LOST IN TRANSLATION: AN ANATOMY OF AMERICAN MINORITY SCHOOLING

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of KEITH REYES find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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There are far too many people to individually enumerate for their support when a milestone of this nature has been attained but I want to thank each and every individual who at some point has come into my life and believed in me. First and foremost I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who made His face to shine upon a high school drop-out and redeemed him. Without Him my very life would meaningless. Secondly, I would like to thank my wife and God ordained help-meet who has been beside me throughout my twelve year educational career. Without her unfailing support and presence I would certainly not have become the whole person I am today and I certainly would not be as blessed. Thirdly, I want to thank my mother who inculcated within me the importance of an education and against all odds dignified the worth of each of her children, teaching each of us that in spite of our poverty, race, and fatherlessness, we are not children of a lesser God. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my doctoral committee. The time, dedication, and guidance they have each afforded this minority scholar epitomize their contributions toward a more just and equitable society where a student’s skin color or family’s socioeconomic background has no bearing on the education they are afforded or what they are capable of achieving.
LOST IN TRANSLATION: AN ANATOMY OF AMERICAN MINORITY SCHOOLING

Abstract

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This autoethnography utilizes Critical Race Theory to examine one Mexican-American’s experiences as a socioeconomically disadvantaged student in the American K-12 system and later as a middle-class, minority instructor in a post-secondary minority serving institution. Personal memory, external data collection, and archival records are utilized to examine the author’s experiences as a minority student in the K-12 American school system and the implications of race and class on those educational experiences. Utilizing systematic self-observation, self-reflective data like interval and occurrence audio recording, and reflexive journaling, the second part of the study encompasses an examination of the challenges I faced as a minority educator and witnessed my students contending with while employed at a Hispanic Serving Institution in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. The study concludes with a theoretical and practical discussion of the findings and implications of the study for policy makers, educational leaders, and educators whose work impacts K-12 and post-secondary institutions and minority student populations. Contrary to prevailing ideologies around equal opportunity, K-12 and post-secondary schooling systems, even those aimed at serving historically underserved minority populations, serve to reproduce the educational and social inequality of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students. Inversely, post-secondary educational success can be attained through providing socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students a racially integrated, middle-class K-12 education but at great personal cost.
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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my son; Eian Zachary Reyes, to all the teachers who told me I wouldn’t amount to much, and all the students in the struggle, especially the countless numbers of former students whose educational success and life chances were undercut by my own shortcomings and cowardice as a minority educator. Eian Zazhary, I love you with all of my being and I pray that my educational success leaves you with greater educational and social opportunities than those I was afforded as a child.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The study that follows is an empirical analysis of my life with a special focus on my educational experiences as a socioeconomically disadvantaged, racial minority youth and later as a sociology and Chicano studies instructor at a Hispanic-Serving Institution, or HSI, located in the midst of the racially segregated and socioeconomically marginalized rural communities that dot the Pacific Northwestern region of the United States. I use autoethnography to explicitly highlight how educational institutions and the educational policies and ideologies enshrined in the ways schools work shape socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students’ schooling experiences and inadvertently serve to perpetuate the racial and socioeconomic marginalization of some minority students. Autoethnography affords me the opportunity to elucidate how these ideologies, policies, and practices work from the vantage point of one who was not only the target of these ideologies, policies and practices, but also one who now helps reinforce them. Massey (2008) highlighting the systematic marginalization of Mexican Americans, writes:

To begin, choose a minority group whose members are somehow identifiably different from the majority. Once the group has been selected, the next step in creating an underclass is to confine its members to a small number of continuous residential areas and then impose stringent barriers to residential mobility….Once a groups’ segregation has been ensured, the next step in building an underclass is to drive up its rate of poverty….The interaction of poverty and segregation acts to concentrate a variety of deleterious social and economic characteristics….through prolonged exposure to life in a racially isolated and intensely poor neighborhood, poverty will quite likely be passed to children in the next generation. (p. 156)
Critical Race Theory is the theoretical framework used to highlight the societal mechanisms Massey alludes to with a special emphasis on the deleterious effects of poverty and segregation on education. I provide an emic; insider’s perspective, of the personal, professional, and institutional challenges I faced first as a minority student in the American K-12 educational system and later as a minority, sociology and Chicano studies instructor and academic advisor while employed at an HSI in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. Chapters one, two, and three, are an introduction, a review of the literature framing the study, and a discussion of the research methodology and study design, respectively. The fourth chapter of the study is an autoethnography of my educational experiences as a socioeconomic disadvantaged, racial minority in the Southwestern region of the United States and the implications of both race and class on the education I received.

The fifth chapter of the study begins with a “setting trope-a narrative convention both shaping and shaped by experiences of fieldwork- [and] is one of a journey, more or less linear, where order and meaning gradually emerge from initially inchoate events and experiences” (Kondo, 1990, p. 7), and includes the geographic and institutional framing of the “setting” of the study. The setting is followed with an examination of my life and work within an HSI in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. The name of the HSI has been given the pseudonym Enganche College. The term enganche is a Spanish word meaning the hook or the indentured and is derived from a period of time in U.S./Mexico relations where thousands of Mexican migrants were duplicitously baited into working in the U.S. under the false pretenses of high wages, great living and working conditions, and hope for a brighter future, none of which came to fruition (Massey, 2008). I feel the term enganche encapsulates my, and my students’, experiences at the HSI where I am employed.
The final chapter of the study encompasses a more nuanced theoretical discussion of the study’s findings and the implications for educational leaders working with socioeconomically disadvantaged Mexican Americans or Latinos, especially within HSIs. Like Luykx’s (1999) examination of Bolivian schooling practices, Ochoa’s (2013) study of Latino and Asian students’ academic profiling, and Foley’s (2010) analysis of schools as sites of cultural reproduction, the first and last parts of the study, comprised of academic, theoretical, discipline-specific terminology, form its skeletal frame and give the study its shape. The autoethnographic narratives in chapters four and five are the evocative flesh and blood of the study, giving the study its life. I begin with an introduction, review of the literature and discussion of the research design, transitions into a narrative, and concludes with the theoretical and practical implications of the study in order to create a text that is both theoretically robust and artistically aesthetic. The methodological function of such a format will be elaborated on in the third chapter which lays out the research methodology and design of the study. The next section will briefly discuss the research problem and purpose, research questions, the study’s limitations, its design and significance, and provide a broad overview of the study’s chapters.

**Research Purpose and Problem**

The chief purpose of this study is to highlight how American ideologies and institutional practices around race and class shaped my K-12 educational experiences and attainment and how race, class, and gender shape the work that I currently perform at an HSI serving the socioeconomically disadvantaged and racially stratified communities in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. I focus on the numerous challenges I faced in first acquiring a quality education myself, and then later, the challenges I faced in attempting to provide the students attending my institution, and those who reside in the surrounding communities, the highest
quality of education possible, often against seemingly insurmountable odds and challenges including limited material and financial resources, numerous institutional barriers, and scant social support. In short, I bring to light the personal, professional, and institutional constraints that hampered my ability to acquire a quality education as a child and, as an adult today, hinder my efforts to aid those in great need of, and whose lives would be most greatly enriched by a quality education.

Because human beings’ lives are intertwined with, and shaped by, the interactions and relationships they experience with those around them, this study discloses the implications of race, class, and gender in the lives of the students I work alongside of and who live and work in the economically marginalized and racialized communities around where Enganche College is located. Because race is a sensitive issue the honest observations I make here may leave the reader with a negative disposition towards me and what I have written. However, it is “imperative from a personal and ethical perspective, as well as from an analytic and theoretical one, to expose the horrors I witnessed among the people I befriended, without censoring even the goriest details” (Bourgois, 2003, p. 18). I have the express purpose of informing my readers, and the larger community, that the academic failure of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students is not the result of their lack of effort or energy as legitimating systems would have them to believe. Instead, I aim to help educators and educational leaders think differently about the schooling of minorities and how schools can best mitigate the educational and social inequity in their lives by improving or altering the institutional practices at work in their contemporary and future schooling. I argue that the academic failure of socioeconomically marginalized minority students is the result of the stratifying forces of race and class that have historically
been at work in their lives, are embedded into the broader American social structure, and enshrined in the policies and practices of K-12 and post-secondary educational institutions.

**Research Questions**

The broader and more general research question I attempt to examine through is whether or not American K-12 and postsecondary schooling systems serve as conduits of upward social mobility for socioeconomically disadvantaged minority youth or institutions that reproduce the societal inequality in their lives. I also attempt to answer how race and class impacted my early K-12 and post-secondary educational experiences as a socioeconomically disadvantaged, Mexican American student and how they impact the educational experiences of my predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students at a Hispanic Serving Institution in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. In answering these questions I also address questions around the personal, professional, and emotional challenges I experienced as a minority educator at a Hispanic-Serving Institution.

**Limitations**

In terms of the limitations inherent to this study, both qualitative and quantitative scholars will find some reason to diminish its merits. Quantitative scholars, with their disposition towards generalizability and the use of large random samples, will find the small, non-probability sample size; \( n=1 \), quite unimpressive (Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). These scholars will also find the subjective, emic perspective I take in the study irreconcilable with their philosophical and epistemological logic towards “objective” research. Qualitative scholars who generally embrace my philosophical and epistemic reasoning for using a subjective approach to research and who can appreciate my small \( N \) and non-probabilistic sampling method may find that the study’s more analytical aspects are too objective.
in their presentation and would like to see a more aesthetic approach (Denzin, 2014), while other qualitative scholars may find that the more aesthetic and evocative aspects of the study diminish its scientific credibility (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008). Irrespective of my efforts to mitigate the limitations of this study, in terms of its aesthetic and analytical structures, it will more than likely find its critics in both qualitative and quantitative camps. Admittedly, I hope that by embedding evocative, aesthetic, and robust analytic components into the study, this study’s detractors will be a bit more tolerant of its shortcomings.

Ultimately, what is important to remember is that in terms of the evaluative criteria used to identify the limitations of this study, and by which “good” or “bad” research is measured, “it is impossible to fix a single standard for deciding what is good or bad, or right; there are only multiple standards, temporary criteria, momentary resting places” (Denzin, 2014, p. 71). It is hoped that my esteemed critics will keep this observation in mind. In spite of its limitations, this study does have its virtues, chiefly an emic perspective that embeds it with a unique depth of insight from a researcher who “is more participant than observer…when one spends many consequential-even formative-years of one’s life in a social setting, rather than swooping in from afar to gather data for a time before going home to dinner and one’s real life” (Conley, 2000, p. 229).

**Design of the study**

Ultimately, I utilize a qualitative autoethnographic design to examine my educational experiences as socioeconomically disadvantaged minority student and educator. It has a special focus on the effects of race and class on the larger American culture, K-12 and post-secondary educational policies, my educational trajectory, as well as the implications of race, class, and gender in my predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students’ educational
attainment. Because ample social science “evidence suggests that overt forms of prejudice and discrimination have declined…”, (Pager, 2008, p. 31) I take a systemic approach to avoid erroneously attributing what happened to me, and by inductive logic to my predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged students, to any one individual’s act of discrimination in a post-civil rights society that espouses a supposed color-blind view of the world and where overt, individual discrimination is highly frowned upon.

In such a society, it is imperative to look “beyond the impact of any given individual or institution to the complex and interwoven systems through which the effects of discrimination become magnified” (Pager, 2008, p. 34). The data used in this study encompasses personal memory, reflexive journaling, analytic memo writing, personal calendars, transcribed audio recordings, video recordings, and cultural artifacts including newspaper stories, official documents like high school transcripts and professional awards. These sources of data will be organized and analyzed using, but not limited to, coding schemes, content analysis, and narrative analysis, respectively.

**Significance of the study**

I aim to contribute to the literature on the educational pipeline of Mexican-American students from kindergarten to high school graduation from an experiential, emic perspective and elaborate on the educational work that minority educators at Hispanic-Serving Institutions perform. I pay special attention to K-12 and post-secondary institutional policies, the students they serve, and the ways in which these institutions operate from the vantage point of a racial minority group member who experienced those policies first hand as a student and who now, as an adult, operates within an educational institution enforcing those policies. While the representation of minority faculty members in both K-12 and institutions of higher education has
improved significantly over the last few decades, today racial and ethnic minorities constitute only 16% of the K-12 teaching force (NCES, 2013), and at a little over 25% of the academic profession, represent a small percentage of the overall faculty within academia (Altbach, 2011).

At only four percent, full-time, Hispanic faculty members like myself, are disproportionately underrepresented at post-secondary colleges and institutions (NCES, 2014). In short, I am a minority, not only because of my skin color and the socioeconomically disadvantaged background that I come from, I am also a minority in that I have survived the educational system that the great majority of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students will not be able to triumph within and am now employed by an institution with a chief task of educating students like the student I was. The emic nature of this study is important in that it contributes to the literature on how minority educators experience working within post-secondary institutions, especially institutions that serve historically underrepresented groups.

Where much of the academic literature on socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students posits an “outsiders” examination of Latino schooling and examines the implications of K-12 and post-secondary schooling policies and the practices these institutions implement, this study experientially examines K-12 and postsecondary schooling from an emic perspective and from the vantage point of a minority scholar with the discipline specific terminology, educational background, and experiential knowledge necessary to assess the quality of that education and the policies that shape it. Unlike traditional ethnography which generally entails “presenting the native’s point of view as understood and related by the ethnographer” (Wolcott, 2004, p. 145), this autoethnography is one “native” telling his own story. I also aim to contribute to the literature on the institutional processes of HSIs and the work minority faculty members perform within HSIs, especially those located in geographic locations outside of the traditional southwest
with which Latino student populations are usually associated, an increasingly familiar demographic pattern.

While a significant majority of the Latino student populations HSIs serve has historically been relegated to inhabiting the southwestern portion of the U.S. in those territories and states originally acquired as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Acuna, 2011), Latinos are increasingly locating themselves further northward in locales not traditionally associated with Latino populations (Acuna, 2011; Rosales, 1996; Wortham, Mortimer, & Allard, 2009). Washington State, located in the northwestern portion of the United States is one such state. The Hispanic/Latino population has increased 70% over the last ten years, from 441,509 in 2000 to 755,790 in 2010 (US Census, 2010). The exponential growth of the Hispanic/Latino population is also manifested in Washington’s K-12 and post-secondary educational institutions and classrooms with the population of Hispanic/Latino students attending Washington public schools doubling from 102,494 in 2000 to 204,450 in 2010; an increase of almost 100% (OSPI, 2013) and the population of Latino/Hispanic students attending community and technical colleges in Washington state at 25,251; about 15% of the total student population (State Board of Community Technical Colleges, 2013, p. 4). Theoretically speaking, I contribute to the literature on whether American K-12 and postsecondary educational institutions serve as conduits of upward mobility or serve to reinforce the racial, economic, and gendered inequity in the broader society and maintain the status quo for socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students.

Contents of the chapters

The first part of this study, which is comprised of chapters one, two, and three, follows the standard dissertation format of an introduction, literature review, and discussion of the research methodology, respectively. Chapter four will as empirically and accurately as possible
describe my educational trajectory as a socioeconomically disadvantaged minority student with an emphasis on how race and class shaped my schooling. Chapter four will also elaborate on my academic experiences and educational career beginning with my early kindergarten years, transition into dropping out of high school, and conclude with my eventual matriculation into doctoral candidacy. The autoethnography in chapter five frames the study in terms of developing the geographic, economic, and institutional backdrop, the setting of the study and elucidates the work I currently perform working with and alongside students at a Hispanic Serving Institution as well as my subjective interpretation of the experiences of that work. It is a descriptive and analytic account of my life and work at an HSI from the time I arrived in 2010 to the present. Chapter five also entails a chronological elaboration of my role in students’ induction into the community college system through their placement into the academic pathways they select and then transition into an examination of the work I perform in terms of their enrollment into the courses they need to successfully complete their degree plans. Chapter Five concludes with an examination and development of the advising process and the actual work I perform in my classroom as I work to help them persist and move towards successful completion of their coursework. Special emphasis in Chapter Five is focused on how my students’ race, socioeconomic disadvantage, gender, and quality of K-12 schooling impede their efforts toward educational attainment.

The vantage point I take in chapters four and five is that of an observer, a sort of witness, to how K-12 educational systems worked in my life as a child and later how HSIs operate from the vantage point of my institutional role within the HSI I am employed at. An emic perspective affords the study with dual layers; from the perspective of students who are often the targets of educational policy and not necessarily the agents who implement it in chapter four, to the
perspective of an enforcer of educational policy in chapter five. While abstract educational and sociological theory and research will be discussed intermittently at various, appropriate junctures throughout the study, in order to ground the study in a less abstract, theoretical format, it is the third and final part of the study, chapter six that will encompass a robust theoretical elaboration of the findings and recommendations for improving the K-12 educational experiences of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students as well as the institutional effectiveness of HSIs.

**Summary**

The following autoethnography begins with the inside story of my escape from a K-12 educational system laden with educational policies and practices that reflect ideologies and social practices embedded in the broader social structure and that inadvertently disenfranchise en masse the social group I am a part of and culminates with my eventual co-opting into that system as an educator within a minority serving institution. Ultimately, this autoethnography is an attempt to redefine the failed efforts I made to enrich my own quality of life and that of my students through the empowering institution of education, in ways that make a difference both educationally and socially, as successes. The next section encompasses the literature that frames this study and in doing so sets the stage for a reflective autoethnographic analysis of my own experiences with the American K-12 and post-secondary schooling systems.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to best contextualize my own educational experiences, first as a student and then later as an educator, a brief historical overview of numerous educational and sociological concepts is the focus of Chapter Two. I begin with first unwrapping the numerous terms used to define me; Latino, Hispanic, Mexican American, and Chicano. The ethnic, racial, and cultural history of the terms Hispanic and Latino is not simple and static, but is instead complex and fluid. The terms Hispanic and Latino are general terms used by those in power to blur the distinctions between individuals from Latin American nations and U.S. citizens. They are terms often used to define the pheno-typical and cultural characteristics of these groups.

Regarding the Latino and Hispanic population’s diversity, Rong and Preissle (2009) found that the Hispanic/Latino population is comprised of European, African, and Native American ancestries with numerous cultural practices and beliefs arising from them. Further, there are various types of “Latinos” or “Hispanics” from Central and South America which are distinct in not only their motivations for initially emigrating, but also in the educational levels, occupations, and economic standing with which they reside in the U. S. (Rong & Preissle, 2009). Within the monolithic construction of “Others” from Latin America, are a number of ethnicities practicing a diverse number of languages and customs including people from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, and other Central and South American countries (Rong & Preissle, 2009). Because Hispanics and Latinos are part of a much larger “Other” in the U.S., they comprise the largest minority group in the U.S. and are the fastest growing ethnicity in the U.S. (U.S. Census, 2010).
Aside from being the largest minority and fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S., and despite being the second oldest ethnic group to inhabit the North American continent, predating the Spanish and the English (Massey, 2008, p. 116), Latinos increasingly possess some of the highest poverty rates, lowest educational attainment, and are the most residentially segregated ethnic group in the U.S. (Bullock, 2008; Farkas, 2008; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Goldhaber & Peri, 2007; Haveman & Wilson, 2007; Lin & Harris, 2008; Pearl, 2011). Aforementioned negative statistics characterized and epitomized my own life experiences. While I am aware of the nuanced delineation between the terms Latino/a/Hispanic, here they are used synonymously to fit the various uses of the terms in the literature. Within the umbrella terms of Hispanic/Latino are Mexican-Americans and Chicanos.

While both the terms Mexican American and Chicano make allusion to “persons of Mexican extraction living in the United States, [but] they have very different connotations” (Mirande, 1978, p. 296). The former of these terms delineates a political identity that embraces the indigenous and colonized roots Chicanos possess, while the latter eschews those origins and alludes to the construction of a racial and ethnic group absorbed into the United States as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (Massey, 2008). While the term Chicano “acknowledges a history of oppression and a trajectory that has uplifted Mexican-origin people in the United States” (Acuna, 2011, p. 412), Mexican-American refers to a middle class, ethnic group who pursues assimilation and “is devoid of radical or militant meaning” (Mirande, 1978, p. 297). Like Hispanic/Latino, I will use these terms in various contexts where most appropriate. Mexican-American will generally be used to allude to the more assimilating aspects of my identity and the ways that those around me perceive me, and at other times I will use the term Chicano to encapsulate and encompass my efforts of resistance towards the assimilating forces at
work in my life. Now that the identifying terms of who I am have been threshed out, I next turn to a discussion of the poor educational outcomes Latinos, of which Mexican Americans and Chicanos are a part, exhibit.

**Latino Education**

The academic performance of poor, minority students like myself has been the subject of great inquiry in the social sciences with a historical tradition that is still extant today. There is ample social science research documenting and examining the historical pattern of low educational achievement and poor educational outcomes of Hispanic/Latino students (Blanton, 2000; Farkas, 2008; Goldsmith, 2004; Oliva & Nora, 2004; Reigel-Crumb & Grodsky, 2010; Rumberger & Larsen, 1998; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Valencia, 2011; Warren, 1990). The historical roots of inquiry into minority school performance go back an extended period of time with “the performance of minorities such as Mexican Americans and African Americans” becoming a “central preoccupation of the American scientific community in the early twentieth century” (Blanton, 2000, p. 1014).

In spite of its historicity, such an inquiry around Latino/a educational performance is still needed today. If there is one statistic that most explicitly and starkly epitomizes the current inequity of Mexican American educational attainment it would be that 12th grade Latino students perform at the level of White, 8th grade students (Kahlenberg, 2004). While a statistic showing four years difference between the academic performance of White and Latino students alone is troubling enough, Latinos exhibit numerous other injurious educational outcomes, possessing “the lowest average education levels and the highest high school dropout rates among major ethnic and racial groups in the United States” (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 104). In terms of
secondary school completion, according to the College Board (2004) 43% of Hispanics do not possess a high school diploma, in comparison to 11% of Whites, 21% of Blacks, and 13% of Asians (as cited by Goldhaber & Peri, 2007). The implication of the high drop-out rates Latinos exhibit is evident in their low matriculation rates to higher education with “an astounding 70 percent of Hispanics [having] received no postsecondary education” (Goldhaber & Peri, 2007, p. 123). With almost 54 percent of Whites possessing some type of postsecondary educational credential, the postsecondary graduation and completion rates of Latinos still lags behind that of their White peers, with only 16 percent of Latinos earning a postsecondary degree (Zarate, Seanz, & Oseguera, 2002). The question amongst educators, school administrators, and researchers is; what is leading to the dismal educational performance of Latinos? Today, debate continues as to the origins of such dismal performance, where it stems from and the factors contributing to its continuing proliferation amongst the Latino students within the American educational system.

Numerous explanations have been posited for the adverse educational outcomes of Latino/a minority students discussed above, with explanations posited as structural, others as cultural, and yet even others as individualistic. The explanations posited for these poor educational outcomes include Mexican Americans and Latino/as possessing cultural values that are antithetical or oppositional to educational success (Lewis, 1961; Ogbu, 1978), residential and educational segregation (Card & Rothstein, 2005; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2009; Orfield & Lee, 2005; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Valencia, 2011), and racialization (Telles & Ortiz, 2008). The next section discusses Critical Race Theory, the theoretical perspective I use to explain these adverse educational outcomes. Utilizing CRT, I argue that Mexican Americans’ socio-historical
construction and the racialized policies that resulted in their residential and educational segregation are the reason for their consequent mis-education and marginalization. From the theoretical perspective of CRT I posit that the racialized history of Mexican Americans in the U.S., and the concomitant economic and educational opportunities they have historically been denied access to have a direct impact on the contemporary educational inequity and cumulative disadvantage they experience.

CRT lends itself as a theoretical framework to autoethnography for chiefly three reasons. First, CRT's emphasis on the historical and normative nature of racism in American institutional life falls in line with the historical racialization that Mexican American students like myself and those I serve today have been subject to. CRT affords scholars a lens through which they can see that the historical racialization of minority students impacts the contemporary educational inequity they contend with. Secondly, CRT's emphasis on the use of narrative to highlight the experiences of minorities' schooling experiences also uniquely lends itself to autoethnography in that I use my own story as a minority student and educator to elucidate the educational inequity I personally experienced and the contemporary educational inequity I see at work in my minority students' lives. Lastly, CRT's emphasis on interest convergence helps to explain my educational success and ascension into the middle class. I posit that my educational success as a minority student and educator serves to inhibit or curtail the criticisms that could be railed against a predominantly Anglo centric educational system that appears to be under serving minorities. My brown face helps assure the predominately White faculty and administration at Enganche College that their efforts to mitigate the educational disadvantage of their predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students are not in vain. In the next section I briefly discuss CRT’s tenets and how they lend themselves to the study design of autoethnography.
Critical Race Theory

According to Ladson-Billings (2009) Critical Race Theory has its origins in the discontent of legal scholars to witness meaningful social change through the federal mandates and legal policies that stemmed from the Civil Rights Movement of the 50’s and 60’s. CRT is comprised of several tenets that I will only briefly present here but discuss in greater detail in chapter four. CRT begins with viewing racism as an integral aspect of mainstream American institutional life, utilizes the medium of narratives and storytelling to convey certain truths embedded into the experiences of people of color, and rests upon a critique of liberalism as an effective mechanism to leverage equality in American society (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Even a cursory perusal of American history marks the truth of the first tenet since race has historically been utilized as a mechanism used to define the appropriate labor, citizenship, and educational opportunities people of color have historically been afforded (Takaki, 1993; Zinn, 2001). The use of narratives is often presented in juxtaposition to the more Western, European, Anglo centric objective and epistemic ways of knowing reality posited by modern science (Denzin, 2012) and the critique of liberalism is also made valid when one considers the current inequity that marks a great majority of minority people’s lives (Conley, 2010, Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

The final tenet of CRT espouses that most, if not all, of the gains made through a liberal approach to racial equality have chiefly served to benefit White Americans (Ladson-Billings, 2009). On the surface the final tenet of CRT seems illogical but when one considers that White women for example have been the chief beneficiaries of Affirmative Action or that White Americans looked less racist to communist Russia during the Cold War by giving minorities equal rights under the law, the tenet makes perfect sense (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman (2011) approach CRT a bit differently by
critiquing colorblindness, arguing that the racial inequality that minorities were subjected to in the past has a profound impact on their contemporary experiences and by incorporating interest convergence as a term to capture that Whites benefit from any social change made for the betterment of minorities. These scholars also focus on Whiteness as property.

That is, Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman (2011) argue that Whiteness is a privilege that empowers Whites to property rights like an education, home ownership, land, citizenship, and opportunities that minorities have historically been denied and highlight the intersectionality and complexity of racial inequality in that racial minorities experience it differently based on their sex and social class. I chose to utilize these two variations of CRT because they share the way in which they pursue narrative to present the complex realities and experiences of students of color and highlight the importance of history for the complex intersectionality that defines the cumulative disadvantage and racialization that minority students like myself and my students have had to surmount. Ultimately, I utilize CRT because it posits that it is only by incorporating the “voice” which communicates the “experience and realities of the oppressed” that we can understand the complexities of racism and begin the “process of judicial redress” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). Concomitantly, in the next section I detail the historical construction and racialization of my people since within a CRT framework, the history of Mexican Americans matters.

**Racialization: The Construction of a People**

1848 was a defining moment for Mexican Americans. The ramifications of what happened then, often unbeknownst to them, are still felt by Mexican Americans today in terms of wealth acquisition, home ownership, educational opportunities, and life chances (Acuna, 2011; Rosaldo, 1985, Telles & Ortiz, 2008). 1848 was the year Mexico ceded more than half of its
territory to the United States, including the modern day states of New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah, and Colorado, in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (Rosales, 1996). Consequently, 1848 was also the year in which Mexican Americans, many of which had previously owned vast tracks of land, had it taken from them and became foreigners in a land that for centuries they had understood to be their homeland.

Through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo “some fifty thousand Mexicans suddenly became U.S. citizens, [and] they were transformed from being a majority in their own country to a minority in an alien land” (Massey, 2008, p. 116). While the treaty legally imbued Mexicans with whiteness, affording them constitutional citizenship, liberty, and property rights, “Euro-American nativists saw Mexicans, whether born in the United States or Mexico, as aliens” (Acuna, 2011, p. 78). Despite their historicity in North America, from 1848 forward, Mexican Americans would summarily be treated as foreigners through the discriminatory, racist, social, and legal practices of residential and educational segregation (Acuna, 2011). The implications of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo would extend beyond 1848 and shape the educational experiences of future generations of Mexican Americans for decades. For Mexican Americans, 1848 was the year discrimination would come to be integrated into the everyday fabric of their lives and for ensuing generations residing in the U.S. Mexican American’s subordination was chiefly the result of the racist ideological belief systems and racialized social practices openly espoused by people of that time (Acuna, 2011; Rosales, 1996). It was during this period of time that “the overall perception of Mexican Americans in the mid-nineteenth century was largely based on scientifically endorsed ideas of race” (Telles & Ortiz, 2008, p. 76).

Mexican Americans, legally white but socially treated as African Americans, were ambiguously and precariously placed somewhere in between European Anglos, who were at the
top, and African Americans, who were at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. The European Anglo racial hierarchy discussed above had its origins in the earliest federal attempts at defining citizenship and personhood through the use of racial measurement in the 18th century Naturalization Act of 1790. While the “nation’s founders resisted an occupational classification that, they felt would violate the eighteenth-century idea of society as a harmonious whole, they hesitated not at all in creating a racial taxonomy” (Prewitt, 2004, p. 147). According to Foner and Fredrickson (2004),

   by the time of the first census in 1790, the distinctive and subordinate statuses of African Americans and Indians were well established, and for reasons having to do with representation and taxation, racial taxonomy—along with classifications by gender and age—had become central to the enumeration and characterization of the American population (p. 3).

Ultimately, the federal Naturalization Act of 1790 laid the foundation for legislative policies and social practices that would legitimate and institutionalize an en masse social group classification system, where “the social construction of groups as persons under the law (and hence as legally deserving or undeserving members of corporate and noncorporate entities) is achieved through more or less adventitious public policies, of which there are many examples” (Berg, 2004, p. 120). Consequently, alongside other non-white groups, Mexican-Americans would come to be adversely impacted by a racial classification system.

While an exhaustive examination of the state and federal policies derived from earlier legislative actions and their implications for the educational experiences of minorities is beyond the scope of this discussion, the systemic ordering, maltreatment, and unequal treatment of
Mexican Americans based upon racial classification most prominently came to be legitimized in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the case that established de jure segregation “as the law of the land for over half a century” (Foley, 2004, p. 350). Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) resulted in the separate but equal doctrine that came to define the educational experiences of Mexican American, amongst many other, minority students across the country (Spring, 2008).

While segregation was legislatively enforced in 1896, Valencia (2011) posits that “the intentional separation of Chicano [Hispanic/Latino] students from their White peers in public schools began in the post-1848 decades following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo” (p. 42). Consequently, minority students came to experience an education quite different from that of their European peers. Mexican Americans were placed into segregated schools with inferior physical and material conditions and limited resources (Spring, 2008; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Valencia, 2011). As a mechanism of social control, Acuna’s (2011) study of Mexican-Americans found that a two-tier segregated educational system had to stay in place because it was “an important vehicle for whites to maintain control of the system. The pretexts for excluding Mexicans from white schools were that Mexicans were ill-clad, unclean, and immoral…” (p. 162). During the mid-19th century the educational segregation of Mexican Americans was put into place under the auspices of “pedagogical arguments”, overt racial prejudice, and a pseudoscientific ideology that involved ethnocentric judgments of culture based on racial prejudice (Acuna, 2011; Blanton, 2000; Gonzalez, 2005; Massey, 2008; Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

Despite the numerous legal victories Mexican-Americans won banning segregation at the local and state levels from as early as 1930, they were continuously subjected to a Jim Crow system of segregation ambiguously placing them legally above African-Americans and socially
below whites well into the early twentieth century (Acuna, 2011; Foley, 2004; Massey & Denton, 1993; Massey, 2008; Tellez & Ortiz, 2008). During the early twentieth century, immigration from Mexico fueled growth in the “Mexican-origin population and the escalating barrioization of Chicano communities led to the entrenchment of Chicano school segregation throughout the Southwest from the 1930’s to 1970’s” (Valencia, 2011, p. 42) resulting in the concentrated isolation of large numbers of Mexican American communities. The segregation of Mexicans is a trend still present today (Telles & Ortiz, 2008) and one which is relevant to my experiences at the HSI I am employed at. The next section discusses the cumulative disadvantage of segregation on the funding these minority schools received and the ensuing, iterative cycle of poverty, miseducation, and limited economic opportunities for Mexican Americans well into contemporary times.

**Cumulative Disadvantage**

The term cumulative disadvantage (Lin & Harris, 2008) refers to the short term and long term effects of individual, structural, and institutional discrimination in the lives of socioeconomically disadvantaged people, especially racial minorities, for whom “everyday life achievements take longer, require more effort, and impose greater financial and psychic costs” (Pager, 2008, p. 35). Cumulative disadvantage elucidates the implications of the interaction between race and class in my life and by inductive logic, the lives of other Mexican American students. Included in cumulative disadvantage are the implications of the history of racialized state and federal policy toward education, employment, housing, migration, and other social arenas. I use cumulative disadvantage to specifically highlight how the past has impacted my educational achievement and matriculation into higher education and that of my Latino students.
in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S.. Using my own experiences first as a minority student and later as a minority educator, I posit that for minorities “just as the effects of discrimination can accrue across multiple domains, they can accumulate across the life course” (Pager, 2008, p. 35).

When the educational and residential segregation of Mexican Americans discussed above was coupled with the limited financial resources their households possessed and the limited funds policy makers allocated to these student populations, these groups came to exhibit poor academic achievement. The implications of poor academic achievement for ensuing generations of Mexican Americans cannot be overstated, especially when seen from the perspective of the status attainment model that posits that the educational attainment, occupational standing, and economic location of parents is predictive of the educational attainment and socioeconomic location of their children (Farkas, 2008; Massey, 2008; Reisel, 2011; Roksa & Potter, 2011; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Because public education has historically been funded primarily through local property taxes, Mexican Americans who have historically possessed limited economic resources, high rates of poverty, and experienced educational and racial segregation have historically been unable to fund the schools in their communities at levels comparable to schools located in predominantly white, more affluent neighborhoods with a wealthier tax base, a pattern still present today (Pager, 2008, p. 32). Evidence of the economic disadvantage in segregated schooling is abundant in the social science research that continues to illustrate “that segregated schools have lower levels of funding, less experienced teachers, and poorer facilities in comparison with mostly white schools” (Tellez & Ortiz, 2008, p. 124). Since research illustrates that “the allocation of resources for public schools is associated with systematic disadvantage to
minority communities” (Pager, 2008, p. 33), the economic implications of Mexican Americans’ historical educational segregation for contemporary Mexican Americans cannot be overstated.

Thus, giving Mexican Americans an inferior quality of education in the K-12 system almost virtually ensured that they would not be able to successfully matriculate and transition into post-secondary educational institutions. If by chance, Mexican American students were able to overcome the racist laws, bigoted cultural and social practices, economic and material deprivation, and the inferior education they received and still enter college, the monetary costs associated with higher education and the quality of the K-12 education they received would combine to ensure that they would not be able to stay there for long. The next section discusses how race and class intersected in American society to further disadvantage Mexican Americans and their pursuit of a quality post-secondary education, enumerating the most significant legislative attempts to redress these inequities, legislative actions that embodied “an aggressive effort to achieve equal opportunity for all Americans, and a central part of that effort was insuring that everyone had an equal opportunity to attend college” (Mumper, Gladieux, & Carrigan, 2011, p. 116).

**Higher Education Deferred**

If the Naturalization Act of 1790 and Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) defined personhood and citizenship with implications for who would be granted a quality K-12 education, the 1944 Serviceman’s Readjustment Act, sometimes characterized as the original affirmative action program “because it was aimed at, and disproportionately helped male, Euro-origin GI’s” (Brodkin, 1998, p. 270), defined who would be afforded the opportunity to go to college and accumulate wealth. The 1944 Serviceman’s Readjustment Act could be viewed as a second key,
legislative moment that merged educational inequity as a result of race with educational inequity because of social class. The significance of the 1944 Serviceman’s Readjustment Act cannot be overstated. According to Katzenelson (2005)

> With the help of the GI Bill, millions [of whites] bought homes, attended college, started business ventures, and found jobs commensurate with their skills. Through these opportunities, and by advancing the momentum toward suburban living, mass consumption, and the creation of wealth and economic security, this legislation created middle class America. No other instrument was nearly as important (p. 113).

The G.I. Bill of Rights, with its financing of home ownership and college benefits allowing for veterans to pursue higher education, was “thoroughly racialized and, for all intents and purposes, earmarked for White Veterans Only” (Massey, 2008, p. 63). In spite of their service to the U.S., Mexican Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities experienced the consequences of the institutionalized social practices of a racialized American social order which often trumped law. Mexican Americans who had historically been denied access to the benefits listed above, chiefly access to a quality K-12 and post-secondary education and the commensurate accumulation of higher earnings and wealth through ownership of an education, homes, and businesses, were left out in the cold. Mexican American veterans returning from WWII who were looking to cash in their service benefits experienced discrimination when trying to acquire loans, housing, and an education through the offices of the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veteran Affairs (VA) (Acuna, 2011; Brodkin, 1998; Massey, 2008; Rosales, 1996). Thus, post-WWII, white parents were afforded the opportunity and federal
resources to acquire a quality post-secondary education that would prepare them for, and lead to
greater employability, higher earning potentials, greater home-ownership, wealth accumulation,
and an overall enriched quality of life for them and their children.

In the meantime, minority parents would come to watch their children languish in poorly
equipped, underfunded, inadequately staffed schools that equipped their students with only the
most rudimentary of skills and tempered any aspirations for a post-secondary education (Spring,
2008; Valencia, 2011). These societal conditions were ultimately untenable and culminated in a
crescendo of civic unrest, violent confrontations, and collective movements in the 1950’s, 60’s,
and 70’s, that sought to disrupt and eventually supplant the policies and social practices that
produced and reinforced the marginalized experiences of minorities (Acuna, 2011; Massey,
Board of Education (BOE), a series of legislative actions at the federal level would begin to shift
and alter the K-12 and post-secondary educational experiences of Mexican Americans.

Alongside Brown v. BOE (1954), a flurry of legislative policies, including the Hart-
Cellar Immigration Act of 1965, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Economic Opportunity Act of
1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education
Act (ESEA); also known as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, and the 1974 Supreme Court
case of Lau v. Nichols were introduced and passed as remedies for the historically racist and
discriminatory past Mexican Americans and other minority groups had been subjected to. The
tenets of each of these laws and their implications will only be briefly summed up here. Brown v.
BOE (1954) “ended de jure segregation schools and other public places, particularly in the south,
where the color line was rigidly enforced” (Foley, 2004, p. 350). The Hart-Cellar Act (1965)
shifted the demographics of the nation by opening immigration opportunities to people of color worldwide, especially Latin American and Asian immigrant populations (Jaynes, 2004, p. 102).

The 1964 Civil Rights Act “brought together the strands of desegregation effort by authorizing federal power to bear on the right of all people to vote, use public facilities, and gain jobs according to their abilities” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 196). The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 allocated funding to ameliorate the lives of historically marginalized, racial and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations whose pursuit of the American dream had proved elusive (Acuna, 2011). The Higher Education Act of 1965 and its reauthorization in 1972, especially under Title IV, ultimately opened the possibility of higher education to the average American through a series of funding schemes that mitigated the financial and economic costs that had historically impeded them from acquiring a postsecondary education (Geiger, 2011).

Title VII of the Elementary Education and Secondary Education Act, also known as the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 (BEA), has been described as an ambiguous legislative policy that “strove to help disenfranchised language-minority students, especially Hispanics (Ovando, 2003, p. 8). In an attempt to improve the academic achievement of linguistic minorities, the act provided federal dollars to school districts that would then in turn create programs providing English language learners access to a quality curriculum and trained educators (Garcia, Wies, & Cuellar, 2011, p. 147). As a result, the ancestral languages and cultural histories of these language minority students came to be recognized in some form in the curriculum that students learned and the everyday “processes of school life” (Ovando, 2003, p. 8). The BEA (1968) however did not do enough for linguistic minorities as was evidenced by the U.S. Supreme Court case, Lau v. Nichols (1974) that today is seen as the seminal decision through which the civil
rights of language minority students came to be institutionalized. The case was brought forward by the parents of 1800 Chinese students who sued the San Francisco Unified School District for not providing the necessary language accommodations and “for failure to provide them with full access to the school district’s core curriculum” (Garcia, Wies, & Cuellar, 2011, p. 146).

Premised upon the tenets of Brown v. BOE (1954) and the Civil Rights Act (1964), the justices in Lau v. Nichols (1978) “concluded that equal treatment of English-speaking and non-English speaking students did not constitute equal educational opportunity and, therefore violated non-English speaking students’ civil rights” (Ovando, 2003, p. 9). The momentum of each of these legislative actions and the benefits such legislation presented for the lives of minorities, culminated in a historical period of unprecedented reform aimed at redressing earlier inequities and encompassed all aspects of the exclusion minorities experienced in their daily lives. The civil rights policies discussed above were aimed at addressing “these fundamental inequalities between whites and blacks by dramatically changing the conditions of political participation, the social mores of public places, private choices about friendships and marriage, and the composition of American schools, workplaces, and leisure activities” (Lin & Harris, 2008, p. 13).

The mid-twentieth century witnessed a tremendous shift in cultural values, ideas about race and equality, and equal opportunity in terms of education (Bastedo, 2011; Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Jaynes, 2004; Massey & Denton, 1993; Prewitt, 2004; Spring, 2008; Valencia, 2011). At the postsecondary level, minority and white students, inspired by the Civil Rights Movement began to reject traditional academic disciplines and curriculums in the academy and advocate and petition for programs reflecting their history and political and social interests (Acuna, 2011,
Bastedo, 2011; Rosaldo, 1985; Rosales, 1996; Valencia, 2011). In spite of all these legislative efforts to redress the discrimination Mexican Americans experienced in the past, today, Latino/as still exhibit the lowest overall college-going rates in comparison to other student populations (Laden, 2001, Oliva & Nora, 2004; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). In fact, the “college going rates of Hispanics have not changed much since the 1970’s, [when] a Hispanic-white gap was created and grew from (0% in 1972 to nearly 9% in 2007) (Goldrick-Rab & Cook, 2011, p. 263).

While there has been an increase in college enrollment among Latino/as, the majority of the increase has been in enrollment in open access, two year community colleges where 52 percent of Latino/as begin their post-secondary education (Zarate, Sanez, & Oseguera, 2011). Enrollment into such institutions in and of itself is not a bad thing, except for the fact that research illustrates that a significant portion of these minority students are unable to successfully transition to a four year institution, irrespective of their declared intent to do so (Goldhaber & Peri, 2007; Zarate, Sanez, & Oseguera, 2011). One important type of post-secondary institution for Latinos is the Hispanic-Serving Institution, HSI. The next section discusses these institutions’ histories and the instrumental roles they play in educating the generally educationally disadvantaged Latino student population. As mentioned earlier, chapter V will be an in-depth examination of what work looks like within such an institution and what the educational policies that shape that work look like from the inside.

Hispanic-Serving Institutions

As the U.S. begins to shift in its demographic makeup, with a burgeoning population of Latino/as, the post-secondary education of these students is critical to the future of the America’s political, educational, and economic institutions. Complicating the post-secondary education of
the Latino population is that at the very time of increasing fiscal demands and limited, diminishing revenues, post-secondary educational systems that serve this population are faced with mitigating the numerous challenges associated with the Latino population’s growth including disproportionate placement into remedial and developmental courses, low matriculation rates into four year institutions, enrollment and capacity issues, and concomitantly the high rates of poverty and low socioeconomic status that generally accompany Latino population (Dickert-Conlin & Rubenstein, 2007; Lin & Harris, 2008; Massey, 2008; Rong & Preissle, 2009; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Valencia, 2011; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006).

Over the last 30 years, an increasing number of institutions with large enrollments of Latino/as, Hispanic Serving Institutions; hereafter HSIs, have emerged to meet the educational needs of the emerging Latino student population and have come to be recognized as the “primary provider of higher education to the growing Hispanic population in the country” (De Los Santos & De Los Santos, 2003, p. 378). HSIs are degree-granting public or private nonprofit institutions of higher education and a type of Minority Serving Institution, hereafter referred to as MSIs, that represent a growing segment of the higher education institutions in the United States (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008; De Los Santos & De Los Santos, 2003; Laden, 2001).

