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REVOLUCIÓN DE IDENTIDAD: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON SPANISH HERITAGE LANGUAGE & IDENTITY

Cristina Velazquez

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REVOLUCIÓN DE IDENTIDAD: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY ON SPANISH
HERITAGE LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

A Dissertation
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education
in
Educational Leadership

by
Cristina Alejandra Velázquez

September 2019

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Approved by:

Dr. Kathryn Howard, Committee Chair

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ABSTRACT

This autoethnography narrative examines my journey as a first-generation Mexican immigrant woman from birth, through completion of the doctorate degree at California State University, San Bernardino. The purpose in writing this autoethnography is to present a personalized account of my experiences growing up, in communicating between two languages, the structural and personal motivators behind maintaining a heritage language (Spanish), and to reflect, in my experience, how I have negotiated with multiple social identities, including ethnic, academic, and bilingual identities. In this self-study, I bring the reader closer to Mexican-American identity, language, and culture. Specifically, this qualitative analysis of Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) and identity will examine the following questions: a) How did I perceive and negotiate my bilingual identity?; b) What obstacles did I face when speaking English, Spanish or both?; c) What role does SHL have in identity development?

I have chosen a qualitative approach, specifically an autoethnography, to answer these questions in order to add to existing literature rooted in the lived experience of Spanish heritage language maintenance. This approach allows me to be the researcher, subject, and narrator of the study, and allows me to reflect on my education as a bilingual and bicultural immigrant student. The autoethnographer's subjective experiences (my stories) become the primary data and encompass looking at a culture through the lens of the researcher. While searching for themes written in vignettes, my journey is an account of two worlds,

which coexist, in the infinite intricacy of language learning, speaking, thinking, and being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to thank my parents, Iselda Romero and Luis Velazquez, for their sacrifices so that I could have a better life here in the United States. You taught me to always try my best and to lead with a kind heart. Thank you to my sister, Janette Diaz Rendon and to Roberto for your unconditional love and support. To my brother, Luis may you too, have the courage to discover your best self. To my beautiful nieces, Cookie, China, Nanas, and Bella for reminding me to never forget to laugh and enjoy life. You all have given me the opportunity, confidence, love, and freedom to pursue my dreams. I hope I have made you proud.

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Thank you to my road dogs Avi, Jesse, and Erica. I am forever grateful I decided to carpool with you three because you all gave me the perseverance and positivity I needed to finish the program. I will cherish the talks, the chisme, the advice, the jokes, and the love. You were more than classmates; you are my friends, my ears, my smile, and the fire I needed to finish. Thank you to my Cohort 7 (the lucky 7)—a diverse group of individuals making this world a better place. You give me so much hope.

To my amazing GIRL boss crew Lacey, Debbie, Katie, Mel, Candie, Omoh, Tammy-- the most understanding and forgiving souls. You all look for the best in people and saw the best in me. Thank you for always believing in me.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate my work to my parents. This is for you. My accomplishments are your accomplishments. Your dreams and struggles changed my life forever. I am who I am because of you. SI SE PUDO.

I would also like to dedicate this book to my Mexican community in recognition of the blood, sweat, tears, sacrifices, struggles, and strength we have endured, hoy y mañana. Somos de aquí y somos de allá--para siempre.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	
Introduction.....	1
Purpose Statement.....	6
Research Questions	6
Significance of the Study	7
Conceptual Framework.....	9
Defining Identity.....	9
Spanish Heritage Language	10
Research Methods.....	12
Assumptions	13
Researcher Perspective.....	14
Delimitations	15
Summary	16
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	
Introduction.....	17
Identity	18
James Paul Gee's (1996) Theory of Discourses (D/d).....	19
Individuals' Agency	22
First Language Loss	24
Spanish Heritage Language (SHL)	28

Heritage Language Maintenance in Education	31
A Union Between Two Different Worlds.....	34
A Varied Bilingual	36
Summary	40

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction.....	43
Brief Overview	43
The History of Autoethnography	45
Why Autoethnography?	50
Participants and Data Collection.....	50
Vignettes and Personal Memory.....	52
Data Analysis.....	55
The Metaphor	56
Validity and Trustworthiness	57
Summary	60

CHAPTER FOUR: VIGNETTES

Introduction.....	62
Vignette One Illegal Immigrant.....	64
Reflection and Analysis.....	69
Vignette Two Early Beginnings	76
Reflection and Analysis.....	87
Vignette Three Ingles Sin Barreras	96
Reflection and Analysis.....	100
Vignette Four Fifth Grade Promotion	102

Reflection and Analysis.....	108
Vignette Five Hispanic, Latin American, Latina/o, Latino@, Latinx ...Ay Dios Mio!	113
Reflection and Analysis.....	116
Vignette Six First Generation College Student.....	118
Reflection and Analysis.....	122
Vignette Seven French, English, No Spanish-Language Choices	125
Reflection and Analysis.....	128
Vignette Eight Spanish for Spanish Speakers	133
Reflection and Analysis.....	137
Vignette Nine Embarking on a Lonely Journey	140
Reflection and Analysis.....	141
Conclusion	146
 CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Introduction.....	148
Discussion of Findings.....	149
Immigrant Life.....	151
Multidimensional Sociolinguistic Space	163
Cultural Straddlers.....	164
“I Am From Here And I Am From Over There”	165
Una Revolución de Identidad.....	167
A Different Kind of Parent Support	168
Autoethnographic Limitations	172
Recommendations for Educational Leaders	173

Future Research.....	175
Conclusion.....	176
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	178
REFERENCES.....	181

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Without language, one cannot talk to people and understand them; one cannot share their hopes and aspirations, grasp their history, appreciate their poetry, or savor their songs.

—Nelson Mandela, *Long walk to freedom*

Introduction

Once upon a time I was a socially “disadvantaged youth” and an amusingly content bilingual child. Mine was a childhood of intense family closeness and perplexity in identity. Thirty-four years later, I write this autoethnography as a middle-class American citizen, fully assimilated. Education has altered my life and it has gotten me to where I am now. I write this autoethnography as a history of my life and my schooling. In order to admit to the changes in my life, I must reflect and speak upon years as an immigrant student and language learner, of losses and gains, triumphs and embarrassments, in English and Spanish, from birth until now. This link between language and identity echoes across multigenerational students as language has been the great subject of my life. From my very first day of school I was a student of language, not knowing it would one day determine my public identity.

I write of one life only, my own. The strength in this autoethnography is in the narrative. I write this book in stories and experiences that lead to certain

outcomes. Here is my most real life as I write about a young immigrant girl's progress toward self-realization and understanding. I trust this story will echo with meaning and importance for others' lives.

I was born in Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico in 1985. I went my entire life not knowing the city I was born in, let alone the hospital I emerged from. It is as if my parents were wandering nomads, in search of a safe home, a comforting home, neither from here nor there. My parents had a small stay in the United States, in Phoenix Arizona to be exact, as my mother attempted to live with my aunt, but that lasted roughly two years, which ultimately led us back to my parent's hometown of Ciudad Obregon. Two more years flew by and my parents, sister, and I fled our hometown of Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico around 1989. I have very few memories of my homeland and very few photos since we were too poor to truly afford and keep our own cameras, and our material memories. I was too little to realize the severity of what was truly happening around me. A terrifying economy, an emerging drug cartel in the community, and a religiously harsh perspective from my grandparents would clearly force any family to run away, to seek better opportunities. My parents protected us as much as they could and did what they had to do in order for us to have safety, food, love, and proper shelter.

At that time, it was just the four of us—isolated from the familiar and starting over in a foreign country. Still, Mexico is imprinted deep within and it will continue to stay deep in my core thanks to the many strong ties to my culture.

Family traditions, heritage, language maintenance and cultural practices are all things that are always a part of you—even if you move away from your birth land. Despite leaving our homeland, my parents made sure that my sister and I never forgot our roots because no matter what, our identities are connected to our roots (Reeves, 2009).

My parents humbly began working as dishwashers in a retirement center making \$3.75 an hour; my sister started middle school and began her English as a Second Language (ESL) journey, while I started elementary school, in Palm Springs, California. We were considered homeless, briefly living in an apartment with two other families briefly, until my parents saved enough money to purchase a home in a small town called Thousand Palms. We lived in a concrete house in the middle of nowhere. My family and I, like countless other immigrant families, came nearly empty-handed, with just the clothes on our back, not speaking a single word of English. We came to the United States in search of the American dream and the pursuit of an opportunity, knowing our native language only.

My culture states that the man works to provide while the woman stays home to take care of the kids and the house. My culture states that men aspire to move to “El Norte” and that it is every girl’s dream to get married and have children. Following *la tradición* has never quite been in the cards for me, I guess I followed in my mother’s footsteps. She was the first member of my family to cross “El Norte” and search for better opportunities for my father, sister, and I. She came to the United States with nothing, just the clothes on her back and a

strength that is unmatched. She did not know English and still had to find a way to work and provide. She lived in fear of being harassed or deported by members of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (I.C.E.), and store patrons who were not so welcoming to Mexican workers. Nevertheless, she persevered. She is a strong woman. Eventually, we all moved to the United States, to be reunited with my mother, as many other immigrant families did, too.

According to the PEW Research Center, there were 56.5 million Hispanics in the United States in 2015, accounting for 17.6% of the total U.S. population (Flores, Lòpez & Radford, 2015). That number has grown since, but still Hispanics and Latinos continue to be the minority. Belonging to the minority, along with limited English capabilities proved difficult for our entire family. When I ask my parents how they dealt with not feeling intimidated or scared, they both replied with, “No teníamos opcion, y era lo mejor que pudimos hacer en ese momento para nuestra familia” (“We had no choice, it was the best we could do in that moment for our family.”)

Thirty-four years later, as I near the completion of this doctorate program, I cannot help but feel blessed about my journey, my struggles, and the direction my life has taken. My parents’ decision to leave the economic, religious, and political turmoil—by immigrating to the United States—completely altered my life. The values, the experiences, the embarrassments, the barriers along the way made me who I am today. For the past 10 years, I have been an educator in a public school system in Southern California. I have not only known what it feels

like to be an English language learner (ELL) as a young child, a SHL learner as a young adult, but also labeled an “alien”, foreigner, and immigrant. I am in an unusual position where I am both a student and teacher, simultaneously learning and teaching. I believe that this story and these truths are potentially relevant not only for teachers of heritage languages but for bilingual students who feel at times they do not quite fit a mold or are traumatized by their immigrant status, their identity, and their language. My parents’ decision to leave Mexico behind echoes the sentiment of many immigrant families. Thanks to the character, perseverance, and values they have instilled in me, I stand strong and live a shared experience. I am who I am today because of them. Admittedly, I had complex barriers along the way and I grew up uncomfortable in a place of contradictions; a place full of hatred toward the Spanish language; a place of anger toward the color of one’s skin; a place where exploitation is a prominent feature in this reality. Nonetheless, there are many joys behind this bicultural identity and a deep appreciation of this *Mestiza*. My lived experiences are unique and parallel common perspectives behind Mexican-American culture, identity, and language.

Chapter one introduces my life story as it is intertwined within the background, the significance and purpose of the study, the research questions, and research methods. I attempt to shed light on my ideological principles viewed through the theoretical lenses of my lived experiences. I will employ these key concepts to frame this story: Identity and Spanish as a Heritage Language. They

are my voice, my inner life, my self. With the unique positioning consciousness takes at these convergent rivers, language and identity echo across multigenerational students, through the story of a young immigrant girl's progress toward self-realization and understanding in this contemporaneous day and age.

Purpose Statement

The primary purpose of this study was to present a personalized account of my experiences growing up, in communicating between two languages, the structural and personal motivators behind maintaining a heritage language (Spanish), and to reflect, in my experience, how I have negotiated with multiple social identities, including ethnic, academic, and bilingual identities. In this self-study, I bring the reader closer to my Mexican-American identity, language, and culture through deep reflection, storytelling, and analysis. Based on the comprehensive review of the literature, there are insufficient existing studies that explore a Mexican American Immigrant's subjective experiences; therefore, this study sought to create opportunities to open dialogue for readers to engage and reflect in topics of self and language that students of Spanish Heritage Language similarly face today.

Research Questions

As noted by Glesne (2011), research questions help identify what a researcher wants to comprehend. Therefore, to understand Spanish heritage language, culture and identity, this study was guided by the following questions:

1. How did I perceive and negotiate my bilingual identity?
2. What obstacles did I face when speaking English, Spanish or both?
3. What role does Spanish Heritage Language have in identity development?

I have chosen a qualitative approach to answer these questions because as Merriam (1998) indicated, “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed” (p. 6). This study illuminates the connection between identity and language use and the mosaic of self-discovery.

Significance of the Study

I did not have the privilege of growing up with texts and books that read of the lives and stories of Cesar Chávez, Jose Marti, Pablo Neruda, Sandra Cisneros, Richard Rodriguez, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Periodically, those texts and literature are offered at university courses, still there is a conspicuous absence of contributions in texts and literature made by LatinX and specifically Mexican Americans. With the high dropout rates, few role models for academic success within the Latino population, specifically in the Mexican-American population (Leiva & Bright, 2015), and detrimental media coverage of Mexican people, it is imperative more than ever that we have literature that is reflective of the culture with a fresh take on what it means to be Latinx in the United States.

This study is beneficial in several ways. First, it breaks ground in the field by examining this phenomenon by looking at culture through the lens of the researcher and understanding those educational experiences that the researcher

reflected upon. It is of essence to research the needs of second language learners and SHL learners to better address curriculum and create enhanced instructional support, I believe it is important for future generations, and the older ones, also, to know and have access to reflections such as my own in order for other students to one day become writers in their own right.

This study carries significant contributions to the education of minority and immigrant students. In addition to addressing a notable gap in literature regarding the lived experience of LatinX Scholars, this study sheds light on cultural values and finding ways to be sensitive about working with students from diverse cultures. This study provides an understanding to lived experiences, deep reflections, and genuine perspectives of a researcher succeeding in higher education. While there is an extensive body of research demonstrating not only the brilliance and capabilities of young children in language and learning but also the legitimacy and efficiency of knowledge, language, and literacies used in homes and communities (Dantas & Manyak, 2011; González, Moll, & Amanti, 2006); we have only begun to see the impact of that research in schools (Mosso-Taylor, 2013). Furthermore, by researching, presenting, writing, and having meaningful conversations on issues considered by many sociocultural and critical scholars as essential to inspire, motivate, and understand a new generation of LatinX, this will only benefit the noticeable gap in LatinX literature. I believe that this study is significant because of: (a) the need for subjective personal experiences from the researcher (a Mexican-American), (b) a deeper view into

the development of young child's to adult's identity and language use (bilingual), and (c) the importance of understanding the educational experiences of minority students.

Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study on heritage language and identity as portrayed through my own experiences is interdisciplinary in nature. It is rooted in scholarship from the fields of multilingual and multicultural education, sociolinguistic anthropology, and critical postmodern literary analysis. Two areas of focus have been delineated within the study: Identity and Spanish heritage language.

Defining Identity

Identity may be defined as “the active negotiation of an individual's relationship with larger social constructs” (Mendoza-Denton, 2002, p. 475). While one's identity embraces racial, class and rank, national, ethnic, professional, and gender affiliations, one's identity is built upon a specific language, dialect, or linguistic form. Tabouret-Keller and Le Page (1985) stress the fluidity of language as acts of identity where speakers “reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles” (p. 14). They elucidate a student's voyage through a “multidimensional sociolinguistic space” in pursuit of adjusting discourses to different positions, various topics of discussion, interlocutors in an evolution of newly-focused forms according to their needs for different identities. In

negotiating a “multi-dimensional space,” students participate in diverse linguistic practices and create multiple identities by accommodating their speech to different situations and topics of conversation depending on their need for multiple identities.

I will be using the terms “Latina” and “Hispanic” interchangeably in this thesis. However, LatinX is considered an umbrella term which references the “commonalities in language of peoples in Latin America who share a language in Latin America, along with European and African roots with a gender-neutral or nonbinary alternative to Latino or Latina,” and Hispanic refers to “people of Spanish-speaking decent” (Morales, 2015, p. 10). However, because different Latin American countries—such as Cuba, Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador—have distinct cultural practices and histories, I reference Mexican or Mexican American within this study.

Spanish Heritage Language

In order to understand a Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) learner, one must understand the term HLLs [heritage language learners]. “HLLs are individuals with familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs of that HL [heritage language] or HC [heritage culture]” (Hornberger & Wang, 2008, p. 27). Valdés (2001) states that a Spanish Heritage Language learner is one who “is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken” and “who speaks or at least understands the language and who is to some degree bilingual

in that language and in English” (p. 280). Cho, Shin, and Krashen (2004) define heritage language as languages articulated by "children of immigrants or by those who immigrated to a country when young” (p. 23). A definition that world language educators embrace is the following “a student who is raised at home with a non-English language,” comprehends it, and is to some degree bilingual (Valdés, 2005, p. 412). Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) take a different approach with their definition stating that heritage language learners are:

individuals that have experienced a relatively extended period of exposure to the language, typically during childhood, through contact with a family member or other individuals, resulting in the development of either receptive and/or productive abilities in the language, and varying degrees of bilingualism. (p. 10)

Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) also add to their definition "an individual with a personal or historical connection to the heritage language" (p. 10). This added piece suits public educational institutions with an emphasis for language maintenance. In "Who Studies Which Language and Why?" by Howard, Reynolds and Deák, Heritage Language Learners are:

broadly defined heritage learners as those students who reported that the language was not used regularly at home and who nevertheless responded that they wanted to learn the language in order to understand their heritage or to connect with family. (2009)

This final definition is appropriate for language learners who have a personal connection to the language.

Conceptually, various theories and concepts guided this study including: The Phenomenon of Uprooting (Igoa, 1995), Acts of Identity, Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) learners (Mendoza-Denton, 2002), Multidimensional Identities (Tabouret-Keller & Le Page, 1985), Agency (Soliday, 1994), Language Maintenance (Fillmore, 2005), and Discourses (Gee, 1996).

Research Methods

This research project is qualitative and reflective, incorporating autoethnography, and vignettes which will provide the groundwork for the autoethnography appearing in Chapter three. Autoethnography is a research method that links the personal layer of consciousness to the cultural (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The researcher employs both autobiographic and the ethnographic experience for the study, thus making autoethnography a method consisting of both a process and a product (Ellis, Adam, & Bochner, 2011). For this dissertation, autoethnography is defined as “cultural analysis through personal narrative” (p.17). It is a reflection of self, intimate in its experience, and unites the narrative to the cultural experience.

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of research and writing with stratum of consciousness, allowing me to connect my *self* to the surrounding culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I chose nine vignettes organized in chronological order. Writing an autoethnography is a challenge for me in other ways, as well.

Having been raised in a traditional Mexican culture, I was taught never to focus on myself, as the focus should always be on my family or the greater community. It is a challenge for me to retrain myself and allow myself to write an autoethnography. Creative writing is a challenge, as you have to understand complexity from different perspectives. Nonetheless, my dissertation chair encouraged me to accept that challenge, and to fear nothing, because “when you have nothing to lose, that’s when you have everything to gain” (K. Howard, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

Assumptions

In all ethnographic research, the College of Education requires us to disclose our assumptions, biases, and backgrounds. To this point, I have made the following assumptions through the reflection of this dissertation project: a) Free K-12 education is a privilege that everyone around the world does not have, b) Children of immigrants must work harder than others in order for their parents sacrifices and efforts not be in vain, c) I learned to work hard by mirroring the work my parents had to do at an early age in life, d) English language acquisition and knowledge is key to success, d) Awareness in one’s ethnic and linguistic roots will allow one to be more academically successful, and f) Telling family stories to others is vital in order to maintain rich historical background information.

Researcher Perspective

I chose my career with an objective frame of reference. Objectively speaking, I am a teacher and have continuously learned about Spanish language and literature, English literature, and pedagogy. However, I am still riddled with doubt because with each year of teaching, comes new surprises and contradictions. Objectively, I converse about pedagogy and best practices, but subjectively I can pay attention to how I feel as a teacher and how my students feel. Those feelings are what keep me alive and fuel my passion for what I do. Having that objective lens can be powerful and valuable but so can the subjective frame of mind. The suppositions I made established on my personal experiences with heritage language were confirmed during my teaching career. Teaching Spanish 2R (Spanish as a heritage language) and seeing many of the same issues fueled my passion surrounding heritage languages and bilingualism.

Today, my dissertation is as much a part of me as the students I will research. I have chosen to use a theoretical framework that will help to better understand the experiences of Spanish heritage language (SHL) learners and identify processes the SHL learner goes through while communicating and maintaining a heritage language. Subjectively speaking, Latinos and other minorities need role models, mentors, or teachers that teach about culture, identity, and must provide each student with the encouragement and resources needed to succeed in ways that fit his or her own culture. These personal

experiences have offered me some basic skills needed to query students, elicit meaningful voices, and gather significant information.

As Peshkin (1985) notes, “subjectivity can be virtuous, for it is the basis of the researcher’s distinctive contribution, one that results from the unique configuration of their personal qualities joined to the data one has collected” (p. 276- 278). As mentioned, paying closer attention to one’s subjectivity instead of trying to define an event that exists outside you will create increased awareness. The point being made is that all events and experiences are both self-referential and subjective; like the clothes on our backs. You cannot have an event, which is completely outside of you because you are a necessary component of every event that occurs. By monitoring myself, I am only empowering my personal statement and elevating my research. By this consciousness, I have eluded the biases that subjectivity provokes and move toward unbiased research. I acknowledge my subjectivity in a meaningful way, as this spirit of confession will only benefit the research process within a milieu of linguistic and cultural uncertainty.

Delimitations

This study did not seek to understand the experiences of a population of students, as it was limited to the researcher as the primary data. This study did not seek to compare the experiences of other students or researchers. This study is limited in scope, its viewpoints and experiences relative to my educational

experiences. The experiences and personal account rendered do not necessarily produce generalizations.

Summary

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 presented the statement of the problem, purpose, research questions, and an introduction to key concepts. I shed light on my ideological principles forged from my lived experiences and theoretical foundation. Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertaining to key theoretical concepts, identity and Spanish Heritage language. Chapter 3 describes the methodological design, which provides a brief overview of the study, theoretical background and a compendious history of autoethnography. In this chapter, I explain my intent behind autoethnography, accompanied by a description of the research method and research design. Nine vignettes serve as the primary data, with analysis and reflections in chapter 4. Chapter 5 delivers a summary of the findings, a general discussion, educator recommendations, and limitations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In response to the growing Hispanic population, specialized programs such as the Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) are being offered to United States educational institutions. The nation's school systems have acknowledged this group of learners as having unique language skills that must be addressed better independent from a traditional foreign language course. Coupled with the influx of the Hispanic/Latino population, academic institutions have had to revise their understanding on bilingualism and the role of the minority language in order to better understand the culture. Many critical scholars of Bilingual Education now argue that one's opinion must veer from seeing speakers of such languages as having an English language deficiency to seeing those native language skills as assets. While pedagogical research in this field is constant, there is a gap in sociolinguistic research as it pertains to Heritage Language Learners, specifically in the construction of identity and the negotiation of language ideologies in SHL learners (Cummins, 2005).

This literature review will discuss Spanish Heritage Language maintenance not in relation to the often heated debate over immigration reform, or other political considerations, but rather in relation to the possible relationship between bilingual/bicultural identity negotiation, heritage language use, and language ideologies. To carry out this study, it is necessary to complete a critical

review of current literature and to develop a theoretical framework by which the studies' data can be analyzed. Consequently, two major areas of literature were reviewed: (a) identity and (b) Spanish Heritage Language.

Identity

Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) learners, specifically Mexican American Spanish Speakers, have unique and thought-provoking identities. Members of a SHL learner course have a shared goal of learning their heritage language, developing mutual ways of acting, speaking and using the language. It is a challenge to disassociate language and identity, especially in the case of Heritage language as students express identity while simultaneously learning the language. Identity may be defined as “the active negotiation of an individual’s relationship with larger social constructs” (Mendoza-Denton, 2002, p. 475). While one’s identity embraces racial, class and rank, national, ethnic, professional, and gender affiliations, one’s identity is built upon a specific language, dialect, or linguistic form. Tabouret-Keller and Le Page (1985) stress the fluidity of language as acts of identity where speakers “reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles” (p. 14). They elucidate a student’s voyage through a “multidimensional sociolinguistic space” in pursuit of adjusting discourses to different positions, various topics of discussion, and interlocutors in an evolution of newly focused forms according to their needs for different identities. In negotiating a “multi-dimensional space,” students participate in diverse linguistic practices and create multiple identities by accommodating their speech to

different situations and topics of conversation depending on their need for multiple identities.

James Paul Gee's (1996) Theory of Discourses (D/d)

A theoretical concept that will allow this literature review to capture the relationships between language, identity, and the larger social, cultural context is James Paul Gee's (1996) theory of Discourses (D/d). Gee's theory is aimed to understand the interrelationships between social identities, social relations, contexts, and specific situations of language use (1996).

Gee states discourses are:

ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit, which comes complete with the appropriate costume, and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize. (1996, p. 127)

Discourses are ways of "behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing", that are recognized as legitimate of particular identities, or "kinds of people" (Hacking, 1995) by specific groups, whether one is being a teacher of a certain sort, a Mexican-American of a certain sort, and so forth (Gee, 1996, p.131). Discourses, thus, are everywhere and they are "ways of being in the world" (Gee, 1996, p.131).

Gee's work on discourses mirrors the way in which Spanish heritage

language learners attempt to fit in. Gee (1996) found that “it has been demonstrated that dominant practices within the classroom make it difficult for students from diverse cultural and linguistic groups to succeed in school” (as cited in Zugel, 2012, p. 4). Immigrant students and their families are fighting for language maintenance, methods to show pride in culture, and a well-balanced perspective of fitting in within a different culture. All of this is occurring while attempting to join the majority group culture. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) assert that students adopting in the ways of the majority group “begin to erase their heritage language and culture to adopt the powerful one” (p. 294). The usage of the word *powerful* seems to suggest that other cultures are inferior, and, therefore, Mexican immigrant students could potentially see themselves and their culture as inferior to the majority group. Pressured to lose their own identity and quick to assimilate, students not only lose a part of who they are, but also “remain marginalized no matter how much they adapt” (Garza & Garza, 2010, p. 204). This can happen to many students if the schools they belong to do not value linguistic and cultural diversity.

