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Autoethnographies Exploring the Cultural Spirit Murdering and Nurturing of Three Minority Educators in K-12

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Dedication

Sara Beg

I dedicate this dissertation to my family who have always been there to support me in all my educational journeys. Ami, Abu, Shana, Maria, Tyler, George, Kinza, Zeenat, Nura, and Yasir – I love you all. Thank you for always being there for me through my craziness, I wouldn't be here without you. To my parents who always encouraged me to follow whatever dream I had. To my sisters who are the greatest sisters I could have ever asked for, forever united through our bracelets of sisterhood.

For Syed Iqbal Ahmad, who loved learning and valued education. May Allah grant you the highest levels of heaven.

Maritza Caldera

This dissertation is dedicated to two special groups in my life. The first bunch is my crew - that's my husband and our five boys. They've pushed through countless late nights and early mornings of me reading and writing, afternoons and Saturdays filled with classes, and even three pregnancies. I dedicate this to my older two boys who understood how much work this took and how much it meant to me and helped me with staying quiet so the babies would sleep a little longer so I could write a little more. I hope I was able to show them that when there is a will there's a way and to never give up on your goals and dreams. I dedicate this to my husband who was in charge of morning breakfast and clean-up, diaper-changes and entertainment while I worked towards accomplishing one of my many goals and dreams. Thank you for believing in me and giving me your support. I'm lucky to have this crew standing beside me. They are my whole heart.

The second bunch I dedicate this dissertation to is my first family. My parents and sister. Thank you for always believing in me and never casting doubt on my abilities. We all grew up together in a new country, learned a new language, and have accomplished so much together. Thank you for instilling pride in my culture and heritage. Thank you for never putting a limit on my dreams. Thank you for working so hard and giving up so much in order to give me and my sister the advantage of living in a place full of opportunities. Thank you to my sister for your words of encouragement and always hyping me up. I love you.

Denise Ross

I dedicate this dissertation to my father Donald Clarke, who encouraged me to start this journey, but was unable to see its completion. To him I say, Your Baby Girl Did It!

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Clara Ross, who was the first "teacher" to nurture my spirit. Nanny, your sweet little Dee Dee did it!

Acknowledgements

Free all people who are suffering at the hands of an oppressor. "If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." – Desmond Tutu

Maritza Caldera

I'd like to thank my Mexican people. Although we are much more than our unmatched dedication to hard work, thank you for that generational blessing. I'm grateful and honored that the cards played in my favor, allowing me to come from a people of ingenuity, resourcefulness, strong family values and a communal spirit. I am humbled to have inherited the unwavering resilience of my ancestors, firmly planted in the soil, determined to weather the storms of life. They stand as symbols of endurance and unwavering fortitude.

I'd like to thank myself. Thank you for never giving up. Thank you for not being afraid of a challenge. Thank you for your commitment to your continuous learning. Thank you for resisting doubt. Thank you for following your dreams and not being afraid to work hard for it. Thank you for not letting obstacles stop you. In the words of Niecy Nash, "Go on, girl, with your bad self. You did that."

Denise Ross

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certainly not the least, I send a thank you to MYSELF. I learned, overcame some

obstacles, and reached my goal. I MADE IT! I love you all.

Abstract

This autoethnography sought to understand how our experiences during our K-12 journey as three minority students shaped our identities as students and our teaching style today. An autoethnography allowed us to analyze our experiences through the lens of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering. Cultural Spirit Nurturing, as we defined it, is the acceptance, respect, and inclusion of different cultures, ethnicities, nationalities, races, languages, and religions in society. We dissected our lived moments as Pakistani Muslim American, African American, and Mexican American students turned educators, defined them as Cultural Spirit Nurturing or Murdering, and bridged them with the concepts of intersectionality and LatCrit (Latino/a Critical Race Theory), MusCrit (Muslim Critical Race Theory), and BlackCrit (Black Critical Race Theory) within Critical Race Theory. This allowed us to further examine the long-lasting effects these experiences made on our choices throughout our lives.