Unlike other MSI's like Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Women's Colleges, and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), the majority of HSI's lack an institutional mission and were not established by educational leaders and state and federal policymakers specifically to help Latino/as per se (Benitez & DeAro, 2004; Gasman, 2008; Laden, 2001; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005). Instead of being developed with specific institutional missions, HSIs developed as a response to the burgeoning demographics of Latino/as and the ever-
expanding geographic locations across the U.S. where they reside (Contreras, Malcolm, Mara Bensimon, 2008). In contrast to the types of MSIs mentioned above HSIs “can come into existence rather quickly, without a mission statement or overt institutional commitment to serve Hispanic students” (Benitez & DeAro, 2004, p. 36). In spite of the lack of an institutional mission like other MSIs, “the rising presence of Hispanic students in certain colleges and universities since the mid-1960s has conferred on them ad hoc missions to better address the educational needs of this population” (Laden, 2001, p. 75).

The majority of HSIs, between 46%-53%, are community colleges (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008; Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez; 2013; Zarate, Saenz, & Oseguera, 2011). HSIs also enroll nearly half of all the Hispanic college student population on top of 20% of other ethnic minorities (Benitez & DeAro, 2004; Laden, 2001; Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez; 2013; Nunez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011; Zarate, Saenz, & Oseguera, 2011). In comparison to their institutional counterparts across the nation they are underfunded receiving only “66 cents for every dollar going to all other colleges and universities, annually per student, from all federal funding sources” (HACU, 2013). All of these factors pose numerous challenges to HSIs and their ability to meet students’ needs. Due to the fact that HSIs are predominantly two year institutions, “an already underfunded segment of post-secondary institutions” (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008, p. 72), serving a marginalized, predominately racialized and socioeconomically disadvantaged population (GoldHaber & Peri, 2007), the challenges they face in acquiring the political and legislative support that provides real financial resources, and not just rhetoric, are quite daunting. As of 2011 there were 356 HSIs, 20 percent of which were 4-year institutions (HACU, 2013). HSIs, as delineated from other MSIs, are modern and were first mentioned at the federal level in 1983 (Santiago, 2006).
Despite the short period of time they have existed “HSIs represent approximately 5 percent of all institutions of higher education [and] they enroll nearly 50% of all Hispanic students” (Mercer & Stedman, 2008, p. 22) and consequently “serve as critical gateways to higher education for Latinos…” (Nunez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011, p. 19). Further delineating HSIs from other types of MSIs is that the majority of HSIs are community colleges, graduate a disproportionately high number of Latino/a students in proportion to their representation amongst other post-secondary institutions, are generally more affordable than their counterparts, and are geographically located near large concentrations of Latino/as (Santiago, 2006). In spite of their increasing prevalence, the identification of what constitutes an HSI is not clear cut.

According to Merisotis and McCarthy (2005), ample “variation exists within the HSI community as to what constitutes an HSI, and not all institutions that meet federal standards for an HSI classify themselves as such” (p. 49). Identifying HSIs is complicated by the multiple political arenas they span; federal, state, and autonomous institutional policy arenas, and the various criteria each of these political arenas utilizes to determine whether or not an institution is an HSI and should receive commensurate federal and state funding (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008; Merisotis & McCarthy, 2005; Nunez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez, 2013; Santiago, 2006). For example, “the U.S. government certifies institutions as HSIs only if they are approved by the U.S. Department of Education for Title V funding” (Santiago, 2006, p.8). However, it was under Title III, and not Title V of the 1992 reauthorization of the HEA, that HSIs were first federally recognized “as accredited degree granting colleges and universities with Hispanic students accounting for 25% or more of the undergraduate enrollment” (Gasman, 2008, p. 23). Unlike the above definition, HSIs as defined by another federal office, the Office of Civil Rights or OCR, include for-profit institutions that
would not be included under the 1992 reauthorization (Santiago, 2006). The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities’ definition; hereafter HACU, on the other hand “includes institutions with at least 25 percent Latino/a student enrollments that elect to become full member, and other institutions with 10-24 percent of Latino/a undergraduates, or 1000 Latino/a undergraduates (headcount) that elect to become associate members” (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008, p. 74).

At the state level, HSIs in Texas for example, are recognized as a result of a state Supreme Court case, LULAC v. Richards (1989), where state policy makers faced charges of discrimination in the inequitable funding of higher educational institutions serving large numbers of Latino/as, and not necessarily the above demographic proportions (Santiago, 2006). The complexity of identifying what constitutes an HSI is the result of their legislative history and the political and legislative actions policy actors and educational leaders took to advance their federal and state recognition, as well as the challenges they faced. According to Nunez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, and Vasquez (2013) HSIs had their origins in congressional hearings about Hispanic access to post-secondary educations and their isolation within certain types of post-secondary educational institutions that could not afford the human and material resources needed to provide them with a quality education.

While these congressional hearings were the first formal introduction of HSIs into the national discourse between political leaders and higher education leaders, throughout the mid-80’s the educational concerns of institutional leaders in the Southwest where large numbers of Hispanic students were enrolled had already come to be widespread as these leaders began to vocalize their concerns around inequity in terms of federal, corporate, and foundational support (Santiago, 2006). The concerns of these leaders ultimately led to the formation of the HACU, a
conglomerate of institutional leaders from Texas and New Mexico, and the use of Hispanic enrollment of 25% or more as a criterion for identification of HSIs (Laden, 2001; Santiago, 2006). Despite being discussed at the federal level as early as 1983, earlier attempts at legislative action in 1984 and 1989 failed. These earlier legislative failures could be the direct result of the fact that Latino/as were primarily relegated to the Southwestern states of the nation as a result of historical migratory patterns and the concomitant geographic and residential isolation of the Latino/a population these institutions served.

Another reason for the earlier failed attempts at legislation could be the lack of familiarity and minimal interaction with Latino/as that federal legislators and policy makers had. Only because the Latino/a population has burgeoned, and become dispersed in many places outside of the traditional Southwestern regions of the U.S. where Latino/as have historically resided, has any kind of substantive federal action been taken. These early failed attempts at legislation may also be reflective of the struggle for equality and equity that educational leaders and policy makers advocating for the historically marginalized Latino population have had to overcome in a racially stratified society.

While legislators in California, Texas, and a few other Southwestern states were well aware of the challenges their Latino/a constituents faced in acquiring a post-secondary education, the majority of lawmakers in the other states did not have a sizable number of these constituents to merit a concerted legislative action towards allocating the resources and funds to the Latino population and the institutions that served them. In sum, the federal legislative body of Congress in the 80’s lacked the critical mass to move the Hispanic student population towards post-secondary institutional equity. HSIs did not receive their first successful legislative recognition until 1992 with the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, when “members of HACU and
other advocates finally succeeded in influencing the passage of federal funding for HSIs as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, Title III” (Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez, 2013, p. 84).

Title III of the HEA (1992) was a legislative success that allowed for HSIs to receive institutional aid and support from the federal government that they needed to improve their Hispanic students’ educational experiences. While the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act helped spearhead HSIs in 1992, it was only under Title III that funding set aside for HSIs was explicitly intended to expand educational opportunities for Hispanic students, improve their academic attainment and completion rates of postsecondary degrees, and expand the academic offerings and institutional stability of these colleges (Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez, 2013, p. 84). The only problem with the reauthorization was that educational leaders of other MSIs, primarily HBCUs, began to bemoan the loss of funds they had previously received under Title III, a problem they explicitly attributed to the formation, development, and funding of HSIs (Gasman, 2008).

The grievances and complaints brought by the leaders of other MSIs eventually led to the appropriation of funding for HSIs in the 1998 reauthorization of the HEA, under Title V (Benitez & DeAro, 2005; Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008; Laden, 2001; Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez; 2013; Nunez, Sparks, & Hernandez, 2011). According to Benitez and DeAro (2005), “the creation of the Title V program in the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act provided a new funding stream specifically for HSIs” (p. 39). Title V allowed for a shift in funding focus from individual students to institutional development meant to scaffold and support the work these institutions were doing towards serving their students by developing a system of collaborative agreements between HSIs (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008).
It was also under Title V that the socioeconomic background of the Hispanic students attending HSI s; a minimum of 50 percent of enrolled Hispanic students below the official poverty line, alongside the 25 percent or more Hispanic student threshold, came to be embedded as criteria into the formula for determining whether or not an institution would qualify for Title V funds (Gasman, 2008). A drawback of the legislative shift into Title V was that HSIs have not been afforded the same secure status of funding as HBCUs and TCUs because they lack an explicitly defined mission to serve a focused population like African Americans or Native Americans (Laden, 2001). One other downside to the criteria related to HSIs enrolled students’ racial and economic demographics is that it “is possible for an institution to cease being Hispanic-Serving if, for example, the percentage of Latino/as drops below 25 percent or there is a change in the proportion of Hispanics who are low-income” (Contreras, Malcolm, & Bensimon, 2008, p. 74).

In spite of the above differences between HSIs, HBCUs and TCUs, the general “basic eligibility requirements shared by all Title III and Title V institutions include low average educational expenditures per student, high enrollment of financially needy students, not-for-profit status, accreditation, and awarding of associate or higher degrees” (Benitez & DeAro, 2004, p. 36). Recent legislation at the federal level; the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 (CCCA), the 2008 reauthorization Higher Education Opportunity Act of (HEOA), and the Student Aid and Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2009 (SAFRA), has increased the resources these institutions have to better serve their students in terms of the academic and institutional support services provided students as well as a mitigating of the cost of higher education to students in terms of awards, loan repayment, and interest rates (Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vasquez, 2013).
In spite of all of the aforementioned actions at the federal level to equalize the quality of education HSIs provide to their students, educational leaders at these institutions still face a number of challenges. The ever increasing number of Latino/as enrolling at HSIs introduces a number of capacity, resources, and pedagogical challenges that complicate the already complex issue of higher education (Perin, Flugman, & Spiegel, 2006). As the above discussion illustrates HSIs are a significant set of post-secondary institutions. Their development is the result of a complex set of shifts in the cultural values in the U.S., numerous demographic changes in terms of the ethnic and racial composition of the U.S., and myriad legislative acts which shape the amount of financial resources they receive and where those resources originate from. Most importantly, HSIs are the result of the endless and tireless determination of educational leaders driven by their belief that all students should be afforded an equal opportunity at a quality education. Now that the literature that generally places Latinos’ educational experiences in the context of a much broader discussion around the historical educational inequity of Mexican Americans has been developed, the next chapter explains this study’s research methodology as well as the rationale for its design.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The idea for this autoethnography stems from the inexplicable pain, countless crying sessions, incessant pleas for help, and struggles my students and I have experienced and shared with one another over the last five years I have been in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. As a result of my graduate training in sociology and educational leadership and the orientation to quantitative research these disciplines inculcated within me, I initially planned to write a mixed methods dissertation on the educational segregation of Latino students in Washington state and the implications of that segregation on the educational performance of secondary students in the K-12 system through quantitative multiple regression analysis as well as a critical, ethnographic study of a small, rural hyper-segregated high school. Part of my motivation in doing such a study was to bring to light the en masse de facto segregation that no amount of legislative force and political action appears to be able to redress.

I also wanted to use my research as an opportunity for a group of marginalized students and their parents, who I viewed as generally voiceless, to be heard. It was my students, Mexican American youth in my community whom I felt I possessed a great amount of responsibility for, who had communicated to me their painful awareness that they were being served what I have to come to define as a sub-par education. An education comprised of lowered expectations, shaped by a deficit view of who these students are and what they are capable of performing. I felt responsible for these students because the great majority of their parents lacked the human, social, cultural, and economic capital necessary to muster institutional and societal change on behalf of their children.
To avoid them maligning their teachers, I often reminded my students and their parents that their education was generally being given to them by educated people motivated by tender hearts and with the best of intentions. My plans, probably like many doctoral students who have come before me, were grandiose. I was going to bring to light the plight of these students and make our society aware of the neglect, marginalization, and outright destruction it perpetrates on these students’ lives and their futures through the seemingly benign and unrelated social practices embedded into how people decide where they live and the educational practices of the schools their children go to. However, while there was not one, salient moment I could recall when my mind had changed, once I completed all my coursework and my proposal was nearing completion, absent a few formatting and methodological errors needing correction and the approval of my chair, I realized I no longer wanted to move forward with such a dissertation.

With the advice of my chair, and against the more rational and expedient approach to completing a dissertation, I decided to make my dissertation about myself and my work with students at an HSI. Not only was I going to have to completely start over in regard to my research questions, research purpose, literature review, and methodology, I was going to have to acquire and master a completely new disciplinary orientation and set of methodological tools and vocabulary in order to investigate my work within an HSI. Perhaps the most daunting of all tasks, I was going to use my newly acquired disciplinary orientation to study the most elusive, amorphous, and resistant of participants, myself. The design of this study, an autoethnography, literally translated as self-culture-writings, “could mean different things to different people” (Chang, 2008, p. 46). There are numerous variations of autoethnography including narrative, interpretive, analytic, and performative autoethnography, and while each has their own orientation to what autoethnography should look like, what it should contain, and what it
examines, each variation incorporates a general understanding of the preeminent role of the researcher within the research (Denzin, 2014; Ellis, Adams, & Buchner, 2011; Madison, 2005; Pace, 2012; Taber, 2010; Wall, 2006; Wolcott, 2004).

Following Chang’s (2008) suggestion that autoethnographers develop their own stylistic and philosophical approach to communicate their interpretation of life and “its connectivity to the world” (p. 149), the autoethnography in this study will at various times change forms. At times this autoethnography will exhibit an analytic form, while at others a confessional-evocative form, and still at others a form more in line with an interpretive format. In the following sections I elaborate on the research methodology and design of this study beginning with a general discussion around qualitative research and then dovetail into a more nuanced discussion of the study design.

**Qualitative Research**

Some of the research methods most frequently advanced in research methods courses are qualitative and quantitative, with the distinction between each type of research generally framed “in terms of using words (qualitative) rather than numbers (quantitative), using closed-ended questions (quantitative hypotheses) rather than open-ended questions (qualitative interview questions)” (Creswell, 2009, p. 3). The differences between these methods encompass a broad range of topics including the purposes for research, the methods of sampling and data collection, and the analysis of the data collected (Creswell, 2009; Muijs, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Aside from the differing ways research is done, the philosophical and epistemological orientations grounding each of these methodologies also vary in terms of their dispositions towards research, knowledge, and reality (Agar, 1996; Bernard, 2002; Creswell, 2009; Eisenhart,
The philosophical and epistemological orientations grounding qualitative and quantitative methodologies are important for understanding why I have chosen a qualitative approach. My choice to utilize a qualitative research methodology is a direct response to the limitations inherent to quantitative research and perhaps more importantly an ideological refutation of my own domestication and the marginalization of my subjective worldview, a worldview that has historically been marginalized by an “objective” science. Due to its historical origins and development, quantitative and positivist orientations to research, have most closely resembled the natural sciences in terms of epistemology (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 53).

According to Creswell (2009) the assumptions undergirding a positivistic methodology include the understanding that knowledge is conjectural and that research is iterative, generalizable, incomplete, explanatory, and objective. The development of “many basic statistical concepts and techniques (e.g., the bell curve, standard deviation, correlation, t-test)” in the 19th century all helped to legitimize the positivist approach and granted some of the legitimacy of the natural sciences to the social sciences (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 58). Consequently, like natural scientists, positivists understand the world to operate according to certain fixed and natural laws of cause and effect, laws that can be studied and tested through the methods of inquiry in the natural sciences being “transposed to social research settings (such as education)” (Muijs, 2011, p. 4). Thus, quantitative research, much like its natural science progenitor, entails the use of instruments like surveys or questionnaires, to ‘objectively’ measure the phenomena under investigation (Babbie, 2011; Creswell; 2009). Irrespective of the statistical
sophistication and careful approach to social science research quantitative scholars took, the positivist approach to understanding the social world ultimately began to wane at the turn of the twentieth century.

The limitations of a quantitative approach ultimately proved too much for its advocates to adequately defend. A quantitative approach has the tendency to dehumanize and conflate the individual lives of human beings experiencing particular phenomena into larger homogenous social groupings according to sex, race, income, educational level, and any number of other variables, strips these individuals of their idiosyncrasies, reduce their lives to certain statistical averages, and then extrapolates those averages to others in that group. Quantitative studies generally negate or fail to account for the “recognition and contemplation of subjective human experience, contingencies of truth claims, value-laden inquiry, and local knowledge” (Madison, 2005, p. 12) inherent to examinations of the social world.

One final limitation of quantitative research is the preeminent position that quantitative research has historically held in research. Quantitative research as the dominant mode of investigation has led to the conceptualization and legitimation of only certain types of research and only certain types of knowledge to the detriment of racial and female minority groups as well as scholars, whose conceptualizations and epistemologies of authority, science, and knowledge fall outside of a Western, male, objective, Anglo-centric tradition (Denzin, 2003). Taking an ideological stand against the marginalization of “Other” ways of knowing is my second reason for this research design. The prescriptive, narrow definitions of knowledge and science associated with objective, quantitative research have historically negated other ways of knowing the social world that researchers and their participants have inhabited. It has also failed
to account for the role of the researchers and subjects in the construction of that social world. It was almost 30 years ago that Myrna Santiago, speaking to the powerlessness and frustration minorities have historically experienced when trying to be heard, stated “I hate objectivity. I am convinced it’s a Western, white, male plot to rob the rest of us of our experience by negating our point of view and thus invalidating our being” (as cited in Abalos, 2007, p. 1). The above words frame the epistemological rationale of this study. In choosing a qualitative study design, I have made a concerted decision to resist the objectivity Santiago derides as stifling of minorities’ voices and their experiences.

I want to humanize the educational policies and practices at work in my early life as a student and which I implement during my work at an HSI. In contrast to the objective, positivist orientation that is preeminent to natural and social science research, qualitative researchers like myself believe that “there is no pre-existing objective reality that can be observed” (Muijs, 2011, p. 4) and are sometimes alluded to as constructivists who believe reality to be constructed by human beings and by their observations. Thus, the research methodology, or worldview, of qualitative researchers is generally that of social constructivism or interpretivism (Creswell, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Qualitative research generally involves inductive reasoning; moving from the particular to the general, is exploratory, and aims to elucidate the generally unknown aspects of a social phenomenon/a, through the collection and analysis of observed and/or narrative data (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Some qualitative research is increasingly utilizing an advocacy or participatory methodology or worldview (Bauer & Brazer, 2011; Denzin, 2014; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Madison, 2005; Theoharis, 2009; Villenas, 1996). Like my rationale for doing a
qualitative study, a more contemporary manifestation of this emerged “from individuals who felt that the postpositivist [discussed above] assumptions imposed structural laws and theories that did not fit marginalized individuals in our society or issues of social justice that needed to be addressed” (Creswell, 2009, p. 9).

From the aforementioned point of view, researchers endeavor to not only study and document the phenomena under examination, in a real way they attempt to challenge and redress the societal systems and mechanisms of oppression that subordinate and marginalize certain types of knowledge and certain groups of people in need of advocacy or representation. According to Merriam (2009), “rather than determining cause and effect, predicting, or describing the distribution of some attribute among a population, we [qualitative researchers] might be interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon under investigation” (p. 5). Researchers “must gain an empathetic understanding of societal phenomena, and they must recognize both the historical dimension of human behavior and the subjective aspects of the human experience” (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008, p. 256).

In contrast to the quantitative approach discussed earlier “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Consequently, qualitative methods are those which endeavor to derive understanding and meaning of the human experience from the language systems and actions human beings interact through and with (Creswell, 2009; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). As a result of my orientation to verstehen; an empathetic understanding of the participants’ experiences, the strength of a qualitative approach is its ability to humanize the
research participants and consequently, the population that the participants represent (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Madison, 2005). Qualitative research humanizes its participants, allows them to develop relationships with those who have institutional and legitimized power, and gives them the opportunity to be heard through the narratives that are disseminated to the broader research community. The next section discusses the qualitative research design of autoethnography used in this study and elaborates on why it is the most effective research method.

**Autoethnography.** As the above discussion illustrates, the study designs associated with qualitative research are extensive. Much of the reason for the extensive research designs associated with qualitative research are the minor adaptations, modifications, and extensions that researchers have made to the more conventional qualitative approaches historically utilized in research. For example, ethnography has a long tradition in the social sciences, preeminently social and cultural anthropology, dating back to at least the 1800’s, but was later picked up by sociologists, educational researchers, and other social scientists adopting a constructivist or interpretivist orientation to research (Agar, 1996; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Wolcott, 2008). Alongside the adoption of a qualitative approach, qualitative scholars at times integrated some ethnographic techniques into their research and at other times modified the ethnographic method to such an extent that it required a re-conceptualization of said term (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Wolcott, 2008). Hence, an entire new assortment of ethnography was spawned to include critical ethnography (Madison, 2005), institutional ethnography (Smith, 1987), and the study design used for this study; autoethnography (Hayano, 1979; Heider, 1975).
Contrary to the concise and simplistic definition Madison (2005) gives of autoethnography; the telling of a researcher’s exclusive experience, autoethnography is a difficult term to adequately conceptualize. Like Madison’s (2005) definition, Wolcott (2008) who prefers the term ethnographic autobiography, similarly frames autoethnography simply as a self-explanatory “reporting style dealing with the lived experiences of researchers themselves” (p. 211). Perhaps because of their own dispositions to research, Madison (2005) and Wolcott (2008) cannot fully appreciate the far more complex nature of autoethnography. There are numerous questions about autoethnography with the great majority focusing on the approach and process of autoethnography as a research method and the scientific integrity of autoethnographic research as a product that contributes to the knowledge base of social science research.

Like its historical antecedent, ethnography, there are questions around autoethnography and whether or not it is a process, a product, or somewhere in between; a combination of both (Anderson, 2006; Chang, 2008; Denzin, 2014; Wall, 2006). One scholar even stated that “autoethnography might be more of a philosophy than a well-defined method” (Wall, 2008, p. 39). Consequently, there is a great amount of variation in what constitutes an auto-ethnography, what it should be called, how it should be done, and what it should look like. There are numerous variations of autoethnography including the narrative, interpretive, analytic, performative, and evocative autoethnography, and while each has their own orientation on what autoethnography should look like, what it should contain, and what it examines, each variation incorporates a general understanding of the preeminent role of the research within the research (Denzin, 2014; Ellis, Adams, & Buchner, 2011; Madison, 2005; Pace, 2012; Taber, 2010; Wall, 2006; Wolcott, 2004).
In spite of a lack of definite agreement amongst qualitative scholars, autoethnography is a contemporary, novel research design with roots in Weber’s interpretive sociology (Denzin, 2014, p. 2), first utilized by anthropologists to delineate between the views that researchers’ have of their participants and/or informants, the view their participants and/or informants hold of themselves, and the views that both the researcher and participants hold of the researcher (Wolcott, 2008, p. 211). It is also rooted in a historically rich tradition of the humanistic interpretive social science discourse that developed in the early 20th century (Denzin, 2014, p. viii). As a result of this orientation, unlike the untenable positivistic/post-positivistic assumptions that “have represented the traditional form of research” (Creswell, 2009, p. 6) and pretended to exude “a level of objectivity that was once fashionable” (Wolcott, 2008, p. 49) autoethnography posits the researcher playing an active, rather than passive, role in the research process.

In more technical terms, autoethnographies are a researcher’s “conventionalized narrative expressions of life experiences” in relation to the groups and social relationships that surround and shape the researcher (Denzin, 2014, pp. 6-7). It is only through the interactions, dialogue, and engagement with the groups and social relationships researchers are surrounded by that researchers come to fully know themselves and others (Madison, 2005). By embracing subjectivity, the narrative form of autoethnography in contemporary research has been used to give credence to “indigenous persons in colonized spaces”….and allowed them “to makes sense of their lives, themselves, and their collective histories” (Denzin, 2014, p. viii.). Embracing subjectivity has also provided the research community with an alternative understanding of the complex, myriad ways in which reality can be interpreted. In stark contrast to traditional science that silences the voice of the researcher and discredits the authority of self to exist and be heard,
especially in light of the racially charged colonial history of social science research (Saukko, 2002), autoethnography makes an “implied or explicit assertion that the personal narrative instructs, disrupts, incites to action, and calls into question politics, culture, and identity”, ultimately providing the researcher an opportunity to challenge and disturb traditional notions of representation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 269).

**Rationale for the use of autoethnography.** Perhaps the greatest strength of autoethnography is that it allows researchers to link the macro and micro-sociological links between a person’s biography and the larger societal and cultural forces that shape that person’s life and experiences (Hall, 2008; Mills, 1956). Taber’s (2010) autoethnographic study examining the broader societal implication of military policy in daily life, illustrates this approach. Autoethnography also does away with the artificial divide between the researcher and research subject and ensures the text and author remain coupled rather than separated (Struthers, 2012). It enables the researcher to explore the empirical, experiential realities of their daily life and how those experiences reflexively inform their decision making and action (Struthers, 2012). It also allows researchers to push methodological boundaries in an attempt to address research questions that cannot be explored with traditional methods (Taber, 2010). Autoethnography “offers a unique methodology that not only has continual access to the researcher as subject, but can also continually revise the data collection and analysis, adding to the trustworthiness of the methodology” (Struther, 2012, p. 70). The unique researcher centered attribute of autoethnography allows the researcher to maintain control of the study and circumvent some of the more political aspects of research in terms of access and institutional approval to engage in studying what are often controversial issues of marginalization and power.
The pragmatism of autoethnography is illustrated by Taber’s (2010) study of a western national defense force and the attempted co-opting of her study by the institutional agents who were granted power to accept or reject her request to study the intersection of military policy and lives of mothers in the armed forces. It was ultimately Taber’s (2010) refusal to be co-opted by the access granting legitimating forces and authoritative agents in the agency she wanted to study that forced her to modify her original study design and shaped her research into an autoethnography. Autoethnography allows a researcher, who possesses experiential knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation, to connect that knowledge with the more abstract, theoretical discourses that often circulate within academic journals and conferences and humanize it through their reflexivity and experiences. One example is that of “Smith (2005) [who] states that “autoethnography allowed my personal experiences to become valid data…. Autoethnography freed me to write reflectively, thoughtfully, and introspectively about a very personal subject close to my heart (p. 6)” (as cited in Taber, 2010, p. 13).

In an attempt to embed autoethnography with a more scientific rigor and to create an air of credibility and objectivity some researchers have sought to curtail the more aesthetic and evocative aspects of their autoethnographic research and systematically embedded their data collection practices with more formally recognized qualitative methods including triangulation, member-checking, bracketing, and document analysis (Chang, 2008; Cho & Trent, 2006; Denzin, 2014). Incorporating “objective” data collection practices into autoethnography has the potential effect of limiting the more evocative and aesthetic forms of autoethnography that researcher’s produce and concomitantly their chances for publication (Librett & Perrone, 2010). Objective data collection methods could also legitimate the structure and form that
autoethnographic research takes and consequently disenfranchise less conventional products from being published (Pace, 2012). Consequently, rather than working to create a transformational and oppositional stance to the monopoly positivist and postpositivist research has traditionally held in the social sciences and rather than seeking to disrupt its monopoly, analytic autoethnography could potentially serve to perpetuate this postpostivist structure and reinforce its legitimacy.

**Study Design**

Like any other approach to research, autoethnography requires a systematic, deliberate, and focused process of data collection (Chang, 2008). In fact, in light of the limited familiarity the scientific community has with qualitative research and the criticisms railed against the subjective aspects of this research design, autoethnography entails a more rigorous and robust data collection process than most conventional quantitative and qualitative study designs. The implications of failing to be systematic in data collection and analysis are far more pronounced for autoethnographers and extend beyond the individual scholar submitting a study. In order to better understand my own educational experiences, and the work I perform at an HSI, multiple sources of data were collected and triangulated. Triangulation embeds this study’s findings with internal validity, or credibility as well as a reliability, or consistency (Merriam, 2009). The majority of qualitative data used in this study was collected and analyzed during the last five years of my work during the 2010-2015 academic calendars but included a more bounded time span encompassing the beginning and end of an academic quarter in final month of fall 2014 and the first month of the winter 2015 quarter. Personal memory and archival data also included the last 22 years of my own educational trajectory and the entire 36 years of my life.
Data collection. The systematic self-observational and self-reflective data documented in personal journals and audio and video recordings, and interactive self-observational data akin to participant observation utilized in this study was collected over a two month period. The period of data collection encompassed the last four weeks at the end of an academic quarter in the final month of fall 2014 and the first four weeks of an academic quarter in the first month of the winter 2015 quarter. The great majority of self-observational and self-reflective data as well as the data derived from personal memory all generally encompasses the last five years I have been employed at an HSI in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S.. The data used in chapter four encompasses a broad array of data points including personal memory data, cultural artifacts, and external textual data that includes official documents like my academic records, academic credentials, personal statements, as well as the research literature.

The latter of these data points are more generally comprised of the academic literature on HSIs, the K-12 and postsecondary Latino/a educational performance and attainment. The literature on the inequity within educational institutions, and the impact of educational institutions on cultural reproduction, cultural mobility, and identity formation for minorities is used to provide a framework for the autoethnographies in both chapters four and five. I use personal memory data to make sense of my own educational experiences as a socioeconomically disadvantaged, racial minority student and later as a minority educator in an HSI. Personal memory data should be utilized in autoethnographic studies because it is a building block of autoethnography, it is readily available to the scholar who has privileged access to those prior experiences and the consequent interpretation of those experiences, and allows the past to contextualize the present “self” (Chang, 2008, p. 71).
Personal memory data was acquired via the construction of an autobiographic timeline highlighting the seminal educational and professional moments and experiences; epiphanies (Denzin, 2013), I had within various educational settings as a student and now as an educator, especially those experiences around my work as an educator and adviser at an HSI in the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S.. In order to provide a more robust approach to data collection, I utilize an autobiographical timeline and self-inventory to systematically document my own past and the current work I perform and then corroborate it by merging it with external data. The qualitative data used in chapter five to elucidate my education and the work I currently perform is also comprised of systematic self-observation and self-reflective data like interval and occurrence video and audio recording, interactive self-observation, and reflexive journaling. Other self-observation data was collected via the chronological documentation of the daily, weekly, and monthly activities I engaged in while performing my work at an HSI. As mentioned above, this study also includes the collection of external data including the field work of self-observational data and the collection of textual artifacts and official documents. The external data encompasses official documents including, but not limited to, my own K-12 and post-secondary grade transcripts, professional awards, one diorama, and photographs. I also identified and examined public institutional records on the goals and agenda of the HSI I am presently employed at.

**Data analysis.** Multiple methods of data management and analysis were incorporated into the study including labeling, classifying, first and second cycle thematic, descriptive, and structural coding, content analysis, ethnographic analysis, and narrative analysis. I include a second cycle of coding in order “to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and or
theoretical organization” of the data derived from the first cycle coding methods (Saldana, 2009, p. 149). Because, “in one sense, all qualitative data analysis is content analysis in that it is the content of interviews, field notes, and documents that is analyzed” (Merriam, 2009, p. 205), the content analysis in this study encompasses all of the collected data mentioned above, some thematically and some narratively. In line with the rich, thick ethnographic nature of this study I utilize Wolcott’s (2008) analytical cycle of description, analysis, and interpretation. According to Wolcott, description generally denotes an examination of what is going on, analysis entails identification of the interrelationships and essential features of the data, and interpretation involves imbuing the former with meaning.

**Positionality and reflexivity.** Complicating my positionality is that “politically and economically I have lived under the same yoke of colonization as the Latino/a community I will be studying, experiencing the same discrimination and alienation from mainstream society that comes from being a member of a caste ‘minority’” (Villenas, 1996, p. 712), thus my perspective is, of necessity, partial. Such an approach is embraced within qualitative research. Using my own experiences as a case study, I argue that the adverse educational outcomes Mexican Americans exhibit do not just happen and are not just an anomaly. Instead, these outcomes are the fruition of the racial, economic, and concomitant educational inequity that has historically shaped their lives. In order to strengthen the integrity of this study, I have followed Merriam’s (2009) advice to explain my biases, “dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken” (p. 219) in and through a reflexive journal. Reflexivity, a term used in sociology and other social science disciplines, enables the researcher to explore the empirical, experiential realities of their daily life and how those experiences inform their decision making and action (Struthers, 2012).
In sum, “the essence of reflexivity is to understand how our worldview is both shaped and constrained by our own subjectivity” (Kaufman, 2013, p. 71). In my journal I attempted to ensure that I was aware of my own agenda, and any ulterior motives and assumptions which may be driving the direction of the research. Reflexivity is important since “being reflective enables researchers to critically consider their own cultural biases and negotiate various ways of seeing while investigating and "translating" culture(s)” (Jacobs-Huey, 2002, p. 791).

Limitations. While qualitative research designs are multitudinous, they all place the researcher as the instrument and consequently the questions of validity, reliability, and generalizability involved with such research take on a different form from that of quantitative research (Babbie, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). A qualitative approach in terms of its limitations is the limited scope of the population which such an approach is able to examine (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). While qualitative research is able to gather a tremendous amount of rich exploratory data about a particular set of individuals, institutions, or other sampling frames, the data is limited in its ability to explain how common its findings are to others of that same sampling frame and population. The qualitative approach used in this study is able to inform the research community about the social phenomena being investigated; what is happening and why it is happening, but it is limited in its ability to account for those who are not a part of the study. Other limitations of qualitative research involve its empirical validity and reliability, which often come under great scrutiny and are frequently cited as problems by scholars and policy makers who generally tend to view research from a positivist/ postpositivist perspective. Fortunately, these issues have been adequately addressed by many researchers as a difference in the epistemic grounding of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam; 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), the type of professional training
the researchers have received (Agar, 1982), the positionality or cultural environment of the educational researcher performing the study i.e. native vs. non-native (Jacobs-Huey, 2002), and even the structural power and privilege relations present between the participants being studied and the researcher (Villenas, 1996).

More specific critiques of autoethnography’s limitations have generally been levelled at “issues of representation, “objectivity”, data quality, legitimacy, and ethics” (Hall, 2008, p. 39), limitations that have consequently impeded autoethnography’s acceptance by both formal and informal peer reviewers. Autoethnography has been critiqued by both those who embrace autoethnography as method as well as those that do not and has been typed as being overly subjective, narcissistic, anecdotal, and non-scientific in terms of its theoretical, rigorous, and analytical sufficiency (Denzin, 2003; Ellis & Buchner, 2006; Taylor, 2011; Walford, 2004; Wall, 2008). A dearth of literature on how autoethnography is done is also a limitation and has contributed to the criticism that it lacks an agreed upon, formalized structure and appearance (Taber, 2010; Walford, 2004; Wall, 2006; Wall, 2008). Admittedly, a lack of formal structure may also be autoethnography’s strength in that the rigid standardization that has historically shaped quantitative research and marginalized most other forms of research is absent so that scholars are free to write what they believe to be good research, irrespective of the opinions of others in the scientific community in which that researcher is a part of.

**Ethical considerations.** While this autoethnographic study is about my life and the educational experiences I have had as a minority student and as an educator at an HSI, I am aware that my experiences are not mine alone. My experiences are by their nature social experiences and they are the product of my interactions with others around me and the relationships I have developed with them. While I have made every effort to keep my story, my
story, as Chang (2008) notes, “even when you are the primary source of data, your story often includes others…” (p. 68). Consequently, anonymity and confidentiality are maintained via pseudonyms and the avoidance of using individuals’ names. Admittedly maintaining anonymity and confidentiality through pseudonyms and avoiding the use of individuals’ names is more difficult to do here since in autoethnography the researcher’s identity is already disclosed and “the identities of others connected to you [the researcher] sometimes become transparent to the broader audience and other times to smaller circles of your [the researcher’s] acquaintances” (Chang, 2008, p. 68).
CHAPTER IV

LOST IN TRANSLATION: ASSIMILATION AND UPWARD MOBILITY

The autoethnography in this chapter explores my K-12 and postsecondary educational trajectory through the American school system and familiarizes the reader with my positionality as a Mexican American minority student. I employ several key insights and observations from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and create a counter-narrative to that which is usually espoused about Mexican American educational performance, chiefly that race, history, voice, interpretation, and praxis matter when examining the educational experiences of minority students (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). CRT is a useful lens to examine the racial dynamics of minority schooling because it boldly exposes how race has been a salient aspect of the U.S. social structure and has historically shaped the way individuals in the U.S. are treated and shapes what individuals are allowed to learn, think, and feel about the U.S. and their place within it (Massey, 2008; Spring, 2008).

In line with a primary tenet of CRT, autoethnography utilizes a counter-story methodology that “is grounded in a sense of reality that reflects the distinctive experiences of people of color” (Taylor, 2009, p. 8). The counter-story in this chapter focuses “on how students of color experience and respond to the U.S. educational system” (Yosso & Solorzano, 2009, p. 142), and challenges liberal notions of merit and colorblindness that have ideologically legitimated the educational failure of Mexican Americans. Concomitantly, this autoethnography also utilizes another primary tenet of CRT by critiquing classical liberalism and its ideological concepts of equity, equality, and the American meritocratic belief system (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). Despite historical facts and contemporary statistics which discredit the notion of the U. S. as a bastion of egalitarianism, the U. S. has continually perpetuated the
image of itself to many within and outside of its borders as a quintessential example of equality. My counter-narrative contests the equalitarian ideologies that undergird American life.

Lying just below the surface of such a fictitious mythology is a highly stratified society comprised of Blacks, Latinos, and other people of color aware that their skin color severely inhibits their pursuit of the American Dream (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The autoethnography in this chapter also highlights the understanding that racism is endemic and normative to the American social structure and integral to its operation, another tenet of CRT. In short, by utilizing CRT this autoethnography critiques the notion of the U.S. as a color-blind society (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011) and acknowledges that many of us within the U.S. through no fault of our own, “are racism breathers, and it doesn't matter what color we are. We don't try to be, we aren't usually conscious of the racism we’ve breathed. We just go about our regular lives” (Delpit, 2012, p. 12).

CRT allows for the development of an autoethnographic counter-narrative that gives voice to a historically silenced racial group, Mexican Americans. In contrast to the hegemonic nature of societies that gives credence to the voices of the most powerful in society, CRT gives voice to the historically silenced and marginalized groups in society whose viewpoints have largely been negated, allowing minorities to give voice to their own story and redefine their situation (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Absent of these voices, the silencing of minority groups’ voices has significant implications for how these groups are viewed by others and how they view themselves. Said silencing is chiefly mediated through the educational curriculum, what CRT defines as a “culturally specific artifact designed to maintain a White supremacist master script” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 18). Viewing the curriculum as an instrument of racial hegemony through the lens of CRT elucidates the process of how those in power acquire the consent to
govern from marginalized, phenotypically different “Others” through the construction of certain legitimating narratives.

Racially biased narratives, chiefly disseminated through the American schooling system, explain to those in power and those “Others” outside of power who each is and what they are capable of becoming. Through schools’ curriculums and narratives minority groups learn and internalize the generally negative stereotypic images of themselves ultimately perpetuating their own subordination (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Learning from a curriculum that posits a biased or incomplete history is a requisite function of minority schooling that Spring (2008) calls ideological management. Utilizing CRT I argue that my K-12 academic failure as a Mexican American was the result of the stratifying forces of race and class that have historically been at work in my life, are embedded into the broader American social structure, and enshrined in the policies, practices, and curriculum of K-12 and post-secondary educational institutions.

Ironically, in a limited number of places the counter-narrative I develop affirms some of the worst stereotypical understandings of Mexican Americans perpetuated in the media and by majoritarian narratives. As a Mexican American student my childhood was characterized by a great amount of residential mobility, I was socioeconomically poor, came from a single-parent household, my parents were teens, and my mother, father, and maternal grandparents all possessed limited levels of education. My itinerant, intermittently employed father was a physically and emotionally abusive alcoholic womanizer who engaged in illicit substance abuse and was in and out of jail throughout my childhood. My mother struggled through an abusive marriage and abject poverty in order to give her four children a chance in a racialized and socioeconomically stratified American social order where poor, Mexican American children from single-parent households like hers face limited chances of educational success and
consequently even more limited life chances (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2008).

In my youth I perpetuated the misinformed cultural stereotypes about Mexican Americans and reinforced the statistical outcomes that pertain to their educational performance. I engaged in illicit substance abuse, dabbled with gang associations, and was even incarcerated, once. As a minority student I performed poorly at almost all grade levels, was especially disruptive in school in the latter years of my K-12 schooling, and eventually dropped out of high school. My counter-narrative in many more places serves to disconfirm some of these same typified assumptions. Contrary to popular narratives about Mexican American parents’ not valuing education (Lewis, 1961; Moreno & Valencia, 2011) my Mexican mother emphasized the importance of schooling and good grades as well as the importance of an educacion or education.

The term Educacion denotes the academic learning generally associated with the term “schooling” but adds a moral dimension that generally emphasizes good manners, a respect for others, especially for those in authority, learning the difference between right and wrong, and acting on that knowledge accordingly (Browning-Aiken, 2005). Early on in my educational career my comportment epitomized these values but as time passed and as I got older the cognitive and practical significance of educacion waned. I now understand that may be because at some point in my childhood I realized the subordinate place I held in the broader American racial and economic social order. It is difficult to stay a nice, well-mannered, and deferential child who does the right thing when society treats you with contempt in almost all areas of your life because of your ethnic background, the language you and your family speak, and the amount of money your household possesses.
It is difficult to be kind and respectful when you know your life is characterized by seemingly endless iterations of economic hardships because of things as superficial as what you look like and what you sound like when you speak. It is difficult to be polite and courteous when the society in which you live directly and indirectly places you and your loved ones in dangerous and violent gang-infested, ethnically homogenous neighborhoods with few, if any, economic opportunities and temporarily houses you in horrendous, sub-par and inadequate living conditions. In sum, it is difficult to see that you are worth much to the society in which you reside when it allows you and your loved ones to be cold, scared, abused, and hungry with cruel indifference. Experiences like these helped me “know my place” as a poor, Mexican American child and student.

Today, I have let those negative perceptions recede to the back of my mind and reintegrated the idea of educación into my praxis. In an effort to get back to what my mother taught me about educación I have thrown off the rugged individualism I was indoctrinated with throughout my schooling and have begun to embrace the familism and selflessness my culture esteems. Consequently, I have spent my entire professional life working within K-12 and postsecondary schooling systems advocating for equitable educational opportunities for predominantly minority, economically marginalized students, like I once was, irrespective of these students’ ethnic backgrounds, the language they speak, and the amount of money they and their parents have. I now work to bring my life and work into sharp contrast with the harmful stereotypical assumptions and deleterious statistical outcomes I once perpetuated. In contrast to the majoritarian narratives disseminated about Mexican Americans as not valuing education, and being lazy (Lewis, 1966; Santa Ana, 2002), I now excel academically and work to help other Mexican Americans do the same.
In contrast to the negative stereotypes disseminated about my people I no longer drink or smoke, have not recidivated, and am expecting a child who my wife and I plan to raise in a two parent household. These are all attributes I did not have as a child in my own father. Theoretically, this chapter contributes to the debate around whether or not American schooling systems are instruments of cultural reproduction, marginalizing socioeconomically disadvantaged and/or racialized minority students’ chances of educational and economic success, as many conflict theorists argue (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Fine, 1991; Foley, 2010; Oakes, 1985; Ochoa, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2001), or if as functionalists argue, they are institutions whereby all individuals are afforded an equal opportunity at educational and economic success and rise or fall based on their individual efforts, talents, and abilities (Dimaggio, 1982; Duncan, & Murnane, 2011; Farkas, 2008).

