to receive the appropriate resources to help them succeed in school.

Hispanic students continue to underachieve the education standards; they also are victims of bullying. Although bullying can affect any child, it can carry serious implications for the individual. Hoffman and Daigle (2019) note, “racial and ethnic minorities are at heightened risk for violent victimization” (p. 17). Research demonstrated bully victimization is more prevalent in rural students compared to urban (Hoffman & Daigle, 2019). Individual that are a part of the non-dominant group tend to be victims of bullying. Kim et al. (2021) states race and ethnicity are targets of bullying. There have been multiple studies that demonstrate ethnic differences in bully are inconsistent (Kim et al., 2021). For example, some studies that demonstrate Latino adolescents are frequently physically bullied compared to Whites (Kim et al., 2021). Due to the inconsistent research, it is hard to pinpoint the cause of bully due to a student’s race.

Not all minority students experience a violent form of bullying, but racial jokes fall under the umbrella of bullying. When other peers tell racial jokes or tease someone based on their race, it can affect their view on race. Douglass et al. (2016) notes, “among a diverse group of adolescents, discrimination from peers, but not from adults, was associated with personal views about their ethnic group” (p. 70). Adolescents rely on these stereotypes and generalizations to make sense of the world. Douglass et al. (2016) said adolescents attempt to navigate their identities through relationships with peers and friends. Although teasing is typically found among friends, it can still impact the individual. Research has documented its negative psychological impacts (Douglass et al., 2016). A child who is teased by a peer for being overweight can impact their mental health. It can also lead to loneliness and an increase in bulimia. Douglass et al. (2016) mentions the same incident can occur for peering about an

individual's ethnicity or race. The teasing with close peers can have harmful effects on the individual if they experience consistent discriminatory experiences.

Whiteness

Whiteness is invisible and has created inequalities for members of the non-dominant group. Darity (2008) notes, "whiteness refers to the nature and social impact of white racial identity" (p. 87). A key characteristic of whiteness involves power. Haviland (2008) notes, "whiteness possesses and maintains real power, power that Whites may ignore, resist, or deny" (p. 41). In other words, whiteness is a social construction and embedded within society. The hidden curriculum dates to the 16th century (Halpern, 2018). Wren (1999) states, "the school environment was carefully supervised by teachers and administrators, who expected conformity both in behavior and academics" (p. 594). It's illustrated within different areas of education. The graded reader series taught students good behaviors, punctuality and respect for authority, and other social values (Wren, 1999). In the present day, the hidden curriculum continues to be a part of the curriculum. Chubbuck (2004) states, whiteness can be found among school tracking programs, curriculum students receive, and standardized tests. The implication on students' behavior too. Wren (1999) notes, "a pioneer in the study of the hidden curriculum, reported that valuing successful competition in the working world had an effect on student's skill, beliefs, and attitudes toward work" (p. 595). Whiteness is an inescapable concept in the education system.

Haviland (2008) investigated forms white teachers approach the subject of whiteness in a primarily white-dominated space. The study demonstrated participants used strategies to maintain their power such as, affirming sameness, focus on barriers to multicultural education, and sharing personal information (Haviland, 2008). The hidden was designed for students to follow the rules of behavior. Halpern (2018) notes, "curriculum teaches students rules of

behavior to ensure, above all, obedience and flexibility so that the workforce that is being shaped meets the demands of corporate capitalism” (p. 40). The hidden curriculum is no longer interested in students’ needs but instead serve economic and political interest (Halpern, 2018). Today schools continue to reward and punish students’ behavior. From a young age, students are taught to adapt by observing older students and avoid being punished (Halpern, 2018). When a student doesn’t conform to the rules, they are labeled as problematic or undisciplined. It works the same way when students demonstrate good behavior teachers praise them. The examines students complete assure their compliance with the rules (Halpern, 2018). The hidden curriculum is taught in educational institutions, but students carry those behaviors as they move forward in life.

However, there are strategies when challenging the hidden curriculum. The study of whiteness has allowed scholars to investigate forms to combat racism (Chubbuck, 2004). Society has embedded whiteness in their everyday interaction with institutions. Chubbuck (2004) posed a research question that investigated how unexamined racism affects everyday pedagogy and policy. The findings found participates required a degree of scrutiny, honesty, and accountability to disrupt racism (Chubbuck, 2004). A key concept to disrupt racism requires reflexivity. One must examine their feeling, thoughts, and motives about racism. Haviland (2008) states, the strategies help move towards a critical discussion of one’s implication of whiteness. The education was rooted in the hidden curriculum. Halpern (2018) notes, “it is impossible to reform schools because, by exposing their central myth and beliefs, they would not be able to function as intended” (p. 42). The education has been built on the hidden curriculum and makes it challenging to push back against it.

Whiteness in Education

There are multiple different institutions in which whiteness, but whiteness can affect children at school. In most cases, most people are unaware of the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum has its origins in both cultural reproductions and agreement theories of schooling (Jay, 2003). The term hidden curriculum was originally used to describe the differentiated training students receive at school based on their social (Sulaimani & Gut, 2019). More recently, the definition shifted to focus on the norms, values, and social expectations indirectly communicated to students.

Mossop et al. (2013) note, “hidden curriculum is classically defined as a set of influence that function at the level of organizational structure and culture, which manipulate teachers and learners in the context of both the formal and informal curricula” (p. 135). On the contract, Jackson (1968) defines it differently. Jackson (1968) states, “hidden curriculum includes given messages at school about authority, business, and social rules because it is used as an aid to teach obeying and being coherent with the society” (p. 1112). Arslan and Akbulut (2018) offer a simplistic analogy to understand the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is understood as an iceberg, and the bottom portion is the implicit part (Arslan & Akbulut, 2018). The implicit part refers to the curriculum that expresses attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors communicated to students without intent (Alsubaie, 2015). It results in students being subjected to assimilation, and it’s not part of the formal curriculum.

The hidden curriculum includes values that are transferred to the connection that exists between teacher and student. Jay (2003) argues that “schools provide children of different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they will need to occupy their respective places in a labor force that is stratified by gender, class, and race” (p. 7). School consequently continues

to maintain the hegemony of the dominant group due to their power. The hidden curriculum has been found to impact different aspects. Alsubaie (2015) states different elements can impact teachers, students, society, knowledge, and awareness. Educators are a crucial role in developing education practices. The hidden curriculum can be found in the social structure of the class, the teacher's authority, rules governing the relationship between faculty and students (Martin, 1976). It can also be found in teachers' use of language and other material use to teach students. Martin (1976) states the hidden curriculum can be found in textbooks, audiovisual aid, and tracking system. The hidden curriculum is arbitrary and makes it difficult to identify.

If individuals do not challenge whiteness, it will continue to create inequalities. Sleeter (2017) notes, "policies were not designed to diversify who teaches or to ensure that teachers can form strong pedagogical relationships with students of color" (p. 165). Currently, institutions are designed to oppress members of nondominant groups. Sorrells and Sekimoto (2016) note, "we sometimes feel that the specificities of our experiences as faculty of color are not completely acknowledged" (p. 201). Minority individual experiences are not acknowledged in the dominant group. Another form of oppression within education is a linguist. Carley Rizzuto (2017) investigated the interaction childhood educators had with ELL students. The education system views students who speak a second language as interfering with English. Carley Rizzuto (2017) notes, "teacher education has not supported bilingual language acquisition or English learners" (p. 196). It oppresses bilingual students, rather than encourages student backgrounds. The data collected demonstrated educators should embrace students' experiences (Carley Rizzuto, 2017). It can create a foundation for education.