Descriptors: Autoethnography, Cultural Spirit Nurturing, Spirit Murdering, Critical Race Theory, Diversity

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

This dissertation group was formed by three minority female educators, united by our shared experiences navigating a predominantly white educational landscape. Our collective identity as minorities in the field of education, dominated by white women, provided us with a sense of solidarity and reassurance. We came together with a shared understanding that in our K-12 education, where we were minorities, we encountered and endured spirit murdering at the hands of teachers and peers. We recognized that our encounters were what author Bettina Love (2020) termed as "spirit murdering" - the systemic, institutionalized violence and racist language directed at dark children - were not isolated incidents, but rather deeply ingrained realities of our educational journeys. Growing up in a society where whiteness prevails, we faced the harsh realities of spirit murdering, even if we didn't have a name for it at the time. Looking back, we can now articulate the pain and alienation we endured in a system that often failed to recognize or validate our identities and experiences. We also recognized that we were able to take the pain that we endured and channel it in a positive way in our careers as educators.

On the other side of spirit murdering, existed spirit nurturing. We discussed the instances in which we were embraced and included, rather than being marginalized or treated as different, from the white majority, or inferior. We examined our encounters with diverse staff vs. white staff, the assortment of after school clubs, languages, celebrated holidays and traditions, and food and diet, etc. This was labeled as Cultural Spirit Nurturing. Each word in this idea was specific and deliberate. Between the three of us, we belonged to multiple different cultures. Culture was defined as, "the customary

beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" and shared

experiences (Merriam-Webster, Definition 1). *Spirit* is commonly associated with the

psyche, the soul, essence, one's mind and character. It is not achievable, it is something

that from birth exists within you, and many believe even after death. Our last word,

nurture, refers to acts that promote, aid, and encourage growth (Merriam-Webster,

Definition 1). Cultural Spirit Nurturing, as we defined it, are experiences rooted in

positive and authentic acts that promote the development of individual identities and

spirits within a framework of culture.

Each experience we shared describes a small moment in time, proven hard to

forget. Moments that have impacted each of us so much, it changed the way we perceive

ourselves and others. These moments made us feel a certain way about ourselves,

whether positive or negative or somewhere in between. These moments are tainted with

race and the feelings that come with being not the white majority. These were feelings

that we, as members of a minority group, often experienced while navigating through our

educational journey. These feelings and experiences were unique in their nuances, but

they are not unique in terms of occurrence. In this autoethnography, we shared and

examined our experiences during our K-12 years and reflected on the impact these events

had on our lives.

Sara Beg - *Teachable Moments*

As students, we look to our teachers as the ones who know everything. In school,

they are the ones we turn to when we have a question or when we need help with

something. Teachers, especially to their students, are the ones that know the answer to

every single question. We never think of them as wrong. During my sophomore year of

high school, I found out how wrong this idea was.

As a sophomore in high school, my Social Studies class for the year was World

History. I have always enjoyed Social Studies and was excited at the prospect of learning

more about World History. I also knew that we would cover World Religions within this

class. This meant that we would be covering Islam. This was the year of September 11,

2001, therefore, my class being able to learn about my religion was something that I was

looking forward to. We learned about each religion in order of revelation and would

spend roughly a week covering it. As the only student in school who wore hijab, the

religious head covering for Muslim women, I knew that when we started learning about

Islam, I would be answering a lot of questions. Normally, I hated the idea of talking out

loud in class because I always felt like I didn't really know the answer. But this was

going to be different. I had been in Sunday school since kindergarten, and I was certainly

capable of answering basic questions about Islam. I especially wanted to be able to

answer questions because since 9/11, the news and media had been giving an incorrect

view on what Islam really was. I was ready to participate and answer as many questions

as I could.