From the former perspective, schools tend to reproduce the ideological belief systems of the dominant social groups in a society as well as the hierarchical cultural and economic social structure (Bennet DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1995). Conflict theorists argue that non-English speaking, racial minorities and socioeconomically disadvantaged students who are unfamiliar with the middle class norms of schooling will find themselves slowly but surely marginalized through their schooling experiences (Fine, 1991; Foley, 2010; Oakes, 1985; Ochoa, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). From the functionalist perspective schools serve as systems of upward social mobility for all students, but especially students from disadvantaged backgrounds like myself. Functionalist scholars espouse the idea that schools are where disadvantaged students like myself can become the recipients of greater educational returns than their more advantaged peers if they are afforded educational opportunities that allow them to exert “an extra incentive to invest in cultural capital to offset their disadvantage in other domains” (Jaeger, 2011, p. 284).
Functionalist researchers further argue that disadvantaged students’ become the recipients of educational returns that ultimately culminate in an upward social mobility that is chiefly mediated through the educational transmission of social capital and cultural capital in its internalized, objectified, and institutionalized forms (Jaeger, 2011). I argue that the functionalist view holds true. The educational experiences as a minority student that I document in this chapter serve to affirm Dimaggio’s (1982) view of schooling systems as instruments of upward mobility for the most destitute and marginalized segment of students in society. My educational trajectory serves as a case study legitimating the validity of some educational scholars’ perspectives of educational institutions as conduits of upward social mobility. My upward mobility was chiefly the result of my ability to shed my “Mexicanness” through assimilation and being given the opportunity to interlope the educational boundaries that the funding policies of the K-12 public school system have rigidly established. These things had their benefits as they resulted in me acquiring the human, social, and cultural capital that are embedded within middle-class, Anglo social networks but as the next section reveals there were some drawbacks. I lost myself.

Voice Matters

CRT scholars generally “engage in the practice of retelling history from a minority perspective” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 5) so it is important for the reader to understand that because I am a minority the academic world I have lived in for the last 23 years of my schooling is culturally foreign to me, as it is based on a Western, European, bureaucratic, middle class model of schooling. Concomitantly, throughout my schooling I have had to shift my own cultural dispositions for writing to meet the writing expectations of the dominant group, and usually that has meant writing assignments in academic English where
telling a story is direct and straight to the point. However, in Spanish speaking cultures the writer gets to the point only after inserting additional information that the writer feels would enhance the story and help the reader make better sense of the entire picture, as I have done here (Garza, 2008).

Cultural differences like how a story is told can make a difference on educators’ judgments and assessment of their students’ educational performance, as it has the numerous times I have been told by professors that I needed “to get to the point” on some of my work. Consequently, there have been limited opportunities in my studies where I have been allowed to write in a way that makes me feel comfortable and at home since I have had to internalize the writing conventions of the “academic” canon comprised of Western, male, objective, Anglo-centric traditions (Denzin, 2013). In Mills’ (1959) words “such writing is not a ‘voice’ at all. It is an autonomous sound….That it is full of jargon is not as noteworthy as that it is strongly mannered: it is not only impersonal; it is pretentiously impersonal” (p. 221).

Even what I have written thus far has been difficult for me to write in “my own voice” since my Spanish voice was silenced so long ago and has been replaced by a voice that is comprised of abstract, academic English jargon, and lofty, discipline-specific terminology that few people outside of academia can, or care to, understand. While the funny sounding, “fancy” English words I use when I speak have helped my educational attainment and professional career as an educator, they have alienated me from my family and those who mean so much to me. These words have frequently made deep conversation between me and my intimates quite scarce and at times awkward, with many of them asking me “Why do you talk so funny?” Fancy English has replaced the Spanish language my loved ones and I used to speak and understand for a language only strangers with advanced degrees, my academic peers, can appreciate.
My fancy English voice has taken me from rooms filled with my family members’ joyous laughter and in exchange placed me in an office where the only things that break the silence are my breath and heartbeat. Here, in the final writing assignment required for completion of my degree, I have attempted to write in my own voice. It is still a voice in line with the writing conventions, language, and worldview of the dominant culture in which I was schooled, but it possesses remnants of the voice I entered school with so many years ago and eventually lost. I hope, like it has in so many other areas of my life, that the expression of my voice in and through my writing in the following sections will not be viewed deficiently by its readers who have to ultimately render a judgment upon it. My story brings to light and magnifies the experiences of discrimination and marginalization I endured on my path to becoming an educated minority as well as the personal transformation that education spearheaded. The narrative in this chapter is also one of the few opportunities afforded me to magnify the tremendous economic contributions of my people to my nation, a people often overlooked in a society where race relations are far too frequently defined as issues between “Blacks” and “Whites.” In line with CRT methodology the next section emphasizes the centrality of history for my story and elucidates the economic, racial, and educational social forces at work in creating Mexican Americans and shaping their lives, including my own, ranging from where my ancestors lived, to the educational attainment they possessed, to the work they did.

**History Matters**

I would like to preface this section with a clarification for why I begin in 1848, a time seemingly so far removed from my own biography. It is the year the racial and ethnic group I am a member of, Mexican Americans, were created. For CRT, history is crucial for understanding the present inequity in contemporary minorities’ lives (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings,
In fact, in order to understand my own educational trajectory, I could go as far back as the 15th century, when “the colonization of the Americas, Africa, and Asiatic world by the European powers set the foundation for contemporary racial inequality” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 4), though, admittedly because of the space and time constraints the members of my doctoral committee and I have, I will not start my story there.

While an exhaustive examination of all of the socio-historical events that shaped the geographic distribution of Mexican Americans in the United States and ultimately affected my being born in El Paso, Texas is beyond the scope of this discussion, many things happened long before my birth that directly and indirectly impacted my educational trajectory. Take for example how I came to be born in El Paso, TX. That I was born there was more the result of the broader racialized and socioeconomically stratified American social order than of serendipitous fortune. My birth in El Paso, TX can be tied to numerous macro and micro socio-historical events dating as far back as 1848 when the burgeoning U.S. acquired swaths of Mexican territory, integrating its new residents into their rather ambiguous place in the racial and economic hierarchy of the time, below whites but above African Americans (Acuna, 2012; Massey, 2008; Rosales, 1996; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). The spatial allocation of Mexican Americans to certain geographic locations, historically in the Southwest and in contemporary times across the U.S. can be traced back to 1848 when, “through a variety of categorical mechanisms-some legal and some not so legal-Mexicans were systematically disenfranchised of their property and liberties and turned into landless laborers for white property and business owners” (Massey, 2008, pp. 116-117).

Some of these mechanisms included overt violence, the nullification of land grants and deeds to land that Mexicans owned; some because they were not written in English and others because their “authenticity” could not be verified, and lastly through the prohibitive legal fees, court
costs, and lengthy litigation proceedings required to retain one’s land (Acuna, 2012; Rosales, 1996; Tellez & Ortiz, 2008).

In the words of Anzaldua (2007), “The Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it” (p. 29). A few of the events of great significance that shaped where Mexicans resided, and by extension my own story, took place in the mid-nineteenth century, a period of time when “the commercialization of land and new trade markets” (Telles & Ortiz, 2008) would lead to the placement of Mexicans into the bottom of the occupational structure. These events include the California Gold Rush of the 1850’s, the building of the Transcontinental Railroad (1863-1869), the Civil War (1860-1864), and the passing of the 13th amendment (1865). It was during the California Gold Rush and the building of the Transcontinental railroad that the few Mexicans able to keep their land after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) were displaced from their land by the racially fueled overt violence and duplicitous court schemes of burgeoning numbers of Anglo land prospectors seeking to develop land for commercial ventures, especially the building of the railroad (Acuna, 2012). Unable to retain their land in Texas and California, Mexicans were forced to migrate in search of the only work afforded them in the now racialized economy, chiefly, low status, low wage work in the agricultural, cattle raising, mining, and railroad industries (Acuna, 2012). As a result of this massive displacement “Mexicans constituted most of the workers on the Texas and Mexican railroad…” (Acuna, 2012, p. 76). My maternal great grandfather moved into the Juarez/El Paso region of the U.S as one of these displaced workers. The Civil War (1861-1865) further exacerbated the experiences of migrant and native Mexicans in the U.S., like my maternal great grandfather.
Apparently, “losing the war [Civil War] only worsened the bravado of many Euro-Texans, and rather than muting their racism, the loss made them more chauvinistic” (Acuna, 2012, p. 68). Likewise, the 13th amendment altered “the Texas economy by freeing its captive labor force whereupon Mexicans were imported to create a labor surplus pool” (Acuna, 2012, p. 69). The importation of Mexican laborers, combined with burgeoning numbers of native Mexicans, gave Anglos the false impression that “their” land was being overran by Mexicans, inciting them to use violence against them since these “foreigners” seemingly threatened Anglos’ socio-cultural and economic wellbeing the more they increased in number. The violence Anglos exhibited towards immigrant and native Mexicans like my great grandfather was extensive. Between 1880-1930 Mexicans were lynched at a rate relatively close to that of African Americans; 27.4 and 37.1 per 100,000 respectively (Carrigan, 2003). The early 20th century did not fare better for Mexicans in the U.S. or for my maternal great grandfather.

When the Mexican Revolution broke out, droves of Mexicans sought refuge in the U.S., only to encounter a racist society oppressing its native Mexican population. Anglo Americans were either unaware of, or indifferent to, the role their own government played in the violence of the Mexican Revolution and the increasing numbers of displaced Mexicans. The violence and consequent influx of Mexican migrants to the U.S. was the result of liberal economic policies that favored U.S. interests and privatized land in Mexico for U.S. industrialists and investors, in the process displacing the great majority of rural landowners and forcing them to fight the Mexican government or migrate into the U.S. in search of the low status, low wage work afforded people of color (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). My maternal great grandfather was again one of these displaced refugees. Incidentally, the displacement of large numbers of Mexican landowners and others because of American policy would repeat itself again with the

Racist and nativist immigration legislation barring some European migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century increased the demand for, and migration of, native and migrant Mexican workers to cities across the U.S. (Massey, Duran, & Malone, 2002). Anti-Asian legislation like the “Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and the 1907 Gentleman’s Agreement with Japan, brought Asian immigration to an abrupt halt, creating serious labor shortages, in key sectors of the Western economy, particularly railroads, mining, agriculture, and construction” (Massey, Duran, & Malone, 2002, p. 27). The U.S. entry into World War I (1917) intensified industrialization, increased the demand for agricultural production, and created an intense labor shortage which native and migrant Mexicans were looked at to fill (Acuna, 2012, Massey, Duran, & Malone, 2002; Rosales, 1996). My maternal great grandfather was one of thousands of these Mexicans whose labor would keep the American economy alive.

Between the end of WWI and the mid-twentieth century, native and immigrant Mexicans in the U.S. had experienced an intense period of deportations resulting from the Great Depression and a period of dramatic economic conscription that resulted from the labor shortage and increased industrial and agricultural demands created by World War II (Massey, Duran, & Malone, 2002; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). It was during this period of marked transitions that my maternal grandfather became aware of his American citizenship. Born a U.S. citizen in Clint, TX, my grandfather lived a great majority of his early life in Mexico believing he was a Mexican citizen, completely unaware of the rights and privileges he should have been afforded by an American birthright. Consequently, he had resigned himself to live and work as a ranch hand in
Cuidad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico, my mother’s birthplace. It was only after an inquiry into the matter that my grandfather discovered that he had been born an American citizen.

After berating his parents for withholding such a secret from him, my grandfather acquired employment in El Paso, TX, my birthplace. Like many Mexicans at the time, it was around the time of WWII, he acquired employment at a textile mill called Farah, where he worked as a machinist until he retired in the mid 90’s as a result of plant closures that accompanied the passing of NAFTA. As I mentioned earlier, the passing of NAFTA impacted my family profoundly. My mother was eventually laid off from work at Farah where she was employed making belts and my grandfather would be encouraged by Farah’s management team that retirement before NAFTA passed would be in his best financial interest. My mother’s and grandfather’s jobs were shipped to the maquiladoras or manufacturing plants across the border to Cuidad Juarez, Chihuahua Mexico just a few miles across the border.

The above historical narrative illustrates the historical and structural factors that led to the construction of Mexican Americans as a race, their geographic placement and economic integration into the U.S., and their powerlessness against their own racialization, commodification, and marginalization. It also documents how I came to be born in El Paso, TX. While my grandfather does not recall experiencing or even hearing about the racist and discriminatory history that I just recounted above, it impacted his and other Mexicans’ educational trajectory and attainment, including my own. As I mentioned in chapter two, throughout all of the history recounted above, immigrant and native Mexicans’ race and socioeconomic standing in the American social order generally afforded them an outright denial of a quality education (Spring, 2008).
For most of the history narrated above, the legal and social practices in place ensured that Mexican Americans, like my grandfather, were societally marginalized and denied access to a quality K-12 and post-secondary education. In fact, Mexican Americans were denied schooling opportunities because “during the post-1848 period there were very few school facilities for Chicano students” (Valencia, 2011, p. 42). The reason for the limited schooling facilities was because

Anglo attitudes about the education of the children of immigrant Mexicans involved two conflicting positions. On the one hand, farmers did not want Mexican children to go to school—because school attendance meant that they were not available for farm work. On the other hand, many public officials wanted Mexican children in school so that they could be Americanized. (Spring, 2008, p. 182)

When not being denied an education outright, Mexicans were served a sub-par education characterized by inferior schooling conditions that consequently limited their employment opportunities, economic prospects, and ultimately their life chances (Farkas, 2008; Lin & Harris, 2008; Massey, 2008). These conditions included inferior facilities, disproportionate student to teacher ratios, racist classification and promotion systems, inadequately under-prepared teachers, and curriculum programs centered on language suppression and cultural exclusion (Acuna, 2012; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Valencia, 2002). These curriculum programs epitomized the Anglo worldview that “wild tongues can’t be tamed, they can only be cut out” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 76) and institutionalized deculturalization, “an educational process that aims to destroy a people’s culture and replace it with a new culture” (Spring, 2008, p. 183). Anglos engaged in deculturalization and “believing that Anglo-American culture….was a superior culture and the
only culture that would support republican and democratic institutions, educators forbade the speaking of non-English languages, particularly Spanish and Native American tongues, and forced students to learn an Anglo-American-centered curriculum” (Spring, 2008, p. 190).

Through segregation, silencing programs, and deculturalization Mexican American students were subjected to an educational system hell bent on changing who they were based on the dominant groups’ conceptualizations of who and what they should be. These programs ultimately stripped Mexican American students of their cultural identity and made them suffer from a sort of cultural psychosis, one moment compelled to be American and expected to speak, act, and live like one, and almost simultaneously Mexican, being harshly treated in ways that reminded them of the subordinate place they held in the broader American social order. The motivations behind such programs were paternalistic and aimed at Americanizing these students as quickly and efficiently as possible. Americanization was usually done through silencing Mexicans’ native tongue, changing their linguistic system, and reshaping the “backwards” cultural values of the communalism and familism they possessed towards a more individualistic orientation (Spring, 2008). Individualism was closely aligned with the liberal notions of meritocracy that ideologically justified these students’ academic failure. The implications of these limited educational opportunities and the limited educational attainment of one generation of Mexican Americans, whether in the mid-nineteenth century when Mexican Americans were created or at the close of the twentieth century when I was born, extend well into the educational attainment of future generations. When multiple generations of a household are denied the opportunity to acquire an education or are given an education that is so inferior in its quality that its recipients are unable to read, write, and speak English proficiently or do math, it becomes
difficult for the recipients of said education to aid their children with homework, advocate on
their children’s behalf when necessity arises, and acquire gainful, well-paying employment.

The implications of historically denying multiple generations of a household an education
become even more pronounced when one considers that

Well educated parents tend to have greater financial resources to use in parenting
and coping with the stressors of daily of life. They also tend to focus more on
promoting the cognitive and educational attainment of their children as well as the
skills and knowledge necessary to do so. (Farkas, 2008, p. 108)

Ultimately it becomes difficult for poorly educated, socioeconomically disadvantaged
minority parents to help their children navigate the complex bureaucracy of American schooling
systems and makes it challenging for them to acquire the only asset that can minimize the sting
of their children’s foreignness to the school system, money and the concomitant mannerisms,
privilege, and worldview that accompany it (Lareau, 1987; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The outright
denial of an education or the inferior quality of education given to my ancestors, chiefly my
maternal grandfather, a man who has less than a 6th grade education, dramatically impacted my
mother’s educational attainment, as well as my own. The history discussed above becomes even
more significant to this autoethnography when one considers the main premise of the status
attainment model discussed in chapter two, a model that posits that the educational attainment,
occupational standing, and economic location of parents are predictive of the educational
attainment and socioeconomic location of their children (Roksa & Potter, 2011; Telles & Ortiz,
2008). Like that of my ancestors, my educational trajectory has been shaped by broader societal
forces seemingly out of my own control and characterized by negative statistics associated with
race, social class, parental educational attainment, and family structure. The implications of these statistics and their impact on my educational experiences for my own educational trajectory are at the center of the next section.

A Statistical Improbability

The implications of race (Laden, 2001, Oliva & Nora, 2004; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006), socioeconomic status and parental educational attainment (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Duncan & Brook-Gunn, 1997; Telles & Ortiz, 2008), and family structure (Moynihan, Sweeding, & Rainwater, 2006) on educational attainment and life chances (Conley, 2005) document that there were forces well beyond my sphere of influence at work in my life that would impact my schooling. Take for example the relationship between the fact that I was born a low-birth weight infant and the fact that I graduated two years later than scheduled. One statistical analysis of the effects of low-birth weight and educational attainment found “that low-birth-weight status is associated with a dramatic decrease-by 34 percent-in the probability of graduating from high school in a timely fashion” (Conley & Bennett, 2000, p. 465).

That I was born with low birth weight was also closely associated with my race and socioeconomic disadvantage since “starting with birth, much research has shown that low income and its covariates such as low maternal education and minority racial status lead to a greater risk for delivering a low birth weight baby…” (Conley, 2005, p. 332). To affirm the truth of the above statement, my mother is a racial minority, was a teen parent, and as a high school graduate possessed a limited level of education. If only my mother had been afforded the opportunity to acquire an advanced education, she would have been able to read the ample social science research documenting the associations between low birth weight and grade failure, lower school achievement, and even behavioral problems (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Maritato, 1999),
all of which came to fruition in my life. The statistical odds associated with my educational attainment did not stop with just my birth.

For all intents and purposes, I was raised in a predominately single parent, female headed household where my father was virtually nonexistent. According to Sigle-Rushton and Maclanahan’s (2004) review of the studies on such households, children raised within this family structure generally exhibit low educational attainment, low scores on measures of educational achievement, higher incidences of behavioral and psychological problems, exhibit higher rates of substance abuse, and have earlier contact with law enforcement. Unfortunately, all of those statistics too came to fruition in my life. For all of my early schooling I was dirt poor and had poor grades. In my later years of schooling I got into fights, was generally disruptive, used drugs heavily, and was even arrested, once. Eventually, as the statistics predicted, I dropped out of high school. In those few instances or periods in my life when my father was present, he was a raging, violent, physically and verbally abusive alcoholic and womanizer.

My mother occupied low wage, low status jobs which afforded me and my siblings few creature comforts and amenities. My mother’s chief primary employment for most of my childhood was in the textile industry, making belts at a clothing factory where my maternal grandfather was a lifelong machinist. My father, when he was around, worked intermittently. When he could get out of bed in spite of his hangovers and was able to get to work, he was paving roads for the city of El Paso or delivering bread with a friend. The low wage, low status secondary market occupational niches my parents occupied were also overlaid by racialized dynamics when one considers that today, as in the past, 35% of the textile and garment production industry and 28% of construction, is comprised of Hispanics (Pearl, 2011). As a result of the low wage work my parents engaged in they did not own their own home.
Consequently, because my parents did not own their own home my childhood was characterized by a great amount of residential mobility and marked by periodic movements from one apartment to another. From the perspective of CRT, the fact that my parents were poor and did not own their own home could be related to the historical marginalization of Mexican Americans and the consequent limited wealth Mexican Americans possess in comparison to their Anglo peers (Conley, 2010; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). The historical marginalization that my ancestors hindered their accumulation of property and the discriminatory tactics used against them ranged from theft of their land, to being forced into racialized low-income, low-wage, low status work niches, to being denied a quality education that would equip them for upward mobility. The historical marginalization of my ancestors is an important point to keep in mind since “perhaps the most tangible long term benefit that whites have accrued from a history of racial exploitation is their wealth, and subsequently their enriched position, in accessing educational resources” (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011, p. 27).

The historical accumulation of material and educational wealth afforded Anglos in the U.S. was denied my ancestors as the ability to pass that wealth on to their children. Consequently, at various times throughout my childhood we would find ourselves living in one bedroom studios, public housing projects, and when life was really good, spacious two bedroom apartments. By the time I was fifteen we had moved 12 times, the majority of the times into Mexican American enclaves, called barrios, scattered throughout El Paso. These barrios represent the lower end of the socioeconomic spectrum where residents are generally poor, at greater risk of being victimized by crime, are afforded less esteem by the broader society, generally have no other housing options afforded them, and have historically been placed there involuntarily (Alba & Denton, 2004; Stoll, 2008).
We moved four times in the two years after my birth before eventually being placed into low-income housing projects immediately across from the U.S./Mexico port of entry, what El Pasoans used to affectionately refer to as the diablo projects. It was within these projects, at five years of age, that I had my first lesson in how to fight and defend myself. Defending myself would be a skill set that I would need and use for the great majority of my childhood in the low-income, racially homogenous minority neighborhoods where I lived. I remember it like it was yesterday. My younger brother who was four at the time had been playing on his tricycle when the neighbor, I cannot recall how old the kid was but I think he was older than me, pushed him off of it and took it from him. I recall that I got angry, went over to him, and took it back by pushing, punching, and wrestling with him until he gave it back.

We moved numerous more times across the city, sometimes to the crime-ridden northeast, other times to the west side or central El Paso, and a few more times back and forth between all these locales before settling one final time in the eastside. The final move to the eastside is significant for me and my family because it epitomized for us a break from the dangerous, poverty-pervasive, gang-infested barrio communities that had characterized my childhood. Incidentally, for me this move to the eastside of town perfectly mirrored the experience encapsulated by that great theme song to the Jeffersons (CBS, 1972), a show I used to watch growing up about an African American couple’s upward social mobility, where moving to the eastside was evidence of them finally getting “a piece of the pie.” Evidence of acquiring a piece of the pie, was the fact that I had finally been given white neighbors, sort of. My Anglo “neighbors” technically lived in houses down the street from my apartments and I never really did interact with them, but I counted them my neighbors nonetheless. I’m not so sure they reciprocated the sentiment.
Prior to our move to the eastside my neighbors for the first fifteen years of my life had all been Mexicans or Mexican Americans. That our housing was always low-income assured that our housing options “were located in predominately minority neighborhoods, reinforcing the race, place, and poverty connection in urban America” (Stoll, 2008, p. 222). The ethnic isolation and residential segregation I experienced as a child too is documented in the literature. In fact, over the last two decades, in spite of a burgeoning Latino population and the rapid suburbanization of the poor and nonpoor, the moderately high Latino-white segregation levels of the past have remained relatively unchanged (Stoll, 2008, p. 215).

Irrespective of the type of shelter we called home, the ecology of the neighborhoods we called home was always dangerous, except for on the eastside where “we had moved on up.” Unemployment, poverty, gang activity, violence, an underground drug economy, substance abuse, and domestic violence became normalized within the minority communities I resided in as a youth and became an integral part of the social and cultural landscape I navigated. The ecology of where I lived is important for contextualizing the limited chances of educational success I possessed. The literature on the community and neighborhood effects on schooling shows that what is happening in the communities and families in which children live matters for shaping their educational trajectory (Connell & Halpern-Felsher, 1997; Harding, Gennetian, Winship, Sanbonmatsu, & Kling, 2011; Levine, 2011; Magnuson, & Waldfogel, 2011). The environment especially matters for schools because “communities with high concentrations of poor, single-parent families and jobless males, and low concentrations of well-educated professional and managerial workers, are unlikely to have or attract the resources necessary to develop and sustain high quality institutions…” (Aber, Gephart, Brooks-Gunn, & Connell, 1997, p. 53).
Serendipitously, in spite of where I lived as a child, because my grandmother resided in a more affluent, Anglo neighborhood on the eastside of El Paso, my mother was able to register me in a better funded district from the district in which I lived. As the next section illustrates, my mother’s best, albeit illegal, efforts to shield me from such an environment and the racialized and socioeconomic forces at work in the broader society worked for a limited time during the early years of my schooling but would have returns later on in my life. In the short term however, in spite of my mother’s efforts to get me educated within a better funded school district across town far from where I lived, the cultural values and norms I internalized from living within racially segregated and economically depressed environments proved harmful to my educational success. The values I internalized in the socioeconomically disadvantaged and racially segregated streets where I was raised would prove especially detrimental later on in my educational trajectory.

**Race and Class Matter**

I entered school on August, 29, 1983, just five years and a few days after I was born. I remember that my first interaction with the American, K-12 educational system was not a pleasant one and can recall it like it was yesterday. I recall that I was brought into Ms. Leyva’s kindergarten classroom at Eastwood Heights Elementary School. It was the first time I had really been separated from my mother and recall that I began to cry as soon as she said that she had to leave. Whether or not this was because she had to work I cannot recall, but I suspect that this was the reason for our parting. Despite being separated from my mother for various reasons before then; primarily being dropped off at my grandmother’s home so my mom could go to work, it was at five years of age that I experienced a great amount of what psychologists and mental experts dub "separation anxiety." I was paralyzed by a fear that arose from the sight of my mother’s hand leaving my own and watching my mom walk out the door.
The first day of kindergarten was the most horrifying and petrifying experience of my life up to that point. I am not too sure if it is that frightening for every child, but I know with great certainty that I was the only one crying when I entered the room. Since my mother worked during the day and would drop me and my younger brother off at my grandmother’s home, my prior experiences with maternal separation were of little comfort for me as my mother indicated that she was leaving my side. My mind became frantic. Leaving? Leaving where? What about me, where was I going to go? Why could I not go with her? When she set me down and told me she needed to leave I grabbed for her legs and held on for dear life. I cried, begged, and pleaded for her to stay with me and not leave me. “Por favor mama, no te vayas. No me dejes aquí”;

“Please mommy, do not leave me here,” I cried.

The moment was so traumatic for me, even as I write these words so many years later my eyes are tearing up and I feel like crying. I wanted her to not leave my side. I was so concerned with my mother leaving my side and trying to convince her not to let me go that I was oblivious to the scene I was making. My mother eventually let me go by pointing to some of the other classmates and the toys they expressed they were willing to share with me. Separation came to characterize my life as a student at different junctures, from my father leaving my siblings, his wife, and I behind, to the severed friendships with neighbors with whom my moving from apartment complex to apartment complex throughout my childhood disrupted. While I no longer remember the details of what transpired the remainder of that day or even that year, the pain of that separation from my mother still lingers in my moments of solitude and inactivity. Despite the specifics of that day and a great majority of my first years of school now being a blur, I recall that it was not long before I understood that I was different from the majority of my peers.
In those first years of schooling I learned that I was Mexican. I learned quickly that the Mexican culture of my home and the Spanish language of my grandmother who walked me to school and picked me up were a language and culture that brought me ridicule from my peers and consequently made me ashamed of her and of myself. It was in elementary school that I learned that I was brown in color and consequently viewed as less than others because of it. In school I became intimately aware that the color of my skin, my “ethnic-distinctiveness,” marked me as different from the majority of my peers at a school filled with light-skinned, blonde or red-haired school children with fair, white skin and last names like Johnson, Morris, McCardle, and Allan.

In school I learned that the language me and my grandmother spoke while walking to school was something to be embarrassed of. As a result of my newfound ethnic awareness I slowly began to distance myself from my grandmother and her language at every opportunity I could. I began to walk a little faster than her to school, always just a few steps ahead of her, and would increasingly break my hand free from her loving and tender grasp, even going as far as to deny that she was a family member when asked about "who the old lady that speaks Spanish" was. In the words of Anzaldua (2007), I had begun to understand that “people who were to amount to something did not go to Mexican movies, or bailes, or tune their radios to boleros, rancherita, and corrido music” (p. 82). These were all things my grandmother did. Spanish became a symbol of inferiority, represented the low status my family and I held in the broader American social order, and imbued me with a sense of shame about myself and my loved ones. In Gonzalez’s (2005) words, the language used by my family was socio-historically interwoven with the minority status we held in the U.S.
The Spanish language we spoke was inextricably linked to the emotions and sentiments of shame, inferiority and otherness conveyed to me and my family by the dominant, homogenous Anglo “culture” which I so wanted to become integrated into. It was in my elementary school years that I also came to know that I was poor. I learned I could not take my own lunch to school like my more affluent peers and if I did I would be laughed at because rice and bean burritos were the types of food poor Mexicans ate. I would instead have to endure being ridiculed for enjoying “cafeteria food” or “free-lunch.” As a child I could not understand why liking cafeteria food was such a “bad” thing. It seemed like good food to me, especially in comparison to my experiences at home where my siblings and I were always hungry. At home, spoons of margarine and peanut butter frequently served as our dinner.

At home I recall most of my childhood characterized by a profound, all-consuming hunger that would accompany me to school and regularly make my stomach grumble and make me hunch over with embarrassment for fear of my classmates hearing it. My attempts to assuage my hunger would eventually motivate me to acquire employment as soon as I was of working age, and would eventually lead me to drop out of school, though I am getting ahead of myself in telling that story. I experientially learned early in my life the rule that so many migrant and native Mexicans in the U.S. are taught, “As a working class people our chief activity is to put food in our mouths, a roof over our heads and clothes on our backs” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 39). Unlike the American culture where a prioritization of family and merely surviving with food and shelter are evidence of sheer inferiority, in my culture there is dignity in such values (Anzaldúa, 2007). The material deprivation I knew as a child was chiefly because of my father’s alcoholism, drug-addiction, and affinity for women.
My father was always spending his money on alcohol, drugs, and women and my mother’s job on payday was to take that money out of his wallet before he could spend it, usually after he would pass out from a night of binge drinking. I remember that this became a sort of ritual in my home since we often needed his money to pay the rent. When we were lucky enough to have food, many of my childhood meals were comprised of Ramen Noodles, bologna, government cheese, and margarine. I recall quite regularly dipping my spoon into a bucket of Country Crock margarine, heartily scooping out a spoonful, and enthusiastically shoving its contents into my mouth. With a little bit of salt sprinkled into it, it tasted like buttered corn, only without the corn. It wasn’t the most nutritious of meals but it did the job of filling my tummy and silencing its grumbling.

Only now do I realize that cafeteria food identified me to my peers and teachers as a poor child. It was during these early years that I learned that as a poor Mexican child I should not conceptualize of lunch as a brown paper bag filled with ham sandwiches wrapped in a zip-lock bag like the lunch of my affluent, Anglo peers. I recall my mother’s and grandmother’s response to my asking for such lunches, “no, eso es muy caro. No tenemos dinero para eso”; “that stuff is too expensive, we do not have money for that.” When I was able to take lunch to school it was accompanied by the stinging ridicule that would ensue after pulling a bean burrito wrapped in foil out of a grocery bag in front of my peers. The bright, crinkly, and noisy foil wrapped around the burrito my grandmother had given me stood in stark contrast to the neatly packaged sandwiches of my peers, a lunch that had been neatly sliced and placed into a clear, ziplock plastic baggie and a brown paper lunch sack. As I got older I usually threw my grandmother’s
burritos away before I got to school to avoid the awkwardness of being identified as a poor Mexican who ate bean burritos wrapped in foil. Instead, I stayed hungry.

I stayed hungry because I had grown accustomed to the hunger pains that characterized my childhood and could handle that. I could not ever envision myself getting used to being the butt of my economically better off, Anglo classmates’ jokes. Those burritos, like my language, the color of my skin, and my grandmother would become symbols of the economic and racial otherness I would later come to read about and study in the academic literature. Things did not get much better in middle school where the peers I had come to know left to attend other feeder middle schools. I was left to find my place in my new environment where I got into fights in class, during lunch on the playground, and after school. At the time the motivations for my behavior were quite simple and rational, someone had disrespected me; said something about my mother, laughed at my clothes, or just looked at me the wrong way.

I now realize that my violent and abhorrent behavior was the result of my socioeconomic disadvantage. My socioeconomic disadvantage was etched into my environment and impacted my own development and socialization. Perhaps my bad temper and short attention span were shaped by the psychological and developmental delays poverty introduced into my life, especially since “children in low SES families have a reduced ability to suppress distractors at the neural level” (Nelson & Sheridan, 2011, p. 38). Or perhaps my bad temper or short attention span were the result of the cultural value systems that undergirded minority life in the inner-city. In the ethnically homogenous, socioeconomically disadvantaged, minority neighborhoods and communities in which I lived, far removed from the predominately white, middle class eastside of El Paso where I attended school, was a set of cultural repertoires that I had inculcated, what
Anderson (1999) would come to define as the code of the streets. Where I lived, “this set of informal rules governing interpersonal public behavior, particularly violence” (Anderson, 1999, p. 33) was necessary for navigating my neighborhood in ways that ensured my safety and well-being.

It is within the racially homogenous and economically marginalized environments I called home that “personal safety, the avoidance or diffusion of antagonisms, and survival are the [primary] overarching objectives” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 49). As Anderson (1999) states, “at the heart of the code is the issue of respect…in the troublesome public environment of the inner-city, as people feel increasingly buffeted by forces beyond their control….respect is viewed as an almost external entity” (p. 33). Because I lived in neighborhoods marred by poverty, limited economic opportunities, sub-quality schools, and limited opportunities for interactions with mainstream, predominately white, middle-class institutions, there were not many avenues through which I could acquire the respect and esteem of those around me. Unlike my predominately, Anglo middle class peers at school, I could not afford the newest athletic shoes. As a result of the poverty that characterized my life I could not possess the newest technological innovations like a CD player and I could not afford the high priced name brand clothing and attire that brought so many of my school peers’ social status. If I could have moved past the shame of my Spanish speaking grandmother, I could not, like so many of my peers, invite my school friends to my “house” after school to play basketball or to play on the swings in my backyard because I lived twenty miles away from school, did not have a house, and we did not have a backyard or swing set to play in. If I had ever mustered the courage to invite them over we did not even have food to entertain or feed my guests.
In my neighborhood, the way through which a person gained esteem was not by purchasing the newest tennis shoes or name brand clothing, since these things would have probably been stolen or made the wearer the object of his peers’ derision. Nor was respect acquired through the middle class income, education, home, job, or vehicle of their parents as is generally done within the middle class. Almost everyone’s parents were poor, unemployed or on disability, almost nobody’s parents owned their own home since we all lived in the same low-income housing complexes, and almost no one owned their own vehicle and instead utilized public transportation. Respect was instead acquired through the only thing most of us teenagers could do well, fight and disrespect the people around us.

What I now realize I had attempted to do was bring the successful cultural repertoires for acquiring respect in my socioeconomically disadvantaged, racially segregated, and alienated community; fighting, vulgar language, and blatant disrespect for authority, and attempt to translate those practices into a commodity marketable at my predominately, white, middle class school. In retrospect, my idea was quite foolish, naïve, and futile with no chance of helping me acquire the esteem of my teachers and peers, an esteem that I sought to affirm my worth. Instead, the end result of my efforts were increasingly frequent visits to the principal’s office, regular after school detention, and an overall dismal educational performance marked by even more disruptive comportment. All this is not to say that my mother did not care about my behavior or my grades. In fact, contrary to the popular stereotypical narratives of Mexican-American parents not caring about school, my mother would use a wet, wire hanger to physically correct my educational inadequacies and, in light of my poor educational performance, she did so quite regularly.
Only later, after much research, would I be able to better understand why such practices took place, especially in light of the research on the impact of SES on parenting practices. Research posits that “parents living in poverty are more likely than parents in better conditions to display punitive behaviors—such as shouting, yelling, and slapping—and less likely to display love and warmth through behaviors like cuddling and hugging” (Conley, 2005, p. 334). In situations of abject poverty like that which my mother [and when he was around my father] confronted:

The need both to exercise a measure of control and to lash out at somebody is often reflected in the adults’ relations with their children. At the very least, the frustrations associated with persistent poverty shorten the fuse in such people, contributing to a lack of patience with anyone—child or adult—who irritates them. (Conley, 2005, p. 46)

Maybe the poverty that characterized my family life was why my mother and father seemed to have such short tempers. At the time, I thought the corrective practices my mother engaged in were the worst thing that a parent could do to a child that they loved. However, as an adult today I realize that my mother was only trying to communicate to me that education is quintessential to a better life. She understood too intimately what society has in store for Mexican Americans without an education: low wage, low status work, sub-par housing, an inferior quality of life, and diminished life chances. I now appreciate the love and concern that the misguided and perhaps disproportionate correction I discussed above evinced. In spite of my mother’s innovative child-rearing practices and her best efforts to improve my educational performance, my grades did not improve.
By 1992 I arrived in high school and the sting of being Mexican and poor, as well as the sting of the wet hanger, was assuaged. The inferiority of being labeled a Mexican was no longer as applicable to me as it had been in the past but was instead reserved for the newly arrived migrant Mexicans that attended my school. By now I had internalized the hegemonic, monocultural and Eurocentric cultural ideology and consequently defined myself as “American” and viewed them as “others.” After all, I wasn’t that Mexican. I listened to American rap and rock music, spoke English, and was even embarrassed of the Spanish music and language the migrant Mexicans at my school listened to and spoke. What I now realize is that by the time I arrived in high school my schooling had shaped me into a self-hating Mexican that identified so intimately with the Euro-Anglo system that I displaced the racism, stigma of my race, and marginalization perpetrated on me for being Mexican, onto Mexicans around me.

I probably became a self-hating Mexican because of my schooling experiences in the dominant groups’ educational system, an educational system where everything I was, from the language I spoke, to the values I held, and even the clothing I wore was wrong and needed to be fixed or at least hidden. My schooling had inculcated within me a deficient view of myself and people who looked like me. Either way, by the time I arrived in high school I was no longer struggling with what it meant to be Mexican, and as if learning the pain of being Mexican and poor were not sufficient enough lessons to learn, high school did have one more important lesson to teach me. High school was going to teach me that I was different and it wasn’t just the color of my skin or my poverty that marked me as such to others. If poverty and ethnic distinctiveness did not mark me as different enough, I was born without an ear and oddly enough despite knowing that for quite some time before high school it had never been a great concern of mine or my peers until one of my first days in high school.
Because I was intimidated by the relative anonymity that accompanies a new student enrolled within a large urban high school of 2500 students, I was a well-behaved student the first few days of my freshman year. Despite being a less than stellar student the thought of dropping out had not yet crossed my mind and I had not learned the joyous art of ditching. Consequently, I had made it a point in those first few days of school to arrive early in class and seat myself in the last back row of my classrooms on the furthest right seat I could find. I seated myself there to ensure no students would be seated behind me or to the right of me and this protected me from having my deformed right ear discovered by any of my peers. One day in the first week of classes I was running late and arrived to a class where the only available seat was located in the front row, right in the middle of the classroom.

I apologized to the teacher for my tardiness, sat down, and covered my right ear by laying my right ear on my hand. Laying my head on my hand served the dual purpose of covering my ear and giving those around me the impression that I was a cool, laid back, and disinterested student listening to the teacher’s boring lecture. A few minutes later my teacher saw me, informed me to sit up straight, and told me to get my head off of my hand. In spite of the tremendous, all-consuming panic I experienced at the thought of my ear being seen, because I had been raised by my mother with an education I reluctantly complied with my teacher’s directive and awaited the inevitable discovery of my ear by my peers. I knew it was only a matter of time before someone was going to see my ear and my hunch was affirmed when behind me I heard a blood curdling scream that culminated with the words “Oh my God….look at that guys ear”! Instinctively, I knew who she was talking about and I felt so small and ugly. I squirmed in my seat, my face turned red, and I endured what seemed like an eternity of stares from my peers for that entire class period.
It was at this moment of discovery that I realized the ugliness people saw when they looked at my ear and even more importantly the disgust they had to restrain in my presence in order to maintain a sense of civility and decency. The trauma of having my ear discovered sealed me with a keen awareness that I possessed what Goffman (1963) defined as a stigma. After this traumatic event I came to see that school was not a good place for me and I discovered the joy of ditching. My mom would drop me off at school, I would turn and wave as she drove off, and walk straight off of the campus when she was no longer in my sight. After a few semesters of low grades and shoddy attendance I was placed into a vocational educational program where I was expected to learn automotive technology.

Later, after years of college, I came to realize that I had been educationally tracked. According to Oakes (1985), educational tracking is when “students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes. Sometimes students are classified as fast, average, or slow learners… and placed into respective courses based on these labels” (p. 3). The justifications for tracking, in technical terms, are that this academic sorting:

Integrate[s] youth into the economic system, through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations not only inures the students to the discipline of the workplace, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identification which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy.

(Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 131)

Stated in a slightly less technical way, because society is comprised of an almost limitless range of needs that have to be performed; from people to collect garbage, to people to perform surgery, to other people to fix cars, tracking within school systems sorts students based on their
abilities and talents, and even more frequently indirectly by their social class and race, identifies them for the tasks they are best suited for, and begins to school them in accordance with their future economic roles (Oakes, 1985).

Ultimately, because the “economic structure of our society requires a system of vastly differentiated educational opportunities for those destined for different jobs….in the elementary and high schools of the nation, tracking is the mechanism that fills this function” (Rothstein, n.d., pp. 63-64). Within school systems such measures have historically been motivated by well-meaning intentions that place these students’ best interest as paramount and are commonly framed as being done on behalf of, and for the benefit of economically disadvantaged and minority students (Oakes, 1985; Spring, 2008). The moral justifications for tracking have been applied to discussions around Mexican American students, who, it is argued, should be given training appropriate for the occupations and careers more amenable to the academic skills, abilities, and professional interests they possess (Spring, 2008, p. 230). I am sure my teachers believed this to be true in my case. Educators and administrators within schooling systems are sometimes unaware of, or indifferent to, how the academic skills, abilities, and professional interests of their students are often shaped by the socioeconomic location they and their parents possess, the racial histories they are descendants of, and the economic structures and opportunities which shape their communities and lives. My knowledge of being educationally tracked is the result of piecing together two significant events etched into my memory. The first memory of me being tracked is of me being called to the counselor’s office in my junior year and speaking to a tall, heavy set Anglo man in his forties. The Anglo stranger, a man who I had never met before, introduced himself as my counselor and asked me about whether or not I liked cars.
I remember being told by my counselor that I would really enjoy automotive technology and that perhaps automotive classes would be of greater interest to me than those I was currently failing in. Despite never having owned a vehicle I responded affirmatively after realizing that perhaps the skills and education I acquired could help me fix my mother’s car, a car that was always breaking down, could not go up hills at a pace faster than 2 miles an hour, and that had plastic grocery bags for windows. I trusted him. After all he was my counselor. I agreed to try these classes out if he felt I would find them a bit more meaningful and if they would help me become a better student. The second memory that helps me realize I was tracked is of the first day I got on the bus to attend my new classes at my new vocational school.

That morning, I recall being placed onto a bus filled with many other poor, Mexican male and female peers whom I had never seen at school. The bus arrived at a school on the Southside (the poor side) of the city where the student body was comprised primarily of poor, young pregnant Mexican females and poor, Mexican males with obvious gang affiliations. I was bewildered by the group of students I was being shipped off to school with, a group I initially assumed I had nothing in common with. Why was I, a relatively well-mannered kid who admittedly skipped class too frequently, being placed onto a bus with gang members and pregnant teenage girls? I wasn’t a gang member and I had nothing in common with these troubled children, or so I assumed. Today, I realize that the school system I was a part of made no difference between a problematic and unruly gang member, pregnant teenage mother, or socioeconomically disadvantaged “Mexican” who was skipping school. I guess all Mexican students looked the same to my school’s leadership and we all represented the same problem to
the educational institution; poor grades and subpar academic performance for which teachers, counselors, and administrators could be terminated.

I guess the only recourse the educational leadership at my school had was to find a way for those of us on the bus to be exempted from the accountability system, or at the very least have our academic performance measured under a different metric from that which we were failing under. The fact that the females at the vocational school were being taught cosmetology and the males, automotive technology, only affirms my own convictions that I and all these other students were tracked. At vocational school, alongside learning about oil changes and how to repair dents, I learned about drugs. I learned how to acquire them, use them, and sell them. I also learned these drugs numbed the pain and shame I felt about my ear.

Needless to say, my academics and my life went downhill pretty quickly after that. A year later, at the age of 18, I was arrested for possession of marijuana. Not wanting to burden my mother with the financial cost of bail, and having more time than money, I pled guilty. I served a week or so in jail and upon my release, I dropped out. Dropping out was the culmination of the economic and domestic circumstances of my life discussed above as well as the non-academic learning I acquired at my vocational school. I eventually returned to high school and graduated two years later, partially completing the process of my educational assimilation into American society. My economic assimilation into American society would take much longer. For many years after I finished high school I lived paycheck to paycheck at numerous racially bifurcated, low-wage and low status jobs and thought nothing of acquiring a further education. All of that changed when I experienced religious assimilation and became a born-again Christian in 2000. My religious assimilation into a predominately White, Anglo-Saxon worldview ultimately served
as a catalyst to furthering my educational and economic assimilation into a predominately middle class, Anglo world.