Methods

In the previous chapter, the literature established a theoretical foundation for concepts for my investigation into how whiteness within the education system can impact a student's perspective of the world. The following chapter outlines my positionality and the methodology used to examine the research question.

Autoethnography

In this study, the definition of autoethnography allows providing the context in which used in the research. The word autoethnography contends a prefix and root word. Farrell et al. (2015) state the prefix auto refers to self, and ethnography means the study of culture. However, autoethnography is not defined using the same definition among scholars' work.

Ellis et al. (2011) notes, "autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (p. 273). On the contrary, Tracy (2013) defines it differently. Tracy (2013) notes, "autoethnography refers to the systematic study, analysis, and narrative description of one's own experiences, interactions, culture, and identity" (p. 30). Both definitions share the similar concept an autoethnography it is used to understand the self. When scholars use autoethnography, it allows them to work within the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm allows scholars to view the world as ordered and cohesive (Littlejohn et al., 2016).

Unlike other methods of qualitative research, autoethnography allows scholars to analyze their personal experiences. Adams et al. (2014) note, "autoethnography is a method that allows us to reconsider how we think, how we do research and maintain relationships, and how we live" (p. 8). An autoethnography are stories about the self through the lens of culture. It allows the researcher to systematically analyze personal experiences and understand cultural experiences

(Bender et al., 2021). An autoethnography approach allows one to have a better understanding of the benefits of the insiders and outsider of the culture (Ellis et al, 2010).

Tracy (2013) explains that there has been some controversy surrounding autoethnography as a method. For example, some have argued that autoethnography should be analytic, while others believe it should be evocative. Furthermore, other scholars argue who is allowed to have a voice. Adam et al. (2014) notes, “how researchers accessed and represented particular groups, especially when the representation had the possibility of cultivating harmful stereotypes” (p. 15). Instead, the stories told can reveal information about societal structures and problems. Other critiques question if the autoethnography will eliminate the truth. BĂIAȘ (2014) states autoethnographer does not look for the truth but reflect on their experiences. It will allow the research to make connections to the cultural systems (BĂIAȘ, 2014). Another concern posed by critics using the autoethnography method answers the research question. Adam et al. (2014) acknowledge autoethnography will not provide answers to all academic or ethical concerns to the research question. However, it does provide an opportunity to contribute knowledge.

Although there are some critiques about the autoethnography method, it does have some benefits. The methodology allows the researcher to write in first person about their experiences (BĂIAȘ, 2014). Autoethnography does have the researcher follow some requirements. BĂIAȘ (2014) notes, “autoethnography requires a researcher to make personal experience meaningful for others, and consequently, say something about cultural experiences and/or motivate cultural change” (p. 29). In other words, autoethnography must explicitly or implicitly relate to cultural systems. The autoethnography approach may not be viewed as a credible method compared to other qualitative methods but allows the researcher to share their life story. BĂIAȘ (2014) states,

“the world cannot be changed, but if you change yourself, only then the world can change by means of your own change” (p. 29). It allows the research to meet in humans (BĂIAȘ, 2014).

Autoethnography: Process

Unlike most qualitative methods, autoethnography requires a unique procedure. Lauricella (2018) notes, “the goal is to produce analytical texts which can have a positive impact on the world in which we live” (p. 66). Anderson (2019) created an activity to help students understand autoethnography. First, students must select a culture to collect research throughout the semester (Anderson, 2019). The information collected allows students to have a context of the culture. Second, students receive an overview of key terms that apply to autoethnography (Anderson, 2019) The autoethnography requires the researcher to go through a reflective process. Lapadat. (2017) states, “autoethnography is reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance, and meaning intersect” (p. 592). At this stage, the researcher is required to remember moments that are significantly impacted their life. Therefore, they can begin the writing stage. Ellis et al. (2010) mention autoethnographies seek to produce a description of personal and interpersonal experience. Autoethnography follows a unique process to collect information to analyze the experiences.

The autoethnography product requires the researcher to provide new information in an ethical form. Lauricella (2018) notes, “autoethnographic studies should also offer care and support as well as producing changing in the world and people” (p. 66). Autoethnography allows the research to move beyond an autobiographical approach to reflexivity. The autoethnography practice provides a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon and theory (Lauricella, 2018). By examining how can whiteness within the education system impact a Hispanic student’s

perspective of the world. I illustrate the complexities in understanding whiteness affect Hispanic students in the education system.

The Unspoken Stories

Autoethnography allows a researcher to analyze lived experiences to understand the culture (Asbury & Kratz, 2018). I have embraced the concept of telling a piece of my story and being vulnerable with the world (Boylorn, 2013). I had to relive these moments when writing these stories, which caused me to shed many tears. These stories were kept from most people in my life to protect my family. However, everyone's stories play a crucial role on view of the world. Boylorn and Orbe (2013) notes, "our stories are instrumental in constructing our identities, and they help inform our interpersonal relationships" (p. 20). The stories shared are moments that shaped my perceptives of the world and identity. Tracy (2013) discusses micro-events of one's life can demonstrate larger societal structures and issues. Autoethnography can unpack valuable information to analyze.

It is also essential to recognize the researcher's internal battle to grapple with the concept of the duality of identity (public and private self). Dual identity is "defined as identification with both one's ethnocultural minority in-group and one's society of residence" (Simon et. al., 2013). There are aspects of one's life they choose to keep private from others; this is considered the private self. The private self is "defined as comprising two levels of undisclosed self" (Asai & Barnlund, 1998). On the contrary, the public self represents the information accessible by individuals and others (Asai & Barnlund, 1998). Boylorn (2013) recognizes the negotiation of the private-public-self versus the public-private-self. Some tensions in the process are central to one's perception of the world (Haynes, 2011). I have chosen three stories to share, yet there are

some details left out to keep some of those people's identities private. Through autoethnography I aim to provide a reflective account and critical evaluation of my stories.

Elisa's Roots

I was born and raised in a small town in Southern Minnesota. The type when asked "*where you are from*" one refers to the closest major city; rather than try to explain where it is found in Minnesota. My small town didn't offer much to do, in the summer most kids spent it at the swimming pool or down at the park to play t-ball. For the older kids there was softball and baseball as extra-curricular activities. Once the school year came around children could part take in flag-football, dance, youth football, basketball, and other after school activities the school hosted. Our small town has three schools, an elementary and high school which are public schools. The average class size is about 25 to 30 students per grade. There was also a small private Catholic school that goes up to the sixth grade. I began to attend school when I was six months old. My mom enrolled in the Family Literacy program to learn English. Family Literacy provides developmental experiences for young children, and their parents are offered instruction in parenting skills. At home, we always spoke Spanish, and at school it was English. It became second nature to switch languages for me.

When my parents first moved into town, much of the population was predominantly white. Slowly over the years, more Hispanics moved into town. By the time I entered kindergarten, I was one of three Latin girls in my class. On top of that, I was one of the few fortune children whose parents were still together. Our school population was about 50 percent Latino/Hispanic and 50 percent white. The same was reflected in my neighborhood that I grew up in; about half identified as white and the other half as Latino. Unlike the student population,

the staff within the district is predominantly white. I never questioned why the teachers did not look like me.