McKay and Wong’s (1996) study is noteworthy because it resonates Gee’s (1996) notion of Discourses and suggests that language learning is often not a democratic process. In many cases, learners are assigned or given identities and roles by members of the target Discourse, which these identities and roles may not permit status as equal members of the Discourse. Therefore, an essential component to consider is relations of power and sites of struggle

and resistance in language learning (Canagarajah, 1999; Cummins, 1986; Fairclough, 1992; Pennycook, 2001; Phillipson, 2012).

Gee (1996) elaborates that:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and artifacts of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network' or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'. (p. 131)

Discourses demonstrate that language is a symbolic system that "saying(writing)-doing-being-valuing-believing combinations" are part of a social role in larger macro-social, cultural, historical, and political ideologies.

As explained by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), "Identity is the social positioning of self and other" (p. 586). It emerges through interaction. Also, when students construct their identities, one must become creative in the ways linguistic practices are carried. Recognizing this creativity is critical to better understand the dynamics of identity construction and reconstruction in relation to others. As seen the West Indies, in Tabouret-Keller and Le Page's (1985) study of Creole speakers, speakers become creative in their language use, switching codes of language use that extends from the highly innovative and eccentric to the very highly conventional and ordinary (p. 12). It is this creativity in language use that illuminates a beautifully constructed speaking as well as shifting of identities.

Often, it is the largely unspoken and implicit issues, which affect Mexican students the most. These students face the remarkable challenge of developing their identities in an environment centered on the premise that their very being—education level, culture, language—is considered subpar (Zugel, 2012, p. 7). Despite the increase in LatinX immigrants and births in the United States, there still seems to be a resistance to cultural diversity within the classroom, even in states like Washington and California, an English-Plus State (Reeves, 2009). Even though linguistic and minority groups should be encouraged to maintain their first language, some educators feel that it is not in the students' best interest to learn a language other than English. It seems that languages other than English are not always considered a gift, but something to be looked down upon because second languages are not the norm (Levine & McCloskey, 2012). On many occasions for example, I have been told to speak English and not my native tongue, and I can attest to the fact that this is damaging to a person's self-worth and identity. It hurts to push your native tongue to the side—and by extension, your very being. It is problematic for Mexican immigrant students to have a solid foundation in identity when they “are expected to abandon their native culture and language” (Zugel, 2012, p. 7) in order to become part of the new one.

Individuals' Agency

Individuals' agency is connected to the sociohistorical context in which language is presented. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) identify three types of

identities which reveal varying degrees of agency: “(1) imposed identities (non-negotiable in time and place); (2) assumed identities (accepted and nonnegotiable); and (3) negotiable identities (contested by groups and individuals)” (p. 21). According to this concept, identities are constructed through dominant discourses. This concept imposes particular labels such as ‘speakers of a minority language’ and ‘Latino’ regardless of a student’s self-identification or how they feel concerning the labels. Through dominant discourse, certain labels are assumed and not contested because they are presumed legitimate.

In *Social Identity, Investment, and Language Learning* by Bonny Norton Peirce (1995), she states that “although a person may be positioned in a particular way within a given discourse, the person might resist the subject position or even set up a counter-discourse which positions the person in a powerful rather than marginalized subject position.” Dr. John Winslade (2012) mentions that the identities and discourses allotted through educational institutions are catalysts of opportunity or “those identities produced by years of schooling predominantly underline a sense of personal failure, and instill a sense of worthlessness” (p. 20). Yet, with negotiable identities, students can exercise the highest degree of agency as they continually shift through identities to fit their personal and cultural identities. Students play around with language in order to fit their personal needs and as a result of this agency, students become active agents of their own linguistic behavior.

First Language Loss

Sandra Kouritzin's (1999) work has made a profound statement on the significance of the heritage language to one's personal identity. In her book, *Face[t]s of First Language Loss*, she includes stories from adults that depict themselves as having lost their first language. Kouritzin (1999) described language loss as "restricted minority-language acquisition in a majority-language submersion setting" (p. 11). This statement says that, when students began school and when English was the only language permitted, their use of and development of their heritage language was restricted and thus, failed to develop further.

For example, in *Face[t]s of First Language Loss*, Lara says:

I do remember being in about Grade 1 or 2 or 3 – I am not too sure – my mother trying to speak to me in Finnish and I was so frustrated and I said, 'Speak English because I do not understand what you're saying to me. (p. 7)

Another story in *Face[t]s of First Language Loss* is Richard's:

We communicated in our language until it became almost an appendage, useless. We communicated in our language until the point where the English language overcomes the Cree; it's like being buried by an avalanche. All of a sudden, the avalanche happens. All of the English words fall on you and you die. The Cree die for a while. The Cree is never

dead, the Cree will never be dead, but the language becomes less important. (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 63-64)

The loss of the heritage language, resulted in him feeling as if he lost his culture “for a while”, and gave a significant comparison to death. Richard connects his identity with his culture and language.

Lara also states:

When it first dawned on me that I had lost my language, there was a sadness, a disappointment, and a sense of tragedy... I have come to the conclusion I will always be an outsider looking in from whatever perspective I look at my life. As a Finn, I am an outsider; as an Anglophone, I am an outsider; as a Canadian, I am somewhat of an outsider because I fit nowhere really – but then perhaps all Canadians are outsiders as well, so maybe there is a common thread there. I suppose there is a certain death of self when you lose your mother tongue as well, that perhaps you do not ever get back, do not ever find ... do not ever resurrect. (Kouritzin, 1999, p. 96)

Richard and Lara not only describe the feelings that come when one loses a language, but also a loss of identity and some elements of culture. Lara must navigate through her Finn and Canadian identities and struggles in identity construction, as she does not feel she can have multiple identities. Richard, on the other hand, went away to a residential school and entered a process of re-learning many cultural elements when he returned to his Cree community.

He says:

If I had not readopted Cree, I think I would be an Englishman. I would be living in the larger world, in English, but I would not be very happy. I would be a misplaced person. I would be a little brown-white man I guess; there would be still something missing. Losing the language is like losing half the man you are. Not to lose the language makes me twice the man, so the loss of the language is the loss of the soul, I think, for an Indian person. It is the loss of the essence of the soul, not to know the language, because you never know how beautiful you are until you know your language...because you can only be described in a foreign tongue, right?
(Kouritzin, 1999, p. 71)

Case studies in Kouritzin's (1999) book *Face[ts] of First Language Loss* characterize tension and the struggle in negotiating one's identity and retaining or regaining the mother tongue.

In Lucy Tse's (2000) article, "The Effects of Ethnic Identity Formation on Bilingual Maintenance and Development: An Analysis of Asian American Narratives", the narrators speak of the process they go through while growing up and the feeling of shame they feel when speaking their heritage language. Out of the 38 narratives, 23 revealed language attitudes, which highlighted language as central to the group's membership. The narrators expressed how the desire of belonging to the dominant culture school translates to the rejection of the heritage language. Tse (2000) calls this stage of ethnic identity formation as

ethnic ambivalence/evasion where an attempt to assimilate to the dominant culture forces one to reject their ethnic identity. Tse (2000) establishes that language is “a salient feature of ethnic identity formation” and that one’s negative feelings towards the ethnic group affect attitudes toward the heritage language (p. 188). Nonetheless, as noted in *Who Studies Which Language and Why?* by Howard et al. (2009), children tend to reject their parents’/ family identity in middle childhood and adolescence yet return to it later in life. Similarly, Kondo-Brown’s (2005) research with bilingual heritage students of Japanese in Hawaii showed that while they were growing up, the adolescents tended to align themselves with the dominant culture. However, when they became college students, they began to identify with both cultures and languages.

Spanish heritage learners face the remarkable challenge of developing their identities in an environment centered on the premise that their very being—education level, culture, language—is considered subpar (Zugel, 2012, p. 7). Although Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and other Spanish speaking minorities are increasingly present in the classroom, there feels to be a resistance to cultural diversity within the classroom, even in diverse states such as California, Nevada, Washington (Reeves, 2009). Despite the encouragement to maintain a language, or learn a new language, some educators still feel that it is not in the students’ best interest to invest in Spanish language maintenance because the focus should be on English development and advancement.

Spanish Heritage Language (SHL)

A former structure created within world language acquisition and educational institutions is the Spanish Heritage Language program. The terms Spanish Heritage Language, Spanish Heritage Culture, Spanish Heritage Learner, Spanish Heritage Language Learner, and Spanish Heritage Language speaker are all accepted classifications; still each embraces a wide-ranging scope. For this study, the collaborative definition established by Hornberger and Wang (2008) will be used, along with other definitions by Guadalupe Valdés. In order to understand a Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) learner, one must first understand the term HLLs [heritage language learners]. “HLLs are individuals with familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs of that HL [heritage language] or HC [heritage culture]” (Hornberger & Wang, 2008, p. 27).

Attentively defined by Guadalupe Valdés (2001), a SHL learner is one who “is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken” and “who speaks or at least understands the language and who is to some degree bilingual in that language and in English” (p. 280). Cho et al. (2004) define heritage language as languages articulated by “children of immigrants or by those who immigrated to a country when young” (p. 23). A definition that world language educators embrace is the following: “A student who is raised at home with a non-English language,” comprehends it, and is to some degree bilingual (Valdés, 2005, p. 412). SHL classrooms are diverse in Spanish academic education, with distinctive levels of

proficiency as noted in their California Examination of Language Development Test (García Bedolla & Rodriguez, 2011).

Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) take a different approach with their definition stating that heritage language learners are:

Individuals that have experienced a relatively extended period of exposure to the language, typically during childhood, through contact with a family member or other individuals, resulting in the development of either receptive and/or productive abilities in the language, and varying degrees of bilingualism. (p. 10)

Beaudrie and Ducar (2005) also add to their definition "an individual with a personal or historical connection to the heritage language" (p. 10). This added piece suits public educational institutions with an emphasis for language maintenance. In "Who Studies Which Language and Why?" by Howard et al. (2009), Heritage Language Learners are:

broadly defined heritage learners" as those students who reported that the language was not used regularly at home and who nevertheless responded that they wanted to learn the language in order to understand their heritage or to connect with family.

This final definition is appropriate for language learners who have a personal connection to the language.

Spanish is considered a heritage language since it is a spoken minority language and the members of this community have recognized a personal and

historical connection to Spanish. It is important to note that the term 'heritage language' continues to play an important role in the advancement of research, development, and implementation of policy concerning bilingual education. Furthermore, bilingualism and the varying degrees of bilingualism are still imperative to mention in order to portray an accurate description of Spanish Heritage Language Learners. Valdés (2001) discusses the varying degrees of bilingualism through the bilingual continuum. The bilingual continuum says, "there are many different types of bilinguals and that bilingual abilities fall along a continuum" (p. 5). Valdés explains that bilinguals do not have equal proficiency in both languages, are dominant in one language, and may have minimal competency in speaking, listening, reading or writing in another language. With these capabilities, he or she may still be considered bilingual as compared to a monolingual counterpart with no experience in a second language. A person can have varying degrees of bilingualism and land anywhere within the continuum as long as they have minimal proficiency within the four basic competences: speaking, listening, reading and writing in one of their languages.

Also relevant are the conditions that lead an individual to bilingualism. Valdés and Figueroa (1994) state that students are either two types of bilinguals: Elective bilinguals or circumstantial bilinguals. Those who choose to be bilingual are elective bilinguals and those who are forced to do so are circumstantial bilinguals. Choosing to enroll in a foreign language course is an example of an elective bilingual. On the contrary, heritage language instruction is based on the

student's prior background knowledge and generally "learns another language to function effectively because of their circumstances (e.g. as immigrants)" (Baker, 2011, p. 4). Their principal language is in jeopardy of "being replaced by the second language" as they "operate in the majority language society that surrounds them" (Baker, 2011, p. 4). This characterizes a circumstantial bilingual, who learns a new language in order to fully participate in the new society (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994).

Heritage Language Maintenance in Education

Similar to language arts, Spanish heritage language instruction is frequently referred to as Spanish for native speakers of Spanish or instruction for Spanish speakers. From birth, students in this field have received almost all of their schooling in English, yet they have grown up with a parent whose dominant language is Spanish, and or live in bilingual homes. Kondo-Brown (2005) requested the reexamination of existing pedagogical practices and promoted the development of separate Heritage Language (HL) classes. Therefore, in 1981, the first compendium of SHL pedagogy articles was published in *Teaching Spanish to the Hispanic Bilingual: Issues, Aims and Methods* by Valdés, Lozano, and García-Moya (1981). The tone of language maintenance began to change. Hidalgo (1993) shows her example of this shift since she advocated for a reappraisal of U.S. Spanish. Hidalgo (1993) stated, "changing the status of Spanish from a vernacular to a semi-official language will not only institutionalize it but will create the appropriate use domain that will guarantee its preservation"

(p. 569).

Research efforts are exploring the field of Spanish Heritage Language Education (HLE) maintenance and development. Heritage language schools were founded to provide support and encourage the learning of their languages and cultures (Bradunas & Topping, 1988; Fishman, 2001). Many of these heritage language classrooms are continuing with the preservation and linguistic proficiency of the language, while providing rich cultural background. To promote Spanish Heritage Language Education (HLE) initiatives such as the Heritage Language Summer Research Institute, the National Heritage Language in America Conference, the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC), the University of California Consortium Summer Institute on Heritage Languages, and the Heritage Language Journal were created.

Heritage learners, many coming from first and second-generation immigrants, must undergo a process of exploration into the history of his or her ethnic group. Students from immigrant backgrounds experience complex issues of adaptation, including both the culture of the new country and their country of origin (Berry, 1997; Rumbaut, 1994). This process is a much harder process as many parents expect their child to completely assimilate into the English language, culture, and practices. Lucy Tse (2000) showed this type of shift to English in the home in her article "The Effects of Ethnic Identity Formation on Bilingual Maintenance and Development". Tse (2000) also indicates that "an ethnic minority student's opportunity to develop additive bilingualism diminishes,

and with it, the chance to benefit from the academic and cognitive advantages of bilingualism” (p. 3). Furthermore, in this stage, ethnic minorities may accept the ideologies, discourses, and beliefs of the dominant group, and are pushed toward joining and conforming to the group norms (Phinney, 1989).

For many Latino children, the PK-12 public school system offers limited opportunities to study their home language. With English language taking precedence, the issue of heritage language maintenance has become a primary concern for immigrant families in the United States (Guardado, 2002; Phinney, 1989; Fillmore, 2000, 2005). Furthermore, bilingual education has experienced dramatic controversy due to the combined outcomes and effects of legislation, concerns with English language requirements and testing of No Child Left Behind NCLB, and financial constraints (García, 2009).

Community language programs have a vital role in home language development and maintenance. However, many heritage language programs are developed outside the classroom by family, churches, and other organizations (Scanlan & López, 2012). To date, only 40% of institutions of higher learning offer SHL courses and then only one or two levels, on average (Beaudrie, 2011). Additionally, course offerings in most SHL programs tend to neglect two student populations that are vital to increasing capacity, opportunity, and desire: (1) advanced students, who are best positioned to take professional advantage of their skills, thereby contributing to opportunity, and (2) Latinos with low proficiency in Spanish who are seeking to recover their home language

(Beaudrie, 2011; Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005). Heritage Language Learners "generally indicated that" (Howard et al., 2009. p.19). Hence, a relevant point is that HLLs may become more interested in studying their heritage language after adolescence, when identity development tends to bring them back to an interest in their heritage (Howard et al., 2009).

A Union Between Two Different Worlds

Chris Weedon (1987) indicates that through language one "negotiates a sense of self" (p. 287). Nevertheless, many Latinos in SHL classrooms vacillate through a union between two different worlds in search of how to speak, who they are, or what their new "self" truly may be. Along the way, this "self" continually battles between different cultural values, standard language, and family or community customs. A critical challenge for language learning is to be able to retain a sense of self while appropriating new discourses (Canagarajah, 1999). When the heritage language, and its use, begins to diminish, students encounter the loss of both cultural identity and the heritage language itself (Guardado, 2002; Ro & Cheatham, 2009).

Sandra Cisneros's (1991) repeated allusions of voice in the "House on Mango Street" and her later works in poetry, definitely showed her child voice emerging and eventually finding a new voice as an adult. Erlinda Gonzales-Berry (2000) in "Searching for a Voice", used Cisneros's book as a motivation to consciously question and find her "voice" and herself. Uncovering that voice

meant however, "peeling away of layer upon layer of voice-muffling circumstances, a voice disguised as bilingualism, self-consciousness, time, and a deeply entrenched baritone register" (Gonzales-Berry, 2000 p. 123). Erlinda was bilingual by historical accident and academic training created her first obstacle in her quest for voice. As an English dominant speaker in her social domain, her formal experiences in Spanish outnumber those in English. She is a fluorescent Spanish literature reader with a certain Spanish flair to her persona. She says, "Spanish offers me an immediate persona, a risk-taker, witty, and English to me is more conservative, insecure, and high self-conscious" (Gonzales-Berry, 2000 p. 123). Her issues regarding language choice went beyond the purely psychological but were social and ideological implications of language choice. Morales (2015) offers researchers, educators, and the community stories about Mexican American children—as told by children—in order to give them voice (p. 7). Following in Morales footsteps, I would like to give voice to the countless Mexican immigrant students like myself and families like mine who have not had a chance to tell their stories.

Gonzales-Berry (2000) words to fellow Caribbean women writers at a lecture were, "if indeed they were sincere in their efforts to reach their people, they must return to the familiar oral mode" (p. 124). Aristeo Brito, a Chicano from Arizona said, "Espero que se siga escribiendo en Español puesto que allí es donde se radica nuestra autenticidad." ("I hope that individuals will continue writing in Spanish, for that is where our authenticity lies.") (Gonzales-Berry, 2000,

p. 124). Those powerful words also mean rejecting the authenticity of the works of Rudolfo Anaya, Sandra Cisneros, Cherríe Moraga, Gary Soto, Artura Isalás, and many other Chicanas/os who speak or write in English. However, language choice of Spanish does not give an exclusive limit to a formal code, but certainly this code provides for a foundation, and a meaning beyond that afforded by a single language.

A Varied Bilingual

Zentella (1997) conducted research in a predominately Puerto Rican neighborhood in New York in which she used "anthropolitical linguistic" analysis. With this methodology, she joined qualitative ethnographic methods with sociolinguistics in order to "understand and facilitate a stigmatized group's attempts to construct a positive self within an economic political context" (p.13). She identified a varied bilingual and multidialectal repertoire exercised in the community. Zentella (1997) recorded daily dialogues from the youth's neighborhood block and noted that the majority of the youth's conversations were in English. Zentella (1997) did not note a single Spanish conversation taking place but instead, the conversations were scattered with Spanish loans, expressions, and code switches. The definition of bilingualism, in that community, reflected the ability to fluently understand English, but a more passive and receptive ability toward Spanish. This case also showed children responding to parents in English, despite parents speaking to their children in Spanish. Overall, Zentella (1997) states, "parents did not insist on being answered in Spanish, only

on being obeyed" (p. 54). Zentella (1997) attributes this language shift to the demands and pressures in school of communicating in English as well as the absence of persistence at home in communicating in Spanish. Thus, code-switching became the "vestigial remnant" of Spanish among young Spanish speakers (p.109). Young Spanish speakers around this block engaged in code-switching that joined their uniqueness with others similar in age and language profile based on "their way of blending their two languages and cultures" (p. 114). Furthermore, Zentella's (1997) data uncovered the partial acquisition of verb morphemes before English became the primary language (p. 211). This data also supported "the appearance of the imperfect tense in place of the preterit" (p. 190) and "the replacement of the perfect tenses by the preterit" (p. 195). Zentella's (1997) study was longitudinal, yet the study found no direct correlation between the type of bilingual each child was and their linguistic profile as an adult. Just as one's identity is adaptable and changes, so do their linguistic abilities.

U.S. Spanish linguistic research emerged in investigations of patterns of codeswitching (Lipski, 1993; Pfaff, 1979; Timm, 1975). These codeswitching investigations primarily sought to find "Moore (2002) analyzed codeswitching examples of U.S. Spanish syntactic structure. In this descriptive analysis, the findings presented "the suppression of syllables, simplification of the subjunctive mood, and the loss of lexical terms" (p. 144). The prescriptivist tone could suggest that such vernacular speech be eradicated rather than preserved.

In the case of Pfaff (1979), 200 speakers were examined through a

quantitative process. The examination found that various lexical, structural, and social constraints did not require a new grammatical system; rather, Pfaff found that “codeswitching relied upon an orderly process that utilized the grammars of both languages” (p. 269). In another study, Poplack (1993) researched the speech patterns of 20 Puerto Rican bilinguals. It found that more fluent bilinguals used intra-sentential switches than less fluent Puerto Rican bilinguals. This research was vital in countering the prevailing belief that the use of codeswitching was a linguistic deficiency. Continued interest in codeswitching prompted studies to examine linguistic structure, communicative functions, and language maintenance in bilingual communities.

In addition, the negative perception toward Spanish spoken in the United States by its own members augments struggles to the maintenance of Spanish. In her book *Borderlands*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) says, “even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca* (“they want to put chains on our mouths”). They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academias* (academic rules)” (p. 248). Here, comparisons among English, Spanish, and its variations influence people's “preference” to speak a language and negative perceptions from others while speaking can leave one chained and voiceless. Furthermore, maintaining Spanish is difficult because of the need to learn English to be able to fully participate in society (Valdés, 1997). Spanish speakers are pressured to learn English and, by comparison, their heritage languages “are accorded little or no prestige by the larger society” (Valdés, 1997,

p.32). A constant comparison to other variations in Spanish, plus a push to learn English, quickly can lead to a sense of linguistic inferiority (Carreira, 2000). Carreira (2000) says that the low self-esteem and sense of linguistic inferiority is another obstacle for Spanish heritage maintenance. With all this being said, maintaining a heritage language allows for increased communication with family (Fillmore, 1991), increased connection to one's culture (Beaudrie & Ducar, 2005), and increased awareness that there are different ways of thinking other than one's own (Moll & Ruiz, 2002). If these opportunities are not provided to our learners, their minority language will recede, and a dwindling of the students' psychological well-being will occur. Immigrant children succeed when they have the proper skills and tools to advance their English proficiencies; however, fluent communication of the home language with family and community members is also an incredibly important component for healthy and positive socialization, along with growth in cognitive brain development, and an emotional or psychological well-being (Cho & Krashen, 1998).

Literature on HLLs suggest that a major benefit to heritage language development is an increased sense of social and interpersonal confidence in communication. Cho & Krashen (1998) administered a survey to 60 Korean Americans regarding conflicts experienced in their daily lives as a result of HL loss. The results determined that a large majority of the participants faced difficulties in communicating with family and the HL community members. Furthermore, heritage language development in English-speaking countries

permits for added personal contact and communication with parents and grandparents who may not be fluent in English, and beyond that, with the larger ethnic community to which the speaker belongs (Cummins & Danesi, 1990). As an alternative example, as part of the ACTFL/Hunter College Project, group interviews were conducted with students from three high schools with heritage language programs (Webb & Miller, 2000). Romero (2000) describes language loss prior to HL class enrollment and also described heritage language acquisition in students resulting in an improvement in communication with their parents as an outcome of taking these courses. As a consequent of the data, the teachers in this study strategically assigned family interviews, letter writing to relatives living in the country of heritage, and article writing from the point of view of the local heritage community. Valdés et al. (1981) state that HLs are "rather, complex persons who are fundamentally different from monolinguals ... members of speech communities in which a single language does not meet all their communicative needs" (p. 3). Therefore, a significant challenge is to promote student agency in language issues and in the heritage course.

Summary

This review of the literature illuminates the connection between identity and the mosaic of learning and language use for SHL learners. It is without argument that a SHL learner's identity is multiple and vacillated through a union between unique worlds within the context of the social environment. Further, this review of literature recognizes the creativity in linguistic practices, language use,

Spanish loans, expressions, and code switches which leads to a beautifully constructed speaking and shifting of identities. These developments of multiple social identities, including ethnic identities, SHL, and bilingual, are also intertwined with practices, school norms, and educational institutions. The review of the research is consistent in that heritage language learning encompasses the multifaceted dynamics of the school system, the communities, and the individual learner.

There is no “one-size-fits-all” towards teaching of heritage languages when based according to student needs and goals. Students, especially from Hispanic/LatinX backgrounds, come from diverse backgrounds and come to the classroom with diverse needs. Schools must not damage a student’s ethnic and bilingual identity, but instead promote the very essence of diverse languages to the core. Language practices are an essential right:

People cannot be effective citizens in a democratic society if their education cuts them off from critical consciousness of key elements within their physical or social environment. If we are committed to education establishing resources for citizenship, critical awareness of the language practices of one’s speech community is an entitlement. (Pennycook, 2001, p. 95)

Student agency must not be ignored, as educators and educational institutions must have an ethical engagement and responsibility in providing a richness and diversity to linguistic practices and identities. When applying the knowledge and

a critical lens to understand the workings of a language and its constructs, there will be a denial of hegemony, and a harmonious maintenance of the heritage language.

The truth is that the oppressed are not ‘marginals’, are not people living ‘outside’ of society. They have always been ‘inside’ – inside the structure that made them ‘beings for others’. The solution is not to ‘integrate’ them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so they can become ‘beings for themselves’ (Freire, 1970, p. 55).

After reviewing these concepts in depth, it becomes evident that the way SHL learner’s negotiate identity appears to influence choices regarding language use and an in-depth look at language usage and language ideologies amongst high school students is of essence. Given the historical trends of laws and regulations excluding cultures and primary languages other than society’s mainstream dominant discourse in public institutions (Valencia, 2012), Spanish heritage language and other HL education must not be abandoned and a commitment to addressing policy toward heritage languages must transpire.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the study, theoretical background and a compendious history of autoethnography. I will explain my intent behind autoethnography, accompanied by a description of the research method and research design. Lastly, participant information and data collection are described before the analysis of data and summary.