**College**

Much like my earlier K-12 years of miseducation, my experiences in higher education have also been shaped by my poverty and my race. Unlike students with a middle class economic background, unpaid jobs that would expand my social network like college internships and student government were out of the question. My poverty has forced me to work my entire college career; my family has needed to eat. I held two full-time jobs; one graveyard shift and one morning shift, while working on both of my earlier degrees and hold one full-time job today. My poverty ensured that I was not ever going to develop a social network as extant as those able to join a fraternity, those able to form study groups that met midday, those able to become teacher’s assistants, or those able to attend weekly tailgate parties and football games. In short, poverty shrank my social world. My race has also shaped my experiences in higher education. The abysmal graduation and matriculation rates of my Latino peers into higher education and their high dropout rates which I discussed throughout my study ensure that I am frequently the sole or one of only a few Mexican American voices in my classes able to communicate the struggles and experiences of Latinos who will never get to seat themselves next to me in a classroom of higher education. Even the subject matter of my research in my doctoral studies, Mexican American educational inequity, was softly foisted upon me. Though admittedly I now possess a passion for the subject matter, I initially really had no interest in studying the K-12 and post-secondary outcomes and schooling experiences of Mexican Americans, especially my own. Instead I wanted to study the alienating effects of bureaucratic schooling on students.
How, when, and why my focus of study changed is no longer even clear to me now. I just know with great certainty that I was not interested in what I now have come to love. As the above discussion also illustrates, my path to doctoral candidacy has not been a straight one. While that is probably true of most other doctoral candidates, my case is an extreme extension of that statement. Statistically and practically speaking, I should not be writing a dissertation since I had so many proverbial strikes against me. As has already been mentioned, from a general statistical standpoint, racial minority children, children reared in abject poverty, children raised within a single parent household, and children whose parents possess limited levels of education are not by and large associated with educational success and attainment (Altonji & Mansfield, 2011; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Maritato, 1997; Corcoran & Adams, 1997; Farkas, 2008; Mayer, 1997; Sweeney, 2011).

From a more personal perspective, I am not sure that many individuals, irrespective of their race, raised in a poverty-stricken household with an intermittently present, abusive, alcoholic and illicit substance-abusing father and teen mother go on to write a doctoral dissertation. I am just as equally uncertain about the number of my doctoral peers who have engaged in heavy illicit drug use, developed and overcome drug addiction, dropped out of high school, have been incarcerated, and engaged in harmful, socially and self-destructive behavior like public brawls and general bedlam, and still gone on to write a doctoral dissertation. I am willing to wager that it is not very many, though I may be wrong. My experiences as a doctoral student have left me with the impression that the world as I have experienced it is a different world from that of my predominately Anglo, doctoral peers. In spite of these differences, my schooling experiences in college have been wonderful and markedly different from the learning
that took place in my K-12 schooling. For example, as the next section illustrates, I have learned that the curriculum I was taught in my early schooling was a socially constructed script meant to communicate a particular message and to reinforce a particular worldview to me by those in power, the worldview of the powerful.

**Interpretation and Praxis Matter**

Simone Weil (1949), writing at the height of WWII, famously stated that “According to the nature of things, documents originate among the powerful ones, the conquerors. History, therefore, is nothing but a compilation of the depositions made by assassins with respect to their victims and themselves” (p. 215). Nowhere is such a statement more relevant than in the history of the United States and its relations to those groups and populations which found themselves in the path of its “Manifest Destiny” towards American exceptionalism, and the grandeur such exceptionalism entails. Consequently, the construction of reality that victors present to their progeny embodies ethnocentric superiority and is laden with omissions, distortions and sometimes outright lies, as the following counter-narrative will illustrate. Since education is about telling stories, in this section I scrutinize how the dominant groups’ metanarrative is constructed, the myths embedded into this metanarrative, and how this metanarrative is legitimized into practice within the educational system’s curriculum and framed in a way that favors the dominant groups’ standing. The counter-narrative in this section challenges the dominant groups’ metanarrative about race and Mexican American minority students like myself and frames it in sharp juxtaposition to the soft, rose-colored, master narrative on race that posits American race relations in schooling as benign and nothing more than cultural misgivings that galvanize conflict between the racial groups that built this nation.
The master narrative that is disseminated through the American educational system and has permeated the American psyche and ethos is that White is good and Mexican is bad. In my early schooling I was not taught that my hometown, El Paso, is home to a rich civil rights legacy. Ironically, it was not until I moved to the Pacific Northwest for employment that I was able to uncover the rich, historical civil rights tradition of my birthplace. The clear omission of the rich civil rights legacy of my hometown in my K-12 schooling substantiates CRT’s view of the official school curriculum as a culturally specific master script that exudes a false political neutrality and censors minorities’ histories (Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). The master script I was taught omitted that El Paso is where the first Mexican-American mayor of a large, American metropolitan city, Raymond Telles, was elected. It omits that El Paso is the birthplace of the deceased Mexican American, civil rights journalist, Ruben Salazar, who was killed while reporting on the racism and corruption of the Los Angeles police department.

The master script omitted Margarita Torres, a turn of the century Mexican immigrant entering the U.S. port of entry in El Paso, which started a riot by refusing to be deloused with zyklon B; the primary toxin used to gas Jews in WWII (Acuna, 2012). I was not taught that El Paso is the first locale in the U.S. where five African American university basketball players were afforded the opportunity to be the team’s starters. The master script I learned from failed to teach me about “Marcelino Serna, a Mexican immigrant from El Paso, [who] singe-handedly captured 24 German prisoners [in WWI] and prevented another soldier from shooting them” (Acuna, 2012, p. 169). Instead the master script taught me about the cowardice of Santa Ana; the ruthless, savage, Mexican military general who mercilessly killed the brave and outnumbered Anglo defenders of the Alamo and did not even afford the survivors of the battle the luxury of a surrender.
The master script I learned from taught me about the escapades and heroism of admirable Anglos like Stephen F. Austin, Davy Crockett, and William Travis. It would not be until much later that I would learn that these brave Anglos were “defending” a mission that Anglos had stolen from the Mexican government. It would not be until much later that I would learn that the great majority of the responsibility for the battles between Mexicans and Anglos at the Alamo, Goliad, and during the Texas Revolution was due to Anglo settlers’ inability and refusal to submit themselves to a Mexican government who they viewed as comprised of a racially inferior people (Acuna, 2012). The master script did not teach me that in spite of their promises to do so, when the Anglo settlers and heroes I learned about in school moved into Mexico, refused to pay customs to Mexico, and resisted abiding by the conditions set by the Mexican government in the Colonization Act of 1824, Santa Ana had no recourse other than to expel these invaders and was really only defending the Mexican homeland from foreign invasion (Acuna, 2012).

The school curriculum did not teach me that the American heroes of the Alamo were illegal invaders who had broken their vows to the Mexican state. So as not to lead the reader to believe that the master script I was taught did not reveal Anglos in a less than favorable light, it did so, but with one caveat. When the master script did portray Anglos in a less than positive light, it may have done so only when that Anglo displayed a viewpoint towards minorities that can be viewed as being disloyal to Anglos. For example, when I learned about Ulysses S. Grant in primary school, I learned that he had one of the most corrupt presidencies in American history, appointing unqualified people to positions well above their paygrade and handing out money and contracts to friends and political allies. However, I wonder how much of him being framed as a corrupt president within the educational curriculum could be the result of him viewing the U.S. as the aggressor in the U.S./ Mexican War, something he would later reveal he was ashamed of.
How much of President Grant being framed as a corrupt leader is because he was a sympathetic of the Mexican plight in the Mexican American War (Acuna, 2012)? There are a number of other events and individuals from El Paso and elsewhere that were omitted from the master script I was taught, omissions that had a profound effect on the ways I experienced and viewed the world. The education I was afforded in my early years was censored by those in power to give me a perspective of the world that was not necessarily complete and of necessity partial. The curriculum neglected the accomplishments, viewpoints, and heroes of my own race, framed members of my ethnic group as “bad guys,” and exalted Anglos as the heroes I should revere. The effectiveness of this script is evident in how I have learned to look up to Anglos.

I cannot shake the racially skewed cognitive foundation that was laid in my mind by that master script. It is a foundation that posits the Anglos around me as generally being more intelligent, morally superior, harder working, and more deserving of the fruits of their labor than people who look like me. That Anglos have always been in positions of authority over all areas of my life, from my schooling to the work I have done, has only served to reinforce my worldview. In short, I have learned the “rightness of whiteness” and that “whiteness is rightness.” Consequently, I have had to be circumspect in what I say and how I say it for fear of having my statements misinterpreted by the Anglos around me and being punished for what really amounts to experiential differences between the way minorities and Anglos experience and view life. CRT’s concept of the master script is not solely relegated to the textbooks and curriculum. My own story is subject to revision by Anglos. Even as I write my dissertation, a script about my educational experiences as a minority, I have Anglo peers who will ultimately determine if the script I am producing will be censored of the controversial comments I am making about my own experiences.
Thankfully, the great majority of Anglos in my life have revealed themselves to be what the literature on CRT defines as white allies (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). The professors on my committee, many of my teachers, and even my bosses have each challenged the racism in their schools and in their students’ lives, especially in my own, and made themselves “allies to people of color” (Tatum, 2009, p. 285). Without these wonderfully brave people in my life, I would not have been able to have the wonderful life I have today.

**Practical Implications**

Despite my recollections of being a great student in my primary schooling years, a recent perusal of my school records shows that I was not the great student I remember being. When I think back on why I performed so terribly, I now realize that my less than stellar educational performance and concomitantly poor grades were really the product of my racial history, the poverty within my home, and the violence, abuse, and chaos that erupted in my home with regularity as a child. For years, on an almost nightly basis, I witnessed the end result of my father drinking himself into a stupor, violence. There were many nights when I saw my father break down our bedroom door to get at the wife he would regularly beat. On the many occasions my father would break through the door, my mother would huddle us in a corner of the room and stand between us and him, so as to protect us from the steel toe boots he would use to physically harm her. She would scream, “Leave us alone. Get out of here”! Despite her crying profusely for him to stop, he would drag her by her hair and punch and kick her in her face until she was bruised, bleeding, and quiet. Once my mother even went to work with two black eyes and wore shades to mask the damage that he had done to her face. On numerous other occasions I saw my father being dragged away by the police.
Sometimes my father was dragged away by the police because he had savagely beaten my mother, kicked my three or four year old brother, or even because he was stealing bologna from the local supermarket. Once I even saw my father get dragged away by the police after he assaulted two police officers and a sales clerk at a convenience store. It is no wonder my grades were so abysmal. It’s hard to earn passing grades, get your assigned reading done, complete the assigned worksheets, and to learn the three states of matter, or any other academic subject matter far removed from any practical utility in the life of a child, when these kinds of things are going on within a home. When I reflect on my childhood and educational experiences I cannot help but think about how absurd it was for my teachers to expect that I would get to class on time every day; have homework in hand, and be ready to learn.

How was I supposed to worry about doing my homework when my father would come home daily, sit down in the lazy chair, drink himself into a stupor every night, and physically and emotionally abuse his family? How was I supposed to be concerned about getting my grades up when I had to make sure that my little brothers were fed, that their diapers were changed, and that I was able to put them to sleep before my father got home, so as to remove one potential trigger for violence? Was I really expected as a child to read the books I was assigned when I could not find a place in my home quiet enough and safe enough to read the words on the page? Was I really supposed to complete those worksheets in the same night that my mother, my younger brother, and I would have to travel across town in the cold because my father kicked us out of the apartment? How was I supposed to stay awake in class when I had spent all night feeding, watching over, and safeguarding my infant brother because my mother worked the graveyard shift at a textile plant across town, could not afford a babysitter, and needed me to babysit?
Today, reflecting on all these things as an adult I realize the absurdity of such expectations. I wonder if my teachers were even supposed to care that all these things were going on in my life. After all, is not an educator’s job simply to assign grades to their students based on their educational performance and comportment? What good would it have done for me for them to care? Would they only have lowered their academic expectations for my performance as I see some of my colleagues do today? Would they have exempted me from the educational tasks the rest of my peers were expected to perform? Would not their concern and pity for my situation only have made me a more inferior student than I already was? Maybe it was better that my teachers did not know what was transpiring in my home or that they did not care. As the next chapter will illustrate, these are still questions I have to grapple with, only now I am not the student but the teacher, and now these are not children but adults living through some of those same experiences and many times even worse experiences than those I lived through.

**Theoretical Implications**

The narrative in this chapter highlights how a great source of strength for the perpetuation of racial stratification in the U.S. educational system and broader society lies in the “Gramscian notion of “hegemony”” or what CRT calls the “legitimating structures in society” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 10). The racial group in power of those social institutions in society which help construct reality is often the group who defines the cultural definitions and standards of beauty, intelligence, and even right and wrong. All other racial groups have to coexist under this social construction of reality. Eurocentric, hegemonic racial standards in the U.S. educational system have historically neglected any student whose primary language, culture, and color deviated from those of the dominant group and served to historically marginalize those students and their
chances of success. One example of this in practice is how American educational systems sought to “Americanize” Mexican Americans by stripping them of their language, religious practices, and even cultural heritage.

Thus, theoretically speaking, early on in my educational career, the American schooling system taught me that being Mexican American was, in Goffman’s (1963) terms, a stigma. According to Goffman, such a label not only serves to mark a person with an undesired differentness to those around him or her who do not possess the stigmatizing attribute, it also serves to mark the stigmatized as less than human and legitimates the discrimination that accompanies such a mark, ultimately reducing his or her life chances. Within the educational system the stigma of being Mexican American served to inform the people around me; teachers, administrators, and peers, of my differentness and justified the concomitant disparate treatment I received. That I, here, conceptualize of being Mexican American as a stigmatizing attribute within American society and its schooling systems is corroborated by the 167 years of American history documenting the oppression and marginalization of Mexican Americans, a history discussed at length throughout this chapter. In this chapter I also highlight how I came to make sense of life as a minority student. According to Mills and Gerth (1953)

The status of any minority is revealed by their exclusion from specific occupations, educational opportunities, social clubs, preferred residential areas….

It is in this situation that the minority child comes to awareness of his status. In time, he also comes to experience its conflict with majority groups as his conflict—as others significant to him reveal hostile stereotypes based on it.

Finally, he attempts to come to terms with the status situation in which he finds
himself; and in the process he is organized into one of several types of personality. (p. 326)

A child’s identity and self-concept as a student, human being, and even self-worth are formed primarily through interaction with others. That is, I cannot know who I am until someone I am interacting with tells me who I am. Thus, the formation of self is primarily a social phenomenon and who I believe myself to be is directly rooted in who others around me believe me to be. I cannot know I am Mexican, poor or inferior until someone affirms that I possess these attributes. The significant implications for the identity formation and self-concept that students develop from the interactions between them and their teachers, peers, and broader society cannot be overstated. In sum, “the thing that moves us to pride or shame is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind” (Cooley, 1902, p. 63). My story illustrates how minority children come to define themselves and their chances of success in a frame of inferiority which arises from their interactions with educators, peers, and a society who define these students as such. As a consequence of being part of one of the most influential and powerful agents of socialization children interact with, schooling systems wield enormous influence for the identity formation of their students, minority or otherwise.

Goffman (1963) posits that the stigmatized can react in a number of ways to mitigate the harmful effects of their stigma including making a direct attempt to correct the stigma or at least minimize its salience to those around him or her or by correcting the stigma indirectly by overcompensating in other areas of life generally cut off to the stigmatized because of the stigma borne. I have practiced in some form each of the approaches Goffman (1963) posits in regard to the racial stigma of being Mexican American. Short of the opportunity to directly correct my
stigma, after all I cannot change the color of my skin, I made efforts to minimize its salience and indirectly overcompensated in other areas generally cut off to Mexicans. I stopped speaking Spanish in public and mastered English.

I distanced myself from my Spanish speaking family members, avoided the Mexican music my family members listened to, and generally put a great distance between myself and anything Mexican. In order to minimize the sting of my stigma, I assimilated. I adapted linguistically by speaking Spanish only in private or when necessity dictated it be spoken. In order to minimize my ethnic stigma I adapted culturally by listening to traditional American music with which I had no cultural identification; Def Leppard, Metallica, Nirvana, the Cars, Tupac, and Notorious BIG and derided my grandmother’s Mexican music. My mother too helped me along in my attempts to mitigate the stigmatizing effects of my race. She Anglicized my name. As Telles and Ortiz (2008) in their research suggest, “birth names have obvious long-term consequences: as labels, they influence the socialization of children and contribute to the development of personal identities” (p. 197). I now believe that my mother may have done this for each of her children; Keith, Eugene, Smythe, and Abel, in an effort to improve her children’s acceptance in her host society.

She may have Anglicized her children’s names to minimize or completely eliminate the effects of racism and discrimination that she herself was subjected to as a Mexican American student with a name that marked her ethnic identity as such. I have even assimilated religiously. As Telles and Ortiz (2008) point out, “aside from language, perhaps the cultural trait most associated with Mexican Americans has been Catholicism, which also serves as a marker distinguishing Mexican Americans from most other ethnic groups” (p. 199). I was born and raised Catholic but since my conversion to Protestantism in 2000, I have experienced a rapid
educational, economic, and social integration into a predominately Anglo, mainstream middle class world. An overwhelming majority of my classmates, colleagues, professional references, and friends are now middle class Anglos.

Many of the minority friends I had as a youth ended up with very limited schooling, a few ended up in prison, many of them ended up in dead end-jobs, and one, a close friend named Spider, was killed by the police in El Paso two years ago. The school system also helped me along in my assimilation, teaching me to read, write, and speak in English and weakening the grip of the Spanish language and culture over my life through the shaming tactics of my peers and the deculturalizing processes of the classroom. As a result of acquiring an education, I have discovered that I have begun to lose myself through my education. Even more frightening, in a real way, my education has coopted me to kill off pieces of myself that have defined me for most of my life. My education has replaced my loved ones with strangers. It has replaced the language my loved ones and I speak and understand for one only strangers can appreciate. My education has taken me from rooms filled with my family members, Mexican music, and Spanish, and in exchange placed me in an office 1500 miles away from my loved ones. My education in many ways has been what Richard Rodriguez (1982) defined as a miseducation.

At the very time I was acquiring an education that would eventually serve to enrich my quality of life and the quality of life of my loved ones, I was being remade by the things I was learning into a person my loved ones would only come to know as a stranger. As a result of my miseducation, not only have my perceptions and understandings of the world shifted, sometimes for the better, and many others times for the worse. The language that I speak, the values that I possess, and even the priorities in my life have also been transformed greatly. Indeed, I am the product of a miseducation.
Summing Up

In this chapter I examined a few of the primary tenets of CRT, developed the historical construction and racialization of Mexican Americans, my racial and ethnic group, examined the historical marginalization they experienced in the broader society and within the American school system, and merged this history with my own biography and educational career as a minority student. The socioeconomic and racialized dynamics of my life, at home, in my neighborhoods, and schooling were also emphasized in this discussion since these areas of my life were inextricably linked to my race and class. Contrary to popular belief, peoples’ life chances and outcomes are not always necessarily the products of the individual choices they make, but are instead the consequences of the way society is structured and the powerful social forces associated with ascribed identities like someone’s race and class and the ways in which they operate within school systems. My story illustrates this point. How exactly does a socioeconomically disadvantaged racial minority, raised in a single parent, female headed household, rank 324 out of 330 as a senior, get arrested, dropout, and eventually go on to earn a doctorate of education? How is that same person able to escape the lowest socioeconomic bracket, ascend to the middle class, and attain an education 1% of Americans possess?

Is the educational and economic success I experienced possible for everyone as the meritocratic, Horatio Alger myths that permeate society would have us to believe or is it more likely that because of the way society is economically, educationally, and occupationally structured such an outcome is a statistical outlier reserved for only a small minority of individuals? While I leave the reader to find the answers to these questions above for themselves, I want to reemphasize how my ethnic identity, socioeconomic location, family structure, parental education, and family wealth, combined with the poor choices I made in adolescence and early
adulthood could not have come together in a more disastrous way and yet I was able to experience educational and economic success.

From the American meritocratic, ideological perspective, a person’s accomplishments are related “to the belief that individuals can shape their destiny and that with hard work and perseverance upward mobility is possible. Indeed, [it is] the belief that anyone can advance, regardless of their family of origin, economic status, or ethnicity…” (Bullock, 2008, p. 53). Contrary to what the prevailing individualistic American ideologies espouse and would have Americans to believe, I argue that my success was not because of my own merit, nor was I more intelligent or harder working than others. Instead, what I believe happened is that I was able to escape the stigma of my race through one of the few ways in which the stigma of race and its accompanying disadvantage can be mitigated, through quality schooling that culminated in my assimilation.

Society did its best to deny me quality schooling because of where I lived and because of the ways in which policy makers fund schools, but through my mother’s innovative deviance I circumvented these institutionalized processes of discrimination. Ultimately, because I was able to escape the schooling systems of my culturally alienated, socioeconomically marginalized, ethnically homogenous communities, I escaped the labeling process that generally takes place in such schools. While my teachers could see I was Mexican, my teachers were not aware that I was as poor as I was. After all, I could not have been attending the schools they were teaching in if I was poor and I was not viewed as poor as my teachers would have viewed me had I attended the schools that existed in my barrio neighborhoods. Had I attended such schooling systems, my attendance would have been a clear indication of my socioeconomic disadvantage to my neighborhood schools’ teachers.
If I had attended school in my own neighborhood, I would have been assigned a label and it would have shaped the ways in which my teachers educated me. What is especially important to consider is that “children of poor and working class families are handicapped by a schooling system that systematically uses criteria of evaluation biased in favor of middle-class culture” (Lamont & Small, 2008, p. 86). The evaluative criteria these schooling systems use often includes children’s clothing, language, mannerisms, parental participation, and even the neighborhoods and households in which they live. In essence the middle-class practices of schooling systems communicate to teachers, administrators, parents, and students alike that “some households are much more successful than others in inculcating these skills, habits, and behaviors, and they are the same households that have more abundant parental resources of time, skills, and money” (Farkas, 2008, p. 113).

Attending an affluent district allowed me to circumvent the social closure that schooling systems reinforce and that for the most part lock minorities out of a high quality education. I was able to interlope the geographic and social boundaries that generally keep minorities in poorly funded schools and consequently keep minorities in poverty. Interloping afforded me the opportunity to become embedded in a predominately Anglo, middle-class social system rich in human, social, and cultural capital. My only hope as a socioeconomically disadvantaged, racial minority, raised in a single-parent household was the American school system. Because educational institutions promote the educational success of their students through recognizing and rewarding the social and cultural capital students possess, sometimes erroneously as my case illustrates, schooling systems play a pivotal role in students’ life chances. The only problem is that schooling systems, because of the ways in which they are funded, are ultimately unequally serving minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.
Unless students are able to escape these systems, as I was fortunate enough to be able to do, the opportunities for upward social mobility for students like me are never going to become a reality. When taken in its entirety, this autoethnography serves as a counter-narrative to the story generally told about Mexican American educational attainment. I did not fail academically and drop out of school because of a cultural value system that did not value education nor because my parents did not value education and encourage me to do well. My early academic failure was the result of having to contend with the socioeconomic and racialized forces at work in my life. Inversely, I did not succeed academically later in life because I was somehow more intelligent, harder working, or even a better student. Instead, my upward social mobility was the result of being able to attend an affluent district as a child. A district where the stigma of my race was muted by the socioeconomic advantage possessed by the parents of the community where my school was located.

My educational trajectory, from high school drop out to eventual doctoral candidacy, reinforces the notion that schooling systems are conduits of upward mobility, even when students make poor choices. Despite my poor academic performance and the numerous poor choices I made throughout my schooling as a poor racial minority, the quality schooling my mother stole and gave to me as a child equipped me with the human, social, and cultural capital necessary for upward mobility. As the next chapter illustrates not all Mexican Americans are afforded the wide margin of error I was granted. In fact, even when they avoid the mistakes and poor choices I made, the society in which they live regularly denies them the opportunity to acquire or steal a quality education and “move on up.” All of the horribly traumatic experiences with racism, classism, poverty, hunger, abuse, and violence I experienced, as extreme as all of these experiences were, would not sufficiently prepare me for what I would have to witness as an
educator at an HSI. I now more cogently understand that all of my prior experiences with these phenomena served as an inadequate training ground for what was in store for me as a post-secondary educator.
CHAPTER V

ANATOMY OF MINORITY LIFE AND WORK IN AN HSI: DREAMS DEFERRED

If the previous chapter supported the notion that the upward mobility of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority youth is possible through the American schooling systems after they have been stripped of their ethnic identity, here I argue the inverse. The autoethnography in this chapter experientially validates conflict theorists’ arguments that schooling systems generally reproduce societal inequity and they do so with ruthless efficiency (Apple, 1996; Foley, 2010; Luykx, 1999). I posit that educational schooling systems merely exude a facade of educational equality, creating the false impression in students’, teachers’, administrators’, and the publics’ minds, that educational equality is being pursued and attained. All the while these schooling systems are inadvertently working to perpetuate the educational inequity and consequent economic and societal marginalization of those they supposedly espouse to serve.

In this chapter I argue that not all Mexicans are able to experience the educational and concomitant socioeconomic upward mobility the narrative in the previous chapter documented. I highlight my experiences as a minority instructor who has witnessed the valiant but futile efforts of a great majority of my students towards experiencing educational success, even when they do not make the misguided choices I documented in the previous chapter that I made as a youth. My observations have revealed to me that the futility of my students’ efforts is chiefly the result of them living in a racially homogenous, socioeconomically isolated, minority region of the Northwestern region of the U.S. Such an environment affords them an inferior K-12 education that leaves them locked into developmental courses from which few escape, impedes and stalls their opportunities to interact with and live amongst middle class Anglos, and ultimately
undermines their acquisition of the consequent human, social, and cultural capital that these relationships embed one within. Opportunities, as was illustrated in the previous chapter, I was afforded by being able to move into a different space.

The marginalization described below ultimately leaves my students with the consequent poverty and limited life chances from which I sought relief and was able to ultimately escape from because of the quality K-12 schooling I was illegitimately afforded as a child. In this chapter I also document my attempts to personally and professionally make emotional sense of what I have witnessed and been an integral part of at an HSI in the Northwestern region of the U.S. dubbed the pseudonym of Enganche College. The work I have done at Enganche College has forced me to witness and be a part of the educational, economic, and societal disenfranchisement of a great number of my students. As will be discussed at length in this chapter, as a result of my employment I have had to witness and sometimes participate in impeding my students’ efforts towards acquiring a postsecondary education that will afford them a greater quality of life and a chance for them and their children to attain the “American Dream.” I have had to witness, and played a part in, the death of countless numbers of my students’ dreams, directly because of the work I do and indirectly because of where they and their parents are from, the language they and their parents speak, the consequent work they and their parents perform, the limited levels of education they and their parents have attained, and their socioeconomic location. In the end, my students’ disenfranchisement is the result of a combination of who I am, the work I am tasked to perform, and who they are; a Mexican American instructor working with Mexican American students in a culturally alienating, Eurocentric middle class post-secondary institution.

**The Setting: El Enganche (The Hook)**

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As was discussed earlier, the pseudonym for Enganche College comes from a period of time in U.S./Mexico relations when during the early twentieth century droves of Mexican immigrants were lured into the U.S. to perform the painstakingly difficult agricultural labor vital to the U.S. economy during a period of tremendous economic growth. Between 1900-1929; through World War I, the roaring twenties, and up until the Great Depression, thousands of Mexican laborers were drawn into the U.S. by American recruiters, called *enganchadores*, under the false pretenses of high wage labor, quality housing, tolerable working conditions, and the untold riches that one could amass from working in *El Norte* (the U.S.) (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2008). These Mexican workers, like their descendants who continue to steadily stream into the Pacific Northwest and across the U.S. today, would only later find out that life and work in *El Norte* was not all it was cracked up to be.

Similar to the experiences of Mexican migrants hooked into working in *El Norte*, my move to the Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. and employment at Enganche College have taught me that in many ways this is what has happened to me. When my wife and I first arrived in the Pacific Northwest five years ago, life was looking good. I had just acquired employment as a sociology instructor, teaching the subject matter which I was most passionate about and earning more money than I could have ever imagined myself earning. I was looking forward to putting into practice in a smaller setting everything I had learned while teaching at a major state university. The beauty of the central and lower valleys of the region, encompassing a distance close to 700 miles and nestled between the larger metropolitan areas of Spokane on the eastern portion of the state and Seattle on the west, captivated my wife and me. While there are numerous small towns and cities that the Pacific Northwest is comprised of and that capture
one’s attention, as my wife and I drove through the region that first day, one of the first things we took note of was the region’s beauty.

The Pacific Northwestern region of the U.S. is a beautiful place lined with vineyards, orchards, blueberry and pumpkin patches, long winding hills, and a scenic view of the snow-capped mountain tops of Mt. Rainier and Mt. Adams. These serene landscapes are why countless tourists who come to the region are enamored by the region’s beauty. However, much less visible to tourists, and me and my wife at the time of our initial arrival and lying just below the surface of the scenic and serene visuals and seemingly idyllic landscapes, was a dark, macabre, socioeconomic and racialized inequity that crushes the great majority of students and their families residing in the region. The beautiful exterior of the scenery I just described above masks the not-so-beautiful parts that make a system of racialized and socioeconomic inequity work, a system that my students and their families are trying to escape through the empowerment of a post-secondary education.

It would not be until my second and third year of employment that I would come to see this exploitative system, though admittedly in my first year I had already begun to see bits and pieces of this system at work. Today, I now more cogently understand that life in the Pacific Northwest is not as blissful as these peaceful and beautiful landscapes led my wife and I to initially believe. While the state and national averages of high school graduates are 90% and 85.7%, respectively, and the state and national averages for those possessing a bachelor’s degree or higher are 31.6% and 28.5%, respectively, in the region where I reside, fewer than 12% of the people who reside as my neighbors possess a bachelor’s degree or higher and only 62% possess at least a high school diploma (U.S. Census, 2013). The socioeconomic implications of the
reduced educational attainment in my region are negative, extending to the earning power and economic opportunities the residents of the region will be capable of acquiring. Here, 25% of the people live below the poverty line, 1.5 times higher than the national and state levels which hover at around 13% and 15% respectively, and the unemployment rate in my region of the Pacific Northwest is 9% in contrast to the 6% at the national and state levels (U.S. Census, 2013).

As some research has shown, the regional unemployment in an area has a harmful effect on the lives of students who reside in said communities, in both their schooling outcomes and within their families, ultimately impacting their academic performance (Ananat, Gassman-Pines, & Gibson-Davis, 2011; Lehman & Smeeding, 1997). While limited educational attainment, high rates of poverty, and persistent high unemployment are problematic in and of themselves, these phenomena become more pronounced when considering the damage they do to the family structure. In spite of the familism that characterizes Mexican American and Latino cultures (Acuna, 2012; Moore & Cuellar, 1970; Rosales, 1996; Telles & Ortiz, 2008), the percentage of single headed households in the region, at 28%, is twice that of the state average; 14.5%, and 1.5 times that of the national average which is at 17.5% (U.S. Census, 2013).

Ample educational and sociological research has documented that children growing up within such homes where the father is absent are more likely to experience higher incidences of behavioral and psychological problems, which could in turn impede the educational performance of children within such family structures (Lipman & Offord, 1997; McLanahan, 1997; Moynihan, Sweeding, & Rainwater, 2004). According to Sigle-Rushton and McLanahan (2004) “studies demonstrate quite conclusively that children who live in single-mother families score
lower on measures of academic achievement than those in two-parent families….[who] on average…..remain in school longer and attain higher educational qualifications than children in one-parent families” (pp. 120-121). Marshall and Sawhill, (2004) further argue that the implications of a single parent family structure extend to the economic and material wellbeing of the family as well stating that “the growth of single-parent families has been closely associated with the growth of child poverty and other adverse consequences for children” (p. 202).

The low educational attainment, high rates of poverty, high levels of unemployment, and large number of single parent headed households that characterize life in the region inevitably merge and culminate in deleterious outcomes that take their toll on the personal, emotional, educational, economic, and familial wellbeing of the students and families who reside here. In sum, not only do the poor residents here “have to grapple with the manifold problems stemming from their own lack of income, but they must also confront the social fallout that stems from living in an environment where most of their neighbors are poor” (Massey, 2008, p. 205). Especially true of my students is that they psychologically, developmentally, emotionally, economically, materially, and educationally have to grapple with the disadvantageous neighborhood effects of these conditions in their everyday lives, much like I once did. In fact with “all else equal, neighborhood disadvantage, as measured by such factors…..is negatively associated with adolescent development outcomes such as dropping out of school, attending college, and achievement scores” (Stoll, 2008, p. 2104).

While the implications of the sobering socioeconomic statistics discussed above on children, parents, families, and communities cannot be overstated, they are further complicated by racialized dynamics that seem to further stratify the region and organize its residents along
racial lines. Ultimately, because the staple of economic activity in the region is agriculture and 41% of the farming industry is comprised of Latino/as (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2009), the great majority of those who reside here are Latino/as. In those communities of the region characterized by high rates of Latino/as the unemployment rate, the poverty rate, and percentage of single-headed households are all without exception markedly higher than those communities with larger numbers of Anglos or white residents (U.S. Census, 2013).

The above demographic statistics appear to affirm Massey and Denton’s (1993) and Wilson’s (1997) research on hyper-segregation, racial isolation, and the cumulative disadvantage of race and class intersections in the lives and communities of racial minorities in the U.S. The median household income in Grandview, WA where 80% of the population is Latino/a, is $37,885, almost $22,000 below the state level and $15,000 below the national median income (U.S. Census, 2013). In Sunnyside, WA, where 82% of the population is Latino/a, the median household income drops even lower to $32,961, a $26,000 difference from the state (U.S. Census, 2013). These numbers stand in stark contrast to those communities in the region where greater concentrations of Anglos reside.

In Prosser, WA for example, only 37% of the population is Latino/a and the median household income is $48,009, still below the state average but at only $11,365, it is a marked improvement from those communities listed earlier (U.S. Census, 2013). Forty-five miles to the east of these communities, the same racial organization that characterizes Grandview, Sunnyside, and Prosser is present in the communities of Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland. In Pasco, the informally titled “Mexican” community in the Tri-Cities area characterized by a 55% Latino/a minority population, the median household income is $49,220, $10,154 below the state level. In
Kennewick, WA, where only 24% of the population is Latino/a, the median household income is $51,581, only $7,793 below the state level (U.S. Census, 2013). In Richland, WA, where only 7% of the population is Latino/a, the median household income is $68,744, almost $10,000 above the state average (U.S. Census, 2013). Forty-five miles to the west of the region are Yakima, Union Gap, and Selah and these communities again exhibit the same racial organization as the communities I have already mentioned.

In Union Gap and Yakima the cities’ populations are 47% and 41% Latino/a, respectively, with median household incomes of $38,825, and $40,569, respectively (U.S. Census, 2013). The poverty rates in these communities are also 21.2% and 22.9%, respectively (U.S. Census, 2013). Selah, WA, the third city in the metropolitan area of Yakima, in contrast is comprised of only 16% Latino/as, exhibits a median income of $52,354, and has a poverty rate of 20.6% (U.S. Census, 2013). While on the surface these numbers seem to be common sense, since White communities would “naturally” be wealthier than those communities characterized by non-White racial minorities, what the above data reveals are the income depressing effects that increased Latino/a populations have on the communities in which they reside.

The above community characteristics illustrate how the social phenomena of White flight, decentralization, sprawl, and residential and educational segregation continue to be extant social practices (Leventhal, Brooks-Gunn, & Kamerman, 1997; Stoll, 2008; Wilson, 1997). As a result of these phenomena, on either side of the region which I call home, forty-five miles to the east and forty-five miles to the west, there are signs of middle-class life. There are shopping malls, theaters, mainstream restaurants like Olive Garden, Famous Dave’s, IHOP/S, and Applebee’s, and major retail stores like Target, Best Buy, and Costco. The communities
discussed above are represented by a greater number of affluent households, larger numbers of
two parent families, a greater percentage of Anglo residents, and the physical landscape is dotted
by single and two story homes, well-manicured lawns, two car garages, and spacious front and
back yards. Alongside these staples of middle class life are ample employment opportunities
behind a desk, counter, or cash register.

Forty-five miles from where my students and I reside are jobs that shelter one from the
elements including the unbearable, searing summer heat and bone crushing, freezing cold of
winter of the region. It is not like this where my students and I live. Where my students and I
live, residents experience a much more painful and difficult life. Here, mobile homes with barely
a few feet of space around the home and larger, multi-unit public housing projects dot the social
landscape and are scattered throughout the community. Were we live, there are no shopping
malls, mainstream restaurants, or major retail vendors. In their place are rows and rows of old,
dilapidated, vacant buildings and store fronts. There are no Applebee’s or Olive Gardens here.
Nor are there theater art centers, cultural activity centers, major clothing and food retailers or
even in-door shopping malls. Well, there is one shopping mall, but the endless array of empty
store fronts within it denotes that it does not merit the title of shopping mall; there are no stores
to shop in. The symphony, orchestra, or minor league sports venues and employment
opportunities that generally characterize middle-class suburban life are all located 45 minutes
way, in either direction, from the predominantly brown community where my students and I
reside. There is no college education required for the work a great majority of my students and
their parents engage in within the region and it appears to me that the K-12 and post-secondary
schooling systems in the region ensure that there is never a shortage of prospective employees in pursuit of such work.

Consequently, the few economic opportunities my students are afforded are much less prestigious, less economically rewarding, and less secure than those available 45 miles away in either direction. As a result of these ecological conditions that characterize my community I have far too frequently seen that my students and their families have to confront economic insecurity as a result of the type of work they perform within “the labor intensive secondary sector…[where] workers hold unstable, unskilled jobs; [and where] they may be laid off at any time with little to no cost to the employer…” (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Ouaouci, Pellegrino, & Taylor, 1993, p. 11).

The work a great majority of my students and their family members engage in is seasonal fieldwork that encompasses cherry and apple picking, grape harvesting, and working with hops. I once even had a student bring the old, rusted, and worn apple bin he has used since childhood to collect apples in the field for a presentation he gave. I can only assume its dilapidated condition was the result of years of use by my young man. I shudder to think of the abuse his body has borne in the endless years of summer heat, winter freezes, and exposure to harmful pesticides and chemicals. In my estimation, the above example illustrates how the economic life of the region is predominately undergirded and made possible by the hard physical labor and lives of poor, racial minorities and further affirms my conviction that my students will experience life much more painfully than the people who live 45 miles away from them in either direction. I posit that it is much more than serendipitous fortune that a large Latino/a population has come to
reside in an area where low educational attainment does not marginalize one’s prospects for low wage, low status employment.

The socioeconomic and racial factors discussed at length above are part and parcel of contemporary life in the region for my students, their parents, and families and lead to a life ultimately characterized by “elevated rates of unemployment, underemployment, lower wages, less stable employment conditions, greater economic insecurity, and elevated risks of poverty” (Pager, 2008, p. 22). From my personal observations and the discussions I have had with the residents here, the few employment opportunities that do exist offer little chance of a living wage, limited upward mobility, and limited protection from the ubiquitous poverty that has stamped its mark on the faces, bodies, families, housing, schooling, and lives of the residents here.

However, life in the region was not always defined by the demographic characteristics I detailed above. My numerous conversations with residents in the region over the last five years have revealed to me that what has taken place in the region over the last few decades, extending back to 1940, has been an increasingly familiar pattern of white flight and the concentration of poverty. For those readers unfamiliar with white flight, it is when the historically dominant group in American society, more commonly referred to as Anglos or Whites, who generally possess the greatest concentration of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized cultural capital, advantageous social capital, and high levels of human capital, for various complex social and economic reasons begin to leave a geographic area for greener pastures (Crowder & South, 2008; Frey, 1979; Massey & Denton, 1993; Renzulli & Evans, 2005).
What the exodus described above leaves in its wake are predominately minority communities with limited levels of human, social, and cultural capital, even fewer limited material resources, and inadequately funded social institutions that ultimately begin to inadvertently perpetuate, instead of reverse, the societal marginalization of their communities (Crowder & South, 2008; Frey, 1979; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). While the phenomenon of white flight can no longer be directly attributed to the racial and ethnic dynamics that gave rise to it, contemporary racial and ethnic relations are still strongly correlated with (Wilson, 1997). While it is difficult to identify the specific catalyst of the pernicious cycle of white flight, a few strongly correlated variables include increases in minority populations, access to affordable housing, mortgage and lending practices tied to the real estate market, the quality of schooling available, high unemployment, and in the most extreme cases, overt racism and discrimination (Crowder & South, 2008). The latter of these is of course tied to the frequency and intimacy of interactions that ethnic sub groups have with members of the superordinate group (Massey & Denton, 2008). It is these exact dynamics that have shaped the demographics of the region.

One of the strongest factors contributing to white flight is the increase in minority population that arises as a result of an increase in the cheaper, more affordable housing that is available in an area as increasing numbers of Anglos leave an area and increasing numbers of minorities move into a community (Frey, 1979). While the mortgage and lending practices that contributed to white flight in the past were directly related to overt racial discrimination, today they are more closely tied to the wealth and capital the residents in a community possess. Generally speaking, if the majority of community residents are migrants or descendants of migrants with limited capital and wealth, like those who continually move into the region where
I and my students live and work, the likelihood of acceptance for a mortgage loan and home ownership are low. I do not believe that this is necessarily because people are racist or because bankers do not want to lend minorities money for a home. It is instead more likely the result of minorities possessing little collateral with which they could leverage the debt they are attempting to acquire.

Concomitantly, as fewer and fewer of these residents are unable to own their own homes, or perhaps only able to afford a home with a low market value, the communities’ schools, emergency services, and churches that draw their resources from said property valuations will ultimately be unable to cope with the demands and needs of the broader community (Renzulli & Evans, 2005). The diminution of resources ultimately culminates in a lower quality of life for all of the residents in the community, with those who are unable to move out staying put and generally forcing those Anglos and more affluent minorities who would like to stay, to leave (Crowder & South, 2008; Frey, 1979; Renzulli & Evans, 2005). As increasing numbers of Anglos and more affluent minorities in an area witness the potential threat to their home investments and property values in the increase of minority residents in their community, they try to mitigate their losses by selling their property as soon as possible, further perpetuating the decline of the community en masse (Conley, 2010; Frey, 1979).

In the region where I work, the process of white flight has been chiefly mediated through the catalyst of a continual stream of migrant field workers in possession of limited levels of human, social, and cultural capital, and generally willing to take whatever legitimate work they can find. Like the migratory experiences of their ancestors from the 19th and 20th centuries, who “would begin new settlements in places that were often designated as Mexican towns,” (Telles &
Ortiz, 2008, p. 161) many of the migrant residents of the region have settled here because the ecology and culture of the region is familiar to them. Many of them have shared with me that they have social networks that can direct them to employment and housing opportunities and the work available here is amenable to their particular occupational skill set, education, and experience.

The cultural familiarity of the region also reduces the psychological, emotional, and monetary costs of migration for these migrants (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Ououaci, Pellegrino, & Taylor, 1993). The region is made less alienating for these migrants by the characteristic Spanish signs that dot the store fronts which they are able to read, the Mexican taco trucks along almost every street corner, and the phenotypical features a great majority of the residents possess; brown skin of various shades frequently quite similar to their own. Ironically, my conversations with the residents of the region have led me to believe that they perceive the ecology of the region serving as a pseudo-buffer from the racism these migrants have heard permeates American society. Consequently, they cannot even recognize that the great majority of their life looks the way it does because of the racism they believe themselves sheltered from.

Further exacerbating the influx of migrants into the region are the racialized demographics of labor and the status and prestige that accompany the work people do in the U.S. Once an economic niche, like the agricultural niche that native and migrant Mexicans have occupied for a century and a half, becomes labeled as the niche of one racial or immigrant group, it becomes increasingly difficult to attract natives or non-ethnic group members into it, thereby increasing the demand for more migrants (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Ououaci, Pellegrino, & Taylor, 1993, p. 11). The effect of the racialized stigma of the niche becomes more pronounced
when combined with the low wages, low status, and difficult working conditions that such labor entails, ultimately repelling even the most poorly educated of natives, and further reinforcing the strong demand for immigrants.