On the contrary, I always looked up to my teachers and respected their work. My mom instilled in my brother and I that education would take us far. The majority of the Hispanic community members worked at a food processing plant. Unfortunately, many of the employees that worked at the factory did not complete high school. My parents were one of the few within the Hispanic community who completed a high school education. They each received certificate like what a trade school would offer; my dad received his as an electrician and my mom as a lab technician. Although my parents had an education, my dad worked two jobs to make ends meet. Once I entered the fourth grade, he quit one of his jobs because of the harmful chemicals; his second job was working at a printing press during the night shift. On the other hand, my mom decided to be a stay-at-home mom. From time to time, she did housekeeping. Their story gave me the motivation to do well in school. It made every award or special recognition extra special when I saw them in the audience clapping for me. The sacrifices made by my parents had paid off.

After high school, I went to a community college nearby to complete my Associate in Arts (AA) degree. Although I wasn't pleased with the decision to attend a community college, I knew financial it was the smart decision. It led me to come across my major, great friendships, and a professor that encouraged share my story with others. After a year and a half, I transferred to a university to pursue my bachelor's degree in Communication Studies and Mass Media. It is where I came across Whiteness and Communication, a course that uncovered the racial disparities among different institutions. Although it was eye-opening to me, there was a part of my that made me upset that I could relate to most of the topics discussed in class. It led me to

take my observation of the world and do research projects to learn more about the field of whiteness.

First-generation

Everyone has a story of how their family came to America. The story may go back many generations in their family because the United States is the land of the free. For many families, they dreamt of the “American dream.” Each family overcame obstacles to provide a better future for their family. Yet, the topic of immigration can be a sensitive topic to discuss.

It is one of those topics you feel like you are walking on eggshells when it comes up.

There is a difference of opinion between everyone. But sometimes, I think we have forgotten; immigrants are what created this nation. After all, the slogan used to describe the United States is “the melting pot.”

Ever since I can remember, I have known the definition of an immigrant. Being from a small rural town in Southern Minnesota, most people had conservative views on the subject. It became a forbidden subject to discuss with people outside my immediate family. My mom didn't want to take any chances based on events that occurred when they first arrived in town. The subject alone is scary, but my parents tried not to have us worry about an adult issue. Yet it still led me to live with anxiety, fear, and uncertainty about the future.

It's sad; my anxiety kept me from enjoying things as much as I should at my age.

Unlike most children my age, they never had to pay attention or worry about laws being passed in Congress regards to immigration. By the third grade, I had a vague understanding of laws related to immigration and the concept of deportation. Being a first-generation immigrant, I continue to live with the fear of what could happen to my family. I have internalized those feelings due to not being allowed to share the topic with my friends.

Yes, I could have talked about my feeling with my parents, but it simply makes the matter worse. Well, maybe not necessarily worse, but my mom especially internalized the stress and fear about the situation. I didn't want her to feel worse about a situation that was out of our hands.

It made me value my parents a little bit more due to the situation we found ourselves in. My mom always reinsured us: if ever is a tomorrow when we are not together to never, they will always be with me.

In 2008, there was an immigration raid in my hometown. I was ten years old; the fear of my parents being deported was taken to the next level. It became hard for me to focus. All I could think of at school was my parents. When I got off the school bus, I was afraid I would come home to no one home. At night when my dad left for work, I had restless nights because all I could think about was my parents. To ease some of the anxiety, my parents decided to come up with a plan. My dad would call us when he entered the building. Although it eased some of the worries, I knew we still had to be careful.

For the time being, my mom had us say our name with a special knock before one was allowed to enter inside. We also had to have to blinds always shut, so it appeared that no one was home. When the raid was over, there were families torn apart. There were children left without a parent(s) due to the immigration raid. I don't think children recognize the privilege about their parent's immigration status. They have never had to live with the fear of not having their parents around for milestone events.

Privilege is not about what one has gone through; it's about what one hasn't had to go through.

Remembering

Isn't it sad when you get hurt so much, you can finally say: "I'm used to it"? Throughout my childhood I learned to brush things off or not show emotions when a comment was made that hurts my feelings. Sadly, this is something that has become a part of my life. Unlike the typically teasing or bullying children experience in school, my was related to my race. By the fourth grade, my peers began to recognize differences. It went beyond the recognition of differences between peers, such as their gender, race, or social class. Classmates began to recognize the special treatment some children received compared to others. For example, there were children who always had a paraprofessional with them who could have traumas in class. But if any of the other students did something similar, one would be sent to the principal's office. We were all humans until race disconnected us, gender separated us, and wealth classified us. It opened my eyes not everyone is treated equally.

But I didn't want to be seen as different.

Most children just want to be accepted by their peers in grade school. They begin to form friend groups. Children feel accepted by their friends. That was not the case for me. My eyes were opened that the world isn't always sunshine and butterflies as they tell us at school. I noticed students were treated differently. All I wanted was to be accepted.

But how is that possible when the color of one's skin is different, when I was in a lower reading level than my peers, and the media portrayed me as the villain?

The teasing began in sixth grade for me. There were kids in my grade that made jokes about immigrants crossing the border or other inappropriate racial jokes. Rather than telling them to quit it or report it to an adult, I just laughed along with them. I never "fit in" with the popular kids, but if I said anything, they would never accept me into their inner circle. There were some

jokes that were easier to brush off, but some of them hit me to the core. I couldn't show them that their jokes hurt my feelings. Instead, I needed to show that could be the bigger person. I never told anyone, including my parents, about it. There were nights when I would wait for everyone to fall asleep at home before I cried about the joke the kids made towards me in bed. The jokes continued until I was in about eighth grade. I got better at just ignoring the things they would say towards me.

It eventually stopped, or at least I believe it stopped. There were kids in my class that would talk behind someone's back, and it was obvious when the individual entered the room their body language gave it away; one was talking about them. I didn't want to waste my energy trying to stand up to these kids. I knew that were people out in the real world that would never accept people me. The comments and jokes just became a part of my life.

I perfected the skill of internalizing everything these kids did to me.

Or at least thought I had perfected the skill. When I think about it's like reopening old wounds.

I hate getting flashbacks from things I do not want to remember.

I look back at pictures of me at the age and know how hard I wanted to be accepted by my peers. Sometimes I question why I never stood up to them. The comments made by my peers made me doubt myself. I would look at myself in the mirror and knew that my appearance didn't fit what was considered "beautiful" by others. They would tease me and call me their "Dora the Explorer."

Let's not forget about the accent!

I even got teased for the way I pronounced "pizza." It got a chuckle out of some people, but it made me doubt my pronunciation.

They drew memories in my mind I can never erase.

They will never have to experience passing firsthand. They will never have to worry about their parents the way I did. They will never have to feel like they must work ten times harder to prove themselves to others.

This is about somethings that happened a long time ago that continue to affect my view of myself today.

I Wish My Teacher Knew

Oh, the dreaded question, “*where are you from?*” I have had this question asked to me a handful of times. In most cases, when asked this question, it is by an acquaintance. There is always an awkward pause before I respond to the question.