Brief Overview

Passionate discussion and considerations over the role of the minority language and bilingual education has led educators and educational institutions to reexamine its theories, practices, and pedagogy. As a fairly new field of language study, research has aspired to understand Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) learners, and heritage language maintenance lacks a deeper look into language usage and language ideologies through the experiences of the researcher. Conventional ways of thinking toward this field in research are limited because different people possess different worldviews, which bring forth a different way of speaking and writing, valuing. Therefore, scholars branched toward autoethnography as a system of responding to criticism by creating research that is personal, meaningful, and grounded in individual experience

(Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The purpose in writing this autoethnography is to consider the various processes in communicating in the heritage language, the structural and personal motivators behind maintaining a heritage language, and to reflect, in my experience, how I have negotiated with the development of multiple social identities, including ethnic and bilingual identities as constructed through various language ideologies. The goal is to add to existing research and literature and to support heritage language development and maintenance efforts.

The study will employ qualitative methods, principally an autoethnographic account of my experiences with Spanish as a heritage language. This qualitative analysis of SHL language and identity will examine the following questions:

1. What obstacles did I face when speaking English, Spanish or both?
2. How did I perceive and negotiate my bilingual identity?
3. What role does Spanish Heritage Language have in the identity development?

I have chosen a qualitative approach to answer these questions because as Merriam (1998) indicated, “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed” (p. 6). A qualitative study will provide insights into a private world, different from a quantitative study, as an understanding of one’s experiences, feelings, and emotions give a well-rounded perspective.

The History of Autoethnography

Within the parameters of qualitative research lives autoethnography (Chang, 2013; Denzin, 2006; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It is a research method that links the personal layer of consciousness to the cultural (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The researcher employs both autobiographic and the ethnographic experience for the study, thus making autoethnography a method consisting of both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2011). For this dissertation, autoethnography is defined as “cultural analysis through personal narrative” (p.17). It is a reflection of self, intimate in its experience, and unites the narrative to the cultural experience.

Muncey (2010) claims that autoethnographies are personal stories that form our understanding of the cultural experience of a group through one’s subjective interpretations using a theoretical framework. Differing from Muncey (2010), Chang (2013) argues “autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self” (p. 48–49). Both journeys are nevertheless personal adventures into a wider social and cultural meaning and a self-reflective search within self through experiences linked to concepts in literature. Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as “autobiographies that self-consciously explore the interplay of the introspective, personally engaged self with cultural descriptions mediated through language, history, and ethnographic explanation” (p. 742). Examples of this emerging method reveal that autoethnographers have explored their own

personal experiences and interactions by telling a story that invites personal connection in order to achieve a wider cultural, political, and social understanding supported by an approach as rigorous and justifiable as any other form of inquiry (Duncan, 2004).

Reed-Danahay (1997) explained autoethnography as an intersection of three writing genres:

- 1) “native anthropology,” in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group;
- 2) “ethnic autobiography,” personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups; and
- 3) “autobiographical ethnography,” in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing (p. 2).

The theory of autoethnography conceptualizes a postmodernist construct, far-removed from a positivist epistemology. It is a philosophical path in the construction of truth. It rejects oppositions concerning the researcher and the researched. It challenges the notions of objectivity and subjectivity, and art and science. While autoethnography has traditionally been tied to either autobiography or ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis, 2004), Chang (2013) argues that autoethnography “should be ethnographic in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation” (p. 48). In traditional research, the researcher maintains a clear separation between him or her and the sample population. However, in

autoethnography, the researcher is the population and develops the data through the narrative account in an attempt to gain access to an inner world. The researcher and the research are linked creating “highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21).

Three descriptors that differentiate autoethnography from ethnography as a method, while acknowledging that autoethnography is ethnographic, are:

First, like ethnographers, autoethnographers follow a similar ethnographic research process by systematically collecting data ... analyzing and interpreting them, and producing scholarly reports, also called autoethnography. In this sense, the term “autoethnography” refers to the process and the product, just as “ethnography” does. Second, like ethnographers, autoethnographers attempt to achieve cultural understanding through analysis and interpretation. In other words, autoethnography is not about focusing on self alone, but about attempting to understand self in relation to others. The last aspect of autoethnography sets it apart from other ethnographic inquiries. Autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data (Sparkes, 2000, pp. 48– 49).

In autoethnography, however, the goal is to convey a “patchwork of feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviors that portray a more complete view of . . . life” (Wolcott, 1999, p. 10). By reexamining conventional positions about objectivity, we can see that “every view is a way of seeing, not *the way*”

(Wolcott, 1999, p. 137). How I see my experiences as a heritage language learner and heritage language educator is my way of seeing, and I cannot help but embrace a sense of passion and emotion in this field. Years upon years of education and a solid foundation in theory border a space around passion and intellect. As a result, autoethnography offers a frontier amid art and life, analysis and subjectivity.

Furthermore, scholars accepted that diverse kinds of people have distinctive assumptions about the world and realize that differences can arise with the various different ways of believing, valuing, speaking, writing. Autoethnography gives a deeper perspective into these worlds, deemphasizing inflexible terminologies of what comprises useful, meaningful, and valuable research. This research method also helps us understand how the kinds of people we say we are or are perceived to be, influence our understanding of what to study, and how to study it. Experiences leave lasting impressions and go far deeper than facts. Writing an authentic story, backed with a theoretical framework, allows for an addition to the volumes of research in a valid manner and quite possibly help others relate to uncovered truths. Realizing the significance of uncovering a core truth and learning to tell that narrative in ways that engender new research, motivate, and inspire advocates, is what I am striving forth with this autoethnography.

Researchers who write autoethnographies seek to create artistic accounts of interpersonal experiences within a culture through self. Initially, this is

accomplished by distinguishing between patterns of cultural experience verified by interviews, field notes, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns by showing and telling, and using storytelling through character and plot development (Ellis et al, 2011). Ethnographies create “thick descriptions” of a culture in order to help create an understanding of that culture by discerning patterns of that cultural experience (Geertz, 1976 p.10). Writing about recurring feelings and stories, as verified by field notes, artifacts, and/or interviews accurately create patterns of cultural experience (Jorgenson, 2002). Thus, the autoethnographer attempts to create a more meaningful and engaging personal and cultural experience. Furthermore, by creating accessible texts, he or she may be able to add to existing research, influence a diverse population that traditional research usually disregards, and conceivably create individual and social change for more societies (Goodall, 2004).

Writing personal stories may be therapeutic and beneficial to the soul as it can help make sense of our own experiences. This method of writing allows authors to question uncontested stories—“conventional, authoritative, and projective storylines that plot how ideal social selves should live” (Tololyan, 1987, p.218; Bochner, 1994). Through this, we seek to develop and grasp an enhanced understanding of our relationships (Wyatt, 2008), reduce prejudice (Ellis, 2004), encourage personal responsibility and agency (Pelias, 2000, 2007), raise consciousness and promote cultural change (Goodall, 2004), and give a voice to those whom may be silenced or voiceless (Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002).

Why Autoethnography?

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of research and writing with stratum of consciousness, allowing for a connection through *self* to the surrounding culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Additionally, I wanted to take into account the importance of the macro-level forces that shape the lives of heritage language learners while dealing with day-to-day barriers and benefits related to language and identity. I also wanted to consider the structural and personal motivators behind maintaining a heritage language and the processes in communicating in the heritage language.

Writing an autoethnography is a challenge for me in other ways, as well. Having been raised in a traditional Mexican culture, I was taught never to focus on myself, as the focus should always be on my family or the greater community. It is a challenge for me to retrain myself and allow myself to write an autoethnography. I will admit, creative writing is a challenge, as you have to understand complexity from different deeper rooted perspectives. However, in order to investigate who I am as a person, as a student and teacher, and in order to answer my research questions I chose auto-ethnography as best fitted for my goals research method.

Participants and Data Collection

In autoethnography, because I am the participant and the researcher, the focus is on my experiences. I was my own research subject and stories of my understanding regarding certain experiences. My life served as the data that

brought into being my identity and paved a way for both understanding my educational experiences regarding language and for understanding certain perspectives as a Mexican-American immigrant through a seemingly successful educational pathway according to mainstream notions of educational success-- that is, of course, measured through degrees from a university or college (Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solórzano, 2006).

In autoethnography, the researcher is the population. In speaking about heritage language and its culture, it is necessary to mention my parents, colleagues, teachers, and my students in my writing. Hence, pseudonyms will be used for all individuals mentioned in the research. As I begin to write, gather data, and analyze events, I will speak to several teachers, my parents, students, and staff members to get their opinions and perceptions on how they saw story unfold. Thus, data for the research required observing one's self (in this case, me) and reflecting upon those observations. Rodriguez and Ryave (2002) claim that self-reflections are valuable tools for autoethnographers since they uncover "covert, elusive, and/or personal experiences like cognitive processes, emotions, motives, concealed actions, omitted actions, and socially restricted activities" (p. 3). In autoethnography, "the data collection is less focused on time in the field or on the extent of data and more on the active collaboration between the researcher and the culture during the study" (Creswell, 2008, p. 489). In this study, a daily reflexive journal recording cognitive thoughts, memories, and observations from the day's interactions create the bulk of the data.

The study utilized autoethnography as foundational to the research design. Data were collected from December 2016 through April 2017 in a range of contexts related to life and language across the K12 setting. Those contexts were written as vignettes in the form of stories. Data were analyzed using a pattern analysis process. Details of this methodology are described in the sections below prefaced by a section describing basic tenets of qualitative and autoethnographic work and why those methodologies supported this research. To increase validity and reliability:

1. Personal memory data. This data accounts and highlights my experiences as a heritage language learner and educator. Selected staff members, teachers, and students will help with the accuracy of certain data pieces that I will need to cross-reference.
2. Reflexive Journal. A collection of self-observation/self-reflexive data in journal entries will be used. I will collect and save unique stories of my life and reflect on each experience.
3. Vignettes. I will set aside time during each day to write for an hour a day. The vignettes are a written personal story but reflexive in comparing my narrative to a culture.

Vignettes and Personal Memory

For this narrative to be reflexive, “the author must focus on a group or culture and use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on themselves and look more deeply at interactions between self and other” (Ellis,

2004, p. 37). I will focus on meaningful life events and recall the emotional data through written detailed notes during the data collection period (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I will focus on the content with connections to my culture and important elements rather than research conducted by outsiders. This subjective process is valid in its own way as “validity is interpretive and dependent on context and the understandings we bring to the observation” (Ellis, 2004, p. 123). From our personal constructs, we determine validity within stories and determine the importance of instances within an event (Kelly, 2003). I included narratives of personal experiences as a student in different educational settings. I uncovered narratives about my own personal struggles and achievements as an adult and student. Finally, I included narratives of my own personal struggles and triumphs with English and Spanish as an adult in a doctoral program as deemed most important to me.

The vignettes are presented in chronological order and were written in an order that made sense to me as the researcher. The stories will follow the voyage of a student in diverse linguistic practices, the use and creativity in those linguistic practices, and the creation of multiple identities from a young child to adult. The goal was to write these narratives with “thick descriptions” and retaining smaller details as a way to observe patterns as more entries were kept. “Authors focus on a group or culture and use their own experiences in the culture reflexively to bend back on themselves and look more deeply at interactions between self and other” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37). Journal entries cannot only focus on

the personal story, the comparison between the narratives to the culture shifts it from a simple documentation of journal entries to reflexive research. The stories depicted will have a clear connection between identity with culture and language.

This study is published in the model of auto-ethnographic vignettes in order to elicit “emotional identification and understanding” (Denzin, 2006, p. 124). The theory of auto-ethnographic vignettes was developed by ethnographer Humphreys (2005) to increase his own self-reflexivity. Originally, Humphreys (2005), used narrative vignettes described by Erickson (1986) as “vivid portrayal[s] of the conduct of an event of everyday life” (p. 149) to enhance the “contextual richness” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 83) of ethnographic research. Each vignette of my study offers for observation of a particular event and written recollection from my life as a student to my professional and personal life. It is impossible to separate the two, like the clothes on my back, connected and comforting. The intent in writing auto-ethnographic vignettes is also to connect with readers through life events. Vignettes and their narrative style storytelling delve into deep emotions and detailed feelings about certain events. Readers not only have an opportunity to connect to the narrative emotionally; but can create an understanding of possible missing components in their own lives (Rambo, 2007).

Aligned in the spirit of Ellis (2004) I chose to also “bring life to research [and] bring research to life” (p. 4). Welcoming Louis’s (1991) argument that “I am an instrument of my inquiry: and the inquiry is inseparable from who I am” (p.

365), my intent is to create connections between my “natural and spontaneous reactions and dispel any notion of a researcher as an independent, objective observer” (Stacey, 1999, p. 365). In establishing on the work of Saldana (2003) and the term “ethnodrama[s]” (p. 221), I aspire to connect via a narrative account that creates engagement with members of the academic community to my being emotionally (Humphreys, 2005).

Data Analysis

I explore and analyze my childhood through reflections and attempt to comprehend identity development and my language choice journey from a student to adult. My life is the fieldwork. Specifically, it includes me as a Spanish heritage learner to a doctoral candidate intertwined amidst the academic school setting and culture. This is a unique amalgam of interpersonal relationships and implements a foundation for analysis of interpersonal relationships within a learning community on all of its levels. I continue to show connections to my personal life because it is impossible to alienate my personal life from my professional within this thorough examination.

As mentioned previously, autoethnography begins with my personal story. The characters in my stories feature the roles they play and create gateways into a larger sociological understanding (Ochs & Taylor, 1992). The characters include my parents, sister, brother, fifth grade teacher, principal, ninth grade French teacher, and Spanish professor at the University of California, San Diego. The cultural understanding of self during the analysis of data is the

autoethnographic intent behind this research (Chang, 2013). According to Chang (2013), the data analysis and interpretation travels fluidly from the personal to social, uncovered through the data and personal experiences need to be understood in their cultural context. This analysis starts with an emotional journey and recollection of my past history. As a researcher and writer, the focus cannot encompass all important details and events, but instead will focus on the most memorable and emotional details and events within the data collection period (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). "I want the theorizing to happen in the story, rather than entirely outside of the storyline" (Ellis, 2004, p. 199). This analysis is key in order to learn from and empower voices that have been omitted in education.

The following vignettes will be presented in chronological order. I chose to include them because I believe that they reflect personal growth:

Vignette One Illegal Immigrant, Vignette Two Early Beginnings, Vignette Three Ingles Sin Barreras, Vignette Four Fifth Grade Promotion, Vignette Five Hispanic, Latin American, Latina/o, Latino@, Latinx...Ay Dios Mio!, Vignette Six Pseudo-First Generation College Student, Vignette Seven French, English, No Spanish-Language Choices, Vignette Eight Spanish for Spanish Speakers, and Vignette Nine Embarking on a Lonely Journey.

The Metaphor

For this study, I chose to use a "journey of discovery" metaphor in order to explain the process of discovery through undetermined destinations (Lakoff 1990, Dyson 2007). I am uncovering my "self" and discovering details and events

that led me to grow up as an immigrant woman between two cultures, two languages, and multiple identities. With that, I did not know the sphere in which each vignette would lead or what discoveries would be made. I realized the need to choose the most memorable events and the need to describe those events with great detail. With this metaphor in mind, I have the professional and personal responsibility to be open to discover the great depths within me, which contributes to the story as a whole within the sphere of Spanish Heritage Language and identity.

In writing my vignettes, I applied four phases to the journey metaphor with various components (Dyson, 2007). During the first phase titled the “why” phase, I awakened aspects leading to my desire to begin the journey, which included my memory of the beginning stages of when my family and I immigrated to this country. This ultimately led me to ask how the journey began. I had this desire to identify certain emotions that went along with the commencement of the journey, as well. How did the journey begin? What emotions did I feel as the journey began?

The second phase is the “resources” phase and is the bridge between literature to my life events; continuing to aid in the journey of self-discovery. I uncovered literature on uprooting, immigrant home life, agency, resilience, Spanish heritage, multidimensional identities, identity construction, and autoethnography to identify the resources used on their journey, as well. The third is the “findings” phase and incorporates the supporting data resources that

help me to reach some possible conclusions related to the findings. The last phase of my journey is the “gathering” phase in which all information is synthesized to create meaning of the entire journey. The final analysis is probed, assessed, and interpreted.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Autoethnographies have also caused debate in the research field as discussions center around the methodology’s lack of objectivity. Ellis and Bochner (2000) assert that autoethnographies “should be subjective in nature since they are profoundly personal and focused on our metacognition and emotional states, which can never be truly validated or shown to be reliable” (p. 192). While most scientists and researchers envision the researcher entering a field far from home quite possibly in different communities or classrooms, autoethnographers tend to study the culture around them, attempting to include the climate and patterns seen in everyday life in the historical record (Wolcott, 1999).

I acknowledge that memory is imperfect and it is challenging to remember exact accounts and experiences in life that represent precisely how we felt and lived those events. I also acknowledge that there are always two sides to a story as people who have experienced the "same" event often voice it through a different lens. (Tullis Owen, McRae, Adams, & Vitale, 2009). Thus, in autoethnography, reliability, validity, and generalizability are often misinterpreted. If compared to a quantitative study, the context, meaning, and purpose of these

definitions are misrepresented due to its credibility and authentic personal narrative.

For an autoethnographer, reliability takes a different stance and indicates a narrator's credibility. "Do the experiences described have factual evidence?" (Bochner, 1994 p. 86) "Does the narrator believe that this is actually what happened to her or him?" (Bochner, 1994, p.86) Both of these questions generate an authentic view of the story. Reliability specifies if the story is deemed as fabrication, rather than a truthful account. Validity pursues authenticity. It suggests in readers a feeling that the experience portrayed is realistic and convincing. It also validates those feelings represented as real and coherent. "It connects readers to writers and provides continuity in their lives and what matters is the way in which the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller—to see the world from her or his point of view, even if this world does not 'match reality" (Plummer, 2001, p. 401).

The focus of generalizability determines whether the autoethnographer is able to elucidate unfamiliar cultural processes and look at personal experiences as it relates to cultures and the ways in which their existence and experience/s challenge hegemonic norms (Boylorn & Orbe, 1999). We benefit from individual experiences if we theorize about what we learn relationally, personally, and culturally through personal narratives. This is particularly significant and useful when approaching issues of identity and personal experience with the explicit objective to resist one-dimensional treatments of a complex phenomenon.

Readers test the generalizability of an autoethnography “as they determine if the story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know” (Ellis, 2004, p. 194-195).

In reflexive studies, autoethnographers uncover their subjective ethnographic experiences, process, or personal feelings from the field. One such example is a teacher of minority students writing a reflective narrative. The teacher’s reflection could change her praxis by engaging with culturally responsive practices (Ladson-Billings, 1992). In a reflexive study of personal experiences, the researcher is the subject and uses personal experience as a foundation for research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Another example, in *Ethnography: A Way of Seeing* by Wolcott (1999) documented brilliantly the experiences of a principal in his ethnography. This 1973 anthropological case study of an elementary school principal vividly describes the everyday obligations and duties of a school principal. It was a first-hand account of his lived story and these experiences provided a deeper understanding of the role and responsibilities of a principal. The book has been cited numerous in many studies, which serves to show that lived experiences add a rich and profound understanding to qualitative research.

Summary

According to Chang (2013), autoethnography is a useful and powerful research tool being used to enhance cultural understanding of self and others and is making a distinctive contribution toward research and literature. Self-

reflection and the gathering of data from multiple sources and multiple methods will give the collected data more depth, enabling me to view a more complete picture of the phenomenon being investigated and examine it with a more reliable perspective. In writing this autoethnography, I consider the structural and personal motivators behind maintaining a heritage language and the processes in communicating, and to consider how, in my experience, I have dealt with the development of multiple social identities, including ethnic identities and examine my own experiences within education. The following chapter is comprised of nine auto-ethnographic vignettes, including reflections and analysis.

CHAPTER FOUR

VIGNETTES

“Ser pobre en México o pobre aquí, prefiero pobre aquí porque aquí hay para comer.” (“To be poor in Mexico or poor here, I prefer to be poor here because there is food to eat here.”)

— I. Romero, personal communication, May 17, 2006

Introduction

I am a woman. I am an immigrant. I grew up between two cultures, the Mexican, with a passion for indigenous culture, and the Anglo, as a member of the colonized people, in a territory that once belonged to Mexico. I grew up uncomfortable in a place of contradictions; a place full of hatred toward the Spanish language; a place of anger toward the color of one’s skin; a place where exploitation is a prominent feature in this reality. Nonetheless, there are many joys behind this bicultural identity and a deep appreciation of this *Mestiza*. My lived experiences are unique and parallel common perspectives behind Mexican-American culture, identity, and language.

In this chapter, I offer vignettes of my experience. They are my voice, my inner life, my self. With the unique positioning consciousness takes at these convergent rivers, language and identity echo across multigenerational students. They tell the story of a young immigrant girl's progress toward self-realization and understanding in this contemporaneous day and age. The vignettes reflect and

analyze my lived experience, my voice, some triumphs, and struggles. The code switching in these vignettes from English to North Mexican dialect, to Spanglish, Castillian Spanish, to a sprinkling of Nahuatl reflects my heritage language. I hope this work will create opportunities to open dialogue for readers to engage and reflect in topics of self and language that students of Spanish Heritage Language similarly face today—even for those on opposing sides of topics about self and language.

Before beginning these vignettes, I would like to point out that in the early 1980s; Mexico began to experience one of the worst recessions in its history as the peso devalued (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 32). It was difficult for people to find jobs and to maintain a home with food on the table. As an adult, I asked my mother why she and my father decided to leave Mexico. I heard stories of how my mother was employed as a department store supervisor, always well dressed, and excellent in sales. However, like the most recent recession here in the United States, Mexico experienced intense financial turmoil and many stores and businesses shut down. My parents began to travel in search for work. She had a friend who worked in Mexicali, Baja California and decided to head to Northern Mexico for any work she could find, and so began their nomadic voyage. Like many immigrants, my parents left their native country with high expectations of *El Norte*, or the north. Here is their story; our story; our struggles to settle; our fight and resistance.

Vignette One Illegal Immigrant

Mi ama (“my mother”) went first. She went to *El Norte* and we stayed behind. She traveled in search of work all over Mexico, but always came back to us since we stayed behind in Sonora. While *mi ama* dreamed of a better future for us all, we temporarily found ourselves left behind without a mother. It is a pain that is indescribable—the pain of knowing you will have to say goodbye and not know if you will be reunited again or ever. *Mi ama* cried every time. She would cry for weeks on end. The agony of leaving her two young girls aged 3 and 13 behind was a never-ending storm flooding her life—“*llena de ansiedad, dolor y una tormenta.*” (“Full of anxiety, pain, and torment.”) Still, *mi ama* faced this with courage and dignity. She knew that she had to leave her current stage in life for another. She had to resist in order to conquer.

The goal had never been to live in *El Norte*. My parents wanted to leave their desperate conditions, work and earn a higher wage, save money, and eventually come back home to Mexico, their home. My dad said, “¿*Porque no vamos a Phoenix con tu hermana y trabajamos por 6 meses? Podemos ver como nos va y luego regresamos, compramos una casa en Mexico.*” (“Why don’t we go to Phoenix with your sister and work for six months or so? We can see how it goes, then come back and buy a home in Mexico”.) They decided to take a stand and to not stay still because to stay meant to accept the circumstances. Leti, my aunt, found a job for my mom where she cleaned offices while my dad cleaned carpets and floors in Arizona. My mom absolutely hated living in the

United States, but it would be for a couple months for us all, then we would return. She was unable to savor the food, could not adjust to the language, and worked extremely long hours. “*Solamente 6 meses,*” (“Only for 6 months”) my father would say.

Those six months turned into three years. My sister began elementary school in Phoenix, Arizona. Once reality set in, both of my parents realized that life in the United States was much harder than the stories told and that the dollar was much harder to earn even with having to work backbreaking jobs. Both struggled, did not know the English language, were homesick, and eventually returned home. They came home with more money in their pockets, but it was little more than a Band-Aid on the proverbial broken leg. Yes, the money was nice, but it came and went quickly.

My family is from the desert of *El Valle del Yaqui*—a valley rich in its history of providing a heroic defense of Mexican territory and culture. It is the second largest city in Sonora but offers no growth or opportunities for better living. When we returned home, the jobs my parents once occupied in Obregon were extinct. *Mi ama* expressed feelings of desperation as she tried to provide for the family. “*Me sentia desesperada y arta!*” (“I felt desperate and fed up!”) *mi ama* said to me. Because of this, two years after our return to Mexico, my parents decided to return to the United States once again. This time we would never return home. We would start new lives. We would also disappear.

I was yanked by the roots. I would never see my grandparents again.

This time was different. *Mi ama* went first and went alone. She met someone who would house her in California. She left blindly, without knowing who, or what, or where she was going. To this day, I do not understand how she did it. I do not understand how she had the strength to leave and search alone for a new home. She did not know English. She practically had no money. When I asked her about this journey later in life, she said “*No tenía opción*” (“I had no option.”)

The fear of the unknown is exciting. It with comes hopes. It is filled with dreams that are corrupted with the disappointment of empty promises. *Mi ama* left for California with little more than the promise of help from a friend. However, this woman was no friend. She left my mom deserted at a stranger’s house and never returned for her. She was left alone with no one to help her, talk to her, or even look at her as she stayed at that house. She had no one, knew no one, and was completely alone, but she shouldered the burden of loneliness for us. She handed over her dreams so that her kids could fulfill theirs.

Her story is unique. She came to the United States alone to prepare our affairs before the whole family crossed. Most families, about which I am aware, send the patriarch of the family. The father will usually stay in America and send money back to Mexico so that the family can eventually cross. She did not do that. She came back to Mexico so we could all make the journey together.