Because “modern occupational hierarchies….create a permanent demand for workers who are willing to labor under unpleasant conditions, at low wages, with great instability and little chance for advancement” (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Ouaouci, Pellegrino, & Taylor, 1993, p. 11), agricultural employers in the region and those industries that support such work have to turn to an immigrant labor source further intensifying the migrant influx and Anglo exodus. In spite of the difficulty to attract native laborers, the limited economic opportunities in the region often compel many of my students who happen to be American citizens to continue to view field work as their only option for gainful employment. It is these migrant field workers, of various ages, or their children that are my students. Unlike the media’s portrayal of these immigrants as criminals, drug-dealers, and immoral characters (Santa Ana, 2002), my interactions with these people have taught me that they are hardworking, decent, human beings in pursuit of a better life. Much like their Anglo brothers and sisters in the 19th and 20th century who legally and illegally crossed various natural and political borders in pursuit of the “American Dream,” the migrant residents of the region have left all that they know and love behind in their native country, mostly Mexico, for a chance to improve upon the quality of life they and their children experience. More importantly, they have left all that they know and love to acquire an opportunity for their children to attain an education. I liken what these immigrants have done to what my mother did for me all those years ago when she violated an arbitrary geographic neighborhood boundary established to keep her children from attaining the “American Dream.”
The increasing number of migrants to the region serves as the catalyst for white flight, ultimately altering the demographics of the region. In sum, as the Hispanic/Latino population in the region grows, the predominantly white, middle class population decides to move themselves, their children, businesses, homes, schools, and human, social, and cultural capital outward and plant it 45 miles or further in either direction. The mass exodus of Whites throughout the region has left behind a set of communities with high rates of poverty, segregation, low educational attainment, low levels of legitimized human, social, and cultural capital and the deleterious consequences of these things. All the while, two large and vibrant predominately White communities are burgeoning with tremendous development, and ample amounts of legitimized human, social, and cultural capital 45 miles away in either direction.

After all, 45 miles is just enough distance to keep property values high and an educational system worthy of middle class children operating. In my estimation, the processes discussed above have happened in the region of the Pacific Northwest where my students and I reside and culminated in their racial, economic, and social isolation. Stated briefly, this isolation has left the predominately minority residents of the region “not only without conventional role models, whose strong presence once buffered the effects of neighborhood joblessness, but also [deprived them] of the social resources (including [white] social contacts) provided by mainstream social networks that facilitate social and economic advancement…” (Wilson, 1997, p. 66). In my estimation the racial and social isolation I discuss above has also had a depressing effect on the human, social, and cultural capital students are able to acquire and culminated in my students possessing a limited horizon and worldview for what they see as potential realities in their lives. The narrowed view of the world that students carry is especially true in regard to the educational,
economic, and professional aspirations my students have shared with me that they possess. Many of my students, not realizing the frequently limited earning potentials and advancement opportunities of a two year degree or certificate, have expressed to me countless times that they are interested in attaining certificates or degrees that require the least amount of time for completion.

Some of these credentials have the potential for some economic returns like an associate degree in nursing or a billing and coding certificate, but others, like a beginning Word processing certificate or traffic flagger certificate are limited in terms of the types of returns students can anticipate from such credentials. Understandably, many of my students perceive these short term certificates and degrees as being able to offer them some sort of hope in a respite from the pressing nature of the poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage they are contending with in their daily lives. My experiences and discussions with students over the last five years have taught me that they often find such unbridled hope ill-placed. Some of the students I have spoken to who have attained such credentials have shared with me that they feel cheated or short-changed for all the time, money, and effort they spent on acquiring such credentials. Perhaps the most insidious aspect of the community defining characteristics I discussed above, and its concomitant worldview, is the utter hopelessness that begins to become normalized into everyday life here. Hopelessness has even begun to grasp its arms around me; a highly educated, middle-class educator with one of the best paying and higher status jobs in the community. The pervasive sense of hopelessness is further reinforced and has become more acute for me by my knowledge of the heart-breaking and soul-crushing statistics available on Latino/as’ educational outcomes, poverty rates, unemployment rates, earnings, and the market niches they occupy.
My advanced education and what I see transpire daily, within my classroom, Enganche College, and within the broader community, has equipped me with a substantiated awareness that a significant number of my Latino/a students will endure a painful life marked by the material deprivation of their present, as they frequently have spoken with me about. As will be discussed in greater detail below, a significant number of my students have been unable to attain a quality education as children, sometimes as a result of the time they and their parents have been in the country, the material deprivation that forced them out of the classroom and into the fields, or at other times, if they are second or third generation Mexican Americans, because of the quality of educational institutions they have attended. Irrespective of the reasons for why this occurred, many of my students are sentenced to watch their difficult and painful lives unfold and then be replayed in the lives of their children and sometimes grandchildren over and over again like a broken record. While the iterative cycle of poverty that characterizes my students’ lives in and of itself is quite problematic, what is especially disturbing is that I have to watch this process of destruction unfold in my students’ lives and at times I have to play a role in their systemic and iterative disenfranchisement because of my role within Enganche College and the work I have been tasked to perform. Before I elaborate on how this process unfolds the next section discusses Enganche College in greater detail and sets the institutional setting for where this disenfranchisement takes place.

Enganche College: A Beacon of Hope[lessness]?

In the midst of the socioeconomically marginalized, racially isolated region of the Pacific Northwest where I and my students reside and the socioeconomic and material devastation I discussed above, like a ray of light shining through the dense cloud of hopelessness that seems to
characterize the lives of its residents, is the HSI I am employed at. On the surface, as I initially viewed Enganche College, the institution appears to be a beacon of hope for students whose lives are characterized by the ubiquitous hopelessness of the region and the hard lives of its residents. I used to think that Enganche College was meant to guide students to a brighter future through the empowerment of a post-secondary credential, much like a lighthouse guides lost sailors through a storm to shore.

My five years here have taught me that is the wrong analogy. The troubling and unsettling reality for me is that Enganche College draws students into it like a moth is drawn to a flame or, from a more insidious perspective, like an innocent animal is to drawn to bait laid in a snare. Both scenarios end in the almost inevitable demise of the creatures who approached the thing that drew them in. From my vantage point as a minority educator, Enganche College is really more like a slaughter house for my students’ dreams. My experiences here have taught me to view Enganche College as a horrifying place where my students’ efforts to bring their dreams of a post-secondary education and a better life for them and their loved ones to fruition are often impeded by the work I have been tasked to perform. From where I stand, and standing alongside me are many, many students whose dreams never came to fruition, Enganche College is a place where a metaphorical death reigns and unfolds in slow, seemingly endless ten week iterations of academic coursework. In case my statement appears to be a bit too nihilistic or an overly harsh criticism of my employer, I posit one statistic to substantiate my claim; 25%. The survival rate of Enganche College, and by that I mean the percentage of students who are able to graduate from our institution within 150% of normal time to completion for their program is 25% (NCES,
2013). Metaphorically speaking, 75% of my students’ dreams to acquire a post-secondary educational credential and a better life come here to die.

To make matters worse, it is a place where their dreams are snuffed out, but not with any immediacy. Instead, my students’ dreams come to die in a slow, prolonged, methodical manner that is drawn out over the course of a number of years. The death of dreams that I have witnessed, and at times executed, have had a profound effect on me and the ways that I view the work that I engage in. So as to not erroneously lead the reader to think that I am somehow indifferent to such devastation, I liken my situation to being on a boat with limited space, surrounded by a multitude of people who are drowning, desperately grabbing on to the side of the boat, reaching out to me and grasping at my hands for me to pull them into the boat. The only problem is that there is no more room left on the boat and I am being told by my superiors who are behind me not to let anyone else on board if they do not meet some arbitrary, undefined criteria of what an educated student is supposed to look like, read like, write like, and speak like. The criterion I should use to determine who is spared and who is not has not been explicitly defined for me. As a result, I feel completely powerless watching the whole destructive situation unfold. Before I get ahead of myself in elucidating the process of how the great majority of my students’ dreams come to die at Enganche College, the next section begins with a physical description of Enganche College, a discussion of its institutional aims and organizational structure, as well as a perusal of the students and faculty working within its walls.

**The Physical HSI**

Enganche College is comprised of two campuses, a “main” campus in the upper valley and an extension campus, some forty-five miles away. The extension campus, my campus, is
located in the heart of three small, economically depressed, and racially stratified communities, those communities discussed earlier. At my campus, we have more recently seen an increase in investments and consequently improvements in the facilities here. In my five years here, I have seen the remodeling of a new foyer and lobby for students to study and just “hang out” in, as well as a remodeling of the students activity center and library on campus. All three of these additions have had a positive effect on the ambience and feel of the campus.

Further reaffirming my own disposition of the improvement in the ambience of the campus are the numerous positive comments I have heard students make about the student center, lobby, and foyer. Comments like, “Mr. Reyes, this feels like a real college now,” or “now I have a place to go to, a nice place, when I need to study.” Where a dead, dreary silence used to permeate the campus, lively, rambunctious, and joyful students, filled with an energy and enthusiasm for schooling now characterize the lobby and foyer. Where just a few years ago when I arrived to Enganche College at any time of the day, a deafening silence and emptiness characterized the campus, now at any hour of the day you will find students conversing, studying, reading, and perusing internet sites. In terms of the library, the city in which Enganche College is located partnered with it to acquire state and federal matching grant funds, “most notably a $600,000 Hispanic Serving Institutions Assisting Communities grant, from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development” (Engel, 2014).

As great as these needed renovations to the campus were, the total number of square feet renovated on the extension campus pales in comparison to the new 43,879 sq. ft. capital building project that began on November 12th, 2013 and is slated for completion on March 30th 2015 on the main campus. While it is reasonable to expect that funding to the respective campuses would be circumscribed by the number of students attending each campus and the human and material
needs the campuses have for adequately serving their students, when one comprehends that the allocation of resources, prioritizing of those resources, and the allocation of space are all reflective of meaningful, underlying symbolic realities, it cannot be missed that the predominately minority students in the region received a few renovations to a set of aging edifices while the students and faculty on the main campus received the gifting of an entire building.

I argue that the institutional inequality between the two campuses is a reflection of my students’ and colleagues’ place in the “natural order” of Enganche College. The symbolic realities underlying the location of Enganche College are reflective of the broader American social order, an order that legitimates and justifies the social and educational inequities that shape minorities’ lives. Take for example the “place” where the extension campus is located. From a sociological perspective:

Place is the locus of economic activity and amenities that gives value to areas.

Places are more valuable economically and socially when there is a greater density of economic activity (businesses, jobs), and valuable amenities and public goods (good schools and neighbors, parks, low crime, museums). (Stoll, 2008, p. 203)

Thus, it could be argued that the extension campus is worth-less, economically and socially, because it is located in a “place” predominantly associated with Latino/a minority group members, high unemployment and poverty rates, and even fewer public amenities and goods. The devaluation of the extension campus becomes more pronounced when one considers the inequity in the social arrangements between the two campuses from the workload and responsibilities faculty members are tasked with, to the resources and support services students
are provided, to the academic course offerings and instruction students are afforded. The point I want to make here is that the disadvantageous community and neighborhood conditions of the region as well as the institutional inequities between the two campuses are a reflection of the broader, more latent social and economic order of the society in which we live. The inequity that society levels at the predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged racial minorities does not stop with them.

Instead, the inequity in my minority students’ lives begins to creep into the working lives of those who serve them irrespective of their racial or ethnic identity. As advisors, the faculty on my campus have two, sometimes three, workdays every quarter taken from us for advising, days that our colleagues at the main campus do not have to relinquish. It used to be a two to three week window of time faculty used to relinquish, so in some ways I guess some progress has been made. I do not have a problem with advising but when these days are essential to the work I and my colleagues do directly with students i.e., grading papers, providing timely feedback, and actually teaching the students enrolled in our classes, it becomes counterproductive to our work as educators. Even something as simple deciding one morning that I want to show a film to my students in order to illustrate some sociological concept generally entails a two-way 45 mile drive and me relinquishing close to 2 hours of my time to pick the film up. If I choose not to lose that time I will generally have to wait two days for the film to arrive, most of the time long after the concept I am trying to elucidate for my students has been covered and discussed.

The inequity between campuses does not stop with the faculty. The students too are subjected to the institutional inequity that frames their schooling. The students at the extension campus of Enganche College have a computer lab that is open 5 days a week with fewer limited
hours of availability than that on the main campus which is open 6 days a week. What the limited
hours of support services available mean is my students have one fewer day to submit an
assignment if they do not have access to a computer or the internet and one fewer day to study
for a proctored exam than their peers on the main campus. My students here have also shared
with me that they feel that they generally receive less instructional support from the writing
center, especially since it is not accessible or open to the students who attend school in the
evenings.

For those students for whom the writing center is available I have been disappointed
when I tell them they should have gone to the writing center to have their work proofread before
submitting it to me and they respond that they did. Students in the math center have shared with
me that they are ridiculed or berated for some of the questions they have. In terms of faculty that
serves the student body, it was only last year that students at Enganche College were given a full-
time math teacher and the turnover rate of faculty here is quite disruptive to any sense of
community that begins to develop. In my estimation, the predominately minority student
extension campus where I work serves as a faculty stepping stone to the main campus where
there is greater autonomy and greater likelihood of recognition by the school’s administration. In
my estimation, the recognition of my peers on the main campus ultimately leads to a greater
likelihood of tenure promotion. In terms of scheduling, there appears to be a lack of awareness
and sensitivity on the part of my middle class, predominately Anglo colleagues that the
socioeconomic dynamics and realities of our students' lives limit their availability for classes.
The students here do not have the luxuries of the middle class students in terms of paid personal
days or sick leave, hour lunches, and flexibility in the times and days they will be scheduled to
work.
The students we serve at Enganche College lack the occupational prestige and social standing to negotiate their working hours and their conditions of employment and they cannot bargain with their bosses about the days and times they must be away from work. Students’ economic insecurity generally means that they lack the standing to shape their work schedules like I and my colleagues do. We at the extension campus of Enganche College frequently schedule courses without enough consideration for the students we serve and without contemplating what times and days are most amenable to their schedules and what schedules would most easily afford the students' access to a quality education at times and days that would not jeopardize their livelihood or lower their already diminished quality of life.

In one recent advising session we convened to discuss the academic schedule and course offerings for an upcoming quarter, it seemed to me that all that mattered was the days and times most conducive to the lives of the faculty. These were not necessarily the times that would allow Enganche College to best serve the community and the students most in need of the education we provide. Perhaps affording my colleagues and I the freedom to schedule our courses at times that work with our lives is in order to meet the human needs of those who work within our institution, from a human resource perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2008), but it still seems selfish to me for us not to consider the economic realities that shape students' work schedules and working lives and that shape the greater community. I too have been complicit in the mass disenfranchisement of the students in my community since I have also chosen a course schedule that works in my interests. Though admittedly I have not done so in nearly as egregiously a manner as my colleagues since I frequently have complied with directives by my colleagues to change my schedule for what they perceive is a “better time slot.” While the main campus, located in a much more urban region, is able to offer hundreds of courses in various academic disciplines
each quarter, our campus with its limited number of full-time and part time faculty members, can only offer between 85-90 courses in only a few disciplines.

The limited number of courses the extension campus of Enganche College offers would be even smaller if the campus was not beaming ITV courses from the main campus. ITV courses are akin to the learning that takes place with public television, only you have a real person on the screen that you can speak to and interact with, although this is not nearly as meaningful and interactive as one would hope. The limited scope of available courses the students are able to take at Enganche College ultimately makes their transition into four-year institutions difficult with a greater number of courses they need for their four year programs simply not being offered here. Instead the limited courses that students are offered and forced to take are courses with limited utility outside of completion of the associate of arts transfer degree.

In my experience, the students’ degrees are often comprised of a patchwork of courses that do not necessarily align with the programs of study at most four-year institutions but instead align with the research interests and disciplinary backgrounds of instructors. These courses include drama, art, film, and communication. The fact that some of these courses are rumored or known to be less academically demanding courses only exacerbates students’ difficulties in transferring out of Enganche College since students flock to these courses repeatedly because they meet the AA transfer degree requirement and help them maintain a high grade point average (GPA). All the while students are either oblivious of or indifferent to the fact that the majority of these courses do not necessarily have great utility since the majority of them are not required for their programs of study and coursework at the four year institutions they eventually hope to transfer into. I cannot even begin to enumerate how many times I have had to tell students “Yes, the courses you are taking now count towards your AA, but that does not mean they count
for anything beyond these four walls since whether or not they count depends on your program of study, the four year institution you plan on attending, and the four year degree you are pursuing.”

**Aims and Organization of Enganche College.**

Because the aims, purpose, and character of HSIs were discussed at length earlier, I will only present a brief historical discussion about Enganche College. In 2000, as a result of demographic changes and socioeconomic shifts in the region, Enganche College became an HSI (Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2012). In order to qualify for this designation, “the college student population must consist of more than 50% of students receiving Pell grants or more than 24.4% in poverty and 25% Hispanic students” (NWCCU, 2012). In general terms, the chief responsibility that HSIs are tasked with is the postsecondary education of their students, irrespective of the race, class, and gender of these students. Admittedly, this goal is a bit more nuanced, since the students HSIs serve are generally socioeconomically disadvantaged minorities and those who choose to live in the communities where a significant number of these socioeconomically disadvantaged minorities reside.

Enganche College’s organizational structure is comprised of various leadership positions with each level subordinate in some way to the layer of administration above it and all levels in some manner responsible for their respective sphere of influence in campus administration. These institutional hierarchies can be broken up into two generally primary arenas. Direct command over the finances of the institution, its facilities, and capital development is under the direction of the Vice-President of Administrative Services while direct command of the instructional programs, instructional technology, and instructional support, as well as outreach, enrollment, and admissions of the institution is under the domain of the Vice-President of
Instructional and Student Services (NWCCU, 2012). Enganche College is also comprised of numerous educational programs and academic departments with each made up of various degrees, academic disciplines, and subject matters.

Because an exhaustive examination of each of the educational programs, departments, and the disciplines each is made up of is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, I focus here on the three instructional divisions in which each of these programs are housed. These three instructional divisions are also those with which I am most familiar and which are in some form housed at the extension campus where I am employed: Basic Skills (BS), Workforce Educational Development (WED), and the Arts and Sciences (A & S). In some form or another I have interacted with students in each of these divisions and academic programs. The Basic Skills division works collaboratively with state agencies aimed at worker retraining and “includes programs in Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language, Literacy, and GED preparation” (NWCCU, 2012, p. 3).

The Basic Skills division’s newest innovations are Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-Best) and high school 21+. The former pairs “higher level basic skills training with specific vocational training to get students started in college pathways sooner” (NWCCU, 2012, p. 3). The latter of these is a program aimed at providing individuals 21 years of age and older an opportunity to acquire a high school diploma through competency based coursework (SBCTC, 2013). Workforce Educational Development “offers 47 degrees and 88 certificate programs in 24 fields of study, as well as 26 non-credit, short term certificates. All Workforce Educational Development programs are guided by community advisory boards and are closely aligned” with Arts and Sciences and Basic Skills program prerequisites (NWCCU, 2012, p. 3). The Workforce Educational Development division is made up of some of the more practical vocational degree
fields students can pursue and offers a broad array of degrees and certificates in agriculture, the medical fields like nursing, medical assisting, dental hygiene, physical therapy and medical billing and coding, automotive technology, criminal justice, and education, among many, many others.

Lastly, the Arts and Science division is tasked with “developmental education; information literacy; student development and physical education courses; prerequisites for many professional technical programs; and transfer degrees coursework” (NWCCU, 2012, p. 3). The Arts and Science division’s work within the institution is chiefly aimed at helping students acquire five associate transfer degrees; two associate of arts degrees, two associate of sciences degrees, and one associate in business degree. Housed within the Arts and Sciences division are numerous academic disciplines including communications, English, the humanities, mathematics, modern languages, as well as the natural and social sciences. Because of the broad academic training necessary for students to earn any of the associate degrees offered at Enganche College, the students who attend the campus and who I generally interact with on a daily basis are those within the latter two divisions; Workforce Educational Development and Arts and Science. The next section details the descriptive demographics of the student population who attend Enganche College and the academic preparation they possess when they enter the institution.

Categories of Students

There are various types of students who attend Enganche College. The students differ not only in age, but in ethnicity, academic preparation, and socioeconomic background. Like the great majority of students at other open access community colleges across the country, students here are predominately less socioeconomically advantaged than their peers who attend four year
institutions and are overrepresented as racial minorities. According to the NWCCU self-evaluation report (2012), over 70% of the student population qualifies for financial aid, 40% of students are white, 60% are minority students, and “more than 85% of students enter the college needing developmental coursework, with approximately 65% needing to take two or more levels of developmental work” (p. 2). One group within this population of students is the Running Start students. From 2010-2014 these high school aged juniors and seniors constituted 9% of the college’s student population (SBCTC, 2014). In order to qualify for the program and be placed into college level courses the students must take a standardized placement exam: Compass, and score at a minimum threshold of 82 or higher in English and 25 or higher in Algebra. If they meet these criteria, these students have their tuition paid for by state funds that have been appropriated to said program but must pay for their textbooks each quarter.

These textbook costs can easily run into the hundreds of dollars per book and are well outside of the average costs economically depressed students and their families can financially manage every ten weeks. These students must also acquire their own transportation. One observation about the Running Start program is that while it affords an opportunity to students who may otherwise not be given an opportunity to enter a college classroom, it at the same time very quickly, and latently, discriminates against socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Competent and able students who take advantage of the opportunity to take college courses through the Running Start Program, but who are limited financially by the socioeconomic location of their parents and may not possess a vehicle or money to purchase such costly texts, quickly find themselves disqualified from said opportunity. The problems of paying for books and transportation are especially acute when one considers the aforementioned high poverty rates and median income that characterize life for students in the region. The remainder of students at
Enganche College, 91%, are non-Running Start students. 43% of our student population is between the ages of 20-29 and 27% are 30 years of age or older (SBCTC, 2014).

91% of the students who attend Enganche College attend classes during the day, 38% of the students are employed at least part-time, and another 47% are unemployed (SBCTC, 2014). In terms of the academic or educational divisions students at Enganche College are enrolled within the great majority, 79%, of students are housed within the Workforce Educational Development and Arts and Science divisions with the remaining 21% enrolled in Basic Skills (SBCTC, 2014). The great majority of the diverse student population discussed above attends the main campus and is served by the faculty at each respective campus of Enganche College. The next section provides a general and brief demographic snapshot of my colleagues at the extension campus.

Faculty at Enganche College

The full-time faculty at Enganche College is comprised of four tenured instructors, six non-tenured instructors, and numerous adjuncts who primarily teach courses in the evenings. While it may be tempting to view the faculty as a homogenous group of well-educated instructors, close examination of the faculty at Enganche College reveals a great amount of differentiation in their academic training and dispositions towards their role within the institution. Even after the addition of two African American instructors in January 2015, the majority of my colleagues at the extension campus are Anglo (70%). Prior to the infusion of diversity that these two colleagues represent only 10% of the full-time faculty at my campus were Hispanic (SBCTC, 2014). Admittedly, the 10% at my campus is much better than the 4% representation of Hispanic and Latino/a professors at universities across the country (NCES, 2013) and the 6% minority representation between both campuses (SBCTC, 2014).
One of the four tenured instructors is the mental health counselor and advisor who teaches one psychology course and one student development course a quarter in A & S and has been on staff since 2008. Another of the tenured faculty members has been on campus since 2006 and teaches biology, chemistry, anatomy and physiology, and a number of plant science courses that support the viticulture and wine-making degree programs at Enganche College. While I esteem all of my colleagues, the last mentioned instructor is the one I have probably established some of the greatest rapport with and call my close friend. I esteem him highly since based on what my students have shared with me he refuses to lower the academic expectations he has set for students. My own conversations with him have led me to believe that he, like me, feels that they of all students, must meet the high academic standards and expectations he holds them to if they are going to have a chance of escaping the poverty that consumes them. Far too frequently this instructor and his intentions are misunderstood by students.

At times this colleague can come off as rough to students but I know this is not because he is a mean or a rude person since my experiences with him have taught me that he is actually very kind. He has served as in informal mentor and role model of professionalism for me since my arrival five years ago. The only other tenured instructors on campus are the two full time instructors within the BS division housed at the campus. They have been here since 1994 and my interactions with both of them have been minimal and quite informal. Since I do not work with their department my knowledge of the work they do within the institution is likewise minimal. The remaining six full-time faculty members that teach here are in the A & S division and not one of us is tenured. Just in passing I would like to mention that I do not think it is a coincidence that the great majority of faculty members who serve the predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students at Enganche College are not tenured.
From a symbolic perspective, I think the lack of tenure promotion for those who work in at the extension campus that serves a predominately minority students body reflects the underlying reality that the inequity that so characterizes my students’ lives even creeps into the lives of those of us who serve them being less seasoned professionals. Because education and even skin color cannot protect me and my colleagues from my inequity, the security of our positions each year, is up for discussion. The budget allocated to the institution requires an examination of what positions can stay and what positions need to be removed. We have three English instructors who have recently been added as faculty members. One was added in 2012, another in 2013, and a third in 2015. Another full-time faculty member is a communication instructor who was added to the faculty in 2013.

Aside from instructors in English, the natural and social sciences, and communication, the campus also has two math instructors. Both of these individuals are new to Enganche College with one colleague being added to the faculty in 2014 and the other in 2015. Interestingly enough, it was not until four years after I arrived on campus, that the extension campus of Enganche College acquired even one full-time math instructor. Beginning with the first few months of my time here I had begun to ask the dean about my institutional limitation. On several occasions I even went as far as to say that Enganche College should perhaps even get rid of my own position so that the students in my community could be afforded an opportunity to get the math education they need. The reason given to me was that the campus has historically been unable to attract the talent willing to stay on the campus and teach developmental math courses. When the talent has been attracted the person has been unwilling to teach such courses. The position has generally been vacated after a short period of time. Regardless of the subject matter faculty teach, all of the faculty at the extension campus wear multiple hats and play multiple
roles within the institution. Aside from the teaching role, faculty are tasked with advising a certain number of students.

The number of students faculty advise is dependent upon the academic pathway we have been assigned with the number of advisees per advisor averaging somewhere between 30 to 75 students. The number of students within each pathway is dependent upon how many students declare that they are pursuing a specific career path. As I discuss below, during the admissions process each student who applies for enrollment to the institution is asked to identify their course of study. Once a student has done so, the students are sorted into one of five advising pathways; healthcare, social services and education, agriculture and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM), business, and an arts and humanities pathway. Each of the pathways discussed above, at least theoretically, is structured so as to place a faculty member more familiar with the professional and academic requirements of the field at the helm.

The pathway leader then takes the particular idiosyncrasies of the field in terms of career opportunities and the course work required for a career in said field and personalizes the frequently abstract, discipline specific information in a way that makes it palatable for the students. These pathways are generally believed to help students in ways that increase their likelihood of completing the academic coursework necessary but also increase the likelihood of them having a successful transition into their respective future professions. While such an approach sounds great in theory, the campus’ implementation of this advising plan has been less than ideal. The extension campus, with a much smaller student body and closer knit faculty, has been selected as the pilot for this approach to advising with full implementation on the main campus expected for fall of 2015. In my estimation, it has been a less than stellar implementation. In fact, as I write this in the winter 2015 quarter, faculty have somehow missed
advising 176 students for whom a mandatory requirement of advising has been put into place. Enganche College’s situation is made worse by the fact that each of these 176 students is now going to be blocked from registration for the spring 2015 quarter until they see their advisor, something that admittedly will not likely happen until well after classes have filled up since each advisor only has one office hour a day and is responsible for teaching three, at times four, courses a quarter.

 Aside from advisors having to confront 60 to 1 student advising ratios, they have 75 to 1 student to teacher ratios. I actually have 108 students this winter 2015 quarter and have had that ratio since I started. As an advisor I am expected to advise between 50-65 students that are pursuing degrees in sociology, anthropology, history, psychology, political science, chemical dependency, criminal justice, and education. The amount of information I need to adequately and competently advise students is quite overwhelming. I have not been prepared by this institution, or even my prior education and work experience, for the scope and magnitude of this level of advising.

 For example, the education program alone has 5 different degrees, three degrees that transfer out to three universities, and two terminal degrees. On top of that, there are myriad para-educator certificates that I have to be up to speed on. My teaching load, the work I am doing with a local school district, and preparation for these things leaves me with little, if any, time for familiarizing myself with these different programs. I am expected to inform advisees about programs and degrees with which I have had limited exposure to and even less limited knowledge about. The latter point illustrates how I am asked to take on an advising load, for which I have not received adequate institutional support. At the institutional level, advising is complicated further by the fact that each degree and the courses students should be advised to
enroll in and complete are contingent upon the college or university the students will be transferring out to. The fact that the university systems at the state and national level are a patchwork of diverse university and college programs is illustrative of the realignment and perhaps even reordering necessary at the post-secondary level between community college systems and universities.

In line with research that shows “African Americans and other minority groups perceive discrimination to be pervasive in their lives (Pager, 2008, p. 24), the work I do is further complicated by racialized dynamics that I see shaping the work I and my colleagues have been tasked with. As a minority faculty member at the extension campus, the one with greater devaluation, it seems to be that I have been subject to greater micromanagement. Just a few weeks ago I had the dean of the college pull me aside and question my whereabouts during an advising meeting. I was working with faculty and staff at the public high school with which we have collaboration and my boss seems to forget that my colleagues sometimes fail to show up to those meetings and frequently even the mandatory advising sessions faculty are mandated to host for students. It appears to me that my Anglo colleagues are not called into account for their whereabouts as I am.

Race also shapes the courses I teach since I teach all the classes that deal with people of color; Chicano studies and ethnic studies courses. It is almost like the college leadership believes that my ethnic distinctiveness affords me an expertise in the history and experiences of minorities. On top of my teaching and advising role, I myself have been tasked with developing a K-16 collaborative between one local high school and the campus aimed at improving college readiness and completion with juniors and seniors. In the next chapter, where I discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this study, I develop how the K-14 collaborative works
in greater depth. When the labor intensive work of the collaborative is combined with the mandatory advising and quarterly meetings with my colleagues on this campus, the mandatory quarterly meetings with my social science colleagues on the main campus, as well as quarterly Arts and Science division meetings, I find that I have little time to devote myself to the one task I think is paramount for my students’ success, teaching. The faculty members at Enganche College are not the only institutional agents tasked with multiple responsibilities.

The staff and leadership on campus are asked to take on multiple roles as well. The mental health counselor on campus is tasked with not only serving the mental health needs of students, but also teaching one, sometimes two courses a quarter, organizing the advising process each quarter as well as sorting students into their respective pathway, and serving as a liaison between the administration and faculty on the campus. The cashier has to perform the work of a cashier, registration clerk, and secretary. The student services coordinator is in charge of student government, serves as a financial aid liaison, Running Start coordinator, and placement exam administrator. The counselor’s administrative assistant serves as a disabled student services coordinator, liaison for the Allied Health program, and the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) student coordinator. Even the dean of the campus is tasked with leadership of both the extension campus and the BS division of both campuses. Irrespective of the differences between each of the faculty and the academic disciplines they teach, those who work at Enganche College are tasked with a tremendous workload and a number of responsibilities outside of teaching. Each of the faculty members has been primed by their respective class backgrounds, postsecondary education, socioeconomic location, and the institutional position they occupy to see their roles within the institution as instrumental to the success of their students.

Admission, Gate-Keeping Mechanisms, and Duration of Stay
The school districts and communities that predominately serve as feeders for the extension campus of the community college include Sunnyside, Grandview, Prosser, Granger, Toppenish, and Mabton, although admittedly some students come from as far away as more regionally isolated locales like Patterson and Benton City. Irrespective of the distance of these districts and communities from the campus, each possesses some similar attributes; significant proportions of Latino/as, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and/or some combination of both. As an open-access institution, Enganche College lends itself to providing all students, irrespective of prior educational performance and whether or not they possess a high school diploma, an opportunity at enrollment (NWCCU, 2012). The students apply for admission by completing a brief application asking them to identify their personal information, course of study, residency information, race and citizenship information, testing information, and academic history. The final steps in the application process are payment of the $30 application fee, completion of a standardized placement exam; Compass, and registration for a new student orientation.

It is in the final step of the application process that students are given an opportunity to speak to an academic advisor who guides them through the process of course selection and, at least theoretically, gives them some of the vital information students need to increase their chances of academic success. I say theoretically because irrespective of my colleagues’ adamant declarations that they cover important material with the students, I have continually every quarter had to explain to students some of the most basic, but important information, they should know, like what degrees Enganche College offers, what advising is, how important grades are for maintaining their financial aid, and how to register. While on the surface each of the steps for admission would appear to pose minimal challenges to students, a closer examination of the
process in light of the types of students who are applying elucidates how hard even these first few steps are for a number of the students who attend Enganche College. I would argue that each of these steps in the admissions process are the first layer of gate-keeping mechanisms at work within the institution.

Even within the first steps of admission to Enganche College, the process of resocialization and the acquisition of, and reorientation towards, a value system antithetical to their own short-term interests begins to go to work on these students’ lives almost immediately. Take for example, the first step in the application process. While providing the personal information the college requests may not be problematic, identifying their course of study when they are the first to attend college and when they have few, if any, college educated people in their lives to guide them is a much more difficult and ethereal concept to grasp. The questions on residency and citizenship are even more problematic when one considers that a significant number of the residents in WA, 230,000 are undocumented (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011).

A number of my students may have been brought here without documentation as children and may even have been born citizens. Perhaps because their parents possess no legal documentation, they are afraid or unable to express this to an institutional authority for fear of political or legal reprisal. From the number of conversations I have had in my five years here, I know that this is true in a number of my students’ and their parents’ lives. Even payment of what is generally perceived as a nominal fee of $30 proves problematic to students and their families in light of the low wages, high rates of unemployment, and general financial insecurity that plague the lives of those who reside in the region. My students’ economic insecurity and disadvantage is especially true when one considers that I have on numerous occasions served as a financial life line and lender to former students who have little to no credit but are in need of
financial assistance. I once had a former student wishing to return to school, a mother of three in her late 30’s, come by my office crying and indirectly asking me if I could help her with the five dollars she was short for her application.

I also had another male student in his late twenties whose pay check failed to come in borrow three hundred dollars to hold him off until his next paycheck. While lending money to students may seem inappropriate for a teacher to do for his students, the educación my mother ingrained within has left me with a clear understanding that I should always, even at great personal cost, be compassionate with those less fortunate than myself and be willing to help those whom I can see are in need of assistance. In both of those cases, as in many other situations, my educación did not allow me to ignore the pleas of those who I could see were in need of the help that I knew I could extend to them. Even the final step of the admissions process, attendance of a new student orientation, poses the problem of value reorientation for students.

The seemingly benign and helpful practice of an orientation aimed at ensuring students are given the appropriate information they need to be successful in college appears to be disjointed from the economic and personal realities students from the broader community have to contend with. The disjunction becomes even clearer when the economically impractical mandatory nature of attendance at the new student orientation that lasts between an hour and an hour and a half, without which students will not be allowed to register, forces students to have to choose between school and work. Students placing school as a priority in the short term results in few, if any, tangible and material benefits and returns in their life. While middle class children are afforded the luxury of placing school first, the poverty and diminished quality of life more socioeconomic disadvantaged students experience daily does not afford them that luxury.
Our students cannot wait two years, sometimes more, to see returns from the daily choices they make. That is just impractical and in light of the material deprivation they experience it would almost be an irrational choice for them to make. Choosing school over work ultimately culminates in an increased discomfort in students’ quality of life since my removes the potential of an open schedule and open availability for the already limited employment opportunities in the region. The very institution that espouses to afford them the opportunity for a better life ultimately makes the difficult present realities they are contending with much more acute. Choosing school over work limits the types of monetary returns from employment that students need to mitigate the material deprivation in their lives. Inversely, choosing to go to work enriches their present quality of life to some degree and affords them the opportunity to fend off the all-consuming poverty that encroaches on the lives of so many of the region’s residents. The latter choice ultimately helps buffer them from the present deprivation that characterizes life in the region but shuts them off from the opportunity for a better life in the future.

In sum, many students I have spoken to have shared with me that they are damned if they do go to school and damned for even longer if they do not. When work is scarce, money is even scarcer, and child care is expensive. It is absurd to ask students to consider attending a mandatory advising session if it means having them miss out on potential earnings that will soften their present misery. The tension students experience in making this decision becomes much more pronounced once school starts and they have to find childcare and work for numerous hours at various impractical times scattered throughout the day so that they can attend class. If students are able to get past the gate-keeping and value reorienting mechanisms of the admissions process, they still have to contend with the quintessential institutional gate-keeping mechanism; a standardized placement exam.
Considering the disproportionate placement of an overwhelming number of entering students into developmental courses, 85% (NWCCU, 2012), Compass is the mechanism that I think poses the greatest challenge for students. The Compass assessment is one that far too many of my students have communicated to me is far removed from anything they learned in high school. The academic performance of students has historically and contemporarily been measured through the administration of standardized exams because they have generally been “considered to be a measure of academic achievement, or what others have variously termed academic ability, cognitive skills, or human capital” (Roksa & Potter, 2011, p. 303).

Consequently, standardized exams play an increasingly important and extensive role in the lives of all students with children within educational systems as young as five years of age interacting with a variety of standardized exams. (Fine, 1991; Oakes, 1986; Warren, Grodsky & Lee, 2008)

Students at the elementary and middle schools levels have these exams administered to them for grade level placement and advancement. Students at the secondary level have to perform at a baseline for graduation and having to do the same for entrance into postsecondary institutions. Much of the pervasiveness of standardized exams is because of increasing calls for school accountability that started in “the late 1970’s, [when] a growing number of states have required students to pass state wide, exit high school examinations (SHEE’s) to earn high school diplomas” (Warren, Grodsky & Lee, 2008, p. 77). I argue that the historical and contemporary academic marginalization of Hispanic/Latino students has predominantly been administered exclusively through such standardized exams with the results of their performance on said exams extended to generalizations about their intelligence and educational performance. Standardized exams have a long, racially biased history and have proven harmful to the educational aspirations of African American, Mexican American, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students
(Blanton, 2000). The consequences of the pernicious framework scholars in the past inadvertently posited through such exams are still with us today and concomitant to student performance on these exams, the intelligence of these students has been erroneously inferred.

As a result of the administration and evaluation of standardized math or reading scores, there is often a presupposed intellectual deficiency identified amongst minority students (Arzubiaga, Nogueron, & Sullivan, 2009). In regard to the incessant nature of the deficit thinking around poor and minority students as a result of their performance on such tests, Blanton (2000) states, “it remains a pervasive notion in society that there is indeed a lag in the mental ability of minorities” (p. 1015). With increasing numbers of parents and K-12 faculty pushing the idea of college for all, and the increasing demand for the post-secondary schooling that ideology creates, the necessity of gate keeping mechanisms like standardized placement exams are one way for these open access institutions to ensure that the limited resources allocated to them are used in ways that maximize their investment.

The necessity of gate keeping practices like standardized placement exams is increasingly pivotal to the operations of post-secondary institutions. Over the last five years of employment at Enganche College I have seen far too many students in pursuit of a two year educational credential stay much longer because of the low scores students at Enganche College exhibit on these exams. Their consequent placement into developmental coursework turns a two-year academic endeavor into a three, four, and frequently even five-year sentence. As will be chronicled in the next section, the reasons I posit for the abysmal graduation rates at Enganche College encompass what I perceive as its depersonalizing institutional processes, especially as it pertains to the advising process and the quality of students’ K-12 educational experiences that place a disproportionate amount of them in developmental education courses.
Depersonalizing Assault: Arrival, Advising, and Selection

On advising day, between 30-75 students from the three larger communities of Sunnyside, Prosser, and Grandview, as well as the other smaller, outlying unincorporated communities of Mabton, Granger, and Toppenish all stream through Enganche College’s doors eager to learn about college, what it will be like, how it is different from their high school experiences, the degree plans Enganche College offers, and what potential career plans they could or should pursue. Many students exhibit a joyous demeanor and frequently make comments that have led me over the years to believe they are relieved to be free from the all-constraining and freedom inhibiting public school system and many students whom I have spoken to in the past five years and have been employed here have even commented as much. They appear to me to be happy to be free.

Other students, a good majority of older students, appear to be less content. Many of them appear haggard, disheveled, unkempt, and all-around appear to bear the effects of poverty on their faces, bodies, and their clothing. A number of students come in with dirt from the fields still on their clothing and shoes or with their work uniforms on. Some of them, those who have probably worked in the fields since they were children, have had their skin darkened by the sun so that their skin is a dark, brown-black hue. Others, the more fortunate ones, have had their skin only slightly burned so that it evinces a light reddish hue. Irrespective of the community from which they arrive, with limited exceptions, the great majority of students arrive academically underprepared. The great majority of the students I interact with also arrive unaware of what to expect at the campus and are frequently oblivious to, and unaware of, how their race and socioeconomic location have served to place them here at this open enrollment institution. The fact that these students are beginning their academic journey at an open access, community
college system, institutions where an increasingly large number of low-income and minority students are choosing to attend (Goldhaber & Peri, 2008), is a reflection of their place in the broader social order.

Access to such institutions is generally afforded to those students who are usually academically unprepared for, and/or financially unable to attend, more selective four-year institutions (Goldhaber & Peri, 2008). Even more disturbing to me as an educator is how naïve students are about the depersonalizing and alienating experiences awaiting them at Enganche College. Once students enter Enganche College, they are forced to begin to navigate the physical and social space of the institution with the former being much easier to navigate than the latter. From my observations, it is not the physical space of Enganche College, but its social space comprised of bureaucratic, middle-class, Anglo-centric normative structures that will serve the greatest impediments to my students’ success in college.

Almost immediately after their admission to the institution and arrival to the campus students become subjected to what Freire (2013) defined as dehumanizing and depersonalizing educational experiences. I would argue that beginning with the advising process students are relentlessly subjected to a set of what Goffman (1961) defines as degradation rituals designed to accustom them to the powerlessness and depersonalization that they will continually be subjected to throughout the duration of their educational career. During the advising process students are slowly and methodically stripped of the unique social identity they possessed before entering Enganche College. The depersonalization I just discussed is especially evident in the new group advising process Enganche College recently implemented on campus. Whereas the faculty used to meet with students on a one on one basis to advise them about the courses they should take, the professional goals they have as well as answer any questions they have about college, in
order to streamline the advising process for faculty and the students Enganche College’s leadership instead decided that a group approach would prove more effective.

In the new advising process students are identified by their student identification number (SIN), herded together in groups of 10 or so and forced to wait for up to 15 minutes in a hallway until they are ushered into a room. Once inside these students are sorted into classes within Enganche College based on their academic performance on a standardized assessment, their course of study, and spoken to in a general way about the courses they should take. The entire time few, if any of their particular circumstances are discussed in any detail. The depersonalizing procedure for advising discussed above is new and I suspect it was ultimately put into place as a result of the campus leadership not seeing gains in retention. Unlike many of my colleagues, I feel like the mandatory group advising they instituted at our campus is really impersonal and depersonalizing.

After one advising session, I even bet my colleagues five bucks that not one of us could recall the names of even five of the morning and five of the evening students we served in a session and the academic or professional goals they shared with us. In the cases where students for various reasons arrive late we are directed to turn them away and instruct them to sign up for a second appointment. If they miss their advising appointments, irrespective of the reasons for doing so, the institution has institutionalized a practice of blocking those students from registering for further courses. As if that was not counter-productive enough to the institutional aim we have of increasing retention, helping students persist, and helping elucidate the complex process of college navigation for these first generation college students, we move these students’ registration appointments back in the calendar, ultimately limiting the number of available courses in which these students can register.
Apparently, I am the only one of my colleagues who sees these institutional sanctions as being counter-productive to what we are trying to do. From what I can glean from my observations when discussions about advising have arisen, the great majority of my colleagues are consumed with scheming up ways to continually ratchet up the sanctions students are subjected to for non-compliance. I think the reason for this indifference is because my colleagues are oblivious or indifferent to the socioeconomic realities of students’ lives. I support my college and colleagues but what kind of “real consequences” for non-compliance can we as an institution introduce into these students’ lives that the racism, sexism, and classism in society has not already introduced? In case my colleagues have not noticed, many students are already living with the “real consequences” of their race, sex, and the poverty these things introduce into their lives.