When it was finally time for us to start on Islam, my teacher started off the lesson

by introducing the five pillars of Islam. These five pillars are the most essential things for

Muslims. Abiding by these pillars are at the core of being Muslim. My teacher started off

with the first pillar which was the Declaration of Faith. "There is no God, but God, and

Allah is his name." My hand immediately shot in the air and before even being called on

I let my teacher know that she was incorrect. The Declaration of Faith was actually,

"There is no God, but God, and Muhammad is his messenger." I had never corrected a teacher on something they had said, but I couldn't let her give the wrong information about my religion to the rest of the class. I remember her looking at me and saying that the two were basically the same thing and just went on with the rest of the pillars of Islam. It was as if she did not want to hear me or take my knowledge on the subject into consideration. My teacher was giving the class completely wrong information and didn't think anything of it.

As we continued to learn about Islam, she proceeded to give further incorrect information on the religion. She stated that not drinking alcohol and not eating pork were the two main things about Islam. And while those things are true, they are nowhere near the top of the list of what makes someone a Muslim. At that point, I had stopped trying to correct her on what she was teaching. It didn't seem worth it and I felt as if I was wasting not only my time, but the class's time as well. I was never one to speak up in class to begin with, so the one time I did, and I was dismissed didn't give me any reason to continue. The teacher wasn't going to take my knowledge and being Muslim myself into consideration. I had thought that being Muslim, I could have added value to the class since Islam was a religion that was not widely known, and the media did not paint the religion in the best light. But despite all of this, this person who was meant to help me learn and teach me new things left me feeling as if the knowledge I already had was worthless and not valuable.

As I share this experience from my K-12 education, I recognize that we all have encounters with those around us that shape our identities and play a role in how we move through the world.

Maritza Caldera - *Testimonio*

    Testimonio, is a Latin American Literary genre widely used as a way for "individuals to tell a collective story and history of oppression through the narrative of one individual" (Saavedra, 2011). Traditionally, *testimonios* are shared with individuals that have a wider audience and can bring awareness to the oppression faced (Saavedra, 2011). My testimonio was analyzed using a CRT and LatCrit lens to better understand how each Cultural Spirit Murdering and Cultural Spirit Nurturing experience shaped my identity as a student and educator. Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education is best described as "centering on five primary themes: social justice, racism in schooling, praxis as a tool for transformation, valuing experiential knowledge, and countering dominant ideologies" (DeNicolo et al., 2015). LatCrit (Latino/a Critical Race Theory), a branch of CRT, includes specific factors like immigration status, culture, ethnicity, and language (Huber, 2022).

    As a Mexican American, first-generation, immigrant, my culture played a significant role in shaping my identity. I come from a large family with 23 aunts and uncles. When my parents arrived in the United States, we initially lived with relatives in an apartment in the suburbs of Chicago. They were ready to start their adventure to provide their children with endless opportunities. Several of my uncles and my dad had already experienced the United States before bringing their families over, through work visas and other means, so they already had an idea of how much work was ahead of them. Everything about my family filled me with pride; we were big, we worked hard, and we took care of each other. My perspective was forced to take in a more negative association to what it meant to be Mexican as soon as I stepped into kindergarten. I vividly remember

standing outside waiting with a cluster of students for some type of direction on where to go once we went up the stairs. Students in my vicinity were engaged in chatter, some in Spanish, but mostly in English. A classmate approached me and asked me something in English. I can't remember what he asked me, but I remember understanding. As I stood there, a grin etched across my face, I immersed myself in the depths of my mind's archive, scouring for the English response. Naturally, it took too long; my English repertoire was insufficiently stocked. His expression shifted to that of puzzled realization, the sort that arises in awkward encounters. I was stuck in my own mind and although the context changed, as I progressed through my K-12 experience, in many ways I remained stuck. I remained running around my head searching many file cabinets for connections and translations or making new files on things I didn't know. When I was younger these included things like songs, shows like *Friends*, artists like *The Beatles*, books like *Harry Potter*, characters, food like chicken pot pie, and words I hadn't translated yet. As I continued through K-12 it turned into history, complex vocabulary, intricate topics like FAFSA, taxes, etc. It's continuous and never ending. To this day during conversations at work, while watching TV shows or listening to discussions in class, I continue to play catch-up. I'll write down book titles or names to look up to understand references made during conversations. I'm often the listener first because I must first check my files and see if I understand and can translate or if I need to jot this down and come back later. It does create feelings of imposter syndrome. While being stuck in my head playing catch-up, I can't share my ideas or contribute to conversations the way I wish I could and so in the moment I felt like I hadn't contributed enough or didn't know as much as others.