It was the summer of 1989 and my father prepared the 1957 Chevy Apache to make the trek from Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, Mexico to Palm Springs,

California, United States of America. I was four. I had absolutely no idea what was happening. Everything happened quickly and suddenly. Admittedly, it was very exciting to me. What four-year-old can comprehend the ramifications of this journey?

My mother crossed back to Mexico so that we could all come in as a family. The plan was for us to reach the border town of Yuma, Arizona. My aunt, who was then living in Phoenix (with a work visa), would help us cross. My father drove as close as he could to the Mexican border town of San Luis, parked the truck, and left with my mom and my sister. I was left with my aunt. At four years old, I watched them leave. I can remember the dust the truck kicked up as it rolled away with my family. I remember the horror of seeing them leave. I was warned to not show emotion—I could not cry, I could not look heartbroken. I still did not understand what was happening.

She looked at me and told me to be good, to smile, and that I would see them soon. My aunt drove the truck and I was snuggled up close to her. I was so scared. All I could do was close my eyes and shut the world out. I wished, secretly, that I could just fall asleep so that when I woke up everything would be okay. I could hear noises in the distance and I could hear the truck stop and go, stop and go. I knew I was far away from home. It was a moment in time when seconds, minutes, hours, and days were indistinguishable. I could only think, “Do not leave me, Mami. Please!” When I opened my eyes, I looked at the empty dirty road, fearing that there was nothing left of my dad, my mom, and my sister.

When we crossed the border, I pretended to be my aunt's daughter. With a quick look at her passport, we were on our way through to *El Norte*. By then, my eyes were wide open and locked on to the road ahead. *La linea fronterisa* is nothing what I had imagined the United States to be. Even at such a young age, I dreamt of flowers, palm trees, green grass, and a forest of beauty. Instead, there was nothing but barren, dirt fields and bone-dry mountains. Being so little, I remember using my hands to cover my eyes from the glaring sun. I felt the tears beginning to burn my eyes, but I could not blink and let them pour down. The desert never seemed to end. We pulled into some sort of town, a town I never saw again. My throat was dry and with each swallow it felt as if a prickly pear was forcing its way down. I did not know what was happening—I just remember feeling as if I were a little bird lost in the dark.

We soon reached a convenience store with huge windows full of water and snacks of all sorts. My mouth was dry—I could not swallow or even blink at that point. We parked the truck and as I gazed forward, I saw my mother, father, and sister appear. I felt like I was dreaming—was it really them? It was, and all I wanted to do was run to them. I wanted to scream with excitement and run back into their arms. As I started to act on this impulse, *Mi Tia Lety* held me down and said, “¡No te vayas a mover!” (“Do not move!”). Again, as if frozen in time, I saw my dad take hold in the back of the truck and he covered himself with a dark plastic sheet, while Janette (my sister) and *Mi ama* squished in the front with us. I pressed close to *Mi ama*. I pressed up against her breasts and did not let go.

Reflection and Analysis

In the mid-1990s, with the restructuring of the Mexican economy and the North American Free Trade Agreement, “The devaluation of the peso and Mexico’s dependency on the United States brought on what Mexicans [called] *El Crisis*” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 32). Conditions, therefore, worsened for the people of Mexico. Work was scarce. Anzaldúa (1999) discusses in *Borderlands La Frontera*, that “half of the Mexican people were unemployed and that in the U.S. a man or woman can make eight times what they can make in Mexico. To make matters worse, by 1987, 1,088 pesos were worth one U.S. dollar.” To explain this in simplest terms, the choice was to continue to stay in Mexico and starve or to move north to live. My family chose the latter. We moved north to survive; we moved north for an opportunity to live.

The Mexican people have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks and long swims; shivering, trembling with fear, still brimming with valor. This is a courage born of desperation, as my mother puts it, with a prayer to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* on her lips: “*Virgencita dame tu bendición.*” (“Dear Virgin Mary, please give me your blessing”).

Throughout my story, and my constant reflection, I discovered that Mexican women are especially at risk. In that way, I can see her prayer as a cry for help. Oftentimes, a woman traveling alone risks sexual assault. At the same time, they cannot call for public health or economic resources because of their lack of English and fear of deportation and are left isolated and worried about

their family. Mexican women, in this case my mother, are prey to physical harm and are helpless. While many cannot fathom the idea of leaving a child, for her to leave and return the way she did was a true testament to her strength and unconditional love.

As I reflect, I cannot help but think of what poverty looked like for us in the 1980s and 1990s. I was never ashamed of our struggles. Instead, those feelings of “shame” were replaced with feelings of appreciation, gratitude, and empathy. That is why I live my life today with gratitude as I choose to create thoughts and make choices that will shape my journey. Agency, which gives us power over the choices we make (Soliday, 1994), allows us to take ownership of who we are. I reflect constantly and have discovered that we are the authors of our destiny. We have the self-determination to change our outlook on our story and to change who we are, or ultimately those same struggles can transform or destroy us. According to Soliday (1994), that one part of success comes from convincing one’s self that despite the odds against you, you somehow endured. I needed to tell my story and to reflect back on this to say, “I know where I come from, I know who I am, and although I struggled in the past, I am okay now.”

Igoa’s (1995) Phenomenon of Uprooting explains much of what I experienced as a young migrant child. During the first stage of uprooting, the parents make an announcement, which initiates a series of mixed emotions that fill the home. It starts with feelings of excitement, or fear, about the journey. This is juxtaposed by feelings of sadness and the realization that you will leave

everything behind. However, because of the sudden plans, the actual departure and transition to a new country takes up so much time that there is not much time to deal with what is actually going on (Igoa, 1995). My mother's strength and resilience equated to a sense of excitement for our journey ahead. In the second stage of uprooting (Igoa, 1995) the child can experience two emotions—excitement and adventure, or fear and anxiety. I was afraid, but she shouldered that burden. With so much courage and in her darkest hours, she was our guiding light, and instilled hope and excitement.

In the third stage of uprooting (Igoa, 1995), the child has many unsettled feelings that are unknown to adults. The child gains emotional support from being together with family and becomes curious about things that are different from the home. The settling happens and the transplant begins. With my parents and sister's unconditional love and support, I was able to stand strong between them, holding their hands with my feet fully planted on the ground. Through the fourth stage, the child (who does not speak the language) may become depressed or confused, and often reclusive. Sure enough, though, all of these feelings and emotions lead to the fifth stage, assimilation or acculturation, in which the child attempts to blend in or embrace both worlds he or she belongs to.

From a very early age, I heard the term "La Migra" and associated it with negative emotions. I freeze and cringe when men in uniform, any uniform, stop me or ask me questions, even when I know that I have not done anything wrong. I flinch and grow quiet when I see a police car. "*La Migra, La Migra...do not run*",

my parents would say, “act normal or else they will think you are from *el otro lado*.” As I reflect, my heart instantly starts to beat fast, my palms get sweaty, my face gets red. I reflect on ages 5, 10, 15, 30 and still I cry. I cry now and I cry to my mother and ask, “why me?” I remember crying, feeling hopeless, and thinking how unfair it was for us and our journey.

In observing my life in high school and parts of my adult life, I took for granted the journey my parents, especially my mother, took from Mexico to the United States. For 20 years, I lived in the shadows in the United States. I was an unmentionable subject and undocumented immigrant. Because my parents traveled to the United States and back to Mexico, numerous times, back and forth, I grew up torn between a country I lived in yet I could not claim and a country I was born in yet did not belong to me. For decades, I had to hide my immigrant story. I was unable to see and grow up with my grandparents. I was a native Baja Californian, from Mexico and an immigrant, and like the 2.1 million Dreamers living in the United States, I was torn. As an adult, I desperately wanted to call this country my home because I have spent so much time here, but by birthright, I am reminded of what I left and where I came from.

I grew up with the term “illegal immigrant,” which for many years was ingrained in my vocabulary. The definition for the term “illegal” is a person who enters or lives in a country without the required documentation for legal entry or residence (Hacker, n.d.), but the definition also states the term is “*sometimes disparaging and offensive*” (Hacker, n.d.). Jonathan Rosa, an assistant professor

of linguistic anthropology at the University of Massachusetts, said in an interview with ABC/Univision that, "The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act defines immigrants as people who have been lawfully admitted for permanent residence, so 'legal immigrant' is a redundant concept and 'illegal immigrant' is oxymoronic," he noted (Costantini, 2012).

New York Times' Lawrence Downes writes:

[The term illegal immigrant] taints everything that person does, and suggests an irreparable offense. How do you legalize an illegal person? This is what many people cannot get their heads around, and why the simple act of legalization through punishment and reparation — paying a fine and back taxes, getting to the back of the citizenship line — is unthinkable to them" (2012).

On the contrary, Fox news for example implies that illegal immigrants are criminals (Shaw, 2019), which the vast majority of undocumented immigrants are not. I, for example, am not a criminal but I am an immigrant from Mexico.

President Donald Trump has made generalizing, hateful, discriminatory, and false declarations about immigrants—and particularly Mexican immigrants.

During a speech he stated:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best....They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people (as cited in Lee, 2015).

I did nothing wrong. I worked my whole life, harder than the student next to me, to prove to everyone that I belonged here. However, I still internalized those words and struggled with this for years. Those words have brought so much more than fear and pain, though. Speeches like those of Donald Trump and openly racist remarks add to the widespread “racist and xenophobic dominant discourses that surround Mexican people in the United States (especially those with recent immigrant experiences)” (Morales, 2015, p. 6).

The consequences of this hateful rhetoric such as “lazy and prone to violence” do trickle down to children and children do grow up and internalize these misconceptions (Nieto, as cited by Morales, 2015, p. 6). Therefore, I had the remarkable challenge of developing an identity in an environment that centered on my being, “culture, language, education level” as subpar (Zugel, 2012, p. 7). Consequently, I had to learn resilience. It is a skill set that I cultivated because I had to respond and adapt to tough situations that many would never have to deal with or endure. I resorted to constantly staying busy and finding ways to achieve more in life. In order to feel complete, I took on more, and I felt I needed to stay busy to fulfill our journey by making my parents proud. I felt pain, anger, and sadness, but through this I cultivated my own resilience. As such, my identity is my sense of belonging, worth, competence, and achievements.

The border and *El Norte* for many immigrants point to the possible future. My parents’ future was full of constant tension and aspiration. I did not know this then, but many people die in their efforts to cross the border according to the

U.S. Border Patrol and Customs Agency. Immigrants are imprisoned and face mechanisms that bar their access to society. Many not only lose their families, but lose their sanity. In this reflection of my family's travels from Mexico to the United States, I realize the forms of resistance that challenged my mother's mobility. Despite many risks and uncertainties, my parents exercised autonomy and agency in the choices that they made. My parents were active participants, with the choices they made, in the construction of their reality (Mitropoulos, 2007).

For me, Foucault's (1982) work offers a helpful way of thinking about resistance and power. He suggests that power cannot be thought of differently from resistance. For Foucault (1982), "power and resistance constituted each other" (p. 223). Foucault (1982) saw power as multiple and not existing by any single force or as an effect that is enacted upon someone or something. Power exists between people or things. In essence, and simply stated, it is the ability for structures, people, or things to act. It is the assertion of will and people, like my mother who came up against certain forces of power and simply put had to make a choice to do or do not. My mother's resistance is the force that propelled us forward in our new life in The United States of America. From my parents paying taxes each and every year, to sending their child to higher education, to being first time homeowners and calling it our own, to finding safety and happiness in this new country, my mother rejected those very notions of power that prevented an immigrant from attaining and doing. In terms of power and resistance, this has

enabled me to see the force as positive and creative, and also in this reflection, the fact that for many it can be negative and destructive. In essence, “where there is power, there is resistance”. From Mexico to the United States of America, thousands have made the journey between two worlds, creating and planting their seeds in America. Now, and forever, their roots and language run deep and the will of the people continues to rise.

The history of the travails of desert crossers is still being written. Perhaps, in the future, these stories will be seen as heroic acts of resilience. Perhaps these stories of the migrant caravans, the desert crossers, and the stories of “wetbacks” one day enter the canon of American and World Literature like the *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Ilyiad*, or *The Odyssey*. I realize that my story, and others who share their stories of crossing a thousand mountains, are reflected in many corners of the modern day media as a crime (Lee, 2015). But, like *The Grapes of Wrath*, the Joads, the despised Okies, or Oklahomans, of that era, crossed the desert after playing a small deception on the officials guarding the inspection station at the Arizona-California line. While crossing the border to survive may be a crime for some, maybe, just maybe, our story will turn into the heroic icons of another.

Vignette Two Early Beginnings

I remember my mother walking me to the corner bus stop as an early elementary kid. The apartment we would leave each morning was always alive

and active. We shared that apartment with another Mexican immigrant family, but never interacted with them. Each morning my mother and I would leave the apartment and walk toward the stop, always together, speaking in Spanish. I would hop on the bus everyday, run to my seat, always with my eyes on my mother until she was a watery blur in the distance.

I remember being in the schoolyard during recess and walking toward the playground while kids all around me would play and chase each other laughing, talking, and giggling. I remember the world feeling like a blur; the noises and language created no connection or meaning with me. I was always quiet. Kids would come to me and I would look, smile, and stare while I was staring off Kindergarten.

One time, I remember climbing to the top of a spider web-like structure on the playground. I looked across and started to cry. As the tears dripped down my cheeks, the rest of the world seemed miles away, even though it was all right there. I remember feeling alone and feeling disconnected, even at that young age.

When I entered the classroom in 1989, two points were evident: English exposure and law and order. I did not know a word of English. Of course, I was only addressed in English. As a young child, this created a constant state of shock and adjustments. When I left for school, I was told to always obey the law and obey all authority figures, because if not, we would be forced out of our current home, forced out of this country, and possibly threaten the family's

security. “Tenemos mucha suerte poder estar aqui y estas aqui para estudiar, entonces no contestes y se un buen estudiante.” (“We are very lucky to be here and you are here to study, so follow the rules, do not talk back, and be a good student.”) These are the words my mother would tell me. These insecure feelings and emotions were at the forefront and I did not want to lose control of the safety of our current environment and the blessing my mother would remind me daily of us being here in the United States.

This was also a time in which I negotiated most with languages. When I was four, I recognized that there was another language I needed to master along with another skill to be successful: All a balancing act. I would head to school and be taught in English and could not communicate in English just yet. I would go home and communicate in Spanish with my family. During my time in Headstart, the low-income program that is akin to preschool, and kindergarten, I continued to speak Spanish at home because I was more comfortable with it. Looking back at elementary school, I cannot remember saying anything in English to my family. I knew that I spoke English poorly because I was unable to connect complete thoughts at school, yet I am also trying to connect my thoughts in Spanish to communicate at home. As a result, I had a difficult time adjusting to sounds and accents.

As I grew up, I transitioned from a Spanish speaking home to a blended Spanish/English world because of the circumstances revolving my life with schooling and with the need to fit in with the traditional monolingual classroom. I

found it important to speak English at school and not speak English at home. This transition seemed to focus more on school as I continued to put emphasis on the English language. When I began school there were bilingual aides who helped translate the content given all while speaking Spanish when we truly could not understand. "Do not speak Spanish!" They would tell me and constantly remind me to not speak in Spanish, to use my English words, and they would push me to pass my exams. I would feel a burst of emotions flowing through me when I needed to say anything in English or when I would mispronounce words. Luckily, those linguistic difficulties had no serious consequences because the mistakes I made as a young child were never embarrassing. When one is that young, those language mistakes do not seem as embarrassing as when they happen at a much older age. As a little girl, I would brush them off knowing my teachers were there to help. The aids and all of my teachers were so kind, firm, and yet kind. However, they also affirmed that I needed to choose one language and ultimately give up one for the other. The full transition took me two years. By the time I was in the third grade, I was considered fully bilingual and proficient in English according to the California state standards.

The biggest difference in learning English was that it was an active process at home with my entire family. My mother says that my sister and I both had no problems learning English. Before kindergarten, she and I would watch the game show *The Price is Right*. That was my absolute favorite show along with *Barney*. I also watched a lot of cartoons. Today, my mother notes the

development of my English-speaking skills in relation to those shows during elementary school. *Barney* was probably the biggest influencer in helping me learn English. From the “Clean Up” song, camp favorites, to other rhythms, the repetition and familiar songs helped me learn and progress my English pronunciation. At the same time, homework I received helped my mother learn English. I remember coming home from school and immediately wanting to open up my books in order to begin my work with my mom or dad. It gave me a feeling of closeness knowing I was with them in those moments.

When I entered fourth grade, I did not need help with homework quite as much anymore. My mom stopped helping me, so my father picked up the slack. My mom never seemed to help my sister with homework, probably because she was in high school. Instead, my cousin Yadira, who was the same age as my sister, would help her with her homework on occasion. My aunts, on the other hand, worked in service and hospitality. They cleaned offices at night, which meant they commonly did not need to communicate with anyone, except to each other in Spanish. This is the major cause of them never quite learning English. Circumstances allowed them the safety and comfort of using their native language. My mom, on the other hand, learned from desperation and from circumstance. In Mexico, she went from a managerial position in which she delegated and set rules, to washing dishes here in the United States. I will never forget her words, “Cómo es que puedo caer más bajo?” (“How can I fall lower than this?”) My mom did not want to do those jobs and internalized those feelings

of resentment for years to come. She needed to learn English to not only earn more money, but to feel whole about herself. Eventually, she ardently worked to earn new positions and to eventually become a supervisor at numerous jobs. She said she was made fun of because of her English but it did not matter to her. She held her head high and continued to do what was needed for the family.

My dad took English courses at the community college while my mom worked at night. They felt they needed to do more. “Me sentía encerrada tener que trabajar en las tardes y hacer trabajo que no quería hacer” (“I felt trapped needing to work at night and trapped in doing that type of work that I did not want to do”). “Aprendí inglés oyendo.” (“I learned English by listening.”) My mother eventually moved to a day shift and a more flexible schedule. On Saturdays, both of my parents had the day off and both knew the importance of family time. My father made it a point to open up the maps, lay it across the dashboard, direct his index finger from one point to the next and go on many family day trips. From the beach to the park, we were always on the hunt for another road trip, another family adventure.

The girl who entered preschool barely able to speak English was now in the fifth grade and eager to learn. With every award and with each grade level, I accumulated an odd and lonely success. The more English I acquired, the more confident I grew and the more distant I became from my home. My mother and father enrolled me in different sports teams and all of my teammates spoke English. From sports teams to the classroom, English was taking over.

I will always remember how anxious and eager I was to learn. My mother and father worked ardently, worked two jobs at once, worked overtime, and were overworked. My sister, who is 10 years older than I am, had a different experience because she entered the educational system in middle school. She had it much harder than I did in terms of navigation and speech. When one is young, getting the wrong answer or mispronouncing words is met with “nice try, try again.” If a student is older, they are mocked openly as teenagers are less forgiving.

At home, though, it was different. I remember giggling at my sister’s mispronounced words. One time, my brother and I tried to show my sister the correct pronunciation of “share” and “chair”. She said, “I want to sit in the *shh*-air” and continued to mispronounce it. My brother and I both looked at each other, then looked at my sister, and all three of us laughed. My sister laughed with us and we then corrected her. It did not seem to faze her, and even though we giggled, it mattered to me that she corrected her mispronunciation. I did not want anyone to make fun of the way she spoke, or the way she pronounced words.

Each day, my sister would leave for high school on the bus. It was a 45-minute ride. At the end of the day, she would take the bus to pick me up from elementary school, then we would both run back to the bus station and take another 25-minute bus ride over to our old brick house. I will never forget those afternoons when my sister and I would sprint down the road knowing we had minutes before we would be left behind by the bus. In the 1990s, our bus system

did not run as efficiently as it does now. If we missed a bus, we would have to wait for two hours because that bus line did not run often. Too many times my sister and I would run with our hands up screaming, pleading for the bus to wait. But just like that, we would wait near a patch of grass for the next one to come.

Eventually, my parents were able to get work schedules that allowed one of them to always be home. My mother worked nights while my father worked during the day or vice versa. This meant they were separated for large chunks of time. They sacrificed their schedules so that my sister and I could have the best possible chance in education and in life. My dad ended up having to cook for us. He was not very good at it, but he managed to always cook for us, provide, and take care of us. My father had a go-to recipe: meat with vegetables in a “special Mexican sauce.” Sometimes it was meat and potatoes in a “special Mexican sauce,” but most days it was meat and vegetables in a “special Mexican sauce.” I grew tired of it, but it was all he knew how to cook. I cannot blame him and I appreciate him for it. I was lucky because I would come home from school every day, eat a home cooked meal, leave the table, and begin my homework: All luxuries awaiting me at home.

As long as I can remember, I was a quiet kid at home. My family was not large and I did not have young children my age around the house. I could entertain myself at home or stay busy with homework. It was as if I had two lives: I remember being one way at home, but when it was time to go to school, I was excited, animated, and quite the talker. Much to my parent’s surprise, during one

of the parent-teacher conferences, my teacher gave me the first ever “needs improvement” in the behavior section. She explained to my parents that I talked too much and would get other students off task. My parents scorned me when I got home. I said, “Ama, no es mi culpa. Son los otros estudiantes que vienen a mi mesa para hablar conmigo.” (Mom, it is not my fault. It is everyone around me that comes to my table to talk to me.”). “Tu estas aquí para estudiar, no para hacer amigos! Tienes que hacerle caso a tu maestra!,” my mom blared. (“You are here to learn, not to make friends. You have to listen to your teacher!”).

I never wanted to be yelled at again because those talks were so emotionally draining and intense. That is really all I needed, one heated discussion in order to set me straight. So instead, I would take out a book and read as much as I could so other students would not come and talk to me. I would go to the library and always check out books. Thank goodness for the library as that gave me the ability to come home with an armful of books to keep around. Books are treasured memories of my childhood.

When I got to the fifth grade, my parents could not help me with my homework as much as they used to. In fact, I would come home and correct simple grammatical mistakes my parents would make. This marked the age in which I would never receive help with homework from my parents, causing melancholy. My parents knew that I would have to figure it out on my own and were confident in knowing I would, yet a piece of me was saddened as my childhood was vanishing. When I was young, my parents could help out in a

different sense and still even help with projects whether it is acquiring supplies, or emotional support, but by age twelve it was different. I would have to do it alone, which was not something I was used to doing.

I continued having two separate lives. In the fifth grade, I was more thoughtful and easily influenced, and careful to keep separate the two worlds of my life. When I was home, I devoted my life to my studies and even when the television was on, I would focus on completing my homework each day, eager and willing to complete any and all assignments or projects given to me. I pushed myself to create unique projects and handmade art. I excelled in mathematics and even won first place in my school's science fair. Winning in the science fair in fifth grade was the ultimate triumph for a ten-year-old. This was the last time my father was able to help me with school. I had to choose a topic in science to experiment on. While most kids recreated batteries, disabled computers, created volcanoes, or looked at sugar levels in different drinks, I went with what we knew. My father and I knew plants and fertilizer. I chose to research and show the effectiveness of chemical fertilizers and the right quantity that should be used on plants. I researched potassium, nitrogen, phosphate levels, sulfur, and calcium. I compared different brands of fertilizer and even included different plants, from vegetables to flowers. I included important factors like the amount of sunlight and water and made sure it was equally distributed. It took four weeks to complete!

My father would speak to me in Spanish about each step and I organized and translated these thoughts into English. Translating in my head, back and

forth, made it more difficult for me to explain the entire process. At times, I felt like I was my father's teacher. I struggled internally with the fact that my father could not speak English. I would explain to him that I needed an abstract and a hypothesis, but he had no clue of what I was talking about. I said, "Apa. Necesito hacer *guess* lo que va a pasar, eso es el *Hypothesis*." ("Dad, I need to guess what is going to happen, that is the hypothesis"). He would say, "ooooorale, pues". (This phrase is similar to saying "okay, then" but not quite.) Without Spanish information about homework and projects being sent to the house, I was always the translator. My use of the English language with my dad penetrated through my Spanish words like a flower growing in the cracks of concrete. I remember wishing my dad would just speak to me in English. Despite my frustration, having him by my side made the difference.

We went to the local store and bought a flimsy poster board and folded it into three sections. My dad had a knack for art, so he drew in the titles for me. I do not remember the title, but I do remember my dad's cool lettering in black sharpie marker. This project was a complete do-it-yourself project. We finished the project and I was extremely excited to submit it. I was excited, because for one, my dad helped me, and two, I was completely fascinated by the findings and the growth (and death) of the plants. When I got to school, we all displayed our poster boards. To my dismay, mine looked sad and felt as common as dirt. It was as if everyone had these huge elaborate projects. All of their words were neatly printed and glued on with fancy computer fonts. Even the poster boards stood

firm and confident while mine was too weak to stand tall. I thought I should have done more. I just did not have the resources like every other kid.

In the end, however, I won the fifth grade science fair and was given the opportunity to go to the district science fair. To this day, the lesson “it is not what is on the outside, but what is on the inside” has stuck with me. In many ways, my fifth grade science project was a perfect metaphor for my journey up to this point.

Reflection and Analysis

I do believe I was blessed with an epic opportunity that many in foreign countries only dream of. When I was a young girl, my parents moved around from place to place like wandering nomads. With no true home, but plenty of optimism, my family moved from Mexico to Arizona, back to Mexico, and eventually to California. My parents commuted between their dismal past and a hopeful future. My sister, like many other immigrants her age, had it the worst. She never really had the opportunity to settle into one town, one school, one language. I, on the other hand, had time on my side.

It was not until I thought back to my actual experience as a young girl that I was able to realize the different stages in uprooting that occur when moving from one country to another. For so long, I had buried my feelings about the journey we took as immigrants. There is so much sadness that comes about leaving extended family members, friends, acquaintances, and grandparents behind. When going through that, there is not much time to deal with feelings, as the move is sudden and the exodus begins. There is no true goodbye or “see you

later” in the life of an immigrant. Instead, I was told to be very quiet and to not speak at all. We traveled by car through the border; seeing those uniforms and guns, seeing the intensity of the hustle, and countless homeless, poverty-stricken people along the border crossings, instilled in me shock and fear. Being so young, I could not put into words what I was going through. From those early beginnings, I had experienced nothing but fear, which ultimately left me voiceless for the first couple of years of my life in the United States.