My students already have to contend with domestic physical and sexual abuse, inadequate housing, low wage, low status employment or unemployment, and perhaps even a boss that will not let them skip out on work for 30 minutes without threatening to take their job away. What other kind of “real life” consequences do my colleagues think we as an institution can introduce into these students’ lives that they have not already had to contend with? Are we going to deny them a post-secondary education? Judging by Enganche College’s graduation rates, we are already doing that. From my perspective as a minority educator, the last thing these students need is for one of the only institutions that can provide them a slim chance of escaping these very difficult life circumstances is to introduce rigid guidelines that marginalize their already slim chances of upward socioeconomic mobility even further. As a minority educator I think my colleagues and I are here to serve these students in ways that help them. I personally do
not want to be privy to institutional processes that are counter-productive to their educational success and that impede their already difficult educational trajectory.

If the whole purpose of redesigning advising was to make sure that students are retained and persist, I am not sure how amenable such depersonalizing interactions and processes are to those ends. Instead of moving towards the viewpoint I hold in how to best serve student advisees, my colleagues are moving in the opposite direction, a direction that I predict and anticipate will hurt students and the institution's effectiveness. The new advising process ultimately forces me to treat the students I advise as nothing more than cogs in a machine and depersonalized sources of revenue for the institution. During advising the personal relations, professional accomplishments, and academic signifiers students had acquired outside of Enganche College are almost immediately negated by the ritual administration of a standardized assessment: Compass.

The effects of the standardized placement assessment are especially pronounced for students who previously were in the top ten of their graduating class, possessed high GPAs, and considered themselves “good students” but scored so low on Compass that they were placed into developmental courses. At Enganche College, the educational credentials these students possessed and the leadership positions they previously occupied mean little, if anything, now that they are a part of Enganche College. If they were the salutatorian, valedictorian or the president of their student council, had a high GPA, or were a high performing student, it is of little significance to the institution they are entering. My personal observations and conversations with students have taught me that the personal relationships that just a few months after graduation defined their identity for the great duration of their lives including friendships and familial ties are now of necessity going to become an obstacle to a great majority of students’ academic
progress and success. The loss of relationships is especially true for the Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students for whom family and personal relationships generally mean so much. For these students these chiefly expressive relationships often serve as a buffer against the poverty and marginalization that poor racial minorities encounter throughout their lives (Conley, 2007).

As I briefly alluded to above, the depersonalizing and dehumanizing resocialization process of post-secondary education begins in advising with students being given a nine digit SIN that usually begins with an 865 or 830. The SIN comes to be the unique form of identification that this depersonalizing and dehumanizing institution has for the thousands of individuals within it pursuing the American Dream, or their version if it, and comes to be the chief criterion for the contact it has with them. Beginning with enrollment even students’ names, the preeminent source of self-identification, will be of little utility within Enganche College and will come to be supplanted by their SIN through which they will be identified and sorted within the institution. The implications of my seemingly benign symbolic act cannot be overstated.

According to Bourdieu (2000):

the proper name is independent of time and space and the variations according to time and place; in that way it offers to the designated individual, beyond all biological or social changes, the nominal constant, the identity in the sense of self-identity, constantia sibi, required by the social order. (p. 300)

The depersonalization students undergo hit home with me when after an endless number of advising situations where new students continually expressed a lack of familiarity with their newly minted SINs. I seriously, but jokingly and mindlessly, commented to a student that he needed “to forget his name” and “begin identifying himself through his student identification
number” since within Enganche College that is the key form of student identification. Stated succinctly, my observations over the last five years have taught me that few people here really care what students’ names are and even when they do it is of little use for looking up exam scores, previous courses, and other pertinent institutional information contained within the system.

Students often attend the mandatory academic advising sessions without their SIN or are completely unaware that they possess a specific number. To me, students unaware of their SIN is a subtle indicator of their naïveté about the situation that they have just found themselves in, or placed themselves into. They are unaware of the fact that only 25% of them will have their dream of academic success realized or that a great majority of them will see their pursuit of a degree that should take two years, become a three, four, or even five-year period of their life. In my own experiences over the last five years at Enganche College, I have seen more than my share of these students.

Students who for various economic, familial, educational, personal, and even political reasons have had to see their time here extend well beyond the two years these degrees and programs were initially structured. The phenomenon of lengthy degree conferment for many students is chiefly due to the low placement of a disproportionate amount of students into developmental courses. In the 2013-2014 academic year 96% of new students at Enganche College placed into at least one remedial math course, 62% placed into at least one remedial English course, and 65% placed into at least both (SBCTC, 2014). In spite of my own dissatisfaction with such a low success rate, this statistic has seemingly been touted at faculty meetings as quite an accomplishment and posited as a good thing by the administration in comparison to the outcomes other community colleges across the state are exhibiting. My
colleagues’ pleasure with being ahead of all other institutions across the region in terms of graduation rates of course is of little comfort to me.

If Enganche College is one of the bright spots in the community college system and are touting such a sad and pathetic statistic as a good thing, I dread to even think about what is happening in those other schools and the schooling experiences of the students who attend these schools. Ironically, the low placement of students stands out in stark contrast to the exceptionally high quality schooling outcomes that the local districts are producing in their graduation rates. One local high school even had a graduation rate as high as 89.5% (OSPI, 2014). At the same time, a great majority of the students from this local high school were being placed into remedial courses at Enganche College. The countless number of articles I have read commending my school district for its success and the number of news stories highlighting one state accolade after another that my district has received for their students’ success has puzzled me.

The trend of increasingly high graduation rates and simultaneous high numbers of students being placed into developmental courses is not unique to the region but instead appears endemic to schooling systems across the U.S.. In spite of improved graduation rates across the U.S., from 2004-2010 the number of students enrolled in remedial and developmental courses at public two-year colleges grew from 43% to 60% (Daiek, Dixon, Talbert, 2010, p. 37). Bailey (2009) in his study of 250,000 first-time enrolling community college students found that 59% were enrolled in at least one developmental education course (p. 13). Likewise, an earlier study of community college student readiness also found that “colleges required nearly one in three first-year students to take remedial courses in reading, writing, or mathematics” (Parsad, Lewis, & Greene, 2003, p. 17). As if educating predominately socioeconomically, racially isolated, first generation minority students was not challenging enough, what these statistics evince is that the
educational efforts at Enganche College are further complicated by burgeoning numbers of younger students who are graduating academically underprepared.

Of those students who do not drop out and are able to attain a high school education, an increasing proportion possess functional illiteracy and innumeracy; problems that plague about 14% and 22% of the nation’s population, respectively (Kutner, Greenberg, & Baer, 2005). I have had many of these types of students in my advising sessions. These students score so low on their placement exam that during my advising sessions with them I have to inform them with the bad news that we as an institution have no courses for which they qualify. Because they have a high school diploma the adult basic education courses offered on campus will do little for them in terms of remediation. Consequently, all I can do for students unable to place into developmental English and math courses is send them away encouraging them to practice their math and English at home or with someone who can tutor them. I am also sure to remind them that I will be here once they feel they can perform better on the exam.

Over the last five years my observations have taught me that the great majority of these students will be unable to get the help they need since the social capital these students possess in their parents and family members is characterized by limited educational attainment and limited fluency in English. As high school graduates, even if they could get past the shame of being back in a high school setting, they cannot really return to high school where the material they need to know is being taught. The reality is I really never see the great majority of these students return. These are the students the institution throws away almost immediately. At Enganche College and other two year institutions across the country students with a high school diploma but lacking the requisite skills to score high on standardized entrance exams get placed into developmental
courses, which in some cases become a “last chance gulch” for students who were served a poor K-12 education (Perin, Flugman, & Spiegel, 2006).

Once enrolled in developmental courses less than 30% of community college students enrolled in developmental reading and writing classes graduate within six years (VanOra, 2012). Part of the reasons for the delayed or stalled educational progress at Enganche College is that placement of students into remedial and developmental education courses introduces challenges to the advising process as many of the courses that students are interested in and want to take are closed off to them because of departmentally imposed prerequisites in Math and English. The purpose of these prerequisites on campus is not necessarily to leave students out of said classes, but to ensure that when they enter these courses they have a greater likelihood of success.

Consequently, the great majority of students on campus who pursue full-time enrollment status are generally advised and placed into two remedial courses, usually one math and one English course, and given one other class that has no prerequisites. Usually that third class is an introductory computer class, Spanish class, or art class since those are generally the courses without math and English prerequisites. Since the courses these students take are developmental or completely removed from what they are interested in, students tend to often view these classes as boring and demeaning of their abilities and what they believe themselves capable of academically performing. As a result, instead of sparking an interest and passion in these students for acquiring an education these courses often have the reverse effect of discouraging students from wanting to persist. It is no wonder then that these set of courses are seen as "the last chance gulch." After what I have witnessed at Enganche College over the last five years, I tend to refer to them as black holes from which few students will be able to escape.
Students have expressed to me that the material covered in the remedial courses they take is frequently material they would have covered at various elementary and middle school grades in their K-12 education and includes subject matter like simple arithmetic, simple sentence construction, and grammar. Ultimately, the material students are tasked to learn is quite condescending and elementary and the classroom environment they find themselves in is quite depersonalizing and often evokes within students a feeling of shame. One Mexican American student even shared with me that in her math class she constantly had to cope with the degrading statements of her Anglo teacher who would quip, “You can do this, my 5th grade daughter is doing this and she is not having any problems.” While I have never personally heard this sort of thing, the sheer number of students informing me of these types of comments and the similarities between what these students tell me they are being told leads me to believe that what these students are saying must be true.

While I personally have never heard these comments, I have had the opportunity to witness these math classes at work. In one instance, I observed a Math 49C/50C class that a colleague asked me to watch. As I was entering my office my colleague glanced outside of the classroom window, which is adjacent to my office, called me towards the door, and asked if I could watch the class while he went to the restroom. I enthusiastically responded that of course I could help out and before exiting the room the instructor informed me a bit about the classroom dynamics. The instructor motioned towards the students directly in front of me and to my right and stated that these students were actually working on their math and hence did not need too much supervision. There was however one student, a female on the left side of the classroom whose back was turned to us, who was taking an exam, and that I needed to “watch her.”
The instructor cautioned me saying, “If she pulls out a cellphone she’s done, and will automatically be failed” or something to that effect. The way I was being cautioned made me feel more like a jail warden or prison guard watching inmates ready to pull a fast one on me than a teacher guiding his students toward greater awareness of the subject matter they are studying. The thing that most struck me about the room and the students within it was the utter and complete silence that blanketed the room and seemed to stifle any evidence of energy and enthusiasm. The students were not interacting in any way with one another, not glancing at one another, not smiling, and not speaking. The students whose faces I was able to get a glimpse of looked completely disengaged and bored as they stared at the computer screen in front of them.

A few students were flipping pages of notes back and forth and looking up at the computer screen. It seemed to me that they were reviewing their notes and trying to make some progress on the work they had been assigned. All of them without exception looked defeated and unenthusiastic about the work they were doing. The classroom had a haunting depersonalizing and alienating ambience that was difficult for me to shake. Whether this haunting feeling emanated from the students or the class structure I am still not sure of. One of the thoughts that also passed through my mind that morning was whether or not this is what education had amounted to. Is education really about sticking numbers of students in a room, forcing them to interact with an inanimate computer, and minimizing their potential to express the more social aspects of their being by making them cease or limit the quality and duration of the interactions they have with their peers? My mind was also turned to questioning how many of these students I would even see in my own classroom since the prerequisites my department has placed on the courses my department offers have eligibility for Math 85 and English 101, courses that are three sometimes four quarters removed from where these students are.
I asked myself how many of them would think that their experience in this math classroom is what college is all about? It is not what education is like in my own classroom. I thought about how many students would become disengaged, discouraged, and ultimately drop-out because of the seemingly meaningless, disengaging, depersonalizing classroom experiences that shape the dynamics of remedial and developmental classrooms. The depersonalization that plagues developmental classes is not confined there but instead extends to other areas of Enganche College so that these predominantly racialized, socioeconomically disadvantaged minorities are generally shorn of any credibility with the institution. Students within Enganche College, especially during advising, will generally encounter a pervasive powerlessness and are generally afforded little, if any say, about the courses they are enrolled in.

Students’ powerlessness is primarily because the limited, legitimated human, social, and cultural capital which these students possess is of little utility within the middle class, Anglo-centric culture of Enganche College. The K-12 education they are afforded places 85% of them into developmental English and Math courses (NWCCU, 2012), their primary language is not spoken, the familism that helps them mitigate the effects of poverty in their life is a detriment, and because these students generally rank low in socioeconomic status their socioeconomic location has not enabled them to learn the rules that guide middle class institutions like Enganche College (Lareau, 2012). A lack of familiarity with middle class norms is because the great majority of students and their parents possess few, if any, educational credentials, and if employed, generally occupy low status, low paying occupations within the economy of the region.

My observations over the last five years and my own personal experiences with poverty have taught me that society is not very kind to people at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Their
pleas to be treated with dignity and respect are generally dismissed because they lack the middle class human, cultural, and social capital that generally affords recognition within mainstream middle-class institutions. In terms of human capital the knowledge they possess is often discredited and delegitimized because it is not accompanied by some sort of post-secondary credential. From the short time I have been a member of the middle class I have learned that only those who speak in English, formal register, and are in possession of a post-secondary credential are worthy of being heard. In terms of cultural capital these students generally lack an awareness of the rules for how to navigate bureaucratic, middle class structures. My brief induction into middle class culture has taught me that the students who lack an awareness of the rules for how to navigate these structures; a pristine physical appearance, high status attire, mastery of the English language, a future orientation, and the ability for self-advocacy, soon find themselves alienated from the post-secondary institution they are trying to be integrated into.

In terms of social capital, my observations here have taught me that these students are often embedded in lower class, ethnically homogeneous relationships that rarely afford them the opportunity to get the help they need to succeed within Enganche College. That is, because a great number of these students do not know anyone within the institution that can help them when they confront institutional barriers. They often have to resign themselves to accept that this is just the way things are. Students’ resignation ultimately leaves many students having to look for alternative sources of help and leaves them locked out of the opportunities for an education they should be afforded (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Sometimes students look for help from the wrong person as the next narrative will illustrate. Because I am identified by students as an institutional agent of Enganche College many students often look to me for help when they encounter problems.
Students knock on my door or stop me in the hallway and sometimes I am able to help and at many other times I am not. In cases of students needing advising, explanations of the degree plans Enganche College has, and some of the courses Enganche College offers, help identifying where a certain classroom or teacher’s office is, or even an explanation of what sociology, psychology or Chicano studies is, I am able to help with relative ease. In other cases, where students are being treated rudely, accused of being leaches on the social welfare system, or just being disparaged by my colleagues, I have proven myself quite the coward. Instead of advocating on behalf of what is already a marginalized and disenfranchised population, I stay silent. I have stayed silent when students have sought my help to stop some of my colleagues from telling them they are lazy Mexicans who are not concerned with schooling but are instead concerned with a welfare check, food stamps, and unemployment benefits.

In my time here I have had to hear students’ pleas for me to help them with the maltreatment they are being subjected to by my peers. Numerous students have complained to me in quite vulgar terms about the advising and educational services they are provided by Enganche College. On numerous occasions I have had students come into my office in tears and emotionally coming apart after being unable to receive institutional support from an advising session, being unable to contact a person in financial aid, or after a discussion with their instructors about their grades. Some of the comments the students inform me have been made towards them are disturbing and problematic. On other occasions students have come to my office, told me their teacher has called them stupid, informed them they lack the intellectual capacity and intelligence for the program they are pursuing or the material they are being taught, and perhaps even that they should look for a different line of work or rethink college because they are not cut out to be in this or that profession or classroom.
I have heard these student narratives quite regularly over the last five years and for the most part I take them with a grain of salt and have never taken any of my colleagues to task for such statements. I mean, who am I, an untenured new arrival to the campus to bring my colleagues into account for the ways in which faculty are serving and treating my students? Admittedly, my muted response to what I am being told may be a psychological mechanism I am using to abrogate myself of the moral and ethical responsibility I have to act on behalf of these students. I try to rationalize my inactivity and express hesitancy and doubt when hearing students’ grievances because my many years of being an educator have also helped me understand that students are not always willing to share the whole story but only that which favors their plight. Instead I lead myself to believe that these comments are not meant to hurt or be mean to the students or that these comments are not coming from a place of racial animus.

I lead myself to believe and hope that the great majority of these comments are often coming from the well-intentioned dispositions my colleagues have in seeing their students succeed, regardless of their race or class. After all, on numerous occasions my colleagues have shared with me how many students are pursuing degrees for the wrong reasons and that students should be led to pursue careers that are most amenable to their talents and abilities. I also tend to justify my inaction on the grounds that their experiences are not unique to them but something I have had to deal with quite regularly throughout my life. If I can do it, why cannot they? In my own conversations with colleagues I have had my own share of insults and mean statements levelled at me. These comments, what educational scholars and sociologists call “microaggressions.” These range from the mild “You’re Mexican so you would not understand the affinity for unflavored yogurt and dairy products of European whites” to the more abrasive “Why do Mexican students not understand that school is more important than family”? 
On another occasion in my first few days of work on campus my wife and I were even told that we did not sound Mexican because we did not have an accent. Unsure about whether my colleague’s comment was an insult or a compliment we took it as the former but thanked our colleague for such unkind words anyways. After all, we did not want to burn any bridges or ruffle any feathers with my new colleagues in the first few days of being on the job.

Microaggressions appear to me to be part and parcel to life as a minority educator. In spite of my rationalizing away of students’ concerns one of the more cogent illustrations of my own cowardice and inability to advocate on behalf of my students took place sometime in my second year when I was approached in the restroom by an older gentleman in his 50’s. The older, non-English speaking male asked me if I worked at the college, what I do, and if I could help him. I responded affirmatively stating that I would be willing to help if he made explicit the problem needing resolution.

After speaking at length about his situation, it became clear to me that this student and the majority of his peers; many, but not all of which were older, non-English speaking, high school graduates and drop outs who may or may not have earned their GED’s or high school diplomas, had been laid off and enrolled into the college’s adult basic education classes as part of a retraining program funded by their ex-employer and the federal government. The problem was this student and his peers were frustrated with the college’s inability to treat them with respect and dignity and educate them adequately in Basic English and math. After that initial meeting in the restroom, I was approached by numerous students. English and Spanish speaking classmates, old and young, male and female, seeking help for the same problem; an inability to receive quality instruction and dignity from the faculty and broader institution. Some of these students
were young, high school graduates who scored so low on the college’s standardized Compass assessment that they were unable to enter even the most basic of remedial college courses.

Other students were older and had been victimized by a U.S. economy that witnessed a sharp economic decline and as a result of economic restructuring were consequently terminated from their jobs. These students shared with me that one of my colleagues had scolded them for not caring about their schooling, not doing their homework, and ultimately only being enrolled as students because they did not want to go back to work and wanted to continue living off of the state and federal aid they were afforded after being let go from ConAgra. Despite feeling overwhelmed as the only Arts and Science minority faculty member students on campus turn to for help, and frustrated with the limited institutional support I needed to maintain a healthy role of advocacy for these students, I decided that the change I needed to see improve these students’ lives was going to have to start with me.

Despite an already taxing workload of 4 courses a quarter with upwards of 100 students, developing a secondary to post-secondary collaborative between the college and a local high school to help students successfully transition into college, maintaining my marriage, and trying to successfully complete my doctoral work, I initially resolved that I was not going to brush them off like so many others must have done to them their entire life. As a result of my decision, the first action of advocacy I took was speaking to the dean of the college about the grave concerns and needs of the students within my program and what if anything could be done to ameliorate the maltreatment of these students and the quality of the education they were receiving. Needless to say I was quite discouraged to hear my boss discuss the low educational attainment of this student population to begin with, the limited chances of success they have, and was saddened
when he began to chide me about why I was so naïve so as to believe what the students were
telling me. It was at that point that I realized the difficult situation me and the students were in.

Shortly after the discussion with my boss I decided I would myself offer tutoring in math
and English to any students in need of support and able to attend the tutoring sessions. I started
off with those few students who had initially approached me for help. We discussed the days and
times we could meet for tutoring that were most amenable to our schedules and began our
journey of learning. I was only able to tutor those students for about a year and during that year I
am certain that my students taught me more than I taught them. I learned much more about
myself, about the educational system, and the unjust ways in which society treats people who are
poor and may or may not be racial minorities than I could have ever anticipated. Not only did I
learn about the students’ lives, about their history, their families, and the goals they have in life, I
also learned about the pains of discrimination, lowered expectations, and the subpar education
that these students have been subjected to.

Most importantly, I came to learn of the humanity my students possess, the dignity they
deserve, and the responsibility and privilege I possess in advocating for the maintenance of their
dignity and humanity, even against the raw power inherent to the depersonalizing and
dehumanizing institutions that educate them. Because many of the students I tutored were high
school graduates that were unable to score high enough on the placement exam for entry into
even the most basic remedial math and English courses I asked them how exactly they had
placed themselves into this situation. Through my discussions with these students I learned that
these students felt what they had been taught in the latter junior and senior years of their K-12
schooling was too simple and elementary for what they needed to be able to do and know in
order to be successful in college. Like Delpit (2012), I am left with the realization that some of
the K-12 education the students in my community are being served is laden with lowered expectations.

I eventually stopped tutoring these students because I slowly became unable to manage the multiple needs of these students who I was volunteering to help and the work of my own sociology students. It had gotten so bad my boss called me into his office right before the end of 2013, invited me to lunch, and suggested that I needed to stop helping “those” students because he thought it was impacting my ability to be an instructor at the college and whether or not I would be able to teach sociology in the long run. He again reiterated the helplessness of these students, the limited chances of their success, and questioned the viability of my efforts to help them in light of my own future with the college. He even shared his concerns about me burning out, stating “Keith, you cannot save the world.” In spite of his warnings I continued to tirelessly help these students until my efforts became less successful than I hoped them to be.

Eventually, most of the students receiving my help just stopped attending and I eventually lost contact with all but one of them. The irony is that I came to learn about these institutional issues from the students’ perspective because it almost seems like my brown face is a magnet for other brown faces to turn to when seeking help. Since I have proven myself to be such a coward in advocating for my students I am now not too sure that is the good thing the students think it is. The powerlessness these students experience is not exclusively confined to the advising process and classrooms as I discussed above. At the campus level, students’ powerlessness follows them into the courses they are free to enroll in, the times their classes will be offered, and even the degrees they can pursue. Part of students’ powerlessness is of course a necessary consequence of the finite financial, material, and human resources afforded the institution by state and federal legislators and their post-secondary funding policies.
However, I posit that the practices that perpetuate the depersonalization, powerlessness, and alienation students experience within Enganche College are not incidental to its culture but are part and parcel, and in fact integral, to the deliberate policy of re-socialization that educational institutions have historically been committed to. The purpose for this is two-fold. For socioeconomically disadvantaged, racial minorities in pursuit of upward mobility, students for whom these practices are especially acute and prolonged, these deliberate practices prepare the students for the extensive shift in personality, disposition, and value orientation that must take place to become a part of the professional middle-class. In such a social location, the time spent in personal relationships and personal escapades become secondary, perhaps even peripheral, to work and its dictates. The students who exhibit resistance to these depersonalizing and alienating processes will generally find themselves missing class, for various personal and academic reasons, and failing courses early in their educational careers.

Conversely, my observations over the last five years have taught me that middle class Euro-American and minority students who as a result of their middle class socialization already possess dispositions more amenable to these forces quickly find themselves at home within the institution and are generally able to navigate the institution with relative ease, thereby illustrating and reinforcing their erroneously inferred “intellectual” and perhaps even “cultural superiority.” These are the students who I have observed graduate, transfer out of Enganche College, and generally begin to occupy the middle class positions they were born into. I believe that the second purpose for such depersonalizing practices is to systematically identify and quickly remove those individuals within Enganche College who prove resistant to such profound change, in themselves and in their values.
The process of identification of those resistant to interpersonal change generally unfolds over the course of a quarter or two since the process of removal generally entails academic and financial aid probation the semester following a course failure. These sanctions are generally followed by harsher sanctions like suspension for a quarter and, in the more extreme cases, suspension for three quarters or indefinite suspension. In the latter case, students are generally suspended from receiving aid until they pay for at least a quarter of courses, and exhibit and demonstrate educational success within their courses for a quarter or two. Only then will these students be allowed access to the financial aid resources they need, in many cases not only for school but in order to sustain their households and families. In most cases, my observations here have taught me that the change required for students’ academic success is so profound that few of the students Enganche College serves are able to survive.

Once the selection process described above has been completed, students enter the classrooms. The next section will chronicle in general terms the work I perform at Enganche College, within my classroom and within the campus. Within the next section I will also attempt to elucidate what I have seen transpire within my classroom and the broader campus over the last five years. Special emphasis in this discussion will focus on how the abysmal graduation rate of my institution comes to be realized. Ultimately, I argue that Enganche College’s graduation rates come to fruition as a result of the socioeconomic, gendered, and racialized dynamics of students’ lives, the K-12 schooling systems they attend, as well as the way Enganche College operates.

**Socioeconomic Dynamics of Academic Failure**

I have seen students fail for numerous reasons, the great majority of which have nothing to do with their intelligence, academic abilities, or value orientation to schooling. Instead the
great majority of my students fail because of the economic constraints they face and the challenges that poverty introduces into their lives and the lives of their families. They do not fail because they are lazy, undisciplined, do not care about school or any number of the reasons I would have believed students fail school just a few years ago. The economic pressures they have to contend with include paying rent, feeding their children, clothing their children, and all of the other demands of daily life when one is engaged in low wage, low status work. My students have discussed with me the difficulty that finances, their parents’ limited educational attainment, and their family backgrounds pose for their educational experiences. The fact that a significant number of students attending Enganche College have to engage in economic productivity to sustain their household while acquiring their K-12 education and while enrolled in developmental college courses only complicates their ability to attend class regularly and learn the academic material required for successful completion of the course.

On more than one occasion students have shared with me the stress of having to miss school because they needed to take care of a younger, or older, sibling or family member. I have had countless other students share with me that they missed class because they needed to work in the fields to help their parents out financially or because they were so physically and mentally exhausted from the work they did after school that they could not go to school the next day. Many of my students have discussed with me how being poor impacted their performance at school in both the K-12 system and Enganche College in other ways aside from attendance. Many of my students have shared with me how an inability to go to school because they were sick and an inability to pay for and acquire a doctor’s note denied them the opportunity to make up the work they had missed; they ultimately suffered academically for it. In other situations many of my students, employed but in need of more hours, have missed class because their
employers have called them into work and the few extra hours they could acquire were going to be the difference in whether or not they would be able to pay the rent for the month, buy enough groceries, or pay for amenities that made their poverty less acute.

In a real way, the situations above illustrate the implications of a worldview shaped by the urgent necessities of the present that generally accompanies poverty (Lewis, 1961). Frequently, my students have to choose between going to class and not receiving any immediate returns for doing so until many years into the unforeseen future or going to work and picking up a few more hours and reaping the fruits of that choice in the immediate one to two week period of a paycheck. I have seen my students fail because their mothers or parents are dying of a cancer or battling an illness that their socioeconomic disadvantage does not allow them to fight against.

They fail because the electricity at their home has been cut, they cannot afford internet or a home computer or because they or their parents are unable to pay rent and they consequently have to spend their days moving in and out of loved ones' homes. They fail because those who have to work a full time job to feed and provide for their children have an employer who changed their schedule on them at the last minute and moved it to the same time the class they initially registered for is scheduled to be offered. My students fail because after a refund from their financial aid is disbursed they are unable to afford the very expensive textbooks required for their courses every ten weeks or because the only vehicle in the family has broken down and they are unable to acquire transportation to school until the car is repaired. The socioeconomic dynamic is clear in that the majority of students on campus struggle with balancing work and school, where the low wages, limited employment opportunities, under-employment, and unemployment of the region mean that missing one day of work for school could be the
difference between paying rent, putting food on the table for their family and their children, or even the loss of a job.

At the same time, missing school to avoid each of those things from manifesting themselves in my students' lives and to earn a bit more money that may improve their quality of life, also may mean being dropped from their classes, missing an exam, flunking out of one or more courses, ultimately leading to academic and financial aid probation or suspension, and likewise leading to limited life chances in terms of graduation from college, limited employment opportunities, and a lower quality of life. Yes, my students fail, but it is not because they do not care about their schooling. The socioeconomic pressures discussed above are further exacerbated by the cultural value of familism common to Latino/a and socioeconomically disadvantaged individuals; a cultural adaptation to the economic marginalization and poverty they are forced to confront (Anderson, 2000; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Wilson, 1997). Constantly having to repay favors to friends and family members at their convenience because they at some point took care of your child when you could not afford a babysitter, made an automotive repair to your vehicle which you could not afford, or even housed you when you got evicted leaves you indebted in a web of reciprocity that at times can make meeting your own priorities difficult. Lack of financial resources is not the only issue contributing to these students’ academic failure. Many other times a lack of money only exacerbates the educational disadvantage these students have to contend with, a disadvantage that poverty introduces indirectly into their lives.

**K-12 Failure**

Many of my students, who do not fail directly as a result of their socioeconomic disadvantage, do so indirectly through the poor academic training these students received in the K-12 system. I am still not really sure how it is that my students, or any students for that matter,
can be seated for 12 of the most instrumental years of their developmental lives, graduate from their local high school and arrive at Enganche College unable to read, write, and do math in a meaningfully advanced college entry level. I know one of the reasons for this is the way public schools are generally funded. The inability of the local school districts in my community to acquire greater operating revenue is tied to the educational attainment, occupational prestige, income levels, and property values of the residents who call the region home. Without such revenue it becomes difficult for school systems to attract the talent these students need to educationally succeed. But even more troubling to me is that before students arrive in the sociology, ethnic studies, and Chicano studies classes I teach that have math 85 and English 101 prerequisites many of my students have already passed through two developmental English and at least two, but more regularly three, math courses. Yet I still see a number of them are unable to read, understand, and break down the discipline specific academic content I assign them. Some of them even have trouble doing the simplest math of averaging their final grades that I assign them at the end of the quarter.

On more than one occasion in spite of being deemed eligible for English 101, I have had students struggle to read the college level texts, articles, and reading excerpts written in English that I assign them. Perhaps they could read the assigned work in Spanish but that would be of limited utility to their own educational progress since I am not sure how many of the college instructors and professors they will have in the future are bilingual and will be flexible enough to assign them readings in their native tongue. Sometimes, I have found that they are unable to read even the simplest sentence on a rubric, in a textbook, or on their paper and I have found it out at the end of the quarter when it is far too late for me to help these students in any meaningful way. I posit that students’ linguistic alienation may be the result of a lack of assimilation into the
English language, limited exposure to academically rigorous English texts throughout their K-12 schooling, and the racial isolation that characterizes the great majority of these students’ lives.

When the great majority of my students’ family members, neighbors, and peers possess limited educational attainment and limited English fluency I imagine that the opportunities to hear, speak, and read academic English in any meaningful ways are quite scarce. Unable to help my students with tutoring, mentoring or practice, they simply fail, frequently never to be seen by me again. How exactly did they get through their English classes without being able to read robust academic material and why did it take me so long to notice this, you may ask? My observations at Enganche College have taught me that many of the students I have worked with have simply mastered the art of pretending. Because they are unable to read the material of which our daily discussions will be comprised, they simply listen to their peers’ responses and parrot a patchwork of the comments their peers have made, often quite successfully.

It has always struck me as odd when these students have attended class regularly, participated in class discussions, and yet they have failed their exams and never submitted their assigned work. When I have asked some of these students why they did not submit an assignment they will often respond that they have been too busy, have forgotten, or have simply been unable to complete the assignment. There are two examples that epitomize my interactions with such students and how it is exactly that I came to discover the challenges they are facing. One of these students was given an education that insufficiently prepared him to read and write English at a postsecondary level and left him underprepared for a postsecondary education. I discovered that this student was unable to read at the college level only in the last two or three weeks of a ten week quarter, when after he had presented his paper in the most unsavory and unsatisfactory of ways, I asked him to read the rubric I was supposed to use to grade him.
I waited until after class and told him something along the lines of “sir, how exactly do you expect me to grade that? What grade am I supposed to assign to such an inadequate presentation? Please come over here and read to me the first criterion on the rubric I am supposed to use to assign you a grade.” After several moments of this student standing in silence, perhaps a minute or two, I erroneously inferred that he had been reading the paper in silence when I asked him to “read the paper to me out loud.” “Tell me what grade I should assign your presentation,” I uttered. After a few more moments, he again stayed silent and I again erroneously inferred he was reading in silence, did not understand me, or was being blatantly unruly and insubordinate. I repeated to him in a much stronger tone, “read to me what that first criterion on the rubric says sir, now.”

At this point, the student began to slowly utter and sound out the first few words of the sentence in that first criterion, “s---o---ci---o-----l---o----gi----cal and Ch----i----c---a----n----o s---t---u---d---ies.” The entire scene unfolded in front of my eyes for what seemed like an eternity, a miserable, heartbreaking eternity, before like a switch that turned on in my head, I realized that this student was unable to read. As soon as I realized that this young man was unable to read what I had asked him to read I immediately asked him to stop reading. I thought to myself, “my God, it took this student this long to read three, basic and easy words and he did so with great difficulty, how much longer was it taking him to read the assigned academic material each week?” The assigned reading for the quarter was a dense, abstract, discipline specific seminal, up-to-date sociological study of Mexican Americans in the U.S. and I thought to myself, “Had he even been able to read the study?” The student had attended each and every class, almost religiously. He had participated in class discussions and roundtable sessions about the assigned readings with his classmates all quarter long, most of the time only after his classmates
had shared their own opinions, but somehow whenever the time came to submit reading summaries of the assigned readings, summaries which were due before the class discussions, he never submitted anything.

Suddenly my student’s previously inexplicable zeros made sense to me. In order to get the answer to the questions racing through my mind, I asked my student point blank, “sir, why did you not tell me you did not know how to read or had problems reading?” It was at this point that my student, a young man in his early twenties, broke down into tears and informed me that he did not know how to read. I too began to cry with him and asked him why he did not inform me that he had problems with reading much earlier. With only two or three weeks remaining in the quarter it was now nearly impossible for me to intervene and help him. He shared with me how he had been pretending to be up-to-date with the readings the entire quarter, mostly through listening to what I and his peers were saying about the reading material, piecing it together in some coherent structure, and uttering his own unique piecemeal account of that information.

With tears in his eyes, my student shared with me how he did not know how he had gotten this far in his education and how he had passed his other courses. The student shared with me how he felt that his teachers were just passing him and how wrong it felt to him, but how he also needed to pass the classes so he could continue to work towards his goal of becoming a video game designer. I was not sure if he was speaking about his experience of being passed through the system, in regard to his high school or college schooling, but either way it was quite problematic to me to see that he was now in such a predicament. I thought to myself, “How did he get through the English 101 course that serves as a prerequisite for entry into my class?” We discussed his feelings for quite some time, I even closed the blinds to the classroom since our tears were no longer able to be masked, and we ended the discussion with me informing him that
it was unlikely that he was going to pass the class, but that I wanted him to keep pressing forward and not give up, on me or himself.

He ultimately failed the course, was placed on academic probation, and was able to return the next quarter on academic and financial aid probation. The student was only the first of far too many students whom I have seen inadequately served by their K-12 education in my time here. Another student, this time a Running Start student, also had the same patterns of classroom behavior that the earlier student I discussed exhibited. Like the former student, this student too attended class regularly, engaged in classroom discussions, and overall exhibited a genuine interest in the course content. The student also failed to submit any of the required reading summaries and as was the case with the student discussed above I found out this was chiefly because this student possessed a problem with reading.

In the seventh or eighth week of the quarter, I saw this student reading some biographical poster that was used to decorate the walls in our classroom. When I asked him to walk over to a different poster, one adjacent to where he was, and read to the rest of the class the quote on that poster, he stared silently at the poster. After a few moments, not more than one or two, I erroneously inferred that he had misunderstood me and was reading the quote to himself. I asked him to read it out loud to the class and not silently. The student began to painstakingly sound-out and pronounce the words on the page, “T---h---e- w----o-----r-------ld brrrr-----eeee---aaa----ks e---v---e-----ry-----n------e.” Having learned my lesson after my prior experiences with such students, at this point I realized that this student too was unable to read and was being embarrassed in front of his peers so I immediately asked him to stop and come back to his seat. He complied. Ultimately, my student too failed my course as well but was allowed to make it up during a summer course at his high school since he was a senior who had already been slated to
graduate. I still see both of these students alongside many others like them in the hallways at Enganche College and I wonder how they are getting by?

I wonder how these students are doing in their classes. Are they learning? How many of their teachers know they are unable to read the great majority of the work they are assigning them? Will they be okay once they leave this institution and how will they find work? Why was this being done to my students? Would this have been done to them had they been middle class, Anglo children? Today, I am not sure how I could have helped these students without lowering my expectations and being unfair to their peers in terms of how I applied my grading. Perhaps I could have done something like provide one on one reading and tutoring sessions to help them, though admittedly with 95 or more students a quarter such a strategy appears highly unlikely. Ultimately, these two students’ stories illustrate how my students’ inability to succeed in post-secondary education is the product of the limited and subpar K-12 education they have been provided.

My students are given an education that ultimately places a number of them into developmental English and math coursework from which few escape and leaves a great number of my students ill-equipped for the academic rigors of post-secondary schooling. It is a quality of education that has been deemed sufficient for people like them because of where they live. As if the socioeconomic dynamics and poor K-12 educational schooling of my students’ lives did not complicate their efforts to attain a post-secondary credential enough, still one more layer of inequity is yet to be discussed. My students’ home life and genders further exacerbate the challenges they face in realizing their dreams of a post-secondary education and attainment of a better life. The next section discusses the gendered and domestic dynamics of academic failure in greater depth.
Gendered Dynamics of Academic Failure

Since my arrival to Enganche College I have had the privilege, but misfortune, of many of my students sharing with me some of the reasons they fail academically. As I discussed above sometimes these problems are related to the economic hardships and quality of K-12 education they were served but those are not the only reasons a number of my students fail. One more dynamic that contributes to their academic failure is related to the domestic situations and gendered inequality that shapes their home lives. It is the most difficult for me to discuss. I have had more students than one would believe share with me the horrible things that are happening to them as adults or have happened to them in their homes as children. Unfortunately what has happened to some of my students includes the contemporary physical, mental, and sexual abuse they are currently experiencing or that which they experienced in the past as children.

In the last five years I have had a couple of young men and numerous other young ladies share with me their horrific stories of being physically, sexually, and emotionally abused within their home by family members and family friends. In my first year, one young lady, a smart, hard-working, and cheerful Anglo student with tears streaming down her face, shared with me that she had been molested as a child and the person who had molested her, a family friend who had been entrusted with babysitting her, was being released from prison for his crime. She shared with me how scared she was that he would see her, how ashamed she felt that this abuse had been done to her, how powerless she felt in the whole situation, and how disruptive this abusive experience was to her educational performance. The next year another young lady, this time a Mexican American, shared with me that she had been molested as a child by a hired farm-hand who her father had employed to work on the farm. With tears streaming down her face she too shared with me how ashamed she felt that this had happened to her, how powerless she felt that
she was unable to get back at him for what he had done to her, and how it had impacted her education.

If some of my female students are not sexually abused they sometimes have to confront abuse in other forms. There have been countless other young ladies who have shared with me the emotional and physical abuse they are experiencing at home. Some of the abuse my students experience is from family members, family friends, and even significant others. I could go on endlessly with these narratives. One young lady excelling in my class begins to be abused in her home, begins to miss more and more class sessions, ceases to submit assigned work, and eventually disappears from my classroom. Another young lady, molested as a child, is in an abusive relationship with a male spouse from which she cannot escape, consumed by the psychological and emotional burden of coping with abuse, and without any other recourse she fails her class and finds herself removed from the postsecondary educational institution that afforded her the only opportunity of escape from her life of abuse and poverty.

An older married woman finds herself a prisoner in her own home. Her poor educational performance, the result of the emotional and psychological stress and overwhelming hopelessness that accompanies being controlled economically and physically by her overbearing husband. The woman finds that she is only allowed to leave her home to attend classes, is expected to return home immediately after her courses conclude, and is so controlled by her husband that even the length of her hair is under his dictates. She too, like the rest of the individuals I just mentioned, eventually finds herself unable to successfully balance her familial and educational obligations in a way that allows her to succeed. Exhausted and humiliated by her vain efforts to succeed, feelings that are reinforced by her husband’s reveling and unending “I told you so’s,” she humbly resigns herself to her lot in life. She relinquishes her will to fight the
sexism in her life and instead resigns herself to being an uneducated, socioeconomically disadvantaged, racial minority mother with little power to improve her and her children’s life chances and circumstances, and eventually withdraws herself from Enganche College.

The domestic and gendered dynamics of my students’ lives are just one of many cases where my students’ academic performance is more the result of their inability to control the chaos in their lives than their individual efforts to achieve academic excellence. As I just mentioned, the realities of my students’ lives are often disruptive to their educational endeavors and the domestic and gendered dynamics of my students’ lives often impede their abilities and efforts to succeed. As a result I have learned a painful lesson. My students’ academic success is usually not a reflection of their abilities, talents, efforts, or even valuation of education. More frequently their failure is associated with the socioeconomic resources they can leverage to calm the storms that encompass and shape their gendered and racialized lives.

What makes matters even worse is that the majority of the women in the above narratives are often the primary breadwinners without which their abusers would have a much more difficult financial situation to work through. A great majority of these women counted on financial aid to support, sometimes entirely, their households in lieu of income through employment. The fact that these women have nowhere or anyone to turn to but a community college teacher who himself has not been trained to deal with these issues and who himself has no place to send them or way to aid them is problematic. That there are no nearby institutional resources like battered women shelters that these students can turn to is a disgrace and for me a reminder of the low priority my predominately poor, minority students’ lives have in the broader social order. That students have shared so much of their pain with me has impacted me and shaped how I perceive the work I do. Because of what my students have shared with me, it has
become difficult for me to compartmentalize between seeing my students as human beings in need of quality K-12 schooling, material resources, and a person in their life who cares about them or as undisciplined and indifferent students whose work does not merit a passing grade because it is laden with errors in clarity, coherence, and lacks a clear demonstration of content mastery.

Personally, I do not know if the failing grades I enter for my students are going to lead to them being physically or verbally abused at home, lead to the loss of one of the only steady sources of income they have in the Pell grants they are awarded every ten weeks, or even if the failing grade I assign is the final nail in the coffin for these students’ attempts at a better life through a post-secondary credential. Professionally, I do not know if the failing grades I enter are really a reflection of their efforts, talents, and abilities, or if they are instead more of a reflection of their socioeconomic disadvantage, the sexism and abuse in their life or the result of the inadequate quality of schooling they are afforded because of where they live.

Where I used to erroneously believe that students who failed to submit assignments on time, submitted inferior quality work, failed to attend class, and failed my courses did so because they were lazy, did not value education, or just because they were subpar students, I now understand that this is not necessarily the case. Instead, these students are more likely than not fighting the socioeconomic, racialized, and gendered dynamics of their lives and the quality of work they submit is more often than not a reflection of that battle. Even more troubling to my soul is that I play a part in a system that disenfranchises the great majority of the students it purportedly seeks to serve. And I do so pretty cheaply; for food, clothing, shelter, and transportation. I feel so impotent and helpless in the face of a system that I know is not serving
these students as they should be served. Instead I find that I am complicit in the
disenfranchisement this system is perpetuating upon them.

Should I as an educator care about, or be concerned with, what is happening in my students’ home lives and consequently impacting their academic performance? Should the amount of income a student's family has, or lack thereof, the educational attainment of their parents and consequent ability to help their children on homework, whether or not a student's parents have a job and can consequently afford their child a quiet place to study, or even the cultural and linguistic value systems a student's family possesses be factors that I as an educator take into consideration when assessing the educational performance of my students? If one considers these questions from a moral perspective, one could answer the question with a definitive yes. I am sure educators and educational leaders would all like to avoid inflicting undue punishment upon victims of circumstances beyond their control.