Are they wanted me to say where I was born or my nationality? I thought to myself.

No matter the number of times I get asked the question, my response has never changed. I look at them and tell them the name of my hometown. After all, it was the place I consider myself from. However, they are not sanctified with my response and ask me the following question.

No, like, where are you from?

I will once again respond with the same answer as before. They will reframe the question to ask me about my parents’ nationality. Once I have given them the response, they are satisfied with they tend to go on with the rest of their day.

In most cases, I left the question feeling they have now identified myself as my parents’ nationality. But I have never considered myself my parent’s nationality. I have never traveled to their home country outside the country. Little alone, I have never traveled outside the country. As a child, I was always the picky eater of the family. There were some traditional dishes such as tortillas, tacos, and spicy foods that I never liked to eat. In my mind, I always associated

stereotypical things to consider oneself a part of a group. I didn't see myself connecting to their nationality. The only thing that connected me was the language.

Yes, I realize there is more that connects someone to their ethnicity than what society has socially constructed. But most of my life always tried to separate myself from the minority group. It was a reality check that others were always going to place me into a box.

Unlike the previous time, when acquaintances asked the question, it was easy to brush off. However, when asked by a teacher, it impacts the student. If a student is at the top of their class, they are offered the opportunity to enroll in College Now. The program offers students university level classes offered at the high school to junior and senior students during their regular school day. Credits would fulfill credits to graduate and receive university credits simultaneously. I was one of the handful of students that took college courses my junior and senior year of high school.

One day, my psychology teacher gave a lesson on the brain. We had gone through each part and labeled their function. It was followed by explaining how a brain of a bilingual individual tends to light up during an fMRI. It is due to having multiple parts of the brain work simultaneously.

Elisa, did you learn English first? My psychology teacher asked me.

It was a valued question. I shared with the class attended Family Literacy with my mom at six months. Every memory I have ever had was Spanish spoken around family, and at school it was English. I went to the extent and shared with everyone I remember interpreting for my parents at the age of five.

So, I guess to answer your question. I learned both languages at the same time. I responded.

My teacher acknowledged my response with a simple head nod and smile. But before he continued with the lesson, another question was asked.

Elisa, where are you from? My teacher asked.

Distinctly I remember all six of my classmates turned to look at me. My heart began to race; I have never felt so uncomfortable in a classroom setting. Part of me was still in a bit of a shock the question was even asked. He is one of my favorite teachers. I valued what my teachers thought of me. They challenged students to a new level. Teachers knew one's capability when it came to academics. Everyone waited for me to respond. I looked at him and responded with the name of the town.

Oh. My teacher responded.

The body language gave it away that the question made the teacher uncomfortable too. There was no apology, and the class continued to look at me. I think everyone at this point is uncomfortable too. Before the bell rang, we wrapped up the remaining of the lesson. I left that classroom and felt so embarrassed. I kept replaying the scene in my head and the rush of emotions from that moment.

I thought to myself. *Would the remaining of the school year be uncomfortable? Should I say something before the class the next day?*

I don't think I ever felt so uncomfortable when asked this question before. The following day everything went back to normal. I never bothered to bring it up again to avoid the awkward feeling. I just wanted to apologize for creating uncomfortable tension amongst everyone. I saw my teachers as more than just an educator; they inspired me every day to push myself to do my best work. Being asked, "where are you from" stung a little.

Data Analysis

The stories were analyzed using grounded theory. First, I read through the stories and highlighted themes that appeared throughout the stories. Similar code units are grouped to form a theme. Each coding unit was placed in the appropriate categories and distinguished with the name of its category. Stories are reread numerous to ensure the phrases are put to the correct theme. A phrase that appeared to be forced to fit into a category or relevant is omitted. A codebook was created in a Microsoft Word document to organize the phrases in one location. Once all stories were coded, the preliminary coding scheme totaled four themes emerged: *intersectionality, privilege, social construct, and microaggression.*

Results

Five autoethnography stories are analyzed to give an insight into my perspective of the world. In general, they uncover some of the challenges posed as a minority student within the education system. Each theme is explained before phrases from the stories are brought in to conduct an analysis.

Theme 1: Intersectionality

Individuals find themselves a part of several demographic groups that makes up their identity. This concept is known as intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. Intersectionality was used to describe a metaphor. Crenshaw viewed intersection with two (or more) roads crossing-which helped understand how the convergence of multiple categories leaves those at the intersection unprotected (Tefera et al., 2018). However, the individual left at the intersection of the crossroad is harmed by the legal system (Tefera et al., 2018). Intersectionality theory acknowledges that people engage in multiple demographic categories (Bright et al., 2016). Its framework looks beyond common demographic categories

such as sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and age. Tefera et al. (2018) notes, “researchers working within an intersectional framework try to account for the dynamic and complex ways that race/ethnicity, class gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, ability, and age shape individual identities and social life” (p. 7). The intersectionality framework challenges people to examine the different intersecting social dynamics that affect minorities who are overlooked. Brantley et al. (2020) notes, “intersectionality [used] as a lens to identify and reflect upon that are restricted or absent from the typical historical accounts” (p. 2). It has been found that the United States overlooked its past. When intersectionality is implemented, it encourages recognizing how marginalized populations experience hegemonic structure.

There are three types of intersectionality: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. Carter and Vavrus (2018) define structural intersectionality as “the way in which students of color are situated within overlapping structures of subordination” (p. 1). In other words, structural intersectionality focus on the structural causes of oppression and marginalization. Secondly, political intersectionality is “the way people of color or of low income are ignored in discussions about race, class or gender” (Cater & Vavrus, 2018, p. 1). Political intersectionality looks at the tensions from belonging to multiple subordinated groups. Lastly, there is representational intersectionality. Cater and Vavrus (2018) define “representational intersectionality uses race, [ethnicity, class] and gender stereotypes to frame images of people of color” (p. 1). Representational intersectionality can be understood as what people view on the media; it creates images for subordinated identities. Each aspect of intersectionality builds an individual’s identity. Yuval-Davis (2016) notes, “identities are individual and collective narratives that answer the questions who am/are I/we” (p. 197). Its fundamental framework to analyze relationships of power and inequalities within society and the

impact it has on an individual's perspective about themselves. Each aspect of intersectionality will help uncover crucial information to understand the impact the education system has on minority students.

Multiple marginalized identities

The phrases within the stories align with standards of intersectionality. Clark et al. (2018) notes, “intersectionality refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power” (p. 174). It allows people to understand social relations by examining the intersections of discrimination. Intersectionality is complicated, but the framework uncovers that many forms of oppression may be present and active in someone's life. Often studies focus on one type of discrimination. Therefore, it is crucial one recognizes all potential barriers. When combined, they transform the experience of oppression, and unique oppressions exist. The framework engages with issues around privilege and power and brings it to the open. It forces people to reflect on their privileges and recognize which groups are excluded.

Intersectionality recognizes several parts that make up one's identity. I found myself belonging to multiple non-dominant groups such as my gender, race, and social class. Primarily in the introduction and Elisa's roots, I disclose different aspects of my identity. The introduction states:

I was one of three Latin girls in my class (p. 21).

Here I made it apparent to the reader about my race and gender. Other aspects of my identity there are not stated as clear—for example, my legal status. The opening sentence in Elisa's Roots states:

I was born and raised in a small town in Southern Minnesota (p. 21).