When moving from place to place, I felt invisible. I was in culture shock. To reinforce this point, Igoa (1995) says, “a child who does not speak the language of the host family may experience varying degrees of culture shock” (p.120). I have reflected on the different elementary schools I attended and remembered the types of students in each school and the early beginnings of labels. The first elementary school I attended was predominantly black. I was not the only Mexican girl there, but I was definitely the only one who did not speak English. I entered a silent stage, and as explained by Igoa (1995), “a silent stage forces a child to keep emotions inside, including emotions stirred up by the host country” (p 125).

The second elementary school I attended was quick to test me, label me, and track me into ESL courses around second and third grades. Still being in the silent stage at school, I do feel I became confused, even let down. I felt hopelessness of ever catching up or belonging. As I reflect, all I wanted to do was stay close to my family because I was afraid to leave them. As a result, I lost

my inner voice. I preferred to be silent. How true it is, I think now, that some teachers rely on observations or comparisons of immigrant children's skills with those who may be native born and disregard their cultural background or prior experiences. To some teachers, immigrant children may appear dysfunctional, uncooperative, unwilling, or even “dumb” (Igoa, 1995). My story, however, is an example of how immigrant children can be completely communicative in their own way and in their own language (Valdés, 2014). In fact, they often have richer cultural lives due to the experiences of migration and an inner world full of wealth based off that experience (Igoa, 1995). Garza & Garza (2010) add that “we must find ways to honor, dignify, and incorporate the knowledge of Mexican American children, families, and communities in our classrooms” (p. 205).

When we finally settled into a house and I began attending my last elementary school, I felt like I could finally come out of my shell. I was given two voices and a tangle of contradictions. The languages and the cultures crashed, exploded, and my negotiation of identities began. When the wind settled, my roots grew deep, diverse and complex with multiple loyalties and identities. I realized that as a child, I had to let go of one voice to pave the way for another. In the fifth stage of the Phenomenon of Uprooting (Igoa, 1995), I faced immense pressure to assimilate into the new culture. Assimilation, I think, forces people to become carbon copies of others. There is no smooth transition and happy ending, because each individual has to give up cherished ways of behaving to become one with mainstream culture. Bhatnagar, (2017) says, with small nudges

and stern looks of “English only please,” children assimilate into the educational system and society at large (Bhatnagar, 2017, p. 70). Consciously, or unconsciously, schools and teachers tend to transfer American values and models onto children, forcing them to discard their old cultural values and models.

This vignette brings up the point that when starting the process in the American educational structure, minority language students like myself, attempt to blend in and be like other peers, or simply assimilate and act as if the past never existed. In searching for my younger self, I learned a valuable lesson and I am continually reminded of what my teachers gave me. I tried to forget my past, my heritage, and my home language in order to move forward with a tight grip on pencils and books. The constant translating in my head, my family's mispronounced words, and the need for independence made me feel like a balloon tied to an anchor. At a young age, the balance was lost and the more I tried to move forward, the more I would get sucked back into a feeling of empty space, a feeling of missing something in my life. I knew too well that education had changed my life and my family's life, as well. I would not have gotten this far if I had not had this constant yearning and remembrance of my past and the need to reverse course. I realized how this girl moved between environments, the home and classroom, which are at cultural extremes. This theme of “Home Life Vs. School Life” showcases an immigrant child's transitions (by choice or by force) that one must live through. With my family, I had the ability to be intimate

and feel surrounded with loving joy. Subsequently, at school, the instruction forced me to trust lonely reason. In relation to school, I had to be more and more alone. I had to obey authority, follow the teacher's directions, and be the absolute best student. This way of being conveyed its way through the home, as I also had to navigate through assignments and classwork on my own. I had to oppose the ethos of the hearth and the gregarious nature of my family. Since everything centers around the living room, while my mother cooks and my father watches Spanish television, I had to cut myself off mentally so that I could do homework and complete assignments to the best of my abilities.

In this reflection, teachers who embrace both worlds and create an integrated sense of self with students can, better support students similar to my upbringing. Without intervention, the child can be hopelessly shut off from the past and lose sight of their voice and cultural identity. It is crucial for the child to be guided to integrate their cultural self so they can regain confidence through culture later in life. As much as I love my parents and appreciate everything they have taught me, I knew when I would enter my house as a child, my family spoke in ways my teachers discouraged and I needed to negotiate this "multi-dimensional space" (Tabouret-Keller & Le Page, 1985). I was on an uphill climb in diverse linguistic practices. This necessitated using multiple identities by accommodating my speech to each situation presented.

Schooling forced me into deep reflection and discussion and forced my academic assimilation. It forced me to rehearse my thoughts and raise my hand

before I spoke in front of an audience. There was always time in class to think about big ideas that were never considered at home. Schooling required me to alter my habits and adjust the discourse according to where I was. Tabouret-Keller and Le Page (1985) emphasize the fluidity of language as acts of identity in which speakers “reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles” (p. 14). A student’s voyage, like myself, is shown through a “multidimensional sociolinguistic space” in pursuit of adjusting discourses to different positions, various topics of discussion according to their needs for different identities (p.14).

Kouritzin’s (1999) work continually influences my reflections on language and identity. In her book, *Face[t]s of First Language Loss*, Kouritzin (1999) described language loss as “restricted minority-language acquisition in a majority-language submersion setting” (p. 11). With this statement, I realized that when I began school and when English was the only language permitted, the use of my heritage language was restricted and thus, failed to develop further. For example, when I was in the fifth grade and my father was helping me with my science project, I was fully submersed in an English-only setting at school. When I attempted to blend that world with my father’s help, I knew my heritage language would cease to develop further, because I needed to master English. My father and I communicated in our language until the English language took over in my life. It dawned on me that losing my first language to English was a tragedy and a disappointment. At that point, I became an alien. As a Spanish

speaker, I was an alien to the English world. This vignette not only describes the feelings that come when one begins to lose a language, but also a loss of identity and some elements of culture. This also includes the loss of an opportunity to integrate my father's deep knowledge of agriculture into my own academic learning. I knew I needed to navigate through my Spanish speaking identity and I struggled in identity construction. Like my fifth grade project, I felt confused and lost between two worlds. I felt insecure, common, and unable to stand tall and confident. I wished to be able to speak confidently in both languages and feel like I did not have to hide any side of me.

The greatest realization is that even though I felt I needed to progress independently with my educational endeavors, without a pulchritudinous determination and assistance or support from family and teachers--at home and at school-- there is little chance for success and relatively few others who experience this become scholars. Somehow, I learned to live in two very different worlds before it got too difficult. I learned to adjust to different discourses or identity kits, with appropriate instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize (Gee, 1996). I realized that my academic success distanced my family circle and me from a life I loved. Gradually, the balance was lost, and I needed to spend more time studying, more time away in silence and intense concentration, even at such a young age. I knew I had to take my first step toward academic success, away from my family. I changed so much, yet my parents have not changed as much

as I. To evade nostalgia for a life slipping from me, I decided to concentrate on the benefits that education would bestow upon me along with all of its competing influences. The more I shifted toward my focus, the more ambitious and confident I became. After a while, I grew more confident, intellectually capable and focused on achieving at high levels across contents. I became outspoken, courageous, creative, and heavily involved in sports. I connected my own knowledge and sense of purpose with challenging academic skills and concepts, all of which gave me the awareness of my academic identity. Much during that time became easier, comfortable, and happy. Hearing my father and mother getting ready for work, my brother still sleeping, and my sister showering, made me eager to go to school. Once I was able to fluently speak English, I remember the extraordinary feeling that learning afforded me. I was eager and fascinated by the idea of new knowledge and inspired by the teachers I had in fourth and fifth grades. Education mattered to me and I mattered to my teachers. It mattered that education was changing me. The primary reason for my success in education was the separation it created within my family. From a very young age, I understood that in order to succeed academically, I felt I was being pulled away and separated from my family. I needed to focus on each and every next level, above family life, language, and issues. I came to the conclusion that teachers push students to be more independent, like adults, and to think on their own, causing a parent to be less relevant to the child's education.

Ambition set me apart and it was that agency exerted that was alive and well. Education, at that point in time, would be the desiderata of my life. The television was always on and one would think that I was glued to the screen, but that was not the case. I would sit in front of the screen only to look and read my books or finish my homework, unless *Barney* was on the television or *The Price is Right*. I would get lost in these assignments and only rested when I knew I completed each one of them. This was a habit I built for years to come because I saw how hard my parents worked each day. This type of agency, doing well in school, staying in school, and working to excel, despite the social structural forces that work to impede such success, allowed for me to build healthy habits, and create the power to think for myself.

This vignette illustrates an inclination to do things independently, as I encountered as a young child, and highlights the importance of parents' daily interactions with children. The themes of academic involvement and life participation showcase the difference in being involved academically as opposed to being involved in life's daily interactions. My parents participated in many aspects of my life and participated in school functions such as my basketball games and back to school night. They also taught me character, value, and morals. They encouraged me, discussed my future with me, monitored my attendance, provided advice, knew my teachers, and encouraged my siblings to look after each other. They did not, however, participate in academic involvement such as PTA meetings, they did not ask questions about my homework, go to the

school library with me or recommend books, visit my classroom, or listen to me read. I realized that with this vignette, when reflecting on my life at home, my Latino parents were participants in my life more than my academic involvement. In this perspective, Latino parents associate involvement in their child's education with involvement in their lives: Participation in their children's lives ensures that their formal schooling is complemented with education taught in the home. "Tienes que educarte," ("You have to educate yourself") my mom would say to me. With these words, this education meant living a clean and moral life. Zarate (2007) explains this:

Parents believed that monitoring their children's lives and providing moral guidance resulted in good classroom behavior, which in turn allowed for greater academic learning opportunities. Awareness of their children's lives also led to increased trust and communication with students, and it allowed for timely intervention if a child deviated in his or her behavior. (p. 9)

My mother's words in my school life were tied to moral guidance and living a good wholesome life, which in turn, shaped my development as a whole, in addition to my formal schooling.

Vignette Three Ingles Sin Barreras

Español: The language of *mi familia*. Growing up, Spanish was always present; from Sunday church to our neighbors, I identified with Spanish speakers

because we shared the language. Even though it was my first language, I spoke imperfect Spanish with many pauses and “uh” and “eh” in between. As much as I felt connected through this language, I was also reminded through language that I was an outsider looking in; a foreigner in such a big world.

I was timid and shy and could not wait to get home to experience the sounds that made life familiar. I could not wait to get home to the sounds and smells that brought me comfort. I will always remember subtle ways I internalized identification, especially when tied to the five senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. Certain foods and songs are my identity. My mouth salivates at the thought of the steaming hot tamales that my parents would make and sell; my father’s carne asada barbeque in the front yard, and my mother’s deep red chile California posole and warm tortillas creates a nostalgia in me that is so intense.

Food and music remind me of this expressive language of culture. It tells a story, expresses ideas, offers opinions, and shares emotions of life's experiences. Certain songs soothe my soul. I have beautiful memories of my sister’s boombox playing Maná’s “Me Vale”, Juan Gabriel’s “Querida”, Los Bukis’ “Tu Carcel”, Timbiriche’s “Mirame” and Paulina Rubio’s “Ese Hombre es Mío”. I remember coming home from school when I was 7 or 8 years old. My sister and her best friend Kylma were playing their favorite Spanish tunes on her boombox. My parents were not home so they had the music blasting! “Miooooo, ese hombre es miooooo.” (“Mine, that boy is mine.”) They would look at each other and belt the lyrics as they mimicked microphones in their hands. I admired their

confidence in themselves, and their confidence in singing the lyrics to the top of their lungs.

It was a simple life I admired and a time in which I had friends at school and a loving family I could come home to. The house we lived in had a few neighbors, but none of which were my age. It was an old concrete house in the middle of the desert that led to many creative outdoor adventures. From digging in the dirt, to shooting hoops for hours in my very own portable basketball hoop, taking care of my little brother, and watching our favorite kid shows, life was simple, life was good.

One afternoon, I remember sitting in the living room watching television with my parents. Channel 12 Univision was always on spreading juicy gossip or world news in Spanish. A famous infomercial came on and said, "*Inglés Sin Barreras: Son personas que saben lo que cuesta hablar inglés. También saben, que no hablar inglés te costará mucho más.*" ("English without barriers: We are people who know the cost of not knowing English. Also, people who know that not knowing English will cost you much more.") I will never forget seeing this English video course. I stared at the television with a tenuous glare, a moment of no return. That moment felt long as if time had stopped. I remember being in deep thought and saying to myself "*no hablar inglés te costará mucho más*". After that, I knew that English had to become my primary language. The familiar Spanish words, those dear sounds, were not so familiar, as I felt I could not use them anymore.

Español: Familiar yet foreign. I was born in Mexico, but came to the United States at a very young age. I was born in Mexico and did not know who I was. When I was growing up, I never knew the hospital I was born in or the city I was born into. I could not tell which state was which in Mexico, or sing the Mexican national anthem. I remember specifically being in high school, rarely referring to my Spanish language. I did not know the history, and could not savor the poetry or literature. I had no idea of the history of Huizilotchtli, God of War leading to Mexico City, or why the eagle perched on the cactus. I had no clue of the meaning of the Mestizo and the mixtures of Spanish and Mexican blood; the Battle of the Alamo and the villainous character of the Mexicans; and The Treaty of Guadalupe that was never honored. I was a young girl, lost and confused. In high school, I spoke English well to survive in the academic world. I spoke English to solidify my spot in a university. Using English, I was quickly effusive as my voice would spark and flare, alive with sounds. I expressed ideas, emotions, and opinions I rarely revealed in Spanish. A silence grew at home and I ended conversations with a quick, "Bien. It was fine or it was a good day." It was more than a literal silence as fewer words passed between my parents and I. I attribute the silence to the results of my inattention to the learning and maintenance of Spanish. I grew careless of the Spanish sounds and found myself at a fork in the road. I began to not care to listen to Spanish music nor the Spanish conversations my parents would have.

Reflection and Analysis

The media, educational institutions, and its system are vital in the construction of identity and language in everyday practices for all students. In many of these venues, English is viewed as the primary language, while Spanish and other languages are the minority language, with certain perceived thoughts and notions about the language. This happened to me. I thought of myself as an English-speaking American, no longer an alien in society. I sought the rights and opportunities necessary for full public participation. I realize that even at a young age, I was pressured to learn English. As Valdés states, the heritage language “is accorded little or no prestige by the larger society” (Valdés, 2014 p.32). I realized I could not bring anything from home to school, not because it was inferior (or superior for that matter) but because to me, I could not enjoy the social and political advantages—at that time. This is a way of saying that the day I raised my hand in class, as I carried my loud, confident voice across a room full of students, English was the harbinger of Spanish, and I realized—as hard as it is to say—my childhood came to an end.

This vignette demonstrates that there is a whole generation out there like myself that live on two shores—American and Mexican—simultaneously, 17.4% of the total population. We live a double life where we learn to preserve one and invest in another, honoring one while adopting another, sacrificing ambitions to pave the way for the other. I come from clasped fingertips around the rosary, La Virgin de Guadalupe, from years of survival from colonial rule, American rule,

British rule, French rule. I come from generations of brown, brown sun-kissed skin, from the reclamation of indignity, healing of historical wounds. I come from the hot desert lands of my ancestors and from indigenous melodic tongues, decolonizing, revitalizing resistance, and Spanglish. I come from: I love you and te quiero. I come from universes colliding and creating my story that lives within me.

I first thought that the constant struggle of being in between two worlds was a burden, but those tears that once dripped down my cheeks at such a young age only helped to fill an ocean that brought forth powerful waves; crashing and colliding against the sand. In these reflections, I now realize the wealth I have accumulated. To be of Mexican-American Heritage means I am seeking, changing, and constantly rediscovering. For me personally, it is about prioritizing family and hard work constantly within my educational endeavors. I am a Mexican immigrant and the culmination of an indigenous multi-tribal heritage, colonial heritage, a copious culture. Mexican culture has lots of influences from Spain, Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, and the United States. And as I have experienced my life in the United States, I am Mexican-American. To be Mexican-American is to hold many complex and beautiful identities. To be Mexican American is to be from a diverse community, diverse in personal experiences, family history, language, and appearance. For Mexican heritage lies in more than just one language, skin tone, height, nose shape, and family name. We identify ourselves by the values we uphold: Family, food, respect, friendship,

and cooperation. In searching for my—self—I learned a valuable lesson, I am proud of my many identities.

Vignette Four Fifth Grade Promotion

I was in Mrs. Horn's fifth grade class, awkwardly tall, and had won a couple of games of tetherball during recess. Tetherball: An interesting recess sport in which a ball tied to a string that is tied to a pole is punched back and forth by two players until the ball is completely wound around the pole. I had never heard of tetherball until I played it here in the United States. With the excitement of being named the tetherball queen, the bell rung and we all ran inside the classroom. I remember finishing up oral presentations on the 50 states. I was given Illinois, my teacher's home state, which made me even more proud to cover the state. Our teacher had taught us how to properly address the mail and request travel brochures from different states. I received traveling brochures in the mail of everything there is to do in Illinois and opening the mail and brochures felt like Christmas morning.

I enjoyed learning. I remember learning about the people and events of early American history, the Native American and colonial experiences, and the original colonies. I remember reading *Hatchet* and the incredible wilderness story of survival; *Where the Red Fern Grows* on boyhood in rural America; and *Shiloh*, the sad story of a young boy and a dog. I enjoyed science, and I remember reading a lot. The entire fifth grade class was still raving about how amazing the

theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was. Countless academic memories were made that year.

For every year in elementary school, I can still picture the rows of desks and the chalkboard the teacher used. The walls had bright colors and all of our artwork and projects were neatly displayed. I will never forget the stars you would earn for positive behavior or the trips or rewards you would get because of it. I knew at an early age that you would have to be responsible for your own work and production.

Even at that young age, I do not remember deep or powerful dialogue where we shared or examined our own lives, our home life, and our family. My classroom from kindergarten through eighth grade never quite gave me the opportunity to share and look closely at my culture, my family, my language, my experiences, or my feelings. Home life was to be kept at home and personal experience never intertwined with school.

I do remember one hot summer day in June when it was unbearably hot. After lunch, I was called into my principal's office. I was already sweaty from our outdoor lunch and the kids around me were wide-eyed and chanting, "ohhhhh" as if I were in trouble, typical fifth grade stuff. I walked over and thought to myself, "what did I do wrong?" I took my time and with every step I recounted the day. "But how could this be? Only kids who get in trouble go to the principal's office. So what could I have done?" I said to myself.

“Cristina, all of the fifth grade teachers have gotten together to choose an outstanding fifth grade student,” said my principal. He goes on to say, “They decided on choosing a student that best represents our school to give the annual fifth grade speech. That student is you.” I remember sitting in his office, shocked, perplexed, and confused. How could I have been chosen? Out of all of the students there, why was I chosen? He asked me to type my speech and prepare for the big day. He said, “You can say anything you want to say in English and to remember my classmates, teachers, and the school.” “Hmmm, English-only,” I thought, “but what about my parents?” I knew they would not understand my speech if I only said it in English.

Still, I ran home to tell my mother and father the good news. I said, “Ama, hable con mi principal y tengo que escribir un, um, un como speech para decirlo en mi promotion.” (“Mom, my principal has given me the task of writing a speech for my promotion.”) She beamed at me with a genuine smile, but asked what a speech meant. I said, “Cuando hablas enfrente de personas.” (“When you speak in front of people.”) “Oh que bien,” (“Oh, how wonderful”) my mom responded. I do not remember her or my father helping me with the speech, only congratulating me for being chosen by the principal. I do remember quickly beginning to write my speech that very same day. I hopped on the couch and began thinking. I asked my father for a typewriter and began typing away. I was eager to use my words and with each special finger that touched down on the click clack and bing, I gained strength. I remember ardently typing and fixing,

adding and deleting in order to create a speech that would win the admiration of my teachers and peers.

My mother dressed me in a white dress and curled my hair with little rosettes and candy circles. She and the rest of my family got ready. I do not remember being nervous or anxious—I was excited. The principal and the other teachers gave their welcome speech. The choir sang and the band played before it was time to give my speech. I had my typed paper in my hand and waited for my name to be called. The principal picks up the microphone and says, “It is time to present the award for fifth grade student of the year.” He says, “This student best represents DSL elementary school in all that it stands for. The fifth grade teachers and staff of DSL elementary choose Cristina Velazquez as the student of the year.” My classmates cheered and yelled with joy. They hugged me and eagerly pushed me toward the stage to get my award. When I got to the stage, I laid my paper on the podium and got close to the mic. I looked across at the sea of parents and could not find my own. I began my speech.

I then heard my father cheering, “Eyy Cristina” and I finally found them. They gave me the comfort I needed to continue with my speech. I finished my speech and the audience gave a huge round of applause. “Your parents must be really proud of you,” I heard from random parents I passed. I remember feeling a sense of power but still, I did not feel empowered. In retrospect, I smiled with irony. Later, I found out that my mother had no idea what my teachers or principals were saying about me. She knew it was important because it was in

front of many others. All the same, she never knew what was said. She never knew what my speech was about. She could not understand the words I arduously wrote. This really upset me. It upset me that my mother lacked her English education. This did not make me proud. It is not that I think or ever thought she lacked intelligence. But I realized now as an adult that I took for granted her tremendous cultural intelligence and rich immigrant experiences, and do wish I could have shared that with others. She had to imagine what I was saying because she did not understand. “Como queria a ver devolvido la cinta. Era muy rapido. Como me hubiera gustado entenderlo” (“I wish I could have rewound the tape. It was too fast and I wish I could have understood it”), my mom said to me as an adult. All I can think is how I wish I could have said it in Spanish because I would rather have one person understand it than the entire school.

My mother always told me to get as far as I can in my education. Immigrating from Mexico, she willed her ambition onto her children. She worked in sales in major furniture companies all over Mexico. She actually got to travel from state to state and made a career out of it. She also became pregnant at age sixteen, which was looked down upon from her family’s side. She was quick to be disowned from the family because of the choices she made at a young age and had to grow up hastily. For a young teen mom to persevere in the manner in which she did, she is a true inspiration. So she moved to the United States. She left my father, sister, and I to find us a home in the United States. She and my

father began working as dishwashers in an old retirement center. She became a waitress and also worked customer service. She worked her entire life and would go no further. "Get all the education you can because with an education, you can do anything and live a better life", she says.

I got to high school and told my mother I would be a teacher. I said, "Hey Ama, remember in fifth grade when I said I wanted to be a teacher, well, I am going to be a teacher, for real." That seemed to please her as she always admired all the teachers I had. She admired their persona, their authority, and their knowledge, and knew I would be that someday. I speak a lot of my mother and have failed to present my father's presence. He recognized the same core values in education but was humbler and less vocal. He showcased his advice through action. In Mexico, he worked in a pharmacy and did well for himself and for his single mom, mi abuela Cristina. My father has always had a knack for music and his classic sense of fashion. In the 60s and 70s he definitely thought he was the Mexican John Travolta and currently you can catch him neatly dressed topped with a cool fedora. Growing up, he knew every word to the BeeGees and Credence Clearwater Revival. He subscribed weekly to Time Magazine (and by subscribed I mean he would bring home the weekly magazine from the retirement center) and would read through every article. He took ESL classes at the local community college and read as much as he could or until the nights fatigued him. He, too, worked his entire life. As long as I can remember, he spent countless nights on the couch asleep, his head thrown back.

Your parents must be so proud. Yes, they were very proud, I knew it. I knew they were proud of me when I was on that stage at age twelve. They have always been proud of me, but at what cost? At age twelve, I gave a speech entirely in English, a language that was not my family's language nor mine to begin with. As I got older, I continually challenged the ideas and beliefs that my parents had. I challenged those same ideas they were taught, in their time to believe. I realized that the more ambitious and successful I became in my K12 education, the more it cost me losing my Spanish language and a sense of my culture, my heritage. My need to think so deeply of my parents, my language, and my academics is an indication of my long education. I know my mother and father have not thought about the cultural meaning of their experiences. If because of my schooling, I grew culturally separated from my parents and my education now is giving me the tools I need to speak and care about this fact.

Reflection and Analysis

In life, I was constantly accepting and rejecting. I was constantly fighting for a position of power and knowledge but at the expense of my heritage language (Zugel, 2012). I kept feeling disappointment in knowing that I could not bring my culture, language, and experiences to school (Hornberger & Wang, 2008). What I realized in this reflection is that empowerment is collaborative. It is clear that my parents could not interact well with my school life. My parents did not attend parent meetings at school not because they were not interested in my education, but because of their inability to speak English and their lack of

knowledge of North American culture and educational systems. My parents had a distinct desire to contribute to my education and cared passionately about my education, still because they were Spanish-speaking parents and did not attend meetings, the educational institution perceived them as apathetic or non-involved (Crane, 2012). To better understand the definition of parental involvement through my experience, it is imperative that I explore the definitions of involvement such as personal beliefs, motivators, and levels of home and school-based involvement (Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011, p. 410).

Crane (2012) investigates questions regarding parental involvement:

What does involvement mean for these parents? What influences the parent involvement choices they make? How are they involved in their children's education at home? Are they involved in ways that are perhaps not recognized by educators and many researchers alike? (p. 2).

Parental involvement in my case is defined differently; hence, this affects how efforts are perceived. Carvalho found that a “perceived lack of parental involvement can lead some educators to believe that parents just are not interested in their children's education” (as cited in Crane, 2012, p. 2). Parents like mine perceive school involvement as it revolves around the home; asking if I finished my homework, helping when possible with supplies for assignments and school supplies, asking about grades. On the other hand, Walker et al., (2011) identified many studies that show that educators often define parental involvement as something that is more school-based (p. 410). Those examples

include PTA meetings, volunteering at school events, activities, dances, athletic events, helping around the classroom, chaperoning a field trip (Walker et al., 2011). Both are excellent definitions of involvement, but clearly polar opposites; and being on one side versus the other does not mean parents are not equally invested in their child's education. It is time we acknowledge this. If our language, culture, home involvement, and experiences are acknowledged and validated, along with a creation of a genuine partnership between Spanish-speaking parents like mine and the school, feelings of disappointment can then instead be turned into feelings of empowerment.