Punishing a child with low grades because their parents are poor, possess limited levels of education, are unemployed, or possess cultural values and linguistic systems that differ from that of mainstream American society would probably not rest well with most American educators and school leaders. Yet, in my estimation, school systems do this day in and day out. Conversely, one could just as reasonably argue that taking all of these factors into consideration when assigning students’ grades would be just as unfair, especially if it means exempting some students from certain educational expectations that other students in whose lives these factors are absent will be expected to uphold. All of these questions, while having no definitive answer, are at the heart of what I wrestle with daily and these issues have begun to take a toll on my emotions. At one point last year I even called my mother and began to cry frantically about what I was having to witness being done to the predominately minority students here and my own role
in their disenfranchisement. I cried because of the immense sadness I feel for the students who are unable to get the help they need and the help they deserve.

I cried because my students are denied help that I believe they would be afforded if they had been born a different color, had not been born socioeconomically disadvantaged, or if they had not been born the children of immigrants. I cried because of the helplessness I feel watching a prolonged, drawn out extermination of the hopes, dreams, and aspirations my students and their parents have for an education and a better life. I cried because of the pain and misery I know my students are living with and the future pain they and their children will experience as they get older every time I enter a zero for their work and every semester they fail my courses. I cried out of the immense sadness I feel for those students who I was unable to help, whose educational limitations I was unable to ameliorate, and who because of my failure and inadequacies as an instructor and the high academic standards I hold them to will never come to know the comforts of my smug, middle class life.

I cannot shake my awareness that every zero I enter may deny my students the opportunity to have a life like mine, where food is in abundance, transportation is reliable, and work is liberating. A life where pain is medically treated, where risks can be taken with some assurance of being buffered from any shortcomings or errors they make, where deadlines can be extended, mistakes can be made, a place where they can speak and be heard. I cried because over the last five years I have spoken to far too many brilliant students who just graduated from high school but whose undocumented status means they are unable to find financial aid for school and consequently will be sentenced to a life of poverty and agricultural field work. As if the dynamics discussed above were not enough for students to have to contend with, the students
who choose to attend Enganche College have still yet one more obstacle to overcome, the structure of the institution itself.

The fact that Enganche College is a rational and cold bureaucratic institution makes it difficult for these students to find someone to help them navigate its labyrinth and perhaps even find someone who cares. That Enganche College is a bureaucracy is an important point to remember since “an individual’s daily existence [and ultimately his or her life chances] is fundamentally shaped by structured and accumulated opportunities for entering multiple institutional contexts and forging relationships with people who control resources and who generally participate in power” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 17). To make matters worse the fact that many of these students are the first in their family to attend college only accentuates their inability to elucidate a complex college navigation process. For these students college navigation is a complex process that I have seen over the last five years of my work at Enganche College swallow up and consume the students attempting to navigate its labyrinth. While the socioeconomic, racial, and even gendered dynamics of my students’ lives frequently culminate in a great majority of my students’ academic failure, as the above discussion illustrates, my awareness of these dynamics has only complicated the work I do even further. In the next section I discuss these challenges at length.

**Personal and Professional Challenges**

The challenges I face as an instructor at Enganche College are intensified by my own rather limited K-12 educational career and my advanced post-secondary educational attainment. Because I dropped out of high school I am left uncertain about the level of competence the average middle class high school graduate should possess. Even more unclear to me is the numeracy, quality of writing, and reading comprehension socioeconomically disadvantaged
racial minorities should possess, students who are not being afforded the opportunity to attend a middle class schooling system like I illegally did. Should I expect the quality of instruction to be the same for both of these student populations? If not, why not and if so why do I see such a disparity between what I think my students should be able to do and what they demonstrate they can do?

The situation of unclear expectations is only made worse by my having attained my advanced degrees. If dropping out of high school has left me unclear about the skills students should have when they graduate from high school, because I am now close to completion of my doctorate I have already internalized a set of skills that disconnects me further from understanding where my students are in terms of their abilities and skills. For example, at one point in my life I could not even read a few pages of a text but now as a result of my schooling I possess an ability to read dense, discipline specific material that can run into hundreds of pages in length and I can do so in a short period of time. Where at one point in time I was unable to write even two pages of text I am now as a result of my schooling able to write up to a hundred.

As a result of the interpersonal changes I have undergone I find it difficult to empathize with my students when they say the 10 page reading I assign for homework is too long, hard to read, and boring. I can no longer comprehend how writing a two-page essay about any assigned reading in one week is too difficult and overwhelming a task. As an instructor the challenge of unclear expectations leads me to constantly ask myself why I am so disconnected from what I believe my students are capable of doing and whether or not my education has led me to unfairly hold my students to high academic standards they cannot meet because of the quality of schooling they were afforded and their placement in the early stages of their educational career. Ultimately the greatest professional challenge I have is identifying the academic expectations my
students can reasonably be expected to attain and the academic abilities they should possess when they arrive in my classroom. The implications of this quandary extend beyond the mere philosophical nature of these questions into the more practical domains of the work I do, chiefly grading and assessing my students’ work.

The professional challenge of grading my students' papers is centered on the lack of clarity in what I should be assessing, what I should be looking for, and what I should be willing to accept in terms of quality, coherence, writing, and content mastery. The dilemma I have is that I am unsure about whether or not I am grading these students too harshly and expecting too much from high school graduates in terms of grammar, spelling, and general coherence in structuring arguments and logic. The situation I am in becomes even more pronounced for me when I consider the formatting, structuring, and citations within their papers. Are my expectations too high, unrealistic, or misaligned? Because I myself am a high school dropout I do not know what to reasonably expect from a high school graduate.

What does a high school graduate perform like and what academic abilities should they at a bare minimum possess in their first year of college? I am unable to differentiate whether or not my students are not taking their academics seriously enough and hence submitting sloppy work or if the school systems they attended inadequately prepared them for what are reasonable, postsecondary educational expectations. As a result of my experiences wrestling with these questions, I have frequently begun questioning if I even know what I am doing. I used to know what I was doing as an educator or at least I used to think that I knew. Today, ten years into my career as a professional educator, after having taught at various grade levels from 4th and 5th grade to high school juniors and seniors, to freshmen, junior, and senior undergraduate students across various disciplines ranging from science and social studies, to economics, government,
and history, to anthropology, sociology, and Chicano studies courses, I now feel much less confident in knowing what exactly my role as an educator is within Enganche College.

The irony is that I now have more education, greater experience, and am much more knowledgeable about education than I once was. Yet, I am less confident, more uncertain, and less clear about my role as an educator. My identity crisis as an educator became acute for me after one incident that transpired in one of my first years here. I was grading a writing assignment on the sociological imagination where students were asked to identify and delineate between two troubles and two issues in their lives and develop the relationship between the two. After grading a few papers I found myself seeing that a great number of my students’ work was quite unacceptable and consequently earning a failing grade. Most of the papers failed to meet the minimum length requirement I assigned, others were not formatted correctly, some lacked coherence and did not exhibit even the most superficial or cursory mastery of the content, and still even others had some clear, egregious, and blatant typographical, grammatical, mechanical errors in terms of the writing.

The great majority of papers had a combination of all of these issues and made comprehension of their writing difficult. To make matters worse, these were some of the things I listed on my rubric and informed students that I would be looking for. I even had a whole class session on American Psychological Association writing guidelines, academic writing conventions, and how to find someone to proofread their work. The moral and ethical problem that arose for me was that in this assignment, in spite of these clear limitations, the personal, intimate, and painful stories these students shared with me opened my eyes up to the seemingly insurmountable challenges they had overcome to get this far in their educational careers and their stories were a testament to their courage, tenacity, and undying fortitude in facing difficult life
circumstances and experiences. Through their assignments I learned that one student had attempted to commit suicide as a teen and continued to battle depression, another had undocumented parents who were only in the U.S. because their medical practice had been shut down for refusal to pay the cartel the bribes they required, and still another student was living in a home where her being a female meant that she was discouraged from going to school and she was being treated as a “little slave” who was subjected to the most menial work within the home.

On top of these dynamics, the great majority of my students’ papers discussed the poverty that characterized their life. In spite of the numerous issues with their work discussed above I could in some ways understand their writing and what they were trying to say to me. I understood their stories and consequently was able to share in the pain they wrote. The problem was that in spite of these strengths I could see that their work did not merit a passing grade. In fact, even when I was teaching fourth and fifth grade I would not have seen, much less accepted, such blatant errors in the work my elementary school students handed in.

Consequently, I could not find it within myself to assign a passing grade to these students’ essays in light of the errors of the great majority of their work. I wrestled with understanding how their work could not merit a passing grade if I was able to understand what they were attempting to communicate. I wrestled with whether or not I should have overlooked those errors because "I was able to understand what they were saying." One part of me wanted to see them earn a passing grade but another part of me kept saying “You cannot do that to these students, the work they submitted is not worthy of a passing grade.” I kept telling myself that if I assigned a passing grade to these students I was really only hurting their long term future prospects of educational success since I knew that my students had to be capable of producing work of a much higher quality. After all, was not the problem that these students had been told
throughout their K-12 schooling that the quality of work they submitted was good enough and was not that the same thing that had gotten them placed into developmental coursework upon graduation from high school?

I was all too familiar with the lowered expectations my students had been subjected to in their schooling in the K-12 system since my work within K-12 systems for five years frequently exposed me to colleagues and administrators who merely taught to the standardized tests students needed to pass for placement and graduation. I was especially sensitive to these lowered expectations at Enganche College where my congeniality with students has frequently compelled them to share with me what is happening in some of their other classes. I have had students share with me that their math teachers have administered exams to them alongside with the answers. I have had students share with me that they often do not even have to go to class since the classes are so easy that they do not have to attend. I have also had students share with me that they know their teachers do not even read their essays.

When I have asked these students how they know their teachers do not read their papers they respond that that they know because they have even written comments into their essays far removed from the subject material they have been instructed to write about and never been reprimanded for it. One affluent, academically stellar student even shared with me that she wrote “Mr.______ I know you are not even reading this so I am just going to write this meaningless sentence in here just to prove my point.” The moral and ethical dilemma this assignment introduced to me was further exacerbated because it also served as a painful reminder of my own role in marginalizing their chances of success through the work Enganche College hired me to do. If I assigned them a passing grade I was really only undermining their own prospects for attaining a degree since assigning a passing grade to their work would have indirectly told them
that their subpar quality work is good enough and acceptable. I also knew that in assigning them a failing grade I was not only lowering their grade point average but impeding their educational progress and ultimately reducing their chances of attaining the degree I want to see them attain.

After grading the papers, I returned to class and shared with my students my crisis. I informed the class that I greatly appreciated each of their stories but that their writing was lacking in many ways. I told them that in my estimation it was counterproductive to their own educational prospects and chances for success for me to ignore them, and therefore, needed to address it in their writing. I told them that these issues were limitations that I as their teacher was responsible for helping them identify and redress. Today I am not so sure that I am helping my students when I identify these limitations in their work. I have begun to think I am perhaps only impeding their best efforts at acquiring an education or credential that has the promising potential of improving their quality of life and the quality of life of their children.

I do not want to see my students fail since that is not why I got into this thing we call education. Instead I want to ensure that they are getting what they are paying for; a person to help them become stronger, more knowledgeable students, better writers, and more critical thinkers, especially through the identification of their weaknesses and limitations in those areas. I used to believe that I knew what students wanted in a teacher, especially in light of my own experiences. I have always attempted to be the teacher I rarely had. I have always wanted to provide students with the skills I knew I was not taught or given. I have always attempted to teach to students the things I should have been taught as a student and attempted to be the teacher who I believed I should have had by my side helping me hone my skills. Instead of having a teacher like that great teacher I aspired to be, many of my teachers opted for bubble sheets, put
ambiguous check marks on my papers, rarely if ever assigned any writing assignments, and when they did, they never informed me about what I did right or wrong on my essays.

Because I have tried to be the teacher I always thought I deserved, I have inadvertently given myself or earned the reputation on campus as one of the hardest teachers and consequently started to question my understanding of things. What is the role I play within the institution and in students’ lives? Maybe being the teacher I always thought I deserved, one who pushed me beyond what I thought I was capable of achieving, is not what these students need or are looking for or what they're paying for. I am made aware of this when students begin to chastise me for teaching them like they are pursuing a sociology degree. My students often become overtly angered by my high academic standards and respond by saying, “I’m not going to be a sociology major so just give me the basics and stop getting all specific about this stuff.”

Other students, perhaps because of the way the K-12 system trains students to perceive an education do not understand that education is about much more than what is going to be on a test. Just last year a set of students informed that the biggest waste of their time were my lectures. They explained to me while they felt that they had learned a lot in my class, especially from my lectures, and perhaps in my class more than any other, they still had the audacity to state to me, "Mr. Reyes, no offense, but why do you waste our time with all this lecture material if some, if most of it is not going to be on the exam?" Needless to say I was left quite taken aback. I merely responded that education is about much more than a test or even a letter grade. As a result of these experiences I have recently started to think that maybe they're paying me for a credential irrespective of whether or not I help them in getting any of their academic limitations addressed. If I am honest, I am not so sure I would have appreciated more writing and reading assignments in my earlier years of schooling, even if these things would have made me a
stronger student. Perhaps if my teachers had done to me what I am doing to my students in holding them to high academic expectations and standards I would have just lost motivation and been turned off by what they perceive as time consuming, boring, and perhaps even meaningless activities.

After all, many of these students will not be able to see the tangible and intangible benefits and returns of these activities until many years from now and long after they even remember who I am. Consequently, lately I have begun to feel that my grading is a bit too harsh and my expectations are a bit too high. Instead of teaching my students I feel like I am punishing them for what their K-12 educators failed to teach them. Lately, I have begun to feel like I am punishing my students for what they failed to learn because of familial responsibilities, domestic responsibilities, financial obligations, and the quality of K-12 schooling they received. I thought I used to know what I was doing, but now I am not so certain.

Should I even be grading their papers for clarity, logic, coherence, and grammar? If I do not help these students identify these errors and limitations in their writing and thinking, will anyone? Should I just look the other way when confronted by these issues? Do these things even matter in education anymore? Judging by the perspective of some of my colleagues in the English department, the great majority of my concerns are outdated, obsolete relics of a racist, Western, Eurocentric educational past that educators would like to forget. My view of what students need to know is completely irreconcilable with a postmodern ethos whose center is fluid, where standards are up to each individual to decide, and where truth is what I want it to be, not what others have determined it to be. In such a culture, rules of grammar, mechanics, formatting, and even meaning are subjective and void of any substantive meaning, except perhaps of disenfranchising and marginalizing whole populations of "othered" students, many of
which are socioeconomically disadvantaged, racial minorities who were never taught these rules. My English colleagues and I have an ideological difference around this issue.

While I view the skills discussed above and helping my students acquire and internalize these skills as paramount for their success, my English colleagues often say that the students will pick these skills up as they continue their education and expecting them to learn these skills now will only serve to discourage and ultimately disenfranchise the great majority of them since they are not yet ready for such advanced skills. I could not however disagree more strongly. As a minority student myself, I believe that my colleagues’ perspective of ignoring these limitations is only an option for middle class students whose parental education and socioeconomic location afford them the opportunity for failure and afford them the luxury of being sheltered from the consequences of that failure if and when it takes place. From my perspective, failure to help socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority students identify and redress these limitations will mean economic and educational ruin in the long term, not only for oneself but for one’s offspring.

The issues of my grading and the high academic standards I am holding my students to have become more pronounced because my reputation as a hard teacher and hard grader has had a depressing effect on my enrollment numbers. I have had many, many students with whom I have great rapport inform me that such narratives are circulating on campus about my courses. Countless numbers of students have told me that they like my classes but "my classes are just too hard," "I give too much work," and “I expect too much.” Students deride my approach even in regard to those things which are in their best, long-term interest as students like expecting them to perform at the highest academic level they are capable of performing. Expecting students to submit only the highest quality of work they can produce, proofreading their work for
grammatical errors, making sure their paper is coherent, asking them to submit work that is formatted somewhat correctly, expecting them to attend class daily, and sometimes even requiring them to read dense, academic materials is apparently too much to ask of my students.

Irrespective of the reasons for why, in any way I look at it, there is a clear pattern of declining student enrollment in my courses. From the time I started teaching here to the present and even between quarters from fall to spring my numbers have dropped. The situation is complicated further by the fact that students have informed me that there are other less time consuming courses that students can choose from. Students have shared with me that these courses generally require much less reading, writing, and studying than my own courses. The problem of enrollment has become much more acute for me since thanks to the addition of other faculty members, students today are offered a greater variety of what students define as “easier” courses from which they can choose.

From what students have shared with me, these are courses where attendance is not mandatory, where the writing and reading standards are much more lax, or perhaps even non-existent since no writing assignments are required, and where passing the class is almost a guarantee. Though I cannot blame these students for choosing the path of least resistance, to add insult to injury, an even more insidious practice is these same students are telling their peers to avoid my courses as well, since in their estimation, credit can be earned in a much easier, less time consuming, and less academically challenging set of courses that other instructors on campus offer. Unfortunately, students often engage in my practice and encourage their classmates to do likewise without thinking of the implications of such choices in their academic futures, especially if they transfer out. There have been a few students who have transferred out of Enganche College and returned to campus to thank me for the high standards I held them to
and others who return informing me that they did not know the academic expectations they were going to be held to were going to be so much more difficult than those I held them to. Because of my declining enrollments and the intense competition I have with my peers to draw students in my class I have increasingly felt the pressure to lower my standards and to be less expectant with my students when grading their work so as not to turn them off from the other courses I will be offering each successive quarter.

The only thing that has kept me from doing so is that I feel like I am compromising my integrity and selling myself to the lowest bidder if I do so. I absolutely refuse to lower my expectations just to keep my job. Instead, I optimistically hope that my numbers do not drop below a level at which my job becomes expendable to the institution and hope that my students will come to the realization that I am really only trying to help them become what I know they can become, the best. My hope in the latter point is not ill-placed since a few students who have appreciated my efforts to educate them have emailed me and encouraged me to hold their peers to those same high standards I held them to. The most poignant example of these types of students is epitomized in the emails two young ladies sent me after they successfully transferred out of Enganche College and began attending a four-year institution. I include excerpts of their correspondence to me below since their messages touch on the subject matter I have discussed above. The first email below highlights the narratives that circulate on campus around my high expectations and encouraging me to not let up on holding students to them:

Mr. Reyes,

Thank you for treating us like college students. I know a lot of students complain about your standards and expectations but I want you to know I really appreciate these high standards. Do not lower them. They really kept me going and gave me a reason to keep trying harder. We need more instructors like you to keep pushing students instead of instructors who do not really care about us. Do not feel bad when students give you a
hard time about your classes. They just aren’t used to instructors who care and they do not understand the concept of college level work. I hope you know how much it means to me that you treated us like adults. Not too many instructors treat us like we are smart enough to attend a university. So thank you, your classes have had a great impact on me, greater than any other class I have taken... just thought I’d let you know that.

Thank you
XXX

Another student emailed me sentiments akin to those expressed by the correspondence above in regard to the academic rigor I hold students to and the lack thereof for students in some other classes:

Hi Mr. Reyes,

...I want to thank you once again for challenging me and all of your students in your courses! Even when my high school did not prepare [me] for college, I feel as though some [of] the classes at XXX did the same. I was quite used to the easy A’s that some classes would give me. However once again I feel a little cheated well mainly on math. But you know what, I know it’s still traces way back to my high school years. For example, my sister calls me when she needs help on her math. You know the questions that she asks? How to add fractions!!! What high school gives diplomas to students that cannot do elementary math?? This is the education we have. I just feel so cheated... It’s not fair, but I know you and Ramirez and a handful of other instructors who still believed and challenged there [sic] students!!

My student later emailed me back encouraging me not to let up on the academic standards I expect students to attain and reminding me that I am a good instructor:

I am taking this teaching and learning class and whenever the instructor lectures about what a good teacher is like i always think of you, keep it up Mr. Reyes!! Who cares if the students whine about how much their is to read or write in your classes, when they go off to study elsewhere (if they do) they will think of you and say, yup he was a good teacher, (not that this was the case for me). I knew your where [sic] a great instructor from day one, well after the fourth class I took with you, just kidding.

Sincerely,

Irrespective of these students’ encouraging words the great majority of my students do not see the education I provide them in the same light and the work I do on a daily basis is not as
enthraling as the above emails would lead one to believe. In the next section I discuss the rather monotonous daily activities my work is comprised of.

**Daily Routine and Working Conditions**

My work day usually begins at about 7:00 am, long before the great majority of my colleagues, except for the custodians and cashier, and usually ends around 5 pm, long after the majority of my colleagues have left. Over the 8 week period of time I spent on data collection I spent an average of 65 hours a week in my office Monday through Saturday. I generally arrive on campus, start my computer, and arrange my books. I have to do this because I have boxes of books that are usually obstructing the path to my desk, seat, and even monitor. Rare is the day when I can open my office door and get straight to my desk and seat. The first twenty minutes of time in my day before my first class, at whatever time that class is scheduled, are usually spent in prayer for myself, my wife and child, my students, my colleagues, and the broader community. I follow prayer by reading the Bible, then perusing and responding to new emails and preparing my lectures, PowerPoint presentations, and class activities for all three of the day classes I am slated to usually teach.

When I started 4 years ago, the time I had seemed to be much more abundant than it is today. Where one or two hours before class used to be ample time for such preparation, one to two hours today seems quite insufficient. As a result, I often find myself scrambling to sufficiently prepare for one class, and little else. As of late, I have been challenged by the limited time I have to prepare for any class beyond my first. The preparation process for my classes is quite labor and time intensive and generally entails perusing classic and contemporary studies published in journal and book form, the textbook required for the course, and my old lecture notes and slides. Such preparation is the reason why every morning when I come in I have to
clear the path from my door to my desk and seat. By the end of my work day, all the books, journal articles, and stacks of yet to be graded papers that I sifted through the day before in preparation for my classes, are everywhere.

Irrespective of the time I devote to organizing my office it remains a collection of piles of journals, books, boxes, and papers. Aside from the time I spend in preparation for teaching and doing advising, I also spend a great majority of my time grading students’ essays. The classes I teach are writing intensive courses because my experiences in postsecondary education have taught me that this is ultimately one of the greatest skills I can help my students acquire and refine. As I discussed above, structuring my classes as such is the area I am most confused about in terms of whether or not I am doing a service or disservice to my students. As a result of all of the challenges I discussed above, lately it appears to me that I was hired by Enganche College to not help students achieve their dreams, but to instead help a system that en masse disenfranchises minority students like those I serve, identify and remove those whose dreams are not worthy of coming to fruition.

Embedded within all of the teaching, advising, and grading aspects of my work, is what I think may be the most important part of the work I do. As the above emails illustrate, encouraging students alongside exposing them to the academic rigors of college and equipping them to be able to handle those rigors appears to be the most salient aspect of my work in my students’ minds. In light of the hopelessness I mentioned earlier, a hopelessness that seems to consume the region, my work generally entails encouraging students not to give up in this depersonalizing and alienating institution where students are generally rendered powerless against the dictates of their life and the institution. I frequently and with great regularity speak to my students about never giving up, never letting other peoples’ opinions impact their own
realization of who they believe themselves to be and who they can become. For example, I recently emailed a student who alongside her siblings’ spent her entire childhood in and out of the foster care system because both of their parents were battling substance abuse and drug addiction, a disruptive experience in and of itself.

My student shared with me that her academic advisor had called her stupid and informed her that perhaps the professional field she was pursuing was not as amenable for a student of her quality as she had initially thought. I often wonder if middle class, Anglo students hear such things in their academic advising sessions. As the above narrative illustrates, on top of the socioeconomic and personal challenges that my students have to contend with, challenges that often consume them and render them defenseless, my students have to face a discouraging and demeaning set of experiences within Enganche College that make success even more difficult. The powerlessness these students experience in confronting these challenges becomes even more pronounced because of the poor K-12 schooling these students have been afforded, an education that leaves them with limited literacy, limited creativity, and even fewer limited life chances for post-secondary education and upward social mobility.

**Conclusion**

In terms of the interactions, discussions, and interpretation of the events that took place between my colleagues, students, and myself at Enganche College, it is important to remember that "each of us, both objectively and subjectively" (Levi, 1988, p. 75), live out our lives and the work that I and my colleagues do is shaped by the racial, economic, and personal experiences unique to our lives. The observations I have made are my own and are chiefly the result of my own location within the institution as a street-level bureaucrat. Consequently, this analysis of life and work at an HSI is just one, of many, interpretations of what transpires in such institutions. In
this chapter I demonstrate how enrollment at an HSI marks a clear departure from the prior K-12 educational experiences for a great majority of the predominantly socioeconomically disadvantaged, racialized minority students I serve.

Irrespective of their efforts the great majority of the students I have observed and worked with at Enganche College find that they are unable to overcome the effects of their class and gender and ultimately unable to remedy the substandard education they were given for the great number of years they were in the K-12 schooling system. Students quickly discover that the detrimental effects of the limited learning that took place during those years, in mathematics, reading, and writing are beyond whatever positive gains can be made from studying one or two hours a day once they are in college. My conversations with students have taught me that many of them when they were in high school, erroneously believed that they could cultivate and develop the academic skills necessary for post-secondary success and catch up once they exited high school.

They have shared with me how they blew off the conversations and discussions they had with their parents about how seriously they needed to take their learning only to find that it is too late to do so once enrolled in college. Similar to what Kirst (2008) found, many of these “students [erroneously] think that their high school course and graduation requirements are enough to prepare them for four-year, broad access schools” (p. 46). I have found that many of my students find themselves wishing that their teachers and principals had done more to better prepare them for this educational environment and wishing that they themselves could go back in time and do things a bit differently. So as not to place all of the blame on the teachers and school administrators who educate these children, I must make clear that some students understand that
a great portion of the responsibility for their poor schooling outcomes rests on their own shoulders.

Many of the students I have worked alongside of have made clear their own understanding that they too have contributed to their educational plight and consequently exacerbated their own misery; be it due to a youthful naiveté, sheer hubris, or blatant laziness. They have openly acknowledged that in choosing to deliberately pursue less educationally meaningful endeavors like popularity, social status, and some of the other things that give youth a great sense of purpose and esteem, these students deliberately granted their academics, and by consequence their futures, a lesser priority. They soon find that no amount of time and effort is sufficient to get them where they need to be in terms of their academics. Further frustrating their efforts and complicating their situation are the socioeconomic challenges and adulthood responsibilities that come to the forefront of life once one graduates from high school.

Challenges and responsibilities that many of them had previously been exempted from because of their status as children in the K-12 system and that are now a part of daily life. Unlike my students’ K-12 schooling experiences, here they soon find that merely going to class is not nearly sufficient to merit success, that their first draft of a paper is not good enough for a passing grade if it is laden with grammatical errors and incoherence, and that the consequences of failure are real, with an imminent academic or financial aid suspension being always just around the corner if they fail. Over the last five years, it has become quite clear to me that prior to enrollment at Enganche College students had become accustomed to a system of schooling where deadlines mattered little, if at all, and grammar, content mastery, and coherence mattered even less. Likewise their prior schooling experiences had trained them to place the brunt of responsibility for their academic success, or failure, on their teachers. In this chapter I also
illustrated the consequences of the disjuncture between K-12 and post-secondary systems in the curriculum, instruction, and academic expectations these students are afforded.

Students entering Enganche College quickly find themselves ill-equipped and, even more frequently, unable to handle the increased academic demands and expectations of their instructors in terms of their writing, reading, and critical thinking. Students are frequently unaware of, or at a minimum indifferent to, academic writing conventions that determine whether or not a paper written by a student merits a passing grade. Unlike their prior schooling experiences, students soon discover that these academic conventions; coherence, an ability to delineate between plural and singular nouns, where distinctions between past and present tenses make the difference between a paper that is coherent and one that is convoluted, and where spelling and grammar are paramount to whether or not a student’s paper exhibits mastery of the discipline specific content, ultimately determine whether or not they will experience academic success and move closer to the academic and professional goals they have set for themselves.

On top of aforementioned academic expectations my students’ academic success is further complicated by the socioeconomic demands that they have to contend with, demands they were generally sheltered from while students within the K-12 system. I imagine that the situation for these students as they receive their diploma on graduation day and apply to admission to Enganche College appears to me to be akin to what took place within the Roman coliseum. In this analogy, some poor, hapless ill-prepared and ill-equipped soul is placed into a life or death situation with only the keen awareness that something hell-bent on his or her destruction is going to be flying out the barred gates that at the moment hold that destruction back. In the same way, as these students walk across that stage, are handed their high school diplomas, and apply to Enganche College, the society around them, with all of its racist, classist, misogynistic inequity,
is just waiting to take a hold of them, unleash its wrath, and begin the process of destruction it wielded on their parents. Parents who had hopes of helping their children escape the same system that took them captive.

Despite the various differences in geographic location, age, citizenship, generation since-migration time spent residing in the U.S., educational attainment, and general demeanor towards education students’ experiences at Enganche College and my own are similar. The majority of students like those I serve at Enganche College and in the broader community generally have all of the statistical odds stacked against them in terms of educational success and life chances; exactly like I did as a child. They are racial minorities, their parents have limited levels of educational attainment, they are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and a good number of them come from single parent households. Perhaps in a real way, my efforts to help these students are my way of trying to save myself and to redeem myself all those years ago.

The deliberately depersonalizing and alienating processes that they encounter from the placement exam to the new student orientation and academic advising all serve as initiation rituals that overtly convey to students their utter powerlessness within Enganche College. Students’ powerlessness begins with the administration of a gate-keeping standardized placement exam, is further reinforced by the advising process that begins to sort students and channel them into their respective location within the institutional hierarchy of academia, and ultimately culminates in the academic failure of a great majority of these students as is illustrated by Enganche College’s graduation rate of 25% (NCES, 2013). The academic failure of a great majority of the students who attend Enganche College is exacerbated by the socioeconomic and gendered dynamics of their lives as well as their K-12 schooling experiences.
The irony of my experiences as a minority educator at Enganche College is that the horrific trauma that I experienced and witnessed in my childhood, with all of its brutality, indifference, and destructive implications, has come back into my life through the lived experiences of my students. Only now instead of being the recipient of such trauma I am only a witness to it through the shared discussions and relationships I have built with my students. In a way, my current situation is worse than my previous one. I find myself unable to change my students’ experiences with racism, sexism, economic disadvantage, educational disadvantage, and ultimately marginalization of their life chances. I am unable to change these things in my students’ lives and at a minimum I cannot even help stop the physical abuse, maltreatment, and inadequate K-12 schooling that impacts their post-secondary educational performance. It is increasingly becoming clear to me that all I can do for them is enter a failing grade.
CHAPTER VI
THEORETICAL, IDEOLOGICAL, POLICY, AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The previous two chapters were an objective and subjective examination of my own educational trajectory and the work that I currently perform as a minority instructor at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the Northwestern portion of the U.S. Theoretically, each of the chapters contributed to the educational debate about whether American K-12 and post-secondary schooling systems serve as conduits of upward mobility or serve to reproduce societal inequality for poor and minority students who occupy the lowest socioeconomic rungs in society. Chapters four and five were each comprised of autoethnographic case studies that served as existential validations of each theoretical perspective, respectively, and leave for the reader the decision about which of these perspectives possesses greater empirical validity.

The former chapter presented a case study of my experiences as a minority student who experienced upward social mobility and concomitant economic success and the latter chapter was a case study of my experiences as a minority instructor who has witnessed the futility of the efforts of a great majority of his students in experiencing educational success. In chapter four, my own educational experiences as a minority student served to affirm the functionalist view of schooling systems as instruments of upward mobility for the most destitute and marginalized segment of students in society (Dimaggio, 1982). At the heart of chapter four was a special emphasis on my own educational trajectory beginning within the K-12 system and ending with the doctoral candidacy I currently possess. The socioeconomic and racialized dynamics of my schooling were emphasized since the same characteristics that defined my schooling in the Southwest are those that, irrespective of the geographic location where Latinos reside, shape the
schooling experiences of the predominantly Mexican American/minority and disadvantaged students I work with in the Pacific Northwestern region of the country.

In the historical tradition of viewing schools as mediums of upward social mobility (Dimaggio, 1982; Duncan, & Murnane, 2011; Farkas, 2008), my educational autoethnography in chapter four documents how a quality education, even when illegitimately gained, has the potential to mitigate and even offset the harmful effects of racism, socioeconomic disadvantage, domestic abuse, and a single parent family structure in a minority student’s life. The positive effects of a quality education like the one I was afforded were ultimately so powerful and enduring that long after I exited the K-12 schooling system I reaped its benefits, even after making a set of poor choices, like dropping out of high school, engaging in illicit substance abuse for over five years, and eventually being incarcerated.

The socioeconomic disadvantage, racial minority status, single-parent family structure, and set of poor choices that characterized my life were ultimately obscured and of little consequence to my life chances by the impact of the solid K-12 education I was afforded. In spite of my later success I must admit that the geographic mobility, racism, physical and emotional abuse, physical and psychological dangers embedded into the ecology of my childhood neighborhoods, poverty, parental unemployment, and even schooling practices like tracking that characterized my childhood all contributed to my initial K-12 educational failure. However, because my mother was able to circumvent the district practices that should have forced me to attend school in my socioeconomically marginalized, racially homogenous neighborhoods, I was afforded a high quality, middle-class education amongst predominately Anglo peers that later allowed me to not only excel in post-secondary institutions but also served to mitigate the effects of the poor choices I made and the actions I took as a youth.
Inversely, the autoethnographic study of my work as a minority educator at Enganche College in the previous chapter validated the stalled educational attainment and limited life chances minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students have grown to contend with when a quality K-12 education like the one I was afforded is denied them, even when they do not make the same set of poor choices that characterized my educational career. The autoethnography in chapter five documented my experiences as a minority educator at a post-secondary HSI, where I presented the other side of the theoretical social reproduction/social mobility debate. What I have witnessed transpire in my work at Enganche College ultimately substantiates more critical scholars’ arguments that schooling systems serve to reproduce societal inequality more than they reduce it (Fine, 1991; Foley, 2010; Luykx, 1999; Oakes, 1985; Ochoa, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2001).

Chapter five juxtaposed my academic success as a socioeconomically disadvantaged racial minority with what I see as a minority instructor at an HSI in the Northwestern region of the U.S. The previous chapter illustrated how ecological factors that characterize life in the region, postsecondary standardized placement exams, depersonalizing institutional processes, and the curricular disjuncture between K-12 and post-secondary schooling systems all merge in perverse ways to contribute to the educational inequity in my minority students’ lives, ultimately undercutting their life chances, with few exceptions. In chapter five I documented how I not only witnessed but also participated in the educational disenfranchisement of my predominately minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students by holding them to high academic standards that a great majority of them had not been academically prepared for. I also discussed my attempts to emotionally, professionally, and personally make sense of what I have witnessed at Enganche College.
What I have witnessed is the death of countless numbers of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ dreams and their ineffectual efforts towards acquiring an education that affords them a greater quality of life and a chance for them and their children to improve their life chances. Chapter five also chronicled how these men and women faced some of the same challenges I confronted as a child only a great majority, if not all of them, have no alternative schooling systems to turn to like I did. Because of the racial isolation and segregation at work in the region where they live, the great majority of my students are subjected to the quality of education deemed sufficient for people like them. Consequently, they are locked into a life of limited educational attainment and limited life chances for themselves and for their children.

Instead of having some other schooling system to turn to, these students are forced to attend schools that provide them with a high school diploma but advertently or inadvertently place an overwhelming majority of them into developmental courses from which I witness few students escape. The autoethnography of my work at Enganche College also illustrates how the educational disadvantage, racial, gendered, and socioeconomic challenges my minority students faced were only exacerbated by depersonalizing and alienating processes institutionalized into post-secondary educational institutions. These processes lead a great number of these students to engage in futile help-seeking practices with a relatively powerless minority educator who is too weak to forcefully advocate on their behalf for fear of reprisal from his predominately Anglo, middle class peers. Taken in its entirety this study illustrates how the quality of K-12 schooling that minorities are served can have a pronounced effect on their future educational attainment and ultimately their life chances. When chapters four and five are seen alongside one another my experiences as both a minority student and minority educator experientially validate that if
Latino/as are going to succeed in the U.S. they are far too frequently forced to make themselves prey to schooling systems where they are forced to distance themselves as much as possible from their minority identity, expected to relinquish the cultural values and dispositions they have been raised with, and even sever the relationships that have helped shape them into the persons they are (Anzaldua, 2007; Garcia, Wiese, & Cuellar, 2011; Ovando, 2003; Rodriguez, 2005; Valencia, 2011).

In order to experience the educational success I have, I posit that minority students have to allow the American schooling system to kill off portions of who they are; like I myself have done to a certain extent, culturally and linguistically, or they can choose to retain their identities and accept the fate of limited life chances with little hope for upward social mobility for their families and communities (Anzaldua, 2007; Luykx, 1999; Rodriguez, 2005; Spring, 2008; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Latino/as in pursuit of educational success and the “American Dream” are in a real way caught between a rock and a hard place; death to self and a life of relative comfort or retention of your identity and a life of limited life chances. I find it hard to envision any alternatives to such realities. Premised upon both the experiential, subjective and objective, academic knowledge that I present in the earlier chapters, here I present my own views on the theoretical debate. Here I will develop a discussion that frames the study in terms of my own positionality. I will not pretend to exude some artificial display of objectivity, which irrespective of a researcher’s best efforts, appear nonetheless. I cannot pretend that what I am witnessing being done to my students, the minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students who attend Enganche College, is inadvertent or serendipitously “just happening.” In this final chapter I utilize a Chicano-centric voice that draws strength from a CRT methodology and argue that what is being done to my students is the necessary outcome of a ruthless and brutal bureaucratic,
Anglo-centric educational system vested with the interests of the powerful in a racially, economically, and gender stratified society.

Admittedly, as strong a voice as I hope to have, I feel some trepidation in speaking because of the rather nihilistic view through which I see the education system that I have been coopted into. I feel that by publishing my real thoughts and feelings about schooling in the Northwestern region of the U.S. and work at an HSI I will jeopardize my own livelihood. Speaking my mind may diminish my chances of getting my dissertation signed off on and ultimately limit my and my family's life chances. My view of work at Enganche College is so nihilistic that the closest thing I can compare my experiences to is a slaughter house of sorts. Death is all around me, only instead of dead carcasses I see the remains of countless numbers of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ dreams.

My experience as a minority educator at an HSI has impressed me as analogous to what has historically transpired to members of various ethnic minority groups who are brought under the control of a dominant group. Throughout history, the dominant group has often engaged in the practice of selective inclusion where a small number of handpicked minority group members have been coopted into the system of privilege in exchange for keeping their ethnic peers in line (Acuna, 2011; Rosales, 1996; Massey, 2008; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). In exchange for maintaining the system of oppression the privileges these “tokens” were frequently afforded included food, shelter, easier work, status, and perhaps even a bit longer life. Africans were recruited by Anglo slave masters to capture slaves, Mexican elites in Texas were recruited by Anglo settlers to convince Mexicans to relinquish their land, and Native Americans were sent to boarding schools and reintegrated into their own communities to convince their peers of the success of Americanization. My experience working at Enganche College mirrors such experiences. Since I
am apparently one of the only Mexican American faculty members amongst a sea of Mexican American students’ faces I get paid to help maintain a system of educational marginalization.

I Had a Dream

In order to frame my rationale for my analogy more appropriately, I would like to share a dream that I had in my second or third year of teaching at Enganche College, shortly after the educational marginalization of my students started becoming clear to me. It was a horrific, frightening dream which made little or no sense to me at the time. My dream shook me from my sleep, left me sobbing uncontrollably, and took some time to recover myself from. In the dream I was attending what appeared to be a large, upscale party, a black tie event of some sort. At this black-tie event there was a symphony or orchestra playing and my wife and I were seated some close distance from the front of the seated musicians. Between us and the band was a large, unoccupied dance floor.

I cannot exactly recall if the music the band was playing changed in tempo or if they had taken a break from playing and resumed their set, but all I remember is that as a few people began to move on to the dance floor, someone involved with the service of the guests, prompted and implored my wife and I to get up and begin to dance. I recall that I was adamantly opposed to the idea of dancing since I knew that I have not been trained to dance to such music nor did I possess a preference for such music. It was a fancy, middle class symphony or orchestra-type music I would associate with Anglo culture. As my wife and I reluctantly began to dance, the floor was overrun with chaos as individuals began to be dragged off of the dance floor and began being beaten by personnel of some sort associated with the event. Eventually, those who were dragging people off of the dance floor and beating others came to me and my wife.
My wife and I became separated in the midst of the screaming, crying, and shoving that overtook the dance floor because of the brute force of those assaulting the attendees. It was sheer pandemonium. Like those around me I was terrified and began screaming and crying for my wife whose hands had been pried away from mine and from whom I had become separated in the chaos of the situation. Rather than removing me completely from the premises as I had initially believed was the purpose of their brute force, those who dragged me off of the dance floor took me to a corner or isolated area of the locale and handed me a white handkerchief. That white handkerchief was eventually forcefully and tightly wrapped around my right wrist by those who were dragging other people around and assaulting them. My captors instructed me that the handkerchief sheltered those who possessed it from the grotesque abuse, violence, and oppression all around me. They also shared with me that those without the handkerchief would be subjected to unending abuse. Shortly thereafter I was led to the back of a room. It appeared to be a dish washing room of some sort and I was instructed to work.

I cannot recall the type of work I was instructed to do although I can recall that the work was difficult. However, it was much easier than the work those around me were being compelled to perform. While I was being led to a back room for work, I was almost immediately beset on all sides by throngs of what were very hysterical people. These people were desperately sobbing and grabbing at my arms and clamoring and pleading in whatever way possible for my attention. I cannot recall every physical detail of what the people around me looked like but I do recall that their physical appearance was horrifying. These people’s bodies bore the marks of abuse and emaciation. Their faces were pale and bore the scars of hunger. Their clothing was worn and tattered with an overall disheveled and neglected appearance. These people closely resembled the half living corpses in the film, “Night of the Living Dead.”
After working for some time I was informed that the handkerchief I possessed could be given to another person. I cannot recall who informed me but it made why the crowds of desperate people around me were pleading for my attention and grabbing at my attire. With this little white handkerchief whomever I wished could be sheltered from the abuse that so rampantly characterized my surroundings. It was in light of this knowledge that I began to frantically search the premises for my wife only to be beset by an even larger mob of individuals grabbing at me and pleading with me to give them what was understood by all of us as the only salvation and escape from this horrendous nightmare of a place. Screaming my wife's name, crying, and pleading for them to leave me alone I pressed forward to the best of my abilities and resisted their efforts to slow me down as best as I could only to realize that I was unable to find my wife and would never see her again.

At this point in the dream I began to sob uncontrollably thinking of the abuse, misery, loneliness, and immense suffering my wife would have to endure and from which I could provide her no protection. As I mentioned above, my sobbing was so real and so riveting that I awoke from the dream crying literal tears. Today, two or three years after I had this nightmarish dream and one doctoral dissertation later I realize that my dream powerfully encapsulates my experiences as a minority educator at Enganche College. The parallels between my experiences at Enganche College and my dream are stark. I believe the large upscale black-tie event I attended represents the comfortable middle class life my wife and I currently possess. Our middle class life is a refined life where a lack of shelter, employment, housing, food, is not a major concern for us. It is a life where the slew of amenities and creature comforts that the great majority of my students are denied are always within my grasp. My wife and I do not know the hunger, thirst, hard physical labor, economic and residential insecurity, and general
marginalization that the minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students and residents of the region know far too well.

The dance floor has to represent the middle class and the fact that my wife and I are being dragged off of the dance floor has to represent the precarious uncertainty that characterizes my experiences in the middle class. In spite of never having had the security of my career questioned I feel like I’m always one mistake away from being fired and having my middle class life of comfort stripped away from me only to be back amongst my minority peers washing cars, washing dishes, and at work in any number of physically demanding, low wage, low status jobs I had before I earned an educational credential. The strangers upon the dance floor who are being beaten and dragged off of it have to represent my minority or socioeconomically disadvantaged students. It is after all these individuals trying to get on the dance floor alongside me who are being denied access to the middle class “American Dream” by a combination of the quality of education they are afforded, as well as the sexism, racism, and socioeconomic disadvantage that characterizes a great majority of their lives.