Although the reader may not recognize it, I state my legal status. Individuals who are born in the United States are automatically U.S. citizens. It is an aspect most people tend to overlook, but it is a part of one's identity. However, one's legal status could drastically create a different experience of oppression for an individual. An undocumented individual does not qualify for most federal benefits such as health insurance, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA), food stamps, or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). It can create an additional obstacle for the individual.

Another part of my identity mentioned within the stories is social class. Elisa's roots stated:

Once I entered the fourth grade, he quit one of his jobs because of the harmful chemicals; his second job was working at a printing press during the night shift (p. 22).

Jobs such as the one my father worked at are considered low-paid jobs. In addition, my family depended on my father's income since it was the primary source of income. Based on total household income, my family was always considered as low-income. Therefore, my family qualified for free and reduced lunches, scholarships to lower the price for activities at school, or programs that help students prepare for higher education. Social class is a part of one's identity and can influence one's life for the better or create some challenges.

In intersectionality, people must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people. However, the stories shared only disclose three aspects of my identity: race, gender, and income. If someone were to ask about my identity, I would describe myself as Latina, female, able-bodied, heterosexual, and low-income. Bright et al. (2016) notes, "individuals' intersectional identity can influence their life more than one would expect by merely adding the

effect on each group of which they are a member” (p. 78). I recognize that other aspects of my identity fit the heteronormative, such as being able-bodied and heterosexual. Each element of my identity intersects and creates a unique experience of oppression. It led me to experience teasing based on my race, life as a first-generation immigrant, microaggressions, and unique school experience. The framework of intersectionality allows people to further exploration of different aspects of my identity that simultaneously insert to create a unique effect.

Theme 2: Privilege

Unlike intersectionality, privilege is a concept exposed more, and people comprehend the complex term. Privilege was coined by the sociologist Peggy McIntosh. It was first discovered when McIntosh observed that white men in the women’s studies were oblivious of the advantages they had for simply being a man (Allen, 2015). Society has been structured to favor the dominant group. Allen (2015) notes, “privilege tends to make life easier; it is easier to get around, to get what one wants, and to be treated in an acceptable manner” (p. 37). Privilege goes beyond the examination of only gender but includes race, age, sexuality, education level, language, able-bodied, and income. It has given the dominant group to oppress minorities. Unfortunately, members of the dominant group dismiss their advantages. According to Lund (2015) describes privilege as “whites do not recognize or acknowledge their unearned racial privileges because Whiteness operates by being invisible, so ubiquitous and entrenched as to appear natural and normative” (p. 45). White individuals will never have to speak for their race or labeled as the “white” teacher.

However, it has been found that privilege affects minorities more than most people recognize. Nondominant group members have internalized oppression. Allen (2011) notes, “[internalize oppression is] accepting these ideas and believing negative stereotype about one’s

group” (p. 16). Oppressed groups believe the stereotypes labeled by the dominant group. For example, nondominant members have internalized their feelings experienced from the hierarchy of skin color. Halley et al. (2010) recognize white people are considered normal, and they will never have to experience passing in terms of race. A Hispanic individual with lighter skin color may pass for a white person. Clark et al. (2018) discusses race and gender bias have existed within the K-12 education system it has resulted in structural inequalities. At school, things such as funding, ability group, track, test scores, and hidden curricula are used to maintain power for white individuals (Clark et al., 2018). The education system claims to be inclusive but is ignorant of the core issue. Most individuals do not recognize their privileges and the long-term effect privilege has on minorities. White supremacy of whiteness impacted admitted to a university, employment, live comfortably where one chooses to live (Clark et al., 2018). The education system portrays a utopian image that education is equal for all, but it fails to recognize white privilege amongst educators. Lund (2015) notes, “teachers need to understand how young people develop and react to racial identity and awareness as well as attitudes about race” (p. 47). However, when educators and students engage in the subject of privilege to move towards equality in schools.

Privilege among the school

Privilege is understood as an unearned advantage based on one’s social group, and it tends to be invisible (Halley et al., 2010). They can be found in different sectors of one’s life. The most common are ability, class, education, gender, immigration, and race privilege (Spade, 2015). Most people are unaware of their privileges and how they impact other individuals. In the stories shared, I experience privilege from both sides - the advantages and disadvantages. People tend only to recognize the side of oppression, and it can be difficult to acknowledge one’s

privileges. The benefits are out of one's control or didn't ask for them. Privilege is not intended to make someone feel guilty or diminish their achievements; instead, it is used to have people recognize the advantages of one's social status.

I recognize that as a minority, I continue to hold privileges that are often overlooked. The first one is my parents' level of education. In the introduction it states:

They each received a certificate like what a trade school would offer; my dad received it as an electrician and my mom as a lab technician (p. 22).

Both of my parents received a certificate in the field they studied. The Hispanic community had several people that did not complete their high school education. It made it difficult for those parents to help their children with a homework assignment. Although my parents' English is not well, they could still help us with schoolwork. It required me to translate the problem into Spanish. If it was a subject, my mom did not know she would go to the library or the internet to do some research. Some children do not have someone at home to receive the same support as I did to complete homework assignments. Although it required extra time, I knew either my mom or dad could help explain an assignment to me.

Privileges can appear minor to the individual, but they can be the factor they experience the world differently. Another advantage over most children in my grade was my parents' marital status. It may appear as a minor privilege, but I had several classmates whose parents were divorced. There juggle living between both parents and adjusting to their new blended family. Although some couples learned how to co-parent well, some that the child someone stuck in the middle of situations. I was constantly reminded how fortunate to have my parents continue to be together at school events.

Lastly, I also much recognized the level of education received thus far. I began attending school at the age of six months at Family Literacy. It gradually progressed to me completing head-start, preschool, elementary, high school, Associate in Arts, bachelor's degree, and soon my master's degree. I have my parents, teachers/professors to thank for their continuous support. Due to financial issues, family obligations, or other factors, several people created an obstacle for them to complete their education. Carter and Vavrus (2018) recognize Black and Latino students have a higher drop-out rate and leave school under-prepared. I am privileged to have completed my education and made it possible to have a better future. People must recognize their privileges that tend to be overlooked at times.

They were some privileges that appeared to be a double-edged sword. I am privileged to be a United States citizen. As a citizen able to qualify for federal aid programs, driver's license, most jobs, and other things that may require a social security number. It goes beyond the use to complete information on paperwork, but other encounters that may occur to someone. I do not have to worry about having my driver's license to the officer when pulled over. I do not have to worry about being stopped by ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) agent. Although I did not have to worry about these scenarios, I was still affected by them. In Remembering, it stated:

I don't think children recognize the privilege about their parent's immigration status (p. 24).

At a young age recognized this privilege of mine, both my parents were in a different situation.

Unlike most children my age, they never had to pay attention or worry about laws being passed in Congress regards to immigration (p. 23).

It was a consistent reminder that other children my age did not have to worry about the subject of immigration. Privilege is invisible to those who have it.