As a teacher, I reflect on the idea that educators and educational institutions should consider this type of glimpse into the home setting. Some parents may not be able to find the time to be as involved because of work and some parents' languages may not be valued for what they are worth. Empowerment in a collaborative form also needs to take the student's prior experiences into account. It is important for educators and schools (at any level) to create special efforts to include students' prior experiences and value different identities. In this vignette, I realize that the English world was the more socially powerful identity, which deemed to devalue the identity of my Spanish-speaking world. In fifth grade, I did the most amount of learning, but I also underwent a full assimilation of the new culture. I adapted to the customs and ideals of the new culture. I proceeded away from my home language, history, food, and culture and moved toward assimilation into the full American identity (Igoa, 1995). Under

these circumstances, I internalized this position and instead of finding a balance between my home language and identity with that of the dominant language, I was continually filled with disappointment or feeling like I was missing something. I made one feel inferior to the other.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) calls this cultural invasion, and says it is:

Essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of that latter becomes, and those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invader. (p. 151)

In the educational context, there are positive and negative outcomes to this cultural invasion that Freire (1970) speaks of and I believe that my resistance came in the form of excelling academically, but the negative aspect from cultural invasion comes in the rejection of speaking Spanish at school at that age, conforming to my principal telling me to create a speech in English-only, and ultimately having an effect on my sense of identity. It is not until now, as an adult, that I recognize how, as a subordinated and marginalized individual, I actively resisted cultural invasion and devaluation of identity.

What I do not think my teachers and principals realized is that I had two ears and was listening from both sides. For example, to acknowledge my

culturally diverse language as a valid form of self-expression and encourage development in that language is to empower the student. Sonia Nieto (1999) notes, “the inescapable truth...is that teachers’ attitudes and behaviors can make an astonishing difference in student learning” (p. 167). In spite of historical realities, during my childhood in the 90s, the bilingual education debate eliminated the use of a bilingual child’s first language and mandated that those teachers follow the law or be sued. Hence, the constant approval of English-only to be used inside the classrooms was evident.

Since I can remember, commentators, politicians, and policies have been opposed to bilingual education programs because they perceived as contradictory to American traditions of assimilating groups into mainstream society. But there will never be a full assimilation into mainstream society because of the long history of prejudice, deprivation, segregation, and labeling. The deep sense of inferiority and cultural isolation will continue to exist because of the labels imposed upon minority groups.

In reflecting on the education that I received (elementary and middle school) amidst certain policies and program implementations, I do feel that, as a speaker of two languages, with the push on exiting out of English language development programs and eradicating the heritage language and culture during school hours, it ultimately brought a feeling of inferiority toward my home language. Clearly, the debate will continue, however it is of essence for parents, policy makers, and teachers to commit to a culturally diverse quality education. I

wholeheartedly believe that in retrospect, I yearned for deep and powerful dialogues centered on family, culture, language, and experiences. If you share and examine your own life, at any age, the classroom would have been full of human knowledge and acceptance, and only then would true empowerment and cultural truth emerge.

Vignette Five

Hispanic, Latin American, Latina/o, Latino@, Latinx...Ay Dios Mio!

Mestizo—It was not until I was teaching a Spanish class that I actually understood what this term meant and along with countless other labels. It is a man of mixed race and the offspring of Spanish and Indian blood. Mixed but confused as to be part Indian spewing Spanish blood is to be overwhelmed by the loss of what is genuine to me—My language, my religion. But where does my ancestry really come from? I was once told, “It must be so cool to be Aztec”. Another person asked me if I was Mayan. Others asked me if I was Pacific Islander, “Wait, what are you? Do you even speak Spanish?” Christine... Christina. I seemed to have been defined (undefined) by every label, race, or country other than my own—Mexico. I was a Mexican in California. A girl named Cristina.

In regards to my many aunts, uncles, cousins, and family, I see faces that do not resemble mine. I believe, that like many other Mexican families, my family echoes Mexico’s perplexed colonial past. My family appears to represent many different continents. We are immigrants. My father’s complexion is light skinned.

Within these last 25 years, my father has aged gracefully and grayed handsomely. My mother has a much darker complexion and has been mistaken for *India* (“Indian Mexican”). My mother’s face has aged quickly because of the constant fight she had here in the United States to provide for her family.

Latino. ELL. EL. Minority. Mexican. Immigrant. Latina. Hispanic. These are the labels that educational institutions bestowed upon me. From a young elementary student to higher education, I bore these labels. There really is no way to say it with grace. I say these labels with irony, as I am a product of events contrary to what is expected. The labels fell upon me, finally to be able to question them today. These terms are indisputable, undeniable. I was forced to accept.

When it came time to apply for college my senior year, I made a rare appointment to see my counselor. I was called into her office and I began to ask her typical college questions. Questions no one in my family could ever answer.

I asked, “Do you think I will be able to get into UCSD?”

She looked at me for a long second, looked me up in her computer, and said, “Well, based off of what I have seen with prior students, I do not think your GPA or SATs scores are where they need to be to get in. I think you have a better chance at a less competitive UC like UCR and definitely CSUSB. Focus on writing a great personal statement and talk about being a minority student and a Latina.”

Did she mean my academic standing was not good enough to get into the schools I had dreamed of? Did she mean that my background and culture would bring pity to those reviewing my application and grant me a golden ticket into school? I had so many questions and emotions running through me.

“Okay”, I mumbled. That was all that came out of my mouth. I was voiceless, like a balloon tied to an anchor; I left with my self-esteem deflating. For the first time, I remember feeling as if I was not good enough. It was the first time my voice faltered to a stop. I remember sensing that she was referring to the fact that my academic performance was linked to my racial identity and to those labels. That I would only get in, if I used my background as qualifier for admissions. I was always taught to hold counselors and teachers to a very high regard, and no matter what, they are always to be right. As I walked away from her office, I replayed every single word in my head. Around me, security guards roamed the hallways, other students were talking and laughing, and I remember passing a class that was on its way to the library. Every day from there on out, I wanted to approach my counselor and question her advice. I thought, “How can I go my whole life denying my language, my heritage, focusing on grades, SATs and an American school system solely dependent on English proficiency... to now depend on my background, on me being Latina, as the reason I get accepted?” Was being a minority, the only reason I would get accepted into a prestigious school? But I did not; I stayed quiet and I let it pass.

Reflection and Analysis

You cannot fit a triangle in a round hole. In the course of this narrative, I speak of the problems I faced in being raised in a culture that is different from the American culture and English language. I am not complaining that I was given certain labels because of my heritage but instead; these are acknowledgements of my reality and agency. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) analyze types of identities, which reveal varying degrees of agency and lay a foundation for the labels I accepted and denied. From imposed, assumed, to negotiable, my identities were constructed through dominant discourses. This concept imposed a particular label such as 'speakers of a minority language' and 'Latino' regardless of my self-identification or how I felt concerning those labels. My whole entire life, I assumed those labels and I never contested them. Through dominant discourse they were presumed legitimate as I was positioned in a certain way only to change that position through resistance.

As I reflect on the different types of identity categories, in a way, it was true and I was a minority student. Somehow, that word does describe me. The word refers to races and nationalities numerically underrepresented in educational institutions. United States federal statisticians decided to determine those exact minorities—Blacks, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans, and some others. I believed it and I accepted it. Today, it is a constant reminder of alienation from the public majority. I believe at that moment in high school, being insecure about my heritage and language capabilities (in both), gave me a sense

of insecurity in regards to my future endeavors. However, although I did come from a low socioeconomic status group and knew that I was considered a minority in terms of percentage as a whole, I am proof that a Mexican American woman can defy all odds and succeed as a student (Ellis, 2004), and even succeed at the graduate level.

That last year in high school, I fell upon the author George Orwell and learned that a literate man would never be able to imagine what it would be like to be an uneducated poor. I connected his words to being classified as socially disadvantaged youth and the power of literacy. Schooling, despite all of its labeling, reminded me that literature would give me a public identity built with the knowledge and power. Paradoxically, I was named a minority student. That year, I was accepted to all seven universities I applied for: four CSUs and three UCs—including the one my counselor said I would not get accepted into. What does this mean now? Despite being labeled a certain way and given a certain position within a discourse, one ultimately has the power to exert a higher degree of agency by setting up a counter-position and resisting the subject position. I would like to think my struggles and those labels imposed on to me only made me more resilient and gave me the motivation to do well.

Dr. John Winslade, my professor and scholar, mentions that the identities and discourses allotted through educational institutions are catalysts of opportunity and in the same manner can underline a sense of personal failure, and instill a sense of worthlessness. In exercising my agency, I had a choice to

make. Bear the labels and subject myself to a marginalized, stereotypical position, or exert a higher degree of agency. With negotiable identities, students can exercise the highest degree of agency as they continually shift through identities to fit their personal and cultural identities. It is as if these labels endorse the rhetoric of inequity and threatens the privilege and status of a society. Diversity is neither the enemy nor a label for pity. If instead of labels, through a negotiation of identity and a shift in them, one can create a positive portrait of oneself, their cultural background and academic successes (and failures). This personal need to play around with language and culture will result in agency and empowerment. With awareness, it takes courage to break through those label barriers and power to analyze these realities.

Vignette Six
First Generation College Student

My mother had thirteen brothers and sisters and about half of them immigrated to the United States. Not only do I have many aunts and uncles, I have even more cousins, many of which I have not met. My mom and dad did not understand anything about the United States educational system including A-G requirements, credits, what the graduation requirements were, or what the SAT or ACT tests were (and what they meant for college acceptance). My sister had no idea of the UC requirements but did manage to submit her application to the local community college, but was married and pregnant early on, and her college dreams were soon out of reach. No one in my family had the knowledge of

United States educational or University of California systems, so I was on my own in terms of my education. My family could not provide the American college knowledge, but they did provide the (emotional) support I needed to move ahead with my educational endeavors.

In September of 2003, I was packed and ready to move out. I was the first in my family to leave the home when it came time to move away to college. I had been admitted to all seven colleges I applied for: UCSD, UCSB, UCR, UCI, SDSU, CSULB, CSUSB. I yearned for this separation and was eager to begin my career and educational ambitions. I always knew my mother and father wanted me to stay close. She asked, "Why are not the colleges here (near the Coachella Valley) good enough? Why do you need to go so far away?" It took me a long while to respond. It has always been so hard for me to develop the same words as in English in order to create meaningful conversations with my mother in Spanish. It never carried the same meaning or the same strength. My Spanish words with her never carried the same intentions and convictions to prove to her my reasons for leaving. I could never speak to her of my term papers and the books I read in high school. I could only ever speak to her about my basketball life, my friends, and weekend plans. So, when she asked me this question, I could not respond to her the way I wanted. I could not tell her that I wanted to leave so badly because I wanted a fresh start, and a separation from the attachment to the home. I could do anything I wanted and be anything I wanted as long as I went to school. But instead, I gave my mom a very simple Spanish

explanation: “Me voy lejos porque este colegio es uno de los mejores en California. Todos los colegios no son iguales, ama, y este es el mejor.” (“I am leaving because this college is the best in California. All colleges are not the same mom and this one is the best.”) “Okay pues,” (“alrighty then”) my Mom said and the conversation ended there.

I remember specifically choosing this university because of its academic reputation and because it was the opposite of all that I was used to back home. This university offered me a new start in a bigger city. I found myself on this particular campus with the golden students of Western America’s middle and upper class. I could not wait to walk on campus and I pictured myself walking from class to class on that huge campus. I pictured independence, the beach, my education, and living in an individualistic society. On my very first day there, my parents, brother, and sister helped me move in. We loaded the truck and loaded the passengers toward my journey to the university. When we arrived, we were immersed into a leisure life used to the sun. There were other families loading and unloading, and students in front of the library sunbathing, reading, and listening to music. Even the music was different, as I was just listening to Spanish music in my dad’s truck and was listening to hip-hop with my friends the previous weekend. There were beach boys everywhere dressed in board shorts, sandals, with long blonde hair. All the girls seemed blonde and tan, all seemingly dressed in beautiful white sundresses. Everything was new and different, and that difference intrigued me.

Purple was the color I chose to decorate my dorm. My mother worked extra hours that summer to help pay for new dorm sheets and pillowcases. I did not bring the big *cobija* (“blanket”) my mom had given to me from Mexico nor did I bring pictures of my family. I wanted a fresh start and new memories. I met some of my new roommates and said hello to their families. There would be ten girls to the suite, five rooms, two per room. I was surprised when I realized that nobody looked like my family or me. All of the boxes were officially unloaded and it was time to say goodbye to my family. I remember I was so eager to start my new life and for senior year to end. I was so excited to leave my home life and for college life to begin. But as I stood there in my dorm, giving my family hugs and getting ready to say goodbye, I felt a piercing pain in my heart. I felt I had committed a sin of betrayal by leaving my family and leaving my home—the home my parents worked so hard to build. I felt I had betrayed mi *familia* (“family”) and I felt guilty. Learning English with ease, picking up on the American traditions, moving away to the beach, getting ready to start my college career away from the home, I felt guilty. I felt a shattering of our family bond and even though I accomplished what I set out to do, *it felt wrong*. I remember my mom holding back the tears, holding her head high, and trying to stay strong. My sister said, “Nunca regresaras.” (“You will never return.”) My dad was equally sad, but eager to get on the road before the sun went down. I did not have any more words, in Spanish or English. So, I smiled at them. And waved goodbye and as

soon as I saw them leave, tears ran down my cheeks, and I felt alone once again.

Reflection and Analysis

Family is everything in the eyes of my parents. Compassion, family as the central role, and supporting each other were traits instilled in me from a young age. My parents grew up in a collectivistic society. Researchers Markus and Kitayama (2010) established that collectivist cultures favor interdependence over independence. Me—leaving the home was my greatest accomplishment but also my biggest feat and the ultimate struggle in academic success. I was not an individualist and since I grew up in a collectivist culture, it made it quite difficult to navigate everyday life because of the clash of wanting the independence but knowing that I share a social life that favors interdependence. There is clearly a clash between what I learned at home versus what I learned at school. Moving away and going to college brought the clash of two cultures into one person into fruition. I moved into another world, but in my mind, I was living in two.

I need to make clear that leaving my family allowed for me to move away from my past and I used education to reinvent myself. I, a different looking, tan-color skin Mexican immigrant had to live and walk the university campus and navigate in between two worlds, all while still living in the world my parents created for me. I had to address professors with no trace of my parent's accent. I felt the need for independence from two worlds that were constantly clashing with each other. Instead, I tried to become a carbon copy of my professors' accents

and words. Coming from me, those anomalous sounds seemed strange and the academic jargon was clearly borrowed. I tried so hard to be something that I was not and at that time, I certainly had no thought of my own. I was a collector of thoughts and not a thinker. Here, I confess my profound lack of self-confidence and true identity confusion. It is a reflection from my past, I almost ignored.

Searching for myself I learned a valuable lesson, no text I ever read in my K12 education spoke of the silence that separates a young girl from her parents. Instead, I read of self-esteem and independence; of majoritarian stories of self-made women; concepts that contradict the way I was raised. As I reflect on my educational paths, I did not focus on one specific pedagogy but instead, a much greater lesson. Education for me has been a rollercoaster of a ride—a long and nurturing, but never natural and inglorious process. I learned I longed for a membership I had lost, nostalgic, and longing for my past. I yearned for family, closeness, intimacy, and my home language. The nostalgia is the quest of my own abandoned self, yet scared to find it—now the uncertain scholar. I am far removed from my past, yet uneasy in part of a community of academics.

I have a close connection to Lucy Tse's (2000) article, "The Effects of Ethnic Identity Formation on Bilingual Maintenance and Development: An Analysis of Asian American Narratives". In this article, I, too, feel of the process of growing up and feeling shame and loss. I grew a huge desire to be part of the dominant American culture and to live out the teenage American dream: Getting good grades, graduating high school, moving out and moving on to college, all

while unintentionally rejecting my home language and culture. A stage in ethnic identity is referred to as ethnic ambivalence/evasion where an attempt to assimilate to the dominant culture forces one to reject their ethnic identity. As reflected in this vignette, I tried so hard to assimilate the dominant culture that I was left feeling guilty, alone, lost, and ashamed.

This reflection also showcases an internal contradiction. I will compare to this internal contradiction to an influential book in my life, George Orwell's (1948) *1984*, and his reference to doublethink. In his futuristic, but all too real novel, *1984*, Orwell (1948) refers to the coexistent belief in two contradictory ideas. The process is defined as follows:

Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting them both. The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of doublethink he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated. The process has to be conscious, or it will not be carried out with sufficient precision, but it also has to be unconscious, or it would bring it a feeling of falsity, and hence of guilt. (p. 865)

I accepted the belief that I needed to let go of my home language and culture and, in thinking I was moving forward, I was in reverse all at the same time. I was in reverse because I loved all that I was able to accomplish, but detested how I got to it and what was to come. Guilt and contentment were

emotions that filled my soul. I was happy because I knew that all of the sacrifices finally paid off with my educational endeavors. I felt guilt because I knew that emotion was telling me it was important. A piece of me inside died to get to that point, and I was not sure at that point in college if I was betraying my own cultural upbringing. I recognize that unconsciously, leaving my family and my home to go to college left me filled with these blameworthy standards. In growing up “imbibed” them from my family, I was vulnerable to this self-tormenting emotion; an emotion that is still there until this day. I realized that I had two contradictory beliefs causing conflict from within. I was in a whirlwind of emotions and identity confusion. I believed that the English language and my education got me to those college steps, but I also believed that Spanish, my culture, and the support and love of my family, did the same. The problem lies in thinking that I needed to choose one over the other in order to move ahead.

Vignette Seven
French, English, No Spanish-Language Choices

In eighth grade, I flourished in G.A.T.E. (Gifted and Talented Education) and no task was too small, no feat was too large. I excelled in language arts, ASB (Associated Student Body), and science. The end of the year fast approached and it then became time to choose classes for my first year of high school. I looked at the list of electives and only 2 languages were offered. Spanish and French. *Hmm. Spanish? Do I really want to be with all of the gringos having them cheat off of me?* In reality, there was no Spanish track for native

Spanish speakers. Spanish was a foreign language and was taught for students with no Spanish contact. This Spanish class was for elective bilinguals choosing to take and learn for the first time another language.

My counselor told me that I should challenge myself by taking another language and with good intentions that I could be trilingual one day. Little did she know my Spanish by then was terrible (by reading and writing standards) and despite me thinking that it was better than what it actually was. The first time she met me, I think she made a quick assumption based off my looks and last name. Yes, I could speak conversational Spanish and my accent sounded natural and fluid, but this was basic Spanish conversation. Nothing that required deep thought or opinions, because then, would I be in trouble the minute my mouth opened. In fact, deep down inside I cringed with every Spanish word that came out my mouth because I knew that all the badly pronounced words spewed out of my mouth, warm and with great intentions, yet half understood.

So, I took French with Mrs. Casillas. She was a white American woman and the shortest teacher I had ever seen. At barely 4 foot 9 inches, I think she was legally considered a little person. She married a Latino, hence her Spanish last name and lived abroad in France before returning to California. Freshman year of French class was a blast. I learned French vocabulary that were the exact same in Spanish, like *bufanda* (“scarf”) and *bigote* (“mustache”), *sofa* (“sofa”) and *pantalón* (“pants”), which totally made me feel like I was one step ahead of the

game. We ate crepes and learned about The Louvre and the Eiffel Tower. I learned that life was too short and to "*C'est la Vie*".

Fast-forward four years, and I stand in French IV AP. I had a difficult time formulating paragraphs in French or conversing with strong conviction. I was not confident in the language or history. I was not as prepared and did not have the opportunities to practice the language with others, because there was not anyone to speak the language. Each day I was given about 20-25 minutes in class to practice, but that just does not cut it. Then, the day came for me to sign up for my AP exams. Sadly, I did not have the \$80 necessary for each exam. I still had some money saved from a summer job, and my parents were able to help me with one more exam. It sounded ridiculous to my parents to pay \$80 for each exam, but they (and I) did not realize the connection in college credits and how much more it would cost to take college units later. I had to choose two exams between the four AP classes. I knew I would take the psychology AP test because I was overly confident in the material, but I had to choose between French AP exam and English AP exam, mainly because of finances. I still had not made up my mind, but I was in line to pay for two exams. There was a Mexican student in front of me and we started small talk while waiting in line. He had a strong accent, and asked me, "What AP exam are you taking?" I said, "Psychology and I still have not made up my mind between French or English. But I am not at all confident in French so I am thinking English AP". "Oh wow, English is going to be hard!" He added. "Yeah, I know", as I shrugged my

shoulders. “Well, French would probably be harder”, then he said, “Do you speak Spanish?” I looked at him, smiled, and definitely felt the pressure to clean up my Spanish. I said proudly, “Claro que hablo español! Si, yo nací en México y llegué aquí cuando era chica.” (“Of course I speak Spanish! I was born in Mexico and I came here when I was little.”) He was instantly surprised with my flow and accent and said, “¿Y porque no tomaste el examen de español AP?” (“Why did you not take the Spanish AP exam?”) “No sé, no lo pense” (“I do not know, I did not think about it”) I said. “Pues, todavia puedes”, (“Well, you still can.”) he added. “No, no quiero.” (“No, I do not want to.”) I said. “¿Y porque no? Hablas espanol muy bien y dicen que si hablas y entiendes bien el español, que el examen va ser fácil” (“And why not?” You speak Spanish very well and they say that if you speak it and understand it, the exam will be easy”), he eagerly told me. I did not want to tell him that I did not have the money nor that I was not confident in myself to take the Spanish AP exam so I brushed it off as if it was not important to me. “No seas Pocha!” (“Do not be a Pocha”), he said to me and turned around.

Reflection and Analysis

In taking a foreign language and continuing my American English studies, my high school (and K12) career ended with me not having an opportunity to learn about my Spanish history, language, and culture. *Pocha!* This is a word that characterized my language and me. In this experience, because I turned my back on Spanish learning or testing, I was called a Pocha. To be *Pocha* is to be a traitor of culture because to speak the language of the oppressor, you ruin the

Spanish language. I realize how nostalgic I was during this experience as I searched for a home I had never seen and a language I was never able to advance. My mouth is tearful as I realized I have spent so many years with my back turned to Spanish, my back turned away from Mexico. I realized during that conversation with the Spanish-speaking student, that at school, I forced out my Spanish words, they spewed out of my mouth, warm and with great intentions, yet, half understood.

In that same conversation, I was very proud to say that I was a Spanish speaker and I am quick to present my Mexican patriotism and identity. I most definitely considered myself bilingual, but until now, did not realize the varying degrees of bilingualism. I connect with Valdés's (2001) explanation that bilinguals do not have equal proficiency in both languages, are dominant in one language, and may have minimal competency in speaking, listening, reading or writing in another language. With these capabilities, I considered myself bilingual as compared to other monolingual students with no experience in a second language. Based off the four basic competencies, I had advanced proficiencies in speaking and listening, with minimal proficiency in reading and writing. I do believe that understanding this continuum would have helped me better understand myself as a bilingual and take initiative to do something about furthering my Spanish language acquisition. Spanish is considered a heritage language since it is a spoken minority language and the members of this community have recognized a personal and historical connection to Spanish. It is

important to note that the term 'heritage language' continues to play an important role in the advancement of research, development, and implementation of policy concerning bilingual education. Furthermore, bilingualism and the varying degrees of bilingualism are still imperative to mention in order to portray an accurate description of Spanish Heritage Language Learners.

As an adult and teacher of world languages, I wish that in the late 90s and early 2000s there could have been a language class that was created for Spanish speakers. Whether fluent or struggling, I wish a class were created in which Spanish speakers could maintain and advance their heritage language and progress proficiencies along the bilingual continuum. In this reflection, I felt that my heritage language was diminishing because I did not have a way to maintain my heritage language. A critical challenge for language learning is to be able to retain a sense of self while appropriating new discourses (Canagarajah, 1999). I realized that when my heritage language and its use began to diminish (emphasis in English and French), I became confused; I encountered the loss of both cultural identity and the heritage language itself (Guardado, 2002; Ro & Cheatham, 2009).

Also, in learning about history and the past, you are supposed to be able to understand how the present came about, but my past was confusion with a blurry present. Instead, I continued to learn a foreign language and English. My history then, included The Mayflower and Christopher Columbus, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, the Bill of Rights, and I was quick to

memorize the Pledge of Allegiance. Even at this young age, I felt a need to look for a space of my own, and identity to which I yearned to find, and quite definitely my own linguistic space. This vignette illustrates the problems I encountered as I craved for a history to which I could connect my identity in order to communicate my realities, my values, and a language that was a mixture of many. But instead, my mixture of languages turned into the denial of one for another. I was told, if you want to be American, you must speak English, well. I was told I needed to take a foreign language in order to be able to apply for college, but Spanish was not foreign to me, so French was it. Hence, my Spanish language, history, and understanding suffered.

As a student with an immigrant background, I experienced a continual clash of languages including both the culture and language of the new country and my country of origin along with a lack of academic Spanish practice or maintenance. This was a challenging process for me with the added expectation from my parents to completely excel in school and the English language. Furthermore, during this young adolescent stage in my life, it was quite easy for me to accept the ideologies, discourses, and beliefs of the English dominant group (Kim, 2014), which in turn, caused me to join and conform to peer group norms.

I realized that language is a such a part of our core and our being that when someone criticizes the way you speak or lack thereof, our first reaction is to be angry, hurt, or even defensive. In being called a Pocha, that experience, that

name, and that thought was stuck in my head for years to come. As a student, I was in a confused bliss. Happy to be alive and learning, but confused internally. Identity is the nucleus in which makes us individuals and creates the conscious experience of the inner self. There is no one pure identity and there never will be.