I think that the handkerchief everyone in this camp was pursuing is an education or an educational credential since such a credential generally affords its owner an improvement in life chances and quality of life. An educational credential also affords those who possess it an opportunity to be tasked with lighter, more tolerable working conditions. For example, because I possess such a credential, I have a job in an office, with hour lunches, and paid sick leave. Work here is much easier than all of the work I did prior to my acquiring an educational credential. The mobs of people in pursuit of that handkerchief have to be my students. All those students want a middle class job and the comfortable quality of life such work affords its owners. My reluctance
to dance on the dance floor is the middle class lifestyle and ways of being, what Bourdieu called habitus (1977), that I am still quite unfamiliar with and apprehensive about exhibiting.

In Bourdieu’s (1977) words:

the habitus, the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus. (p. 645)

In other words, my quick ascension from rags to riches and the short period of time I have been in the middle class has not afforded me the opportunity to fully internalize the middle class norms and worldview; what Lareau (2011) calls a “sense of entitlement” that the great majority of my Anglo, middle class colleagues at Enganche College possess. Unlike my predominate Anglo, middle class colleagues I am unable to act as though I have a right to pursue my own individual interests and to actively manage interactions within middle class institutional settings like Enganche College. Unlike a great majority of my colleagues I find myself still uncomfortable with shifting my interactions within Enganche College to meet my own interests and suit my own preferences in such things like course scheduling, office hours, the courses I teach, and even the times I make myself available to my students. In short, unlike the great majority of my Anglo, middle class colleagues I have not yet learned and internalized the rules of the game that govern middle class institutionalized settings nor have I learned to customize those interactions in ways that work in my favor.
My upbringing as a racial minority and poor youth did not afford me the opportunity to learn the rules of the game, let alone understand why those rules are in place, and it did not teach me how to make demands on those in authority, especially Anglos, and to do so in a manner that allows me to gain advantage. Instead, the racial and socioeconomic background in which I was raised provided me with what Lareau (2011) dubbed a “sense of constraint” (p. 6). As was illustrated in the previous chapter my sense of constraint has had a pronounced effect on my ability to advocate on behalf of myself and especially my students who are in need of institutional advocacy. Like the middle class minority parents in Lareau’s (2011) study “whose children tend to spend a large part of their lives in predominantly white environments” (p. 181), I find myself far more attuned to my students’ issues with racial exclusion and insensitivity than my predominately Anglo counterparts but impotent to advocate on their behalf in any meaningful way.

I have learned to accept the directives and actions of persons in authority, especially Anglos which is why I often refer to my predominately Anglo colleagues by their last name or official title, like Mister, Miss or Doctor so and so, even when they are in a position subordinate to my own within the institutional hierarchy. I have frequently been asked by my colleagues why I do not call them by their first name and while I was initially unsure of my internal motivations for doing so I now realize that I do this because Anglos have always been in a position of authority over my life and thus my job, my grades, and livelihood have always been tied to whether or not I showed Anglos deference and left them with a good impression of my own subservience. Irrespective of my advanced educational credentials, my own ascension into the middle class, and even
perhaps my equal standing with my Anglo middle class peers, my sense of constraint has
left me apprehensive about telling them that my deference is really because as a minority
I fear that they can quickly remove me from my position because of something I may say
or do and they may be able to do so with relative ease.

That is, I cannot really tell my Anglo colleagues that my deference towards
them is because I fear them and what they can do to me because they are White and I am
Mexican. I have internalized my subordinate place in the social and organizational
structure and if my honesty offends them I can lose my job. My wife and child will lose
the joy and comfort of our middle class life. I will lose the already limited opportunities I
have to make a difference in the lives of Mexican American students who need the
limited help, guidance, and advocacy I can provide them. My honesty would offend my
colleagues sensibilities about who they think they are, who they think I am, and how
differently life is experienced as members of different racial and ethnic groups.

As a minority instructor at Enganche College I am constantly worrying about
what I say to my Anglo peers for fear of being cast out of the mostly Anglo, middle class
inner circle I have been allowed to enter into. If I ever doubt my perception of the
situation all I have to do is look around Enganche College, and despite its designation as
a Hispanic Serving Institution, see that there are almost no other Mexicans, let alone any
other minority educators in the entire organization standing alongside me. I cannot
express to my predominantly Anglo peers that I think I am here because the hard work of
inadequately educating minority populations has to be done, but it cannot exclusively be
done by Anglos for fear of the brown masses being educationally disenfranchised rising
up and challenging their marginalization by a predominately Anglo system, much like it was almost seventy years earlier in the Civil Rights era with African Americans.

Not having my brown face here would expose the educational system and my predominately Anglo peers working within it to accusations of racism and institutional discrimination. Instead, I think my brown face serves to comfort my Anglo peers and affirms their convictions that the work they are doing towards social justice is worthwhile. After all, my presence as a minority educator could lead my Anglo colleagues to infer that the meritocracy has to be a reality since there is one brown face among them. I am sure that my brown face assures my colleagues that the progress towards equal opportunity for minorities has to be working. I also think my brown face helps to minimize my Anglo peers’ concerns that perhaps all is not well with what is being done within Enganche College. I think I am here as a minority educator because the hard work at Enganche College has to be performed by someone who looks like me since the masses of brown faces seated in the classrooms need to see at least one person in front of the classroom that looks like them.

Consequently, I find myself constantly forced to perpetuate “structural systems of inequality while managing to salvage [my own] hopeful belief that [I] could (and must) be an agent of change in the context of such inequity” (Pollock, Deckman, Mira, & Shallaby, 2010, p. 218). Rather than harness the social, cultural, and human capital I possess and utilize it to leverage greater educational outcomes for the students I serve, I have instead become an instrumental member of a system of racial, economic, and educational marginalization that maintains the status quo for minorities’ educational outcomes. The institutional constraints I have failed to confront and overcome have not only broken me apart, they have impaired my sense of justice and limited my ability to aid those in greatest need of my help.
I have been co-opted by the same system that threw me away so many years ago, only to engage in the same en masse, wholesale destruction of students who are in the same precarious situation I used to be. In a real way I get paid to see myself destroyed day, after day, after day. What is even more disconcerting to me is that perhaps my coopting into this system of educational and societal marginalization has not even been the result of my exceptional abilities or talents, as the prevailing meritocratic ideologies would have me to believe. Instead of viewing myself as an exceptional minority student and educator who deserves all that he has attained perhaps my status as a minority educator is really only because American schooling systems necessitate that “a certain small minority of low-status youth must be selected, nurtured, and exalted to demonstrate that meritocracy remains alive and well, and that public institutions [especially HSIs] remain committed to the heralded tradition of (individual) social mobility in America” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 258).

As a second generation, Mexican American, my brown face and socioeconomically disadvantaged upbringing make me a prime candidate for such a system. As Delgado (2009) aptly illustrates in his discussion of “affirmative action as a majoritarian device” (p. 109), the fact that I am a minority only intensifies the expectations those around me have of my cooperation in maintenance of the status quo. As a successful minority “I am expected to tell the kids, that if they study hard and stay out of trouble, they can become a [middle-class academic/professional] like me” (Delgado, 2009, p. 112). My brown face assures the brown masses of students enrolled at Enganche College and my Anglo colleagues that the American meritocratic system of schooling works and that the American Dream is always just within arm’s reach if minority students are willing to work hard enough for it. It sure convinced me. That is after all why I have an overload every quarter and find myself frequently advising a
disproportionate load of advisees. That is after all why I usually find myself alone on Saturdays and sometimes Sundays grading papers. That is after all why I find myself locked in my office on campus sometimes several hours before the great majority of my colleagues arrive and several hours after the great majority have exited the building.

**Summing up**

In order to contribute to the literature and practice around improving socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students’ K-12 and post-secondary schooling experiences I conclude by first discussing the ideological underpinnings that legitimate the educational inequity in minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ lives, then transition into the study’s implications in terms of policy and practice. Within the discussion on ideology, I pay special attention to American ideologies of race, class, and gender and how their stratifying effects justify minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ educational inequality. In the section on policy, I discuss the limited effectiveness of policy at the federal level and the necessity of educational, family, and fiscal policy to reduce the educational inequity at work in socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority students’ lives. Before I begin with these discussions I want to openly acknowledge that my perspective of what is being done to minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students is nihilistic. However, if scholars are sick and tired of hearing only bad news about minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ educational attainment, as was suggested to me by an Anglo attendee at a national conference where I presented a paper, I am even sicker of having to witness it being done to people who look like me. More personally disturbing than hearing the bad news about minority schooling is the fact that in order to ensure the comfort and well-being of my loved ones I find myself not only cooperating with the K-12 and post-secondary educational systems that I know
are inadequately serving the students in my community, but also perpetuating the opportunity gap and concomitant generational poverty, marginalization, and limited life chances of the students I'm supposed to be advocating for.

**Ideological Implications**

Because “CRT helps us to understand how schools are structured and rooted in particular epistemological ideologies” (Zamudio, Russel, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2010, p. 162) in order to more fully comprehend the policies and practices of schooling impacting the experiences of minority students and educators within American K-12 system and post-secondary institutions I examine the racial, socioeconomic, gendered, and meritocratic ideologies that undergird the cultural value systems of the broader contemporary American society. Schooling systems are microcosms of the larger American society (Greenberg, 1965), and the same ideologies that operate in society and impact students’ lives outside of school creep their way into schooling systems and impact their educational performance.

Consequently, within the U.S., “among groups that hold significant social and economic power, individualistic beliefs and stereotypes around race, class, and gender are likely to influence perceptions of the access and treatment” (Bullock, 2008, p. 58) minorities receive within such institutions. Take for example, racialized assumptions about the educational aspirations and performance of Mexican Americans. In terms of the racial ideologies undergirding the schooling experiences of my students, the deficit thinking that has historically been embedded into ways of understanding minority students educational performance directly shaped the academic expectations my students were subjected to throughout their educational careers (Gorski, 2008; Lewis, 1966; Telles & Ortiz, 2008; Valencia, 2011). Unfamiliar with the high academic expectations associated with postsecondary schooling, many of my students were
overwhelmed by the middle class, postsecondary academic expectations I expected them to
attain and they struggled with the readings I assigned them.

That I expected my students to read a few dense academic studies, numerous chapters
of text a week, and write a minimum of 10 pages a quarter was just too much to ask of my
students. Unbeknownst to them, I only assigned such a workload because I know that
acculturating them to these expectations was what would afford them greater academic success
in the future and was the thing I felt was lacking in my own educational trajectory. As was
illustrated earlier, for over 160 years Mexican Americans have been viewed as a reserve labor
force for the least economically rewarding, most physically difficult and laborious job sectors in
the economy that require little if any educational attainment; chiefly agriculture. Consequently,
the education they have been afforded, or denied, reflects that reality.

When 90% of the high school graduates enrolling at Enganche College are being placed
into math classes that require them to add and subtract, do long division, multiplication, and for
the more advanced students division of fractions, something has to be amiss with the quality of
education these students are being given. In the words of one of my students who was a recent
high school graduate, “what high school gives diplomas to students that cannot do elementary
math??” Apparently the schools my predominately minority students attend. Alongside the
racialized assumptions about minority schooling, gendered assumptions around the role of
women in the household, the type of work they should do, and the socioeconomic disadvantage
women have to contend with in the broader society also impact their educational performance.
Enrollment into a post-secondary institution does not magically absolve females from having to
contend with the gendered dynamics present within their lives.
As the previous chapter illustrated, enrollment into postsecondary institutions only amplifies the gendered dynamics present in my female students’ lives. A good number of female students in my classroom have to contend with abuse of all sorts and providing their children with the emotional and material resources healthy children need to be able to develop while trying to further their own life through an education. In my female students’ cases this means them having to miss class so that they could take their children to the doctor, withdrawing from classes to take care of ailing parents, and a great majority of them having to acquire full-time employment alongside the work of being single mothers.

A great number of these women found themselves having to mitigate the damaging effects of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in their lives simply because they live in a society where men rule and they are, by and large, able to abrogate the parental responsibility they have to their children, wives, and households. Because my female students were born women they are generally expected to care for the parental, economic and emotional needs of their children, responsibilities that many males in society are often exempt from (Rainwater & Smeeding, 2004). Because my female students are women they cannot drop the responsibilities of caring for their children or ailing family members and pursue their own goals in life, without being labeled and stigmatized as bad mothers, disloyal daughters, horrible persons or perhaps something even worse. If they were born males I assume they would have been able to attain an education a long time ago without having to worry about all these other responsibilities, but the sexist ideologies that operate within society and schools will not allow that. My female students’ genders played an enormous role in their educational disadvantage. As a result of the gendered dynamics of their lives, my female students often found themselves having to try to balance
school, home life, and work in abusive home environments with few people to turn to as is evidenced by their turning to me for help.

I witnessed my female students at Enganche College contending with the gendered dynamics of American society in ways that I did not see my male students struggling with, simply because they were born women in a gender stratified society. The socioeconomic ideologies undergirding educational performance, especially as it pertains to meritocratic belief systems, also impact the K-12 and post-secondary schooling experiences of minority students. Narratives around the poor not valuing their education dominated the conversations I had with my colleagues. It appears that in spite of the ample educational research documenting the effects of social class on schooling and educational attainment (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Lareau, 1987, 2002, 2003, 2011; Kirst, 2008; Ochoa, 2013; Pearl, 2011) my colleagues refuse to relinquish their ideological beliefs about why students perform the ways in which they do.

Rather than understanding that their failure may be the result of K-12 and postsecondary institutional processes that favor students from more socioeconomically privileged backgrounds and broader community forces outside of students’ individual efforts to academically succeed, my colleagues assert that failing students are just lazy, do not care about their schooling, or are just not working hard enough to succeed. I know I bought into these prevailing narratives. In true candor and in retrospect, for all but the last two or three years of my ten year professional career as a minority educator I failed to genuinely inquire and consider the challenges that my students’ race, gender, and socioeconomic status have posed for their educational attainment and performance within my classrooms. Though I always attempted to provide an affective environment in which my students could learn, I failed to incorporate into my instruction any
humanizing practices that dignified my students’ worth (Fitts, 2009). My prejudicial disposition was probably because I had preconceived notions of what my students’ lives were like.

As Cranton (2006) states, “in educational systems and within the culture of institutions, there are often socially constructed notions of what students are like: “students cannot read or write anymore, today’s students are lazy, and students are only interested in getting jobs” (Cranton, 2009, p. 8). Socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority student populations, like those I have served all my life are especially vulnerable to such overgeneralizations. Today, I am far too keenly aware that these ideologies were detrimental in some respects to the nature and quality of the education my students received from me. It is only now, as a doctoral candidate that I am cognizant of the lost opportunities to dignify my students that I squandered and can never redeem and the unrecognized and delegitimized dignity my students possessed, dignity which I failed to help them tap into and utilize. My study is one step towards redeeming some of those squandered opportunities.

Ultimately, the ideological justifications discussed above that have historically been used to legitimate the educational failure of Mexican American and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are no longer tenable. The fact is that my predominately minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students fail at Enganche College because they are not afforded the same quality of education their more affluent or Anglo peers are. Because of their ethnic background, where they reside, and the amount of money and education their parents possess they are instead sent to schools that do not teach them the same things and they do not equip them with the same human, social, and cultural capital their more affluent and Anglo peers are given. I firmly believe that when minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are
afforded a quality education akin to that afforded more affluent and Anglo peers they can succeed even as I did.

As was the case in my own experiences as a socioeconomically disadvantaged minority student, my education can serve as a buffer against the racialized, gendered, and socioeconomically stratifying forces within the broader community and at work in students’ lives. As a result of my own experiences, I believe that regardless of what is happening in students’ lives the quality of K-12 education they are afforded can possess utility long after they have exited high school and can allow them to succeed in post-secondary institutions. Absent a quality K-12 education, the ideological justifications of educational inequity discussed above will continue to lead educators to blatantly ignore that minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students’ academic failure is more closely tied to the sexism, racism, and classism in the broader society that creeps into their lives than to minority students and their parents not caring about or valuing education enough or them not working hard enough.

I think the crux of the matter is that the American K-12 and postsecondary schooling system reify these prevailing ideologies and this dissertation is one attempt to oppose those narratives. The problematic issue about these ideologies is that my students have internalized what is being done to them in terms of their poverty, quality of life, limited employment opportunities, low wages, and limited life chances, as being the result of some arbitrary set of poor choices they made at certain critical junctures in their lives. They fail to see that their lives look like they do more because of the racialized, gendered, and economic dynamics of their lives than any set of choices they have made. Students’ lack of a critical discourse is best exemplified by a young female advisee who I had spoken to as a senior a year earlier and who I had asked
how her friends were doing. She stated quite nonchalantly that her friends are all pregnant and/or unemployed at home. When I asked her to elaborate she simply stated that they had chosen that life for themselves. I asked this young lady to think more critically about that situation since from my vantage point the great majority of my students’ lives look the way they do because of the ascribed racial, socioeconomic, and gendered statuses the society in which they live has given them. In short, her comments bring to light how ideologies operate as “subterranean aspects of societal exclusion…..that lead many inhabitants to play host to the system and ultimately, to regulate their own oppression” (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 6).

Policy Implications

The American institutions of K-12 and post-secondary education have historically been shaped by racialized and socioeconomically stratifying societal forces and the institutionalized normative expectations and cultural values at work in the larger American society (Massey, 2008; Massey & Denton, 1993; Spring, 2008; Takaki, 2008; Valencia, 2011). While an exhaustive examination of each of these forces was beyond the scope of this study, the preceding chapter illustrated how race, gender, and social class impacted the K-12 and post-secondary educational experiences of minority students. The dynamics of each of these stratifying forces have each overlapped as historically salient criteria for shaping educational policy and for determining who has been allocated an education. However, many well intended educational and social policies are frequently accompanied by numerous unintended and often unanticipated consequences. Far too often federal educational policy at the K-12 and post-secondary level is driven by interests far removed from the classrooms students are seated in, the school houses they inhabit for the great majority of their childhood and young adulthood, and the even
communities and neighborhoods where students reside. Consequently, federal policy can effectuate only so much change toward improving the racial, economic, and gendered disadvantages students face.

For example, sixty years after Brown v. Board of Education (1954) and fifty years after the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 the minority residents in the Northwestern region of the U.S. are yet to fully realize the noble and lofty goals such legislation sought to accomplish, chiefly equality of opportunity. Despite being the largest minority group in the U.S., the second oldest inhabitants in the North American continent, and the countless sacrifices and contributions members of my racial group have made for the betterment of the U.S. in terms of its economic, cultural, and military institutions, Mexican Americans are yet to be afforded life in a society where the color of a child’s skin does not determine the quality of education that child should be given.

In terms of the racial and socioeconomic stratification within education, educators have to recognize that there are social practices in place that fast-track and expedite the opportunities for hoarding of the social, human, and cultural capital present in a community at any given time and place while simultaneously minimizing the opportunities for racialized minority community members who possess little, if any, of those types of capital to acquire it (DiTomaso, 2013; Massey, 2008; Stainback & Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). Irrespective of federal policy, social practices like residential segregation, local policies like the funding of schools through property valuations, and school policies like the drawing of district boundaries all work to disenfranchise minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students like those I serve (Lin & Harris, 2008). My mother had to innovate and break the law in finding ways around these social practices to give me an opportunity to acquire a solid middle class education and improve my life chances.
Similar to the limited effectiveness of federal policy to mitigate racial inequity, in spite of all the federal policies aimed at addressing the socioeconomic inequity at work in education, it too has also proven itself less effective than was once hoped. While federal financial aid legislation in the past few decades, beginning with the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), has afforded a greater number of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students like myself a greater opportunity to access higher education, the Great Recession of 2008, a shaky stock market, and political gridlock have all led to a gradually increasing public resistance towards the funding policies of higher education (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The HEA of 1965 and its reauthorization in 1972, especially under Title IV, ultimately opened the possibility of higher education to the average American through a series of funding schemes that mitigated the financial and economic costs that had historically impeded them from acquiring a postsecondary education (Geiger, 2011).

The original Higher Education Act of 1965, (HEA), expanded federal power over the political and financial arenas at both the state and federal level and as a legislative act was a conglomerate of what Fowler (2009) defines as systemic policy agents like legislators, professional agents like educational leaders and institutions, and the general public. The HEA (1965) was “an omnibus bill with sections covering financial aid to students, constructions of facilities, aid to institutions that wanted to work on societal issues, and not least, the directive that each state establish a coordinating agency for higher education” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 254). According to Mumper, Gladieux, and Carrigan, (2011), Title IV of the HEA, the centerpiece of this legislation, was explicit in removing the barriers keeping low-income students out of college, chiefly through the development of three types of federal aid programs; a need-based grant, today called the Pell grant for the most needy students; a loan program dubbed the
Stafford Student Loan Program, for students who had resources but were still in need;, and campus-based programs designed to support and augment the needs of individual students.

Each portion of the HEA proved instrumental in helping socioeconomically disadvantaged students like me and many of my students gain access to a post-secondary education. Despite the tremendous social and legislative progress Title IV reflected, minority access to institutions of higher education due to a lack of funding continues to be an issue, especially for the contemporary Latino/a student population (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Johnstone, 2011; Smith 2011). On a more positive note, Title IX, the quintessential success of federal education policy aimed at mitigating the gendered bias of education has proven itself a success with some scholars arguing that its implementation has improved the graduation rates of women (Mumper, Gladieux, King, & Corigan, 2011).

Based on my own experiences as a minority student and minority educator I think it is safe to say that it is not solely educational policy that will effectuate change in the educational experiences of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged children and adults. Especially when considering how early such students’ educational disadvantages begin to manifest themselves (Duncan & Murnane, 2011; Farkas, 2008; Nelson & Sheridan, 2011). From as early as kindergarten and 1st grade, an educational disadvantage between children in the upper and lower classes and White and minority children becomes clear (Delpitt, 2012; Nelson & Sheridan, 2011). If Berliner (2005) is correct in his analysis of the amount of time children spend outside of the classroom being of greater significance for educational performance than time spent in the classroom, federal and state family policies are going to become increasingly pertinent to efforts aimed at mitigating the educational disadvantages these students contend with. It will take a combination of comprehensive family policy, fiscal policy, and educational policy in
communities across the U.S. at the federal, state, and local levels to effectively combat the educational inequity schools perpetuate. My educational autoethnography illustrates this point.

My initial educational failure in the K-12 system was more the product of my own family background, the events taking place in my home, the poverty that marked my childhood and the racial and economic factors at work in the broader American society than of my individual shortcomings. What was happening in my home and the racial and socioeconomic forces at work in my life all greatly impacted my educational performance. When these factors combined with the depersonalizing, bureaucratic structure of schooling, the institutionalized practice of educational tracking, and the state and federal educational policies of accountability that framed the decision making calculus of school leaders tasked with educating me, they culminated in the perverse, unintended outcome of my educational failure. With the exception of the grades they entered for the work I submitted, the great majority of the factors leading to my early educational failure were well beyond my teachers’ and principals’ spheres of influence.

Today, almost 36 years later the reasons leading to my educational failure is true of my students’ as well. In fact, in preparation for the final chapter of this study where I planned to discuss the implications of the K-12 schooling experiences of minority students on their postsecondary educational performance I perused two seminal studies on the K-12 schooling experiences of poor, minority students and am troubled by the minimal progress educational leaders have made in improving the educational experiences and outcomes of such students over the last thirty years since those earlier studies were first published (Fine, 1991; Oakes, 1985). Likewise, in preparation for discussing the stalled educational progress I witnessed my students experiencing at Enganche College I perused several contemporary studies examining the current limited academic gains and stalled academic progress of students in post-secondary institutions.

Needless to say, my experiences corroborate the findings within all of these studies and from an educational practitioner’s and researcher’s perspective the lack of progress in improving the schooling outcomes of socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students is quite problematic and only serves to reinforce my view of how little societal progress has been made toward social and educational equity for socioeconomically disadvantaged racial minorities. If Enganche College’s 25% graduation rate and the fact that 75% of my students’ dreams and aspirations for a post-secondary educational credential and the concomitant upward social mobility such a credential affords are not coming true are not clear enough markers of this, then perhaps my inability as an instructor to help my students succeed academically because they are poor, because of the quality of the K-12 education they are afforded, or because they are being physically, sexually, and emotionally abused can bring this point home.

**Practical Recommendations**

In order to improve the postsecondary success of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students I posit a few practical recommendations. The positive implications of social and cultural capital on the educational attainment of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students are clear in the literature (Contreras, 2005; Kao, 2004; Nunez, 2009; Ream, 2003; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2001) so each of these suggestions hinges upon a reconceptualization the capital minority communities possess and the bridging of those differing forms of capital between students, community members, and school leaders. Because Bourdieu’s concept of social capital is premised upon a European-centric Westernized disposition of the social world it serves to overinflate the valuation of the social and cultural
capital the dominant group possesses, normalizes whiteness, and delegitimizes the other forms of capital minority group members and their communities possess (X. Neider, personal communication, March 18, 2015).

The delegitimizing of the capital minority community members possess is chiefly mediated through institutional and cultural processes that do not recognize capital as it may appear in iterations or manifestations foreign to Bourdieu’s conceptualization. The delegitimization of varying forms of capital is to the detriment of racialized minority groups who possess social and cultural capital that looks different from that of the dominant group. Thus, my first suggestion requires a reconceptualization of the social and cultural capital and assets minority communities like those in this study possess. According to Yosso (2005) minority communities are rife with linguistic, familial, aspirational, resistant, and navigational capital that frequently goes unrecognized because these types of capital ultimately stem from marginalized minority communities.

The linguistic, familial, aspirational, resistant, and navigational forms of capital that minority students and their communities possess could theoretically and practically afford these students some potential opportunities for success. The problem is that they are currently delegitimized by the bureaucratic, middle class schooling practices that characterize contemporary schooling. American school systems punish familism when students choose to attend to their ailing parents’ or relatives’ doctor’s visits or when they engage in economic productivity that sustains a household. Instead educators fail those students for their poor choices or lack of priorities. American schools do not measure the resilience of minority students who are confronting poverty, abuse, and racism in their lives and are still able to show up to school every day instead assigning them zeros for incomplete or subpar work they failed to submit.
American schools do not reward students for navigating their sometimes dangerous neighborhoods by going the long way to get to school and instead school systems count them tardy and send them to the principal’s office. Like Gregory, Long and Volk (1985), I believe that these minority students and their communities possess a wealth of capital that can be different from the knowledge demanded by contemporary schooling. Likewise, contrary to the popular ideological narratives that justify the marginalization of such communities school leaders need to reframe their views of these students and their families and recognize that they do care about the schooling of their children, are hard-working, and are not linguistically deficient (Gorski, 1998). If educators and school leaders stop to listen to what is transpiring in their students’ lives, even as I have, they will see what is stopping their students from achieving success are the racialized, socioeconomic, and gendered dynamics at work in the broader society that have stamped themselves onto students’ lives.

Admittedly, my recommendation goes well beyond the traditional lens of viewing educators’ tasks as entering grades for the work students submit or do not submit and means challenging the depersonalizing ways schooling is done. My suggestion for educators to humanize their classrooms is in line with Freire’s (2013) critical pedagogy and entails viewing students as human beings, perhaps even as educators see themselves. My suggestion, like I have so painfully learned, also means bearing witness to students’ experiences. If educators and school leaders stop to do this they will learn that students really do want to learn the skills, abilities, and knowledge they are going to need to direct their lives. Educators and educational leaders would also learn, as I have, that the contemporary bureaucratic structure of education creates and imposes on teachers and students alike a profound alienation; the ultimate consequence of any bureaucratic organization (Marx, 1978; Weber, 1968).
Because social structures like schools deny teachers and students the ability to experience those intrinsic aspects of their human nature that are psychologically empowering (Stanton-Salazar, 2001), educators and school leaders would learn that students feel insignificant in the grand scheme of education and powerless in the entire process of “learning” (Luykx, 1999). If the way schooling is done is going to be re-conceptualized it will ultimately entail a reassessment of the complex, multidimensional realities of organizational life. Human beings operate within natural systems, not mechanistic ones. Conversely, schooling needs to be structured organically and in a way that allows people to grow and meet their emotional, physical, and psychological needs through the utilization of their talents and the development of relationships with those around them to realize their goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Snyder, Acker-Hocevar & Snyder, 2008).

Educators must build relationships with students and remember that organizations exist to meet peoples’ needs and not vice-versa. As a result of trying to put my suggestion into practice I have begun to see my students’ efforts and my own as interdependent pieces to the needs we each work to meet. Building relationships with my students is a different pedagogical approach from the one I utilized when I arrived in the Pacific Northwest 5 years ago. I had previously been a full-time lecturer of sociology and anthropology at the University of Texas El Paso. My position was a temporary one that had me covering the vacancy of a professor on maternity leave and a vacancy in the department that had not yet been filled. At the time I was working with 500 undergraduate students at the freshman, junior, and senior level and as challenging as that work was, work with fewer students a quarter at Enganche College is even more challenging because of my new approach to schooling. At the university I approached schooling in a mechanical and bureaucratic way.
At the university, it was easy to “slit throats” or assign failing grades to work that was subpar in its quality. I didn’t have time to stop and think about why. Such a task is much more difficult for me today. A great part of the reason for the difficulty of failing students is because at Enganche College my students have become much more human to me. As a result of my new approach to schooling I get to learn students’ names, the particulars of their biographies, and ultimately develop relationships with them that were simply not possible in a classroom comprised of 100 students at a time. The blurred sea of faces that made up my university classrooms has been replaced by smaller groups of human beings who, in pursuit of a greater quality of life, greater financial security, upward mobility, and ultimately improved life chances, find themselves in a classroom of higher education and subjected to a bureaucratic system that slowly but surely dehumanizes, alienates, transforms, and ultimately places them into their future economic roles within the broader social system.

As unsavory as such a declaration may be in the minds of some of my peers my students are students who I now care for. They are students whose stories have become intertwined with my own and who as a result I endeavor to serve with all of my heart and with all that moves me. In contrast to the mechanical, bureaucratic, and inorganic set of interactions that used to take place in my classroom and between the students I encountered daily, I now embrace their humanity and relish in them sharing the pains, joys, set-backs, and victories in their life. Admittedly, embracing students’ humanity is difficult to contemplate putting into practice because of the immense psychological and emotional energy required for such a task (Weber, 1968) but as my experiences have taught me, the costs are well worth a try. My second recommendation for improving the postsecondary schooling outcomes of minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged students is in line with other research on postsecondary
educational success and entails bridging the gap between post-secondary and K-12 educational systems (Bailey & Dynarskey, 2011; Kirst, 2008; Bettinger & Long, 2008; Goldhaber & Peri, 2008; Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2009).

K-12 educators and school leaders need to be informed of the academic admission requirements that the local post-secondary institutions in their community have institutionalized and aligning those expectations with the coursework and graduation requirements students within the K-12 system are tasked to perform. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, in an attempt to apply these theoretical ideas in a practical way that helps the students who attend Enganche College I have been part of the development and implementation of a collaborative with a local high school in my community that aims to do that very thing. The secondary and post-secondary collaborative has provided juniors and graduating seniors with a diagnostic placement exam to identify college readiness deficiencies and to link their junior and senior year coursework with post-secondary expectations.

Enganche College has also worked through this K-14 collaborative to provide these students with a financial aid workshop, given them campus tours, provided goal-planning seminars on priorities, career selection, and how to choose an institution that best meets their needs. The collaborative is also examining how to best align the coursework students are taking as juniors and seniors with the skill set and knowledge that they will need to be successful in their first year of college. Before being replaced by my English colleague, for the first two years of this project and with the explicit permission and guidance of the English teacher, I personally exposed students at a local high school to a few more rigorous academic exercises than they were used to including the consumption of academic literature and a few critical writing exercises. The collaborative, now in its third year, has been only moderately successful in bridging the gap
between the agents within the district and college and establishing some social capital between the institutional agents operating at the college, administration/faculty at the school district, and the students themselves.

The few faculty members at the high school who are a part of this collaborative have also experienced only moderate success with collaboratively embedding rigor into the curriculum the students are exposed to. Over the last three years that I have been a part of the project I have talked with countless numbers of students and it appears that they just do not believe they are college material. If not led to believe their own academic inferiority as espoused through the dominant ideologies at work in schools, these students’ youthful naiveté and hubris have blinded them to the deleterious implications of their race, class, and gender. In my estimation, because of these students’ youth, the stratifying effects of the ascribed statuses of race, class, and gender are partially mitigated by their being deemed children by the broader society.

It is clear to me that because of their limited education these students are not completely aware of how each of these ascribed statuses can and probably will impact their life chances in harmful ways. If my experiences working with students at Enganche College are predictive of what is to come in the future of these children who will soon be deemed adults, the future looks quite bleak. Admittedly, it is not only the students who are critical of the value or meaningfulness of such a collaborative. A number of my colleagues have expressed extreme pessimism and criticism about the merit and chances of success for such a program. My colleagues’ main interests have been aimed at getting the gist of the program, what it was exactly we at Enganche College were supposed to be doing with these students, how success was going to be measured, and why exactly we were doing what we were doing. Even after it has been
explained in some detail they have shown some skepticism to the idea of what we are trying to do.

Some of my colleagues have even asked about whether or not these are even students who have indicated they want to go to college and why we have some students who do not plan on going to college in the program. I have expressed to those willing to hear me out that much of what we are trying to do is non-tangible, in that it is centered on building relationships between the faculty, leadership, and student body at both Enganche College and the local high school. I have shared that in the literature what we are attempting to develop is called social and cultural capital and that much of the leg work we are engaged in is in developing that capital in ways that will result in tangible outcomes we can measure in the future like improved placement exam scores for graduating seniors from this district, improved matriculation to college, and the development of a more academic value system within the culture of the school community and student body.

I have shared with my colleagues that there are certain benefits derived from efforts at building capital. Benefits like modeling for these students what a middle class professional looks, speaks, and acts like, irrespective of the race/ethnicity of those models and greater educational attainment for minority children who reside next to and interact with Anglos. Alongside these benefits are the opportunities to establish relationships with Anglos who by and large are not present in these students’ communities and lives in any personally meaningful ways. Another challenge with such a collaborative is my colleagues wanting to incorporate some sort of vocational path for those who are interested in pursuing such careers. I am adamantly opposed to such an idea since my train of thought is what has historically left Mexican
Americans being afforded an education that leads them to work with their hands in low wage, low status work instead of with their heads.

Considering that so many Mexican Americans in my community are already engaged in a life or death struggle in vocational careers that lock them and their children into limited life chances, poverty, and afford them a slim chance of escape, why not expose these students to a post-secondary education that affords them a chance to enter the middle class and that leads them to work with their heads instead of their hands. My third recommendation is for educational leaders to advocate more forcefully with policy makers responsible for appropriating more equitable funding to schools or at the very least for them to innovate new ways to fund schools. Education leaders must advocate for the students in their community by giving their voice a forum through which they can be heard by policy makers who fund their schools and other powerful social agents, even if it means having to face some frightening consequences and seemingly insurmountable barriers (Theoharis, 2004; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

While educational leaders generally fall outside of political funding arenas, from a social justice framework they still have opportunities to address the fiscal policies that underfund the schools where students most in need of financial resources attend. By developing coalitions comprised of other educational leaders, students, parents, and community members who are willing to advocate on behalf of these students who are voiceless and for whom advocacy is so consequential, educational leaders can advocate reform that addresses the opportunity gap and in turn the education debt. One example of this is what educational leaders, policy makers, and taxpayers did in conceptualizing the high risk and innovative K-12 level funding formulas in Vermont where taxes across the state are pooled and redistributed on an equal per-student basis (Goodman, 1999; Shlaes, 1998). My fourth suggestion is at the institutional level. Enganche
College needs to work towards limiting the almost limitless goals and objectives it is attempting to meet.

At the institutional level Enganche College suffers from what sociologists and organizational researchers define as institutional ambiguity (Bolman & Deal, 2005; Fox & Harding, 2005). Rather than choosing a few things to do well, confer associate degrees on college students and help those without a high school diploma acquire one, Enganche College has instead opted to branch out in these and numerous other areas. Most recently rather than focusing on improving retention and graduation rates for the numerous two year degrees offered at Enganche College its leadership has opted to pursue a new four year degree market niche by offering a Bachelor of Applied Science in Business Management (BASBM) and expanded its adult basic education program to include conferring a high school diploma equivalent rather than a GED. Both ideas appear to be risky ventures at a time when funding for CC's is increasingly being scrutinized by policy makers, taxpayers, and the community in general (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Many of the programs enumerated above that Enganche College is currently engaged in successfully operating appear to be redundant in that K-12 funding is already being appropriated for high school credentials and four year institutions are already in the "business" of conferring four year applied degrees. At the micro level, the individuals who work within these institutions are experiencing the same phenomenon only it goes by another name, role conflict. With instructors at Enganche College increasingly being tasked with playing multiple roles including being academic advisors, instructors, and even confidants, the effectiveness of these individuals within their respective roles within the institution are no doubt highly questionable. That is the case with me. The gendered dynamics I found myself being unable to mitigate in my females
students’ lives because of a large teaching and advising load could be addressed through Enganche College hiring a set of fulltime academic advisors who work yearlong at advising students and perhaps even bringing on a few mental health counselors exclusively tasked with mental health.

Enganche College does currently have mental health counselors but they are busy teaching courses, doing outreach, and performing tasks outside of mental health counseling leaving students to look for help elsewhere. A set of full-time mental health counselors tasked exclusively with counseling students would enable them to serve as liaisons between students and the community organizations that provide the much needed services my female students have made clear they are lacking like childcare services, domestic abuse counseling, and suicide prevention. The group of counselors could even be tasked with creating innovative, cost-effective or cost-free cooperatives with local organizations aimed at meeting students’ needs. These cooperatives would not necessarily have to require funding since a child-care collaborative could entail students volunteering for and perhaps even earning credit for their service if they are pursuing a degree in the social services field.

A set of full time advisors at Enganche College tasked with no other responsibilities would have the time to find such information out and make it user-friendly for students. Right now, only a convoluted patchwork of the ideas I discussed above with limited success in terms of students’ retention and graduation rates is in place. In order to mitigate the gate-keeping effects of standardized placement exams, Enganche College could also adopt a more balanced set of alternative placement and admissions procedures that take into consideration a students’ linguistic background, academic performance, and even civic engagement. Washington State University for example has put into place a set of English courses for multilingual, non-native
English speakers that are equivalent to traditional English 101 courses at other universities. WSU’s admissions and placement procedures take into consideration that students from other ethnic backgrounds need support in English and can be just as successful as monolingual English speakers if and when they are granted the institutional support they need.

Other colleges have opted for “snap apps” and early decision admissions processes that humanize the college process and present students with benefits and institutional support they would otherwise be lacking (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2011). At the institutional level, the information about admissions processes and course requirements for students transferring to programs at four year institutions needs to be made readily available in a user friendly way to the academic advisors at Enganche College. With advisors helping hundreds of students a year, transfer to hundreds of programs at four year institutions across the state, the sheer volume of information needed to help students transfer successfully is beyond the scope of and reach of instructors whose main task is teaching. Someone at the institutional level needs to be tasked with acquiring this regularly revised information and making it accessible and coherent to faculty who advise and students who need the information.

My final recommendation is a necessary outcome of the above recommendations. If educational leaders reframe the forms of capital students possess as positive things, change the ways they interact with students and the ways they operate within their classrooms, begin to develop the capital in the broader community, utilize that capital to advocate on behalf of greater educational equity, and begin to devote their energies to a limited number of the most important priorities or goals they have through reorganization of their human resources, the educational inequity encompassed in this study is sure to be mitigated. The end result will be a more diverse workforce where minority scholars are not an exception but perhaps more of the rule. While I am
not making the case that my experiences at Enganche College are representative of other Latino/a educators employed at HSIs, in my experience it has been the case that the educational inequity Latino/as are subjected to ultimately culminates in establishing postsecondary institutional contexts characterized by a dearth of minority educators and leaders.

As a minority scholar and educator employed at an HSI, I have been isolated from minority peers within a predominately white institutional world. The dearth of minority faculty representation leaves the few minorities able to ascend to preeminent positions within post-secondary institutions and the broader society, like myself, isolated and powerless to effectuate meaningful change within a predominately white institutional world (Ladson-Billings, 2009). From my experiences at Enganche College, Mexican American minority scholars and educators like myself are not only almost non-existent, but when and where they are present I posit that they may frequently experience alienating institutional norms and processes. These alienating processes simply do not allow minority educators to forcefully occupy their positions to advocate for, and on behalf of, the marginalized populations these institutions are supposed to serve. That has been the case in my experiences at Enganche College. The precarious situation I have found myself in over the last five years during which I have had to silently witness a significant number of students in the K-12 and post-secondary system disenfranchised and underserved has only served to remind me of that.

**Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, in regard to what may perhaps be erroneously perceived as an unfair and nihilistic criticism of the efforts I and my colleagues at Enganche College are making towards improving the educational outcomes of the predominately socioeconomically disadvantaged minority students we serve, I would like to address what may perhaps be the elephant in the
room by way of an analogy, no pun intended. Dr. Seuss wrote a story that I think epitomizes my experiences as a minority educator at Enganche College. In this story an elephant named Horton is bathing in a stream, enjoying his blissful experience in the jungle when he happens to hear a faint cry for help from an invisible speck of dust that is falling through the air and about to be destroyed in the pool he is bathing in. Horton’s ears are what enable him to hear this faint yelp and after contemplating whether or not he really was hearing a cry for help, he acts to catch the speck of dust because “after all, a person is a person, no matter how small” (Seuss, 1954).

Consequently, Horton rescues the speck’s inhabitants; the Whos of Whoville, and places the speck on a clover of some sort. Horton’s troubles begin when Jane Kangaroo, an apparently powerful, influential, and prominent person in the jungle, witnesses the entire scenario unfold. She examines the speck and begins to question Horton and whether or not he is really hearing what he thinks he is hearing. When Horton begins advocating for the people of Whoville and their existence and worth, she attempts to destroy the speck of dust with a puddle of water. Luckily, Horton removes the clover just in time.

The rest of the story encompasses Horton evading the discriminatory actions that those in the broader society he resides within aim at him for speaking up on behalf of and advocating for the Whos. Horton also attempts to get those persecuting and trying to silence him to see that there exist worlds beyond the jungle they occupy. Ultimately, because of Horton’s reluctance to stay silent about what the Whos have shared with him he is captured and forced to witness the inevitable destruction of the speck and the inhabitants of Whoville. At the last moment possible the Whos of Whoville speak up on their own behalf, are spared destruction, and Horton is ultimately freed. There are a number of parallels between my own experiences working with minority students at Enganche College and Horton’s interactions with the Who’s of Whoville.
First and foremost, like Horton, prior to hearing my students’ cries for help, I was experiencing the joys of a middle class life. I was being paid a good middle class salary, had employer provided medical and life insurance, flexible work hours, and a tremendous amount of autonomy at work.

I was afforded the status and prestige that accompanies a middle class salary and occupational position within a post-secondary institution. I had food in my fridge, nice clothes on my back, and not a smidgen of material deprivation in any area of my life. If my car broke down I had money in the bank to repair it, if my wife or I wanted to go out and eat we could afford to do so. I was doing well and my education had provided me with material and non-material returns I could not have envisioned for myself even a just few years earlier. Unfortunately, like Horton, hearing that cry for help has introduced into my life a slew of ethical and moral dilemmas and the tremendous amount of accountability that accompanies those decisions. I have encountered a world that some, if not all, of my colleagues refuse to acknowledge exists.

Within my world are a group of people whose pleas for help are either being overtly ignored, blatantly disregarded or just going unheard by everyone except for me. Like Horton, I am apparently the only one who can hear their pleas for help, only instead of having ears like Horton, my color of skin serves as a marker to those around me in need of help that I am someone who can hear them. Hopefully there is a happy ending for me like there was for Horton. Right now I am not so sure that there will be. I wish I could have presented a much rosier picture of life and work as a minority student and educator since that would have made my life much easier and increased the likelihood of a happy ending for my story. Doing so would have allowed me to not have to worry about my job, whether or not my colleagues will still like me, or even whether or not this study will even be approved by my committee. Writing a more charitable
narrative would not have placed my job in a compromised position like I feel it may be after this study is published, but like Horton I cannot ignore the voices that have spoken to me nor can I change the message those voices have shared with me. Like Horton, I cannot ignore that my and my students’ stories are inextricably linked and I cannot ignore that they have been and are currently being denied the quality education they should be afforded and the dignity all human beings deserve. “After all, a person is a person, no matter how small” (Seuss, 1954).
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