Another privilege that appeared to have a double edge was being bilingual. From the outsider's perspective, it comes with several advantages. Individuals are highly valued within the job market, paid more, and can communicate in a different language. However, it can come with its challenges too. When I enrolled in school, my parents marked Spanish as the primary language spoken at home. It resulted in being placed in English Language Learner (ELL) program. The program is designed to help students achieve English proficiency (Wassell et al., 2017). Once I reached the third grade, I recognized the difference with the curriculum taught to ELL students. White children are privileged not to be placed in programs such as ELL. Clark et al. (2018) notes, "the utopian aspiration of equal educational access and opportunity is a myth – one that is perpetuated by the dominant class in an effort to reproduce and legitimize subordination of the masses and maintain control and power" (p. 116). It demonstrates some disparities exist for racial groups among academics. Privilege can be found in the least expected sectors of one's life.

Privilege operates along with discrimination and social groups; it uncovers power, dominance, and exclusion hierarchies. Amongst the stories' shared passing is found multiple areas. Passing can be understood as the ability to appear as another group. They can claim the advantages of the other group. At the time, I wanted to be accepted by my peers. It went further than being accepted. I went to the extreme of me quitting swimming to ensure that my skin did not darken. Based on physical characteristics, I was never going to be able to pass as white. I never "fit in" with the popular kids, but they would never accept me into their inner circle if I said anything. It was a difficult pill for me to swallow, but as a child, it was the only thing that made sense to me for why I was treated differently. Several privileges can be found within one's

life; once someone recognizes their advantages over a group, it can open their eyes to a different perspective.

Theme 3: Social Construction

Based on one's position and experiences, one begins to construct their view of the world. In 1960, Berger developed social constructivism (Gerber, 1997). It recognized people actively shape their reality through social interactions. The theory states that knowledge is not real. There is biological realism and anti-realism. Diaz-Leon (2015) states biological realism claims that race is biologically real. It exists because society has given reality. On the contrary, anti-realism states specific categories are empty (Diaz-Leon, 2015). However, one's identity also can be socially constructed too. Allen (2011) recognized that human beings develop their social identities primarily through communication. When a baby is first born, people categorize it by its gender. It is in human nature to do so. Gerber (1997) notes, "human beings are natural constructs" (p. 3). Classification plays a crucial role on how human beings perceive themselves and act amongst society. Gerber (1997) notes, "they shape our minds as we shape them" (p. 7). Humans play a crucial role that allows social construction to exist.

One of the items that has been socially constructed by humans is race. In the United States it has been an important issue which has resulted in mass movements throughout history. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach founder of the social hierarchy of race (Allen, 2011). It made Caucasian to be perceived as the superior race. The power of language allowed people to continue to construct this concept that race exist. Over generations people have been disciplined to continue to believe it. Scientist conducted several studies to demonstrate race existed (Halley et al., 2010). However, recent studies have proved race had been socially constructed and there is no biological difference between humans.

Rather than to prove race through science, society has constructed a social reality through interaction. Race had been constructed through “the network of largely unspoken, taken-for-granted assumptions, myths, etc., and to the actual constellation of relationships and the patterned distribution of power which give rise to and express it, and which informs, justifies, generates and sustain” (p. 70). People continue to view race based on one’s phenotype characteristics. Phenotypes include skin color, hair texture, body type, and facial features (Allen, 2011). In addition, people use language to categorize individuals into racial groups. Allen (2011) states words such as American Latino, Native American, Korean, Mexican American, and African American are all examples of racial groups. Although it has been proven race is not biologically connected, society uses language to categorize individuals into groups.

Categorizing people can begin as young as a child. Scholars have recognized school plays an important role when forming one’s identity. When one looks into the mirror, people often see the labels others have categorized them. Espitia (2016) describes how they view themselves based on labels people have identified for themselves and by them.

When I look at myself the mirror, I am focusing on the facts I am a white European, a therapist holding a M.A. and a Ph.D., of middle class, able-bodied, and heterosexual, while I push to the background the fact that I am a woman, and also an immigrant in the United States myself (p. 138).

Often the labels others categorize one overshadow the traits one sees for themselves. The labels given to people can either exclude or include them from certain groups. Hylton (2010) mentions that stereotypes, naming, name-calling, unequal educational placement, discrimination advertisements, and discriminatory laws are all forms of labeling individuals part of the in-group and out-group.

Power of social construction

Social construction is understood as categories that can take on meaning that society has shaped for it. The concept that had risen from social construct continues to exist because society has continued to validate them. One's perceptions create their reality. Assumptions and experiences help people to define what is real. Social construction is found in every sector of one's life.

Race is socially constructed, but people continue to believe race is real. The school played an important role in my perception of the world. The interaction between teachers and peers constructed my knowledge about race. From a young age, children begin to associate race with the color of one's skin and characteristics. I have golden honey skin, brown eyes, and dark color hair. People who have brown skin tone and similar characteristics as myself, society immediately associated them with Latino or Hispanic. This ideology is found across other spectrums that may identify an individual. People tend to associate African Americans with someone with coily hair and dark skin. On the contrary, an individual with light color eyes and light hair color is perceived as White. Society has placed individuals into categories based on physical, geographic, or other cultural cues. In *I Wish My Teacher Knew* it stated:

Yes, I realize there is more that connects someone to their ethnicity than what society has socially constructed. But most of my life always tried to separate myself from the minority group. It was a reality check that others were always going to place me into a box (p. 28).

It demonstrates that no matter how hard someone attempts to separate themselves from their race, people will categorize them. Allen (2011) notes, "racial categories have facilitated a sense of identity and common experience for racial groups" (p. 68). I didn't want to be viewed as all

the other Hispanics. By excelling in academics, it was a form to demonstrate to my peers, teachers, and other community members that I was different. From experiences and interactions with Hispanics/Latino individuals, the dominant group began to construct a negative perception of the community. There were negative stereotypes given to social groups, and people continue to believe them based on a small number of interactions.

Besides interactions, the school socially constructed collections of messages that demonstrated the disparities found within the education system. There were reading level differences between ELL students and the rest of my peers. In elementary school, each student was assigned a number of points to reach by the end of the school year. A combination of factors were taken into consideration to determine the reading level and the number of points assigned to the student. At the beginning of the school year, students had to complete a test on the computer that would determine the student's reading level. The multiple-choice questions would gradually get more difficult as the student correctly completed a series of questions. Once the student completed the exam, teachers were given a report with their students' test results. My elementary school had a color assigned to indicate the book's reading level. Charts are found in essentially every classroom and at the school library. Based on the results from the exam, students were to pick books that matched their reading level. The school used a program that indicated the book's reading level and the number of points it was worth. When students went to the library at school, there were stickers with colors that fit the reading level on the back of their library card. Therefore, based on the chart, students would see how low or high their reading level based on the chart. When students completed a book, they had to complete another test with questions about the book. It helped indicate students' comprehension of the book. If students answered all

the answers correctly, they were given points to achieve their goal. The school had socially constructed a reading level system.

Based on this social construct, I quickly recognized that my reading level was lower than most peers. Students' reading level was apparent, and it became evident that ELL students had a lower reading level than their peers. Remembering it is stated:

But how is that possible when the color of one's skin is different, when I was in a lower reading level than my peers, and the media portrayed me as the villain (p. 25).

Messages around the school reinforced students were behind the standards. There are subtle messages of difference found among the school.