I am aware that I do have multiple histories—in the indigenous culture of Mesoamerica, in the conquests, in Catholicism, colonialism, in the Spanish Language and all indigenous languages—but also in the thirteen original colonies, the civil war, Christianity, and in the English Language, Spanglish, Español Chicano, and all languages. For me, to be Mexican is a state of the soul and mind. If you ask me what I am, I say I am Mexican and my brother and sister say the same. If I refer to myself as Mexican-American, I signal that I am neither Mexican nor American, but that I am the noun American with an adjective Mexican. I have for quite some time internalized the conflict of the border and for many years felt that by canceling one or the other, I become zero, nada, nothing, zilch. And I think, am I nothing or do I belong to nothing? Yet still, the fight for identity continues and I am learning to survive. My voice is learning to survive. Because I was able to write about this experience, and reflect up on this experience, in looking back, I realize that I always had self-doubts in language learning. I overly criticized my abilities in English and even in French and when it was time to take the AP exams, I was filled with doubts and worries. Through this, I do believe that educators are married to the commitment of helping students acquire learn and knowledge, however, the very choices with respect to

issues of language, culture, pedagogy, and parent involvement also reflect certain discourses, certain labels, certain perspectives, and certain ideas. There was a lot at stake, personally, in my educational endeavors and personal development and progress will be made via process of dialogue, reflection, and analysis. The perspectives that are part of discourse that value cultural diversity, critical thinking, and social justice are the kind of education I would hope for all students and heritage language learners.

Vignette Eight Spanish for Spanish Speakers

My first college experience was the loneliest. I was surrounded by thousands of students on the daily, but still, I felt alone. I knew no one. I had no one. I hardly ever saw Latinos walking around, let alone the Spanish language heard. I stood out because no one looked like me. In high school, race, language, and culture flowed like water—soft, yet through each hall and classroom, the school embraced different languages and different cultures. So now being at this university with over 20,000 students, I could not believe the difference. I took for granted my home life and what I experienced in high school, and when in college, I yearned for my culture and my language.

I went into this UC as a mathematics major. I had done fairly well in high school and thought this could be my major. One quarter into college Calculus, I said “heck no, not for me”. I could not bear being in a 300-seat classroom with no idea what the professor was lecturing. The following quarter, I changed my major

to Psychology without any real direction. Third quarter came and I was forced once again to take a language. I thought to myself, well, I do not want to go through another language debacle (as with French) and luckily I had run into a student from my same hometown, just different high school. He was wearing a sweater that said Palm Desert. I looked at him, waved him down and said, "HEY! I am from Palm Springs". We both hugged each other and felt like we had known each other for years even though we were meeting for the first time. We got to talk about the start of the year, different classes, and the transition from our small towns to this big city. I was telling him how lonely and lost I felt, especially with my major and now with this language requirement. "You should take an Ethnic studies or a language course for Spanish speakers". "They have those here?" I said, perplexed. "Of course they do, and they are incredible, nothing like in high school." He recommended I take an Ethnic studies or a language course for Spanish speakers. You might be having a hard time leaving home or making new friends here, but I really recommend you take a class and delve into your roots. "Y por supuesto, dime con quien andes y te diré quien eres." ("And of course, tell me with whom you walk and I will tell you who you are - Mexican proverb.") This was the last thing he said to me, we said goodbye and I never saw him again.

In college, I attended my first Spanish class. It was titled, Spanish for Spanish Speakers. It was not until college where I was heavily influenced by the books I was introduced to and the introduction of a radical group from the 60s and 70 named the Chicano Movement and Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de

Aztlán (MECHA). The MeCha programs on campus and its determination for existence, gave voice to Chicano short fiction, poetry, and prose as a means of expressing the Chicano barrio experiences through English and Spanish combined. I was introduced to code switching and realized the false cognates I was so used to using, along with my need to fluidly move from English to Spanish and Spanglish to English.

I decided to take Spanish 2D for Spanish Speakers because I was lost. I did not know what to major in and I did not know what direction I wanted to go in— forwards or backwards. I took this class because it was the closest thing I had to home. First day of class that quarter, I walked past different grey halls and tall buildings. I finally reached my destination and walked into a gloomy old concrete classroom. Everybody was speaking Spanish to each other and it felt like they all knew each other. I felt so self-conscious and felt my teeth clenching. I have always been quite the confident girl back home because I was heavily involved in sports and the associated student body (ASB), but I could not understand why at this point in time, I was so anxious and fearful. As beautiful as it sounded, I could not speak Spanish with confidence. A powerful guilt blocked my ability to fluently speak my mother tongue. I was missing the glue that held my thoughts in Spanish together to form sentences with intellect and skill. I was unable to speak freely. I would speak or try to speak in Spanish, but my vitriol sounds hiccupped and would come to a halting stop. I entered the university underprepared yet ripe for critical comparisons on the subject of language disparities and language use.

With each assignment required, I was confronted from basic grammar errors to a lack of ability for deeper analysis in Spanish critical thinking. Eighteen years with the lack of writing instruction and mentoring in bilingualism came to the surface. My college career began with me being reticent in my Spanish use.

Furthermore, in this University Spanish class, I heard a Puerto Rican female student and Cuban female student speak to me in Spanish for the first time in what seemed another foreign language. I was shocked, and did not know this linguistic world existed as I was so used to being in constant contact with Mexican and Mexican American students. Each brought with them a beautiful accent, different speeds and tone in language, a new vocabulary, and the use of *nosotras*. I knew the words I wanted to say, but I could not say them. My teeth clenched, my jaw would quiver and I gave others more of a reason to call me *pocha*. That word that I was referred to in high school. I was mortified thinking this could happen again and thinking I would shrivel up into a dried prune. A Spanish dictionary describes the word as 'colorless or bland'. But to me, it was a noun, naming a Mexican-American who is too American and not Mexican enough; who forgets her native society; someone who is a disgrace for not speaking proper Spanish.

I somehow managed to pass my first Spanish class with a C+. The reading and writing were challenging, and worse, I had no idea of Spanish history. I had to write my first essay in Spanish and remember thinking of my responses in English. I remember thinking of when I was with my dad in

elementary school. I remember thinking of those times he helped me and I had to translate his Spanish words into English. Now, at the university, in a completely different environment, without my family, without all I have ever known, I wanted to translate those responses into Spanish but with each word that came out of my mind, of my mouth, it lost its initial intent, emotion, or message. My translated words were stripped of an essential meaning. It was a sad confusion. I was a sad confusion. I was a confused bilingual and inarticulate, for that matter. I lost a sense of who I was. I felt as if my forehead was tattooed with the label *Pocha*. I was unable to auscultate my own sounds. My words could not create complete thoughts; the confused syntax and hesitant rhythm of Spanish sounds. It was an unsettling feeling to know that I struggled with Spanish. In hearing my thoughts, and hearing my sounds, I grew nervous and my power weakened. Spanish. Español: the language that is so close and dear to my heart-my family. I was too embarrassed and lost sight of who I was so I decided not to enroll in Spanish the next quarter.

Reflection and Analysis

While one's identity embraces racial, class and rank, national, ethnic, professional, and gender affiliations, one's identity is built upon a specific language, dialect, or linguistic form. I have always connected my identity with my culture and language. It was my first formal language class in college, when it dawned on me that I had lost my first language. There was a sense of disappointment and I came to the realization that I was an outsider looking in. As

a Mexican woman at the University of California, San Diego, I was an outsider. As a Mexican woman in the United States, I was an outsider; a victim to a disabling confusion.

I believe I was going through *Una Revolución de Identidad* (“A revolution in identity”). It was my moment in life where my actions, words, and thoughts, no matter how big or small they may seem, had implications not only on me but for others, and my environment, too. When I read about Gloria Anzaldúa (1999), an American scholar of Chicana cultural theory, I cannot help but think of the popular sentiment, “*no soy ni de aqui ni de aya.*” (“I am not from here nor there.”) At times, when I feel torn by being part of two different cultures and speaking two different languages, I also agree with Anzaldúa (1999).

If we search for the identity of self analytically, it is apparent that in my case, closeness in terms of strength of mind, dissolved while in my new environment. But does self denote the mind? It is hard to suggest that self can exist as an independent phenomenon outside the mind-body aggregate. Self is not independent; rather a complexity of interrelated phenomena and my identity was an aggregate of all past experiences. I explain self, as I am tall. I am Mexican. I am a Spanish Speaker. I am American. I did this, I did that, and I am not questioned. It is clear, evident, and no one questions you. But you question you. You question yourself and your existence in accordance to those statements. I heavily questioned who I was in my new surroundings. Such convention is also part of everyday discourse, discourse that is part of you (like

the clothes we wear on our backs). As I contemplate on those lonely college student days, those days in which I was self-conscious of the mind and self-conscious of my discourse, today, I give an account to my own sense of awakening with the words of a working-class man, Freire (1970):

Perhaps I am the only one here of working-class origin. I cannot say that I have understood everything you have said just now, but I can say one thing—when I began this course I was naive, and when I found out how naïve I was, I started to get critical. (p. 35)

I recognize that I have traveled through an array of radically different educational settings and “Pocha” became the harsh reality created by the mind. It took over the way I thought and the way I felt. However, just because someone says they found a unicorn does not truly mean the unicorn exists. Just because someone labels you a certain way, does not mean you have to assume the label. Clearly, personal identity of any individual has different aspects. In other words, there are many different designations and language use along with identity is multifaceted. Every aspect in my identity is nominally different and I am not the sum of one aspect or one experience. I am the sum of many, constantly changing, learning to be okay with being from here and over there, from speaking two languages—one at times more fluid than the other, but never superior.

Vignette Nine
Embarking on a Lonely Journey

“So what you are saying is, you are going to write about your life?” My classmate Avi says casually. “That sounds so doable and you do not have to do any research or collect data, you should get it done in no time”, she adds hastily. I sigh from deep within and tell her, “Ummm, it is deeper than what you think or have come to know, and in fact this is research. It is incredibly difficult for me Avi”. I continued to explain that, “with Autoethnography, yes the study is on me or self, but it involves excruciating hours of writing and uncovering stories that have been buried deep within me. You know, like that onion we always talk about; peeling and peeling, only to find yourself struggling and crying in the end. Think of it this way, if you were asked to describe your deepest secrets and truths in front of Ph.D.s, scholars, your peers, students, and a large audience, do you think you would struggle in writing it or in letting it out?”, I reply. “Well, since you put it that way, you are right”, Avi voiced. “But it will clearly be subjective and in research, we try to eliminate that and all the biases. I am genuinely having a difficult time understanding how you will do that. And what about traditional forms of data collection, how are you going to run that by IRB?” Avi asserted. In all honesty and in that moment, I was absorbed with self-doubt and the realization that I would have to not only be vulnerable but also generate experiential knowledge, research, and data. “Avi, I know this to you might sound like a blurred genre of writing but self-reflexivity and a focus on my emotions through lived experience is what created my choice in methodology”, I concluded. So who are

you writing this for? Who is your intended audience?" Avi adds. I shrugged at first, perplexed, as I did not know what to say and did not consciously determine the reader. "Somehow, I know deep within that my words are meant for any public reader-young or old, immigrant or not, monolingual or multilingual, child or parent, student or teacher. I know I am young but I seek to not feel alone or eccentric and know that my feelings are suited for public intelligibility. In turn, studying self, self-reflection, and the act of revelation helps me to better understand my own feelings and such, is the benefit of language. In writing and finding the public words to describe my feelings, what once was darkly felt, will hopefully render a voice. I am determined to have my voice, my writing, my findings, read by strangers. As I have come across wonderful works of literature and published scholarly articles, I yearn for intimacy and a personal statement. I hope my written words, as private and intimate as they are to me, carry over not to one specific reader, but to the public reader and audience, this is my hope", I concluded. With a smile, Avi said, "I applaud your energy and advocacy, Cristina." I smiled, headed toward the elevator, we parted ways, and I thought, "How am I going to begin to write about my "self"?"

Reflection and Analysis

As eager as I was to prove something to others, like Avi, I dreaded the isolation this writing required. Each day, I stared at my computer. Some days I wrote for hours, other days I could barely scratch 30 minutes. My eyes grew tired and at times I felt I had nothing left to give. I was mentally drained with each word

I typed, and I was flat out exhausted. This autoethnography reminds me that I am making my personal life public and with each passing day, the writing became more complex. IT WAS NOT EASY.

It has taken me over six years to finish my coursework with months and months of writing my own work. I stayed away from late night parties in order to wake up fresh for work and school. I disconnected my phone for most of the day and turned off all social media. I avoided complex relationships with friends and loved ones. People all around me got promotions, divorces, moved away, got pregnant, had babies, got married. And still, I sat each day in front of my laptop and attempted at piecing together my words and thoughts like a jigsaw. I sit here in silence writing a small volume of words and will forever be the most public thing I will do.

This vignette reveals the struggle in knowing that your life will be judged and your work will be critiqued. It can be humiliating or it can set you free. With this autoethnography came endless hours of reading, research, and in-depth data collection. As the literature states in Muncey (2010), autoethnographies are personal stories that form our understanding of the cultural experience of a group through one's subjective interpretations using a theoretical framework. Chapter 1 and 2 in this dissertation was filled with Foucault, Giroux, and Valdés who would light my path through perplexed data and theory. I realized that as I began this project, I wanted to fall back on pragmatic paradigm and theory without becoming emotionally raw as seen in Chapter 2. As I continued with this project, I became

increasingly and emotionally real and the difference between this and other dissertations is the format. According to Davies (1999), the goal is to “seek to develop forms of research that fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience as an intrinsic part of research” (p.5). I chose narrative storytelling to provide a glimpse into my sphere of culture and race as a LatinX and immigrant student, while creating familiarity to life epiphanies (Ellis, 2004). In speaking with Avi, I have an appreciation and awareness of the culture surrounding me, which only I can cohere in writing my history (Kelly, 2003).

My biggest realization in this vignette is that I built up strength from deep within to let my voice be heard and to *let go*. This story is unlike others because it is my story but can still echo similar experiences. Writing this narrative was therapeutic and beneficial to my soul as it helped make sense of an experience. Through this, I am able to develop and grasp an enhanced understanding in the power in my voice and to give a voice to those whom may be silenced or voiceless, as well (Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002).

‘Objective’ and ‘subjective’ arise in social theory and in different contexts they have different meanings. Throughout my coursework, I was taught to be as objective as possible and to exist outside of the human mind; however, to be subjective, one must inhere inside the human mind. This existence of subjectivity within oneself includes positive and negative emotions or feelings, thoughts and various perspectives, needs and desires, fears and goals, dreams and aspirations, and so forth. In the theory of knowledge and methodology, objectivity

and subjectivity rely on truth-claims with clear methods to prove validity.

Furthermore, in my heart, there is a need for social scientists to be subjective and amply introspective about their feelings, motives, or understandings within

their experiences along with a need for the researcher to be one with the culture.

Too many, social scientists write about the experiences of other cultures but what about researchers that **are** the culture?

Spanish speaking Immigrant and U.S.-born English Language Learners confront difficult challenges that are not purely linguistic. As Luis Rodriguez (1993) describes “We needed to obtain victories in language built on an infrastructure of self-worth. But we were often defeated from the start” (p. 219). In his own story, English learners not only struggle with the intolerance of the majority of the population, but also seek a sense of identity, self-expression, and self-worth. In speaking with Avi, themes and words like *secrets*, *buried within*, and *uncovering truths* recurred throughout the conversation. All of a sudden, I was filled with self-doubts and I became increasingly vulnerable in having to reveal myself as a member of a marginalized population and uncover those truths. Additionally, I have no real control over how the reader will interpret my writing (and the judgments to follow) and no job nor school could ever prepare me for the task of writing these pages where my own life is the subject. It is almost as if I stopped living in the present to commit to remembering my past. To reinforce this point, I turn to Spindlers’ (1993) notions of *enduring*, *situated*, and *endangered self*. The enduring self has a sense of continuity with its own past,

and continuity with experience, meaning and social identity. The situated self is contextualized and instrumental and changes selectively to meet the demands of everyday life. When the enduring self is violated too often and too strongly by the demands of the situated self, it is damaged and becomes the endangered self. For immigrant students like myself, the enduring self is what I bring forth from my previous experiences and life in another country. This enduring self gives me pride and comfort and this enduring self (the self of the past and the home culture and language) needs to be recognized and valued, if not the endangered self can prevail, with drastic educational and personal consequences (Spindler & Spindler, 1993). In writing this, my attempt is to write of the person I am and the person I am becoming in order to feel recognized and valued.

This vignette is important to discuss because I perceived it as a passionate discussion and we both had to take into consideration the role that autoethnographies have on the experiences of a Spanish Heritage Language learner, its theories, practices, pedagogy, and credibility in qualitative research. While the research in Heritage Language (HL) has been particularly used in Canada since the 1970s, it is finally gaining significant grounds in United States (Hornberger & Wang, 2008). As a fairly new field of language study, this conversation was the fuel I needed to begin the process and better understand Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) learners through stories and experiences.

Chávez (2012) contends that storytelling is important in many genres—oral stories, song lyrics, fairy tales, and personal narratives. Autoethnography, as

a literacy narrative and case study, is a powerful platform which allows writers, like Chávez, to share their stories by “immersing” themselves in the “the field of another culture” (p. 341). In trying to explain to others, like Avi, I write to “immerse” myself in my experiences as a first-generation Mexican immigrant student and share my story in the hope that future immigrant and first-generation students will learn from my struggles and my success. Soliday (1994) writes that “observing how others use narratives to reshape their identities may also suggest ways to redefine oneself desirably” (p. 51). It is important for Mexican immigrant students to see and read about examples of students facing obstacles and overcoming them (Manke & Cohen, 2011, p. 276). If students read and identify with the hardships and triumphs of others, they can see that it is possible for those hardships to develop into strengths and successful outcomes.

Conclusion

From the vignettes in Chapter 4, I outlined the findings of this study and made connections with existing literature through each reflection and analysis. This study was conducted in order to understand Mexican immigrant experiences. I saw it as my responsibility as researcher to present the various elements that made up the whole of my experience. The essence of these vignettes and the code switching from English to North Mexican dialect, to Spanglish, Castilian Spanish, to a sprinkling of Nahuatl reflect my heritage language. The vignettes reflected and analyzed my lived experience, my voice, some triumphs, and struggles.

From the data I constructed seven themes. These include a) Uprooting b) Immigrant Home Life, c) Agency and Resilience, d) Straddling Cultures, e) Multidimensional Identities, f) Spanish Heritage Language, and g) Reflection. The themes combined with stories of culture and languages serve to create gateways into a larger sociological understanding and play an important role in learning about bilingual students. The summary of findings, key recommendations, limitations, and future research will be discussed in the final chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Autobiographical stories really make theory and history come alive, don't they?

—Carolyn Ellis *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine my journey as a first-generation Mexican immigrant child through completion of the doctorate at California State University, San Bernardino. The purpose of writing this autoethnography is to present a personalized account of my experiences growing up and immigrating to the United States, and in communicating between two languages both at home and in the classroom. Additionally, this study sought deep reflection on experiences encompassing a negotiation of multiple social identities, including ethnic, academic, and bilingual identities. I was particularly interested in examining Mexican-American identity, language, and culture.

Three research questions guided this study: a) How did I perceive and negotiate my bilingual identity?; b) What obstacles did I face when speaking English, Spanish or both?; c) What role does Spanish heritage language have in identity development? I utilized a qualitative approach, specifically an autoethnography, a useful and powerful research tool (Chang, 2013), to answer

these questions in order to add to current literature rooted in the lived experience. In this chapter, I discuss the results of this study and relate them to the existing research presented in Chapter Two. After connecting my findings with established research, I give the conclusions of the study. Furthermore, I advance recommendations for public educators and public education leaders and suggest areas of future research, with the study's limitations in mind.

Discussion of Findings

From the vignettes in Chapter 4, I outlined the findings of this study and made connections with existing literature through each reflection and analysis. This study was conducted to understand Mexican immigrant experiences in the form of vignettes using my voice, my life experiences, and my "inner self". With the unique positioning consciousness takes at these convergent ideas, language and identity resonate strongly in multigenerational students. I saw it as my responsibility as a researcher to present the various elements that made up the whole of my experience. Within this study, I was my own research subject and stories of my understanding regarding certain experiences. My life served as the data that brought into being my identity and paved a way for both understanding my educational experiences regarding language and for understanding certain perspectives as a Mexican-American immigrant through a seemingly successful educational pathway according to mainstream notions of educational success—that is, of course, measured through degrees from a university or college (Huber et al, 2006).

From the data, I constructed seven themes. These include a) Uprooting; b) Immigrant Home Life; c) Agency and Resilience; d) Straddling Cultures; e) Multidimensional Identities; f) Spanish Heritage Language; and g) Reflection. The themes, combined with stories of culture and language, served to create gateways into a larger sociological understanding and play an important role in learning about bilingual students.

The essence of these vignettes and experiences centers on the Latina experience. This was a conscious pursuit on my part for the personal and cultural to come together as I demonstrate that trying to separate the two creates a sense of divide between the home culture and the academic experience. As Rendon (2009) contends, “Unlocking polarities requires surrendering old belief systems and working with our growth edges as we begin to uncover larger truths that join two realms of reality” (p. 68). In writing these vignettes, I hope to assist in “unlocking polarities” (p.68) to expand upon new forms of knowledge and understanding of our current practices and roles in education. Vignettes and personal narratives in academia not only further the scholarly contribution to the human experience, but also unlock a perspective that can better suit a student’s educational experience. In the end, vignettes such as mine capture the home life, the culture and heritage, resilience, and deep immigrant reflection.

Through a retrospective analysis and reflection of nine vignettes, my goal was to explore the following questions linking the personal layer of consciousness to the cultural (Reed-Danahay, 1997; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Although it was difficult to remain objective, all questions are answered and rooted in scholarship from the fields of multilingual and multicultural education, sociolinguistic anthropology, and critical postmodern literary analysis.

1. How did I perceive and negotiate my bilingual identity?
2. What obstacles did I face when speaking English, Spanish or both?
3. What role does Spanish Heritage Language have in identity development?

Immigrant Life

I am an immigrant who comes from a country that has been portrayed as if it were a Third World country, ridiculed for its drug and gang violence.

Contemporary immigration to the United States has been portrayed, largely by the media, as groups of people arriving from Third World countries. If these countries of origin are generally poor or depicted as a country sending violent people, many Americans will believe that immigrants themselves are uniformly poor, uneducated, or violent (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006). With this in mind, we tend to lose sight of the richness in culture, search for freedom, certain customs and beliefs, music, food, stories, and diversity in languages immigrants bring to this country. Instead, the stories of many in search of the American dream is portrayed as an escape from poverty, hunger, and persecution, yet the arrival through deserts, oceans, valleys, and walls are not too different from those of the “tired, poor, huddled masses yearning to breathe free” that Emma Lazarus

honors at the base of the Statue of Liberty, which has become a symbol of freedom and immigration (Barbour & Wright, 2018).

Freedom. The definition of freedom is “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants without hindrance or restraint and the power of self-determination attributed to the will” (Freedom, n.d.). It is essential to acknowledge that in the instant that immigrants step foot on foreign land, as shown in Igoa’s (1995) *The Phenomenon of Uprooting* along with other valuable immigration literature, some are forced to assimilate or possibly acculturate and give up many freedoms. Assimilation is linked to an expectation that foreigners will shed, or at least contain, their native cultures while embracing the host country language, customs, and behaviors (Portes, 1997). On the other hand, acculturation allows the individual to become part of the mainstream culture, without discarding past associations and meaningful traditions and values. Bowers (1984) states that people cannot exchange one culture for another in the same way that they exchange commodities. I agree with Bowers (1984) in that we, as immigrants, do not come to this country, “the land of the free” (Key, 1992) to give up our freedom and exchange our being and our culture for another as easily as one discards older cars for newer ones, old shoes for new styles, or other commodities that Western industrial societies easily discard (Igoa, 1995). Freedom to me is a choice, something we must continually fight for in order to have personal independence and a strong sense of self.

Igoa's (1995) *The Inner World of the Immigrant Child* inspired me through her portrayal of the immigrant experience of uprooting, culture shock, and adjustments to the new world. I use this reference to explain much of what I experienced as a young immigrant child as I made my transition to a new language and new culture. Reflecting upon those experiences was crucial in answering questions regarding identity and my attempt to regain cultural self later in life. Cristina Igoa (1995) describes the variable stages that may occur simultaneously or in varying degrees. These six stages include: mixed emotions, excitement or fear, culture shock, assimilation or acculturation, and being in the mainstream. During the "mixed feelings" stage of uprooting, as referenced in the vignettes in chapter four, the announcement by my parents of our journey to the United States brought feelings of fear. This was juxtaposed by feelings of sadness and the realization that I left everything behind. For many children, the announcement is sudden with not much time to process or deal with the mixed emotions. It is important to acknowledge these feelings in order to embrace and acknowledge the past. In the second stage of uprooting, excitement or fear in the adventure of the journey occur as we traveled by car with a direct path to the host country.

In Chapter 4, I wrote:

Being so little, I remember using my hands to cover my eyes from the glaring sun. I felt the tears beginning to burn my eyes, but I could not blink and let them pour down. The desert never seemed to end. We pulled into

some sort of town, a town I never saw again. My throat was dry and with each swallow it felt as if a prickly pear was forcing its way down. I did not know what was happening—I just remember feeling as if I were a little bird lost in the dark.

Even at such a young age, I was a young child, unknowing and afraid. The fear and silence I experienced when I left my homeland is evident in the sensory details of this quote. Luckily, I was quickly reunited with my mother whom shouldered that burden. The third stage of uprooting is curiosity in which many unsettled feelings occur, and at times unknown to the adult. I gained emotional support from being with my family. I gained courage from being close to my mother, father, and sister. Even at a small age, I knew how courageous my mother was and always will be. She risked her life to create a better life for us here today.

During the fourth stage of culture shock (depression and confusion), the transplant is well underway and plans for schooling are made.

In Chapter 4, I wrote:

One time, I remember climbing to the top of a spider web-like structure on the playground. I looked across and started to cry. As the tears dripped down my cheeks, the rest of the world seemed miles away, even though it was all right there. I remember feeling alone and feeling disconnected, even at that young age.