Children also begin to construct their perception of the world based on a conversation they may hear from adults and the media. In First Generation it states:

Being from a small rural town in Southern Minnesota, most people had conservative views on the subject (p. 23).

Hence children tend to continue the same values and beliefs of their parents. One of the topics that several of my peers expressed was the subject of immigration. The media portray the Hispanic/Latino community to fall into stereotypes. The introduction stated: Hispanics were/are stereotyped as "bad people," and it felt as though all Hispanics are lumped into that category. There might be some Hispanics who made poor choices; these actions should not reflect upon the entire race. It was hard for me to accept people had socially constructed and one individual could not change the world's perspective of them. Fleras (2016) notes, "particular attention is devoted to the sociology of language not only in constructing and securing hegemonic patterns of social control through subtext and code, but also in offering a tool for making visible how power

operates in everyday practices" (p. 3). Language is critical for social construction, and it shapes people's reality.

Theme 4: Microaggression

It is easy for people to recognize slurs as racism, but subtle microaggression comments are difficult for individuals to pinpoint as racist. Pierce coined the term microaggression. According to Dr. Chester Pierce, a Harvard psychiatrist defines, microaggressions as a "subtle, cumulative mini-assault is the substance of today's racism" (Schmidt, 2018, p. 586). Language is a powerful weapon used to oppress nondominant groups. Words are used to highlight the concept of difference (Taffel, 2020). Fleras (2016) discusses microaggression has become normalized in everyday interactions. Microaggression can be found in the form of a question or statement. For example: where are you from, you speak good English, or I am not racist I have several Black friends. These microaggressions can be found in everyday interactions with acquaintances, peers, teachers, or employers. It continues to reinforce the power of privilege.

Other concepts also fall under the umbrella of microaggressions, such as micro-insult, micro-assault, and micro-invalidation. Castellanos et al. (2012) define micro-insult as "unconscious behavioral/verbal remarks or comments that convey rudeness or insensitivity and demean a person's race" (p. 207). They are referred to an unconscious comment that demeans a person's racial identity. A micro-assault is an explicit derogation to hurt someone (Castellanos et al., 2012). For example, naming calling, avoidant behavior, or discriminatory actions based on an individual's race are all forms of micro-assault. Lastly, there is micro-invalidation. According to Castellanos et al. (2012) micro-invalidation is "verbal comments or behaviors that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person" (p. 207). An individual born and raised in the United States is consistently asked where they were

born is an example of micro-invalidation. These terms express aggression against minority groups (Espitia, 2016). Microaggression is more complex than a comment made to put down nondominant groups.

Although microaggressions appear to be subtle, it has a psychological impact on minorities. The microaggression comments are dismissive, hostile, derogatory, and harmful towards the victim (Schmidt, 2018). Some victims internalize the complex feelings microaggression carry. Fleras (2016) notes, "victims often struggle to determine if bigotry is at play or whether to dismiss the micro-bullying by blaming themselves for reading too much into the situation or by taking offense when perhaps none was intended" (p. 9). Microaggression sends a powerful message to the individual and makes them feel less of a human.

In most cases, the individual is unsure how to react to the comment. Espitia (2016) recognizes microaggressions are often confusing, and the victim tends to respond to the comment with a smile, gaze, a moment of silence, or a non-verbal gesture. People neglect racial minimization that separates them and us. It supports society's way of thinking of white superiority.

Effect of microaggression

I have encountered several microaggression in my lifetime but never recognized them as a child. The most common form of microaggression I have encountered is where you are from.

Oh, the dreaded question, "where are you from?" (p. 27).

This question always left a lingering uncomfortable feeling. I never knew how to answer this question correctly. Are they wanted me to say where I was born or my nationality? Schmidt (2018) notes, "the impact of a racial micro-aggression is often dissociated and resides in the

body, inaccessible to words” (p. 604). It was an internal battle with myself not being able to put my feeling into words.

Along with the pressure to answer the question correctly, if not, they would ask again. Espitia (2016) recognized when individuals do not share these feelings with others; it can leave the person to doubt their worth. A series of questions ran through my head, unsure about the remainder of the school year:

Would the remaining of the school year be uncomfortable? Should I say something before the class the next day? (p. 29).

It parallels with the same feelings I expressed after the question was asked and after I left the classroom. I have encountered microaggressions but usually done by someone that does not know me well. When a teacher asked me the question, it stirred several negative emotions within me. This scenario demonstrates microaggression can be found within a classroom; the action can be done by an authority figure.

A microaggression can be found outside of the education system, but they continue to affect students within the classroom. The stories shared disclose that I identify myself as a first-generation immigrant. It led me to keep this hidden secret from the world and internalize the emotions that came along with the position my family found itself in. In 2008, there was an immigration raid in my hometown. I was ten years old; the fear of my parents being deported was taken to the next level. It had been a secret I kept from my friends and teachers – due to the repercussions it could have on my family. They had already poked fun about the subject on conversations amongst my peers, and I did not feel safe to turn to them. Schmidt (2018) states that victims of microaggression must be aware of the truth and decide whether to respond or not to protect themselves. When an individual chooses to respond, they are viewed as sensitive. I

knew it was a battle not worth fighting; instead, I wanted to do everything in my power to protect my family. Microaggression can have psychological effects on the victim.

The subject of immigration does not appear to be a microaggression from the surface level, but a profound implication surrounds the issue. Jimenez-Castellanos et al. (2020) conducted a study that examined micro-aggressions of undocumented Latino immigrant fathers. The themes found within the study parallels which experiences shared in the stories. Microaggression can be found in institutionalized policies. According to Jimenez-Castellanos et al. (2020) institutional policy microaggression is a policy that manifests to a systemic and institutional level. It is displayed as racial profiling and carried over to law enforcement agents.

In 2008, there was an immigration raid in my hometown (p. 46).

The agency which conducts the raids is known as Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). ICE raid or the rumors of raids causes fear for undocumented immigrants (Jimenez-Castellanos et al., 2020).

In a blink of an eye, I could no longer have them by my side. It is a scary thought that one day would arrive from school and they wouldn't be there anymore (p. 5).

It was my biggest fear that I would be separated from my parents as a child.

They weren't criminals; for me, they are the ones that will always have my back no matter what happens (p. 5).

Society had sent a clear micro-assault message to us that my parents perceived as a threat to resident socioeconomic status (Jimenez-Castellanos et al., 2020). On the surface, communication may appear to be minimal, but a cumulative microaggressions can leave intense psychological effects for the victim.

Discussion

This study aimed to discover how whiteness within the education system can impact a Hispanic student's perspective of the world. Ultimately, four themes were found among the five stories: *intersectionality*, *privilege*, *social construct*, and *microaggression*. The themes found parallel to findings done by other scholars that focus on this area of research. In this discussion section, I will discuss how this research enhances our understanding of the education system continues to enforce a hegemonic mindset. First, I will be offer suggestions on what can be done to combat the disparities found amongst the education system.

Direction for the Future

It seems simple to suggest creating a new policy or law to prohibit the education system from allowing these actions to continue within schools. However, it will take a larger movement to create the change needed to put a halt to whiteness. The analysis demonstrates minority students' experience of whiteness can shape their perspective of the world. There have been several scholars who have contributed suggestions to close the disparities found within the education system. However, as a minority student that experienced these inequalities within education, I believe I can suggest some advice too. These suggestions may help move towards a better future.

In the process of scholars' research, they have unpacked possible solutions to deconstruct whiteness and its implications. Cater and Vavrus (2018) notes, "racial disparities, white privilege, racially coded language, and corresponding systems of oppression and privilege must be exposed, explicitly named, and examined in order to give students and educators the tools to develop a critical consciousness" (p. 67). It demonstrates the importance of educating individuals about the terminology. Most people have come across a situation but recognize the terminology

associated with the action. Figueroa (2012) recognized that once individuals reflect, they will adjust behavior and thought processes. However, this may be difficult for some people to recognize due to the power white individual has held for years. According to Lund (2015), "Whites see themselves as the cultural center of society, then the identities and cultural practices of others become something different" (p. 46). Whiteness has been in power for centuries and created this mindset within society. Educators can play a crucial role in shifting future generations' mindsets. Freire states teacher's role is to teach content and critical thinking, otherwise known as correct thinking (Wiggin, 2011). It challenges students to be conscious and critically engage in social change. Although most people turn to color blind for the solution, it continues racism to soar. Color blind is the act one claims not to see a racial difference, and that racism has been resolved (Schmidt, 2018). Racism does exist and affects minorities more than people want to recognize.

Another suggestion that can be implemented in educational institutions is to reexamine the curriculum. Schmidt (2018) suggests the curriculum focuses on the structural nature of racism. It includes strategies to interrupt racial bias, otherwise known as micro-interventions. Sue and Spanierman (2020) define micro-interventions as everyday interactions that communicate microaggression and macroaggression. Micro-intervention focuses in four areas: (1) validates experiential reality, (2) values as a person, (3) affirmation of their group identity, (4) encouragement and reassurance they are not alone (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Educators have the power to use micro-interventions within their classroom. Teachers can raise students to understand concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, and racism (Sue & Spanierman, 2020). Besides educating students of key concepts, educators can encourage their students to use their voice. Sue and Spanierman (2020) suggest they challenge students to respond to

macroaggressions. These are all potential suggestions for educators to take matters into their own hand. Although, these are great suggestions from scholars, one must face the reality too.

Unfortunately, educators are not prepared to carry this conversation within the classroom. Carter and Vavrus (2018) notes, it is clear educators overall have not been prepared to think complexly about race or employ a worldview that challenges power, privilege, and oppression” (p. 60). If educators are never ready society will continue to follow the same patterns. Educators have the potential to make significant difference for the next generation. It offers an opportunity to explore their own worldviews and challenge the fundamental problem of structural inequality.

Outside of academics, there are still things one can do to put a halt to disparities. First, people must recognize their privileges and how privilege operates in their lives (Allen, 2011). Although it may appear like a simple task, it isn't easy to step back and recognize our privileges. Allen (2011) notes, "[locating privilege] it's like telling a fish to detect water (what water?), or to describe how its gills function (what gills?)" (p. 188). Our privileges have become a part of one's life; it can be a challenge to recognize on our own. People can also monitor their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Allen, 2011). Self-awareness sheds light on privilege and power from daily interaction with others. Lastly, an individual must be proactive. Allen (2011) defined proactive as "responsibility to make things happen" (p. 189). It is a matter of standing up and calling things out. All individuals have the ability to make the invisible visible.

Implications

Theoretical implication

In terms of theoretical implications and agendas, muted group theory has value for marginalized groups. Littlejohn and Foss (2009) notes, “[muted group theory] focuses on the ways that the communication practices of dominant groups suppress, mute, or devalue the words,

ideas, and discourses of subordinate groups” (p. 2). It examines the cause of muteness by certain marginalized groups. Gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, national identity, immigration status, regional geography, and language are all examples of groups that are muted (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). The following have been factors that inhibit marginalized individual ideas. Scholars have critiqued the muted group theory. Critics of the theory state the theory neglect the complexities of one’s social identities (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Based on the work that has been done with the theory, the current study challenges the muted group theory.

As critics have mentioned, the muted group theory fails to consider the complexities of one’s social identities. However, one of the themes found within the stories demonstrated one’s identity is complex. Intersectionality recognizes people are a part of multiple demographic categories (Bright et al., 2016). I identified myself as Latina, female, U.S. citizen, and low-income among the stories shared. It recognized that members of a non-dominant group have a unique form of oppression based on their experience. Unlike the muted group theory, it tends to only look at an aspect of one’s identity. Both muted group theory and intersectionality engage with issues that surround power. Examining all the aspects of one’s identity can unpack other factors that cause the individual to face oppression.

Practical implication

The stories shared can be used to improve the daily experience of children that face oppression. First, the current education system opens children’s eyes to differences among children and contradicts the messages that they see around the school. In elementary school, one typically finds posters with encouraging messages and sayings to treat others with respect. However, I found myself in a position that contradicted those messages. In the third grade, I began to recognize disparities within education. I had been placed in the ELL program to help

me meet the proficiency level. It was determined to be placed into the ELL program based on a few questions. By educating individuals about power, privilege, microaggressions, racism, and race, individuals will begin to recognize systemic racism found in other aspects of their life.

Once knowledge is built about whiteness, it will help people self-reflective about their behavior and thoughts. I faced years of teasing that targeted my race at school. For example, they would call me their "Dora the Explorer." I had several features that matched the cartoon character. Although, many of my peers may not have intended any harm with comments made at school. It caused a psychological effect on me that had been internalized for years. One must recognize the repercussions of the actions and how they can manifest in other areas. Overall, the potential practical outcome and consequences of power offer scholars strong motivation to continue having minorities' voices heard.

Limitations of the Study

Although the results from this study are used from a practical and theoretical standpoint, some limitations must be addressed. One limitation of this study results is from one person's preceptive. The stories were from my perspective of the world based on experiences. My stories are not intended to speak on behalf of all minority groups. They were shared to illustrate systematic racism. There are others with different backgrounds that shape their perspective of the world.

Another limitation was the degree of vulnerability. I found it difficult to become fully vulnerable in writing the stories. These events happened to me, and I had internalized these feelings for years. As someone that is a reserved person, it was a challenge to be open about the matter. Boylorn (2013) discusses the challenges between the public-private-self and private-public self. I had to protect the privacy of others, which resulted in leaving some details out.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reveals that daily interactions can shape how minority children perceive their identity. The literature review examines the complexities of race (Halley et al., 2011) and how it manifests within the classrooms (Davis, 2007). It has resulted in federal programs such as the No Child Left Behind created more challenges for minority students (Bratt, 2008). Hispanic students have faced the repercussions of being placed in programs to help them reach the proficiency level (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2019). Many children also experience bullying, typically related to their race (Kim et al., 2021). Unfortunately, whiteness is embedded within the education system that has trained students to behave (Sulaimani & Gut, 2019). The literature demonstrated the implication institutionalized disparities have on children. Autoethnography stories highlight the role education continue to highlight differences among children. Amongst the stories shared, four themes: intersectionality, privilege, social construct, and microaggression. The themes paralleled with the findings of other scholars that found experiences and interactions can have profound implications on minority children. It can affect how they view their identity in society. Due to it being from my perceptive, there are limitations. The recommendations from scholars a positive change can be done to combat disparities found within the education system. The system was never broken it was built this way, and now it's time to expose the invisible to the world.

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