As a child not knowing English, I experienced confusion and disappointment in being thrown into the mainstream culture. Feelings of hopelessness and not feeling as if you belong are too common in this stage. Not only did I experience these feelings, but my family did, as well. My mother's journey was not easy because she could not know what was happening or speak the language of the majority either. From the minute she stepped foot in this country, she was looked upon strangely and her only reaction was to ask herself "what am I doing here?" and to then remind herself that she did this all for us. That optimism and hope was instilled in me the minute I hopped into that 1957 Chevy and we all made our separate ways across the border wall. Luckily, despite all of these emotions, I was never alone. Her light has always guided me, assuring me that everything was and will be all right. In the later stage of uprooting I was able to gain emotional support from being together with my family. I was able to gain strength and calm those unsettled feelings from the support of being together. Wickes (2010) says that loving, secure relationships with parents are important for children's growth and well-being. My family, a family of immigrants brought strength, resilience, and valor. This foundation is what propelled my self-discovery and negotiation of flourishing identities as a young child, young adolescent, and adult.

During the fifth stage of uprooting, the immigrant child faces immense pressure to assimilate into the new culture and pressures students into becoming carbon-copy personalities. Unwillingly, students give up cherished values and

ways of behaving to become part of the mainstream culture. Bhatnagar (2017) says that the United States tends to assimilate immigrant children into the educational system and society at large.

In Chapter 4, I wrote:

With every award and with each grade level, I accumulated an odd and lonely success. The more English I acquired, the more confident I grew and the more distant I became from my home.

I believe in my attempt to blend into the educational system and with my peers, I was denying a piece of me and could not embrace my cultural self. Those feelings of distance force one to hopelessly shut off from the past instead of integrating and embracing both worlds. In the final stage of uprooting, the child is “in the mainstream” and if the child is “able to own his or her cultural roots, he can begin to transplant successfully without shutting off or destroying his original cultural self” (Igoa, 1995, p. 119). However, I acted one way in school and another way at home. This maladjustment manifested itself in a cultural split. Hence, growing up and being conscious of these two separate worlds pushed toward a negotiation of identity and discovery of the native part of myself left behind at childhood.

While one’s identity embraces racial, class and rank, national, ethnic, professional, and gender affiliations, I conclude that one’s identity is also built upon a specific language, dialect, or linguistic form. In the education of immigrant students, it is necessary to recognize and to continue to build upon that identity,

knowledge, and language the student possesses (Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005). Hence, I have always had this connection and yearning that intertwined identity with my culture and language as shown from a young age. Tabouret-Keller and Le Page (1985) stress the fluidity of language as acts of identity where speakers “reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles” (p. 14). They elucidate a student’s voyage through a “multidimensional sociolinguistic space” in pursuit of adjusting discourses to different positions, various topics of discussion, interlocutors in an evolution of newly focused forms according to their needs for different identities. In negotiating a “multi-dimensional space,” students participate in diverse linguistic practices and create multiple identities by accommodating their speech to different situations and topics of conversation depending on their need for multiple identities. Bilingual students go through experiences in which language abilities are tested, maintained, or lost, which can lead to healthy or unhealthy views on his or her self. As seen in Vignette Two Early Beginnings, there were moments in which I was trying to figure myself out and experiences in which helped shape a healthy view of my own first and second language, as well as self-discovery with my ethnic identity. When the opportunities to maintain the heritage language were not met either by not engaging in the community or speaking with my parents (through higher level thinking) in my own mother tongue, there was a sense of disappointment.

In Chapter 4, I wrote:

I tried to forget my past, my heritage, and my home language in order to move forward with a tight grip on pencils and books. The constant translating in my head, my family's mispronounced words, and the need for independence made me feel like a balloon tied to an anchor.

I was given two voices and a tangle of contradictions. The languages and the cultures crashed, exploded, and my negotiation of identities began. I express emotions of feeling stuck within my bilingual abilities at a young age. I realized that as a child, I had to temporarily let go of one voice to pave the way for another. In the fifth stage of the Phenomenon of Uprooting (Igoa, 1995), I faced immense pressure to assimilate into the new culture. Because of this rapid force into assimilation, I came to the realization that I felt as an outsider looking in and quite frankly, that at times I felt I did not belong.

In Vignette Two Early Beginnings, I explain the relationship I had with my father with schooling. In his attempt to help me with homework or projects, my father would speak to me in Spanish in regards to questions or processes, and I organized and translated these thoughts into English. Translating in my head, back and forth, made it more difficult for me to explain to him in Spanish. I, at such a young age, felt I was my father's teacher. I struggled internally with the fact that my father could not speak English. Without Spanish information about homework and projects being sent to the house, I was always the translator and struggling to bridge both worlds. My father and I communicated in our language

until the English language took over. My use of the English language with my dad penetrated through my Spanish words like a flower growing in the cracks of concrete. I remember wishing my dad would just speak to me in English. However, I grew despite the concrete because I had my father (and his loving support) by my side.

In Vignette Two Early Beginnings, my story is an example of how immigrant children can be completely communicative in their own way and in their own choosing of the language (Valdés, 2014). I developed a rich, cultural life due to the experiences of migration and an inner world full of wealth based off that experience (Igoa, 1995). For example, in Early Beginnings, I was able to incorporate my father's deep knowledge of agriculture into my own academic learning and projects. This ultimately led to my fifth grade science fair project success. Garza & Garza (2010) add "we must find ways to honor, dignify, and incorporate the knowledge of Mexican American children, families, and communities in our classrooms" (p. 205). This not only includes the vast array of delicious Latin foods, but music, language, geography, family stories, and migration experiences that many students and families can unite within the classroom. In the United States, we have generally been socialized to think of language diversity as a negative rather than a positive (Crawford, 1992), yet bilingualism and multilingualism along with all aspects of culture in this country should be highly valued.

Immigrant students must undergo a process of exploration into the history of his or her ethnic group and begin to get critical through reflection. Students from immigrant backgrounds, bilingual students, and students learning English as a second language experience complex issues of adaptation, including both the culture of the new country and their country of origin (Berry, 1997). A point overlooked is that this is a much harder process as many parents expect their child to completely assimilate into the English language, culture, and practices. Lucy Tse (2000) showed this type of shift to English in the home in her article, "The Effects of Ethnic Identity Formation on Bilingual Maintenance and Development". Tse (2000) also indicates that "an ethnic minority student's opportunity to develop additive bilingualism diminishes, and with it, the chance to benefit from the academic and cognitive advantages of bilingualism" (p. 3). Furthermore, in this stage, ethnic minorities, like myself, accept the ideologies, discourses, and beliefs of the dominant group, and are pushed toward joining and conforming to the group norms (Kim, 2014). This type of rapid assimilation into the English dominant language creates challenges for students to explore and strengthen their ethnic identities and languages while developing his or her capacity to engage in the valued discourses of this country. Chris Weedon (1987) indicates that through language one "negotiates a sense of self" (p. 287). This negotiation of identity and language does not need to develop at the expense of another.

In observing my life in high school and parts of my adult life, I took for granted the journey my parents, especially my mother, took from Mexico to the United States. For twenty years, I lived in the shadows of the United States and attempted to push my past into my unconscious. I was an undocumented immigrant which affected my sense of security and cultural identity. Whether I am a documented immigrant or undocumented immigrant, this still does not guarantee acceptance by others in this country or even acceptance of myself. From a young age until age 19, I was afraid to reveal my background for fear of deportation, discrimination, or even ridicule. Students, like me, who push their cultural past into their unconscious will feel uncomfortable, acting one way at school, and one way at home causing confusion and mixed emotions as mentioned in the vignette *Ingles Sin Barreras*. Growing up, Spanish was always present at home and from Sunday church to our neighbors, I identified with Spanish speakers because we shared the language. Even though it was my first language, I spoke imperfect Spanish with many pauses and “uh” and “eh” in between. As much as I felt connected through this language, I was quite critical and judgmental of my own speech, plus I was a foreigner in such a big world. Language, Immigration status, and cultural backgrounds can deeply affect motivation, confidence, and a sense of cultural identity (Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005), all of which shape who you are and your educational experience.

With initiatives such as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (D.R.E.A.M. Act) and clubs such as “The Dreamers”, students’

educational experiences can be supported, shaped positively, and their resolve can be strengthened to successfully study and work ardently in this country (Kim, 2014). Due to the fact that my parents traveled to the United States and returned to Mexico, numerous times, back and forth, I grew up torn between two worlds. A country I lived in, yet I could not claim, and a country I was born in, yet did not belong to me either. For decades, I had to hide my immigrant story while I negotiated my identity and these emotions finally surfaced within the vignettes *Illegal Immigrant*, *Early Beginnings*, *Ingles Sin Barreras*, and *Fifth Grade Promotion*. In these vignettes, I realized that the English world was the more socially powerful identity, which unconsciously deemed to devalue the identity of my Spanish speaking world. By fifth grade, I had grown tremendously educationally, but I also underwent a full assimilation of the new culture. I adapted to the customs and ideals of the new culture. I proceeded away from my home language, history, food, and culture and moved toward assimilation into the full American identity (Igoa, 1995). Under these circumstances, I internalized this position and instead of finding a balance between my home language and identity with that of the dominant language, I was continually filled with disappointment or feeling like I was missing something or replacing something. I made one feel inferior to the other, but I did not have the right words to express what that something was. As I grew and became conscious of my two separate worlds, I knew as an adult, I had to discover that native part that I left behind in my childhood.

Multidimensional Sociolinguistic Space

In attending school, I had to give up cherished ways of behaving to become one with mainstream culture. Without intending to do so, I entered school as a member of a marginalized population and this marginalization was enforced by operating structures of each school I attended (Spindler & Spindler, 1993). As a result, lacking in ways to communicate bilingually and a lack of projects that celebrate students' cultural diversity at school, consciously or unconsciously, causes schools and teachers to transfer American values and models onto children. As a consequence, this forces them to discard their old cultural values and models (Bhatnagar, 2017) if strong ethnic values are not cherished at home. Furthermore, I realized in moving between environments, the home and classroom, which are at cultural extremes, I luckily was able to hold on to strong cultural values as they were instilled in me at home, despite the school's inability to unite the two.

Schooling required me to alter my habits and adjust the discourse according to where I was. Tabouret-Keller and Le Page (1985) emphasized the fluidity of language as acts of identity in which speakers "reveal both their personal identity and their search for social roles" (p. 14). A student's voyage, like myself, is shown through a "multidimensional sociolinguistic space" in pursuit of adjusting discourses to different positions, various topics of discussion according to their needs for different identities (p.14). When I attempted to blend my academic identity with my home and with my father's help, I knew my

heritage language would cease to develop further, because I needed to master English in order to progress with my studies. As mentioned previously, my father and I communicated in our language until the English language took over in my life and that notion in itself has always been a disappointment. In essence, in the education of immigrant students, it is necessary to recognize and build on the identity, language, and knowledge they already possess and educators "must do more than simply teach students English. They must also attend to and strengthen cultural awareness and identity" (Rumberger & Larson, 1998, p. 88). Educators and educational leaders should provide students with avenues to explore and strengthen their heritage language and ethnic identities in order to engage in the valued discourses of this country (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Hence, one's language and identity do not need to grow at the cost of another.

Cultural Straddlers

In speaking, I was fully submerged in an English-only setting at school from elementary school all through high school. Yet, negotiating between speaking Spanish and speaking English helped me to create an academic identity. This academic identity was driven and inspired by academic success, in awards, and advanced language proficiency. Carter's (2006) article titled "Straddling Boundaries" strikes the best academic and social balance as it illuminates another place on the spectrum of identity and cultural presentations. People, who Carter (2006) refers to as 'straddlers', recognize the functions of both dominant and nondominant cultural capital (Carter, 2006) and "value and

embrace skills to participate in multiple cultural environments, including mainstream society, their school environments, and their respective ethnoracial communities” (p.306). I was inspired to pursue and believe in education fully (the words of my mother and teachers) and still critique the norms of assimilation and a lack of heritage maintenance. Despite being on the verge of accepting the ideology of the dominant group as a culturally, economically, socially, and politically assimilated individual, or “cultural mainstreamer”, I navigated through the divide as I continued to develop my academic identity, while embracing cultural codes of school and the home. This view is one as a Mexican-American—both an ethnic and racial minority and an American; a “blended bicultural” moving back and forth between culture and language. I was inspired to pursue this pathway as I knew that educational success meant career success, something my entire family and I needed to move ahead. My mother will continue to be my source of inspiration, educationally and emotionally. I was encouraged to work hard and I was encouraged to pursue my dreams of college, as both she tells me will lead to success.

“I Am From Here And I Am From Over There”

Language is such a part of a person’s core and being that when someone criticizes the way you speak or do not speak, reactions can be angry, defensive, or dismal. After being called a “Pocha,” that experience, that name, and that thought was stuck in my head for years to come. That word that I was referred to in high school is described in the Spanish dictionary as ‘colorless or bland’. But to

me, it was a noun, naming a Mexican-American who is too American and not Mexican enough; who forgets her native society; someone who is a disgrace for not speaking proper Spanish. As a student with an immigrant background, I experienced a continual clash of languages including both the culture and language of the new country and my country of origin along with a lack of academic Spanish practice or maintenance, along with a country demanding excellence in the English standard. This was a challenging process for me with the added expectation from my parents to completely excel in school and the English language. I accepted the idea that in order to have academic success and to be taken seriously as a scholar, I needed to speak eloquently and in standard English. At the same time, I valued the speech codes I shared with my LatinX friends, the speech codes I shared with family members, and the speech codes I shared with educators. Spanish was home to me. Thus, I chose to draw on my familiarity with the Spanish language to solidify my racial authenticity allowing me to confidently say, "I am from here and I am from over there," a characterization of my Mexican heritage.

In reflecting on the education that I received (elementary and middle school) amidst certain policies and program implementations, I do feel that, as a speaker of two languages, with the push on exiting out of English language development programs and eradicating the heritage language and culture during school hours, it ultimately brought a sense of rejection toward my home language. It is important for parents, policy makers, and teachers to commit to

culturally diverse quality education. To strike an effective balance among various cultural spheres, deep and powerful dialogues centered around family, culture, language, and experiences are tools students need to foster a strong sense of bilingual and bicultural identity. In order for children to have a healthy view of themselves. It is important for children to not “forget” their home language and feel as if they have to choose between one or the other. Children should be able to maintain their mother tongue and important aspects of their culture by introducing the home life into the certain aspects of their school day and “navigate between dominant and nondominant communities, choosing to be intercultural” (Carter, 2006 p. 322).

Una Revolución de Identidad

I believe that bilingual students undergo “*una revolución de identidad*” (“a revolution in identity”)—a time in which actions, words, and thoughts, no matter how big or small they may seem, have implications not only for their self but for others, and his or her environment, too. Gloria Anzaldúa, an American scholar of Chicana cultural theory, might agree with the sentiment “*no soy ni de aquí ni de allá.*” (“I am not from here nor there.”) However, through discovery and resilience I am here to say, I am from here and I am also from there. This “self” is not independent, rather a complex mix of interrelated phenomena and my identity was an aggregate of all past experiences and of all language practices. As I contemplate all my years of schooling, I was self-conscious of the mind and self-

conscious of my discourse; today, I give an account to my own sense of awakening with the words of Freire (1970):

Perhaps I am the only one here of working-class origin. I cannot say that I have understood everything you have said just now, but I can say one thing—when I began this course I was naïve, and when I found out how naïve I was, I started to get critical. (p. 35)

A Different Kind of Parent Support

I believed that the English language and my education got me to those college steps and higher education, but I also believed that the Spanish language, my culture, and the abyss support and love of my family did the same. Furthermore, my personal strength, resilience, and determination played a huge role in my identity development undergirded by my family's strength and support. In seeing my young self grow throughout my primary years, my parents taught me character, value, and morals. My parents participated in many aspects of my life and participated in many school functions such as my basketball games and back to school night. They encouraged me, discussed my future with me through advice and *dichos* ("Mexican proverbs"), monitored my attendance, provided advice, knew my teachers, and encouraged my siblings and I to look after and love each other unconditionally. They had a very active role in creating an environment that supported my education. On the contrary, they did not have academic involvement in meetings such as PTA (Parent teacher association), they did not ask questions about my homework, go to the school library with me

or recommend books, visit/chaperone my classroom, or listen to me read in English. I say this to distinguish two perspectives of perspective: Involvement in their child's education and involvement in their child's life. Participation in their child's life ensures that their formal schooling is complemented with education taught in the home. "*Tienes que educarte,*" my mom would say to me. With these words, this education meant living a clean and moral life; a life that surpasses knowledge in academics but manners and moral responsibility.

Zarate (2007) explains this:

Parents believed that monitoring their children's lives and providing moral guidance resulted in good classroom behavior, which in turn allowed for greater academic learning opportunities. Awareness of their children's lives also led to increased trust and communication with students, and it allowed for timely intervention if a child deviated in his or her behavior. (p. 9)

My mother's words in my school life were tied to moral guidance and living a good wholesome life, which in turn, shaped my development as a whole, in addition to my formal schooling.

In terms of identity development, my parents taught me resilience and to become self-sufficient. While they provided "invisible support" and love at home, I was led to believe at a young age that my parents' educational level could only help me get so far and if I wanted more, I had to work for it and learn to do things independently. Even though they were extremely encouraging and supportive,

their limited resources only helped me navigate school to a certain degree. In regards to limited resources, those are measured by the school as it is also the case that schools, by giving homework and instructions only in English, restricted the benefits and knowledge that my parents provided to assist in my academic life. I am living proof that the more aware students are of their ethnic roots, tied to the love and invisible support from home, the more likely they are to be successful academically. I want to stress the point that Mexican immigrant parents work ardently to be involved in school, but much of their work goes unnoticed. If more educators were aware of the different types of support parents offer, along with the barriers and challenges faced, we would lean toward true educational growth. Like many families, my parents were always busy working and often missed parent-teacher meetings or events at school unless they were held later in the evening. They were afraid to miss work because that ultimately led to a chance of losing valuable income to feed the family and provide shelter. This is what it means to live in poverty—not working one day meant not having rent to pay or food to eat. I believe this to be the case for many students of Mexican backgrounds in education today. However, instead of feeling sorry for myself or shame for living in poverty, I realized that I replaced those feelings with appreciation, gratitude, and empathy. Agency (Soliday, 1994) which gives us power over the choices we make, allows us to take ownership of our lives and who we are as individuals. The agency I created based on my choices in life coupled with overcoming struggles has allowed me to transform--rather than be

destroyed. Soliday (1994) says that part of the success comes from convincing yourself that despite the odds, you somehow did okay. I am here to say, if I can do it, so can you! To have these stories and to reflect on them gives me the power to say now, I know where I come from and I know who I am.

Accepting myself, and the foundation between two languages and two cultures, has helped me to become who I am. Telling my story about a little girl, confused between omissions, navigating a treacherous educational system who came to earn the highest degree in education is an important way to honor my parents and honor my heritage. I hope that those who are struggling to find themselves and their identity in the midst between cultures are able to do so without losing parts of who they are, but most importantly one must see that it is possible to succeed and blend both. I believe that we must uncover student backgrounds and tap into the rich cultural history students bring, hard work and sacrifice, and strong family ties inspire children (like myself at one point) to hope and dream and ultimately succeed.

When I look back at how far I have come, I am reminded that I all started with my parents' desire to give their family a better chance at life. I am astounded and amazed that my parents have adapted to the changes so quickly, as they were only able to graduate from high school, and I sit here about to earn my Ed.D.

Autoethnographic Limitations

I acknowledge that autoethnography created difficult decisions in me about what to disclose and what to omit. This method can be restrictive for some readers, as I cannot share EVERY aspect of the story, which began 30 years ago. By default, pieces will be left out and one will decide what is most important. I realize what is most important to me, might not be the most important to readers. In considering the limitations for autoethnographic writing as a research tool, it is important to consider the claim of generalizability from a single autoethnographic account. I acknowledge that there are always two sides to a story as people who have experienced the "same" event often voice it through a different lens. (Tullis Owen et al., 2009). Thus, in autoethnography, reliability, validity, and generalizability are often misinterpreted. If compared to a quantitative study, the context, meaning, and purpose of these definitions are misrepresented due to the demands of credibility and authentic personal narrative. However, from an educational standpoint, unifying the voices and stories of scholars belonging to marginalized groups facilitates understanding of our own critical consciousness and could change one's praxis by engaging with culturally responsive practices (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Second, considering the researcher and participant are the same individual, many scholars create a restrictive pattern too often found in academic texts and discourses, and find this epistemological framework to be "messy". I acknowledge that memory is imperfect and it is challenging to remember exact accounts and experiences in

life that represent precisely how we felt and lived those events. Producing autoethnographic research not only acknowledges and validates my bicultural identity but my LatinX presence within education.

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

As educators, we must learn as much as we can about cultural values, community ties, and finding ways to be sensitive about working with students from diverse cultures. One key element to remember is the invisible support parents can provide along with the home support and love. Teachers not being aware of what parents do at home (making sure homework is done, encouraging respect toward teachers and principals, helping get their children safely to school), can strengthen the relationship among immigrant students, families, and educators—as we all know everyone is working toward the same goal—student success. If schools are serious about successfully educating LatinX students and other minority students, these autoethnographic vignettes from an actual Latina, specifically a Mexican-American immigrant who “made it” reveal salient aspects that lead to Latina success.

Educators and educational institutions should consider glimpses into the home life and get to know students and parents through a different lens. Some parents may not be able to find the time to be as involved (meetings, Parent teacher conferences, chaperoning) because of strict work hours and some parent’s languages may not be valued for what they are worth. Appreciation of diversity in languages and home experiences is vital. Empowerment in a

collaborative form also needs to take the student's prior experiences into account. It is important for educators and schools (at any level) to create special efforts to include students' prior experiences, diversity in languages, and value different identities.

Broadening the framework for language diversity means redefining how we view multicultural education. Typically, with multicultural education, race, class, and gender are usually considered as integral parts, and so too should language diversity. Since language is one of the utmost salient features of culture, the connection the vignettes and the data made are important for the fields of bilingual and multicultural education as both are inextricably connected, both practically and historically. If the languages students speak, with all intended social meanings and affirmations, are denied to an inferior position in schools, there is a higher chance of school failure (Nieto, 1999). It is essential that the natural links between bilingual and multicultural approaches seek to empower the most vulnerable students in our schools.

After being in a position in which assumptions and misperceptions have influenced how others view me—as a Mexican immigrant—I have cultivated compassion and empathy for cultures. This is key in education. We cannot be empathetic about other cultures if we do not begin to uncover who we are as people, our stories, our struggles, and our triumphs. We cannot get to know one another, if we do not know each other. It is imperative that educators begin to

discover the stories and backgrounds, along with the inner world of a child where fear, joyousness, fantasies, and intuition move and speak.

Another recommendation I propose is positive affirmations with language and culture at home and at school. Thinking positively about language proficiencies and language use, along with valuing the diversity in cultures create affirming messages about self-worth. Creating an empowered education of immigrant students requires sensitivity to all aspects of self (former and current lives). While we strive to see people and students as unique individuals and see them for who they are, we should create experiences in which we take into account shared attributes without assuming people and students are all the same. Learning about student backgrounds (their lived experiences), English language skills along with Spanish language proficiency, family support systems, and immigration and economic status are essential attributes we should consider to better understand our immigrant students. In creating deep meaning through reflection and in telling our stories, we also create a community of writers by allowing others to step into our lives and make connections to their own lived experiences. I highly recommend other cultural minority educators and educational leaders look to share their story, as well.

Future Research

The limitations of this study help inform future research. Future research based on language and identity should attempt to include a comparative study between two students of two different immigrant backgrounds who have

experienced bilingual maintenance and development and ethnic identity formation. As the role of language and culture continue to be researched, those experiences today may have differing experiences and understanding related to their own identity or language development. Another area of study can include research that focuses primarily on the college/university experience in relation to immigrant and language background. Understanding the experiences of college/university students would provide further recommendations for college professors and provide knowledge for educational lessons and best practices. A study that focuses on primary/secondary education only can further advance educational strategies and structures that engage students in healthy constructions of possible selves.

Future research should also use a larger sample size. Understanding lived experiences through diversity from both genders and multiple ethnicities, would also provide greater insight and increase the number of viewpoints. With both diversity in gender along with ethnicities, a better understanding of student immigrant experiences and perspectives would emerge in relation to the Spanish language and culture but also other languages and cultures.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of the study and gave a deeper understanding to lived experiences, deep reflections, and genuine perspectives of a researcher succeeding in higher education. They tell the story of a young immigrant girl's progress toward self-realization and understanding in this

contemporaneous day and age. These results were connected to literature reflected in Chapter Two. The findings of this study found opportunities to open dialogue for readers to engage and reflect in topics of self and language that students of Spanish Heritage Language similarly face today—even for those on opposing sides of topics about self and language. I also presented a list of recommendations for public educators and educational leaders and outlined the study's limitations. Lastly, I highlighted topics for future research related to Spanish Heritage Language and Identity and also suggested exploring other languages and cultures.

APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

February 27, 2017

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Expedited Review IRB# FY2017-112 Status : **Approved**

Ms. Cristina Velazquez-Romero and Prof. Kathryn Howard Department of
Teacher Education and Foundations California State University, San Bernardino

5500 University Parkway

San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Ms. Velazquez-Romero and Prof. Howard:

Mon, Feb 27, 2017 at 12:07 PM

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Yo, En Mi Mundo: An Autoethnography on Spanish Heritage Language and Identity" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The informed consent document you submitted is the official version for your study and cannot be changed without prior IRB approval. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended using the IRB Cayuse system protocol change form. **Your application is approved for one year from February 24, 2017 through February 23, 2018. Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is up for renewal and ensure you file it before your protocol study end date.**

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

- 1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,**
- 2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,**

3) To apply for renewal and continuing review of your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,

4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Caroline Vickers

Caroline Vickers, Ph.D., IRB Chair CSUSB Institutional Review Board

CV/MG

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