I quickly came to realize that my family was different, my culture was different, and that I was different. Besides differing in many cultural aspects like food and traditions, there were also differences in language and immigration status. Although I was born in the United States, this is a fact that is not reflected when you first see me. I'm not white passing and so for many people who see me, see an undocumented immigrant. I can tell when I'm asked where I'm from, which is a question that makes me uncomfortable to this day. I never know whether the question means where I was born (Chicago) or where my family is from (Mexico). This doesn't bring me shame. My parents were once undocumented immigrants, my husband, my uncles, my aunts, my cousins. I am what is considered an "anchor baby" (along with all the U.S. colonizers). My parents deliberately made sure I was born in the United States to provide me with all the benefits that come with being a U.S. Citizen. As I reflect years later, I realize how much Critical Race Theory and LatCrit (Latino/a Critical Race Theory) shaped what I experienced, how I experienced it, and the outcome of those experiences in the K-12 setting from the perspective of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering.

My experiences are unique by nature, as all experiences are. Yet there is a thread of cultural awareness and divergence that is shared and detailed through my experiences, Sara's experiences and Denise's experiences with Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Murdering encounters.

Denise Ross - *Fractured Not Broken*

Having a November birthday caused me to have to wait a year before starting school, so I went to Head Start for half of the day and stayed home with my grandmother the other half of the day. My grandmother took the time to teach me to recognize the

letters of the alphabet, write my name Denise, the shapes, colors, and to read basic short sentences. Needless to say, Kindergarten through second grade were a breeze. It was not until I entered third grade and had my first white teacher that I noticed "differences" in how she treated me. She was extremely hard on me. I never seemed to do anything right. I didn't walk in line correctly, I didn't put my heading on my paper correctly, or I didn't put my work in the designated place (which we didn't have because it was collected by a helper). She'd even say that my work was always sloppy, which I had beautiful penmanship even back then. She would also take my recess for little or no reason. One time I was caught chewing gum, and my punishment was to stick the gum on the tip of my nose and walk around like that for what seemed like hours. I was humiliated. These things added to the feeling I had that this white teacher just did not like me for whatever reason.

I would always complete my work before everyone else in the class, then I would draw pictures or talk to someone next to me, which was not a good thing to do. One day, she was not pleased with this behavior, and she came over to my desk, snatched the paper off my desk and told me I'd never be anything in life. This is not a great thing to say to anyone let alone a young child. I could not understand why my teacher, someone who was supposed to care for children, would do and say these things to me. I felt betrayed. What could I, a nine-year-old child, have done to deserve this? I went from being in a loving environment with my grandmother, to an environment where I felt hated for no reason. There could only be one reason for this behavior. It had to be because I was Black. This white teacher could not have been used to dealing with Black students who were *ahead* of the other students. This presented a problem for her, or rather *I* presented a

problem for her. This still influences me today as I type these words. As a result, I began

to withdraw and detach from class hoping that would make me invisible to her. It worked

for a while.

I shared this experience because of the effect it had on my *spirit.* My spirit was

murdered at the hands of someone who was supposed to protect it. Unfortunately,

children often experience instances of spirit murder at the hands of teachers or other

school administrators who are supposed to nurture and protect them (Love, 2019).

Problem Statement

The stories we shared all came from our time in our K-12 education. We shared

these stories to show who we were as children and how that has impacted who we are

today as adults. These stories are a part of our lives and have impacted us in different

ways. As minorities living in white America, we experienced spirit murdering firsthand.

We felt the sting of racism, of oppression, of being othered, of being not the majority. As

we reflected on our lives, on our K-12 educational experiences, we hoped to dive deeper

into how our experiences shaped us as individuals, as minorities, as women, and, more

importantly, as educators. We examined how the lack of cultural spirit nurturing, and the

extensive amount of spirit murdering affected our identity, our decisions to become

educators, and how we chose to teach our students in the classroom. As we looked back

on our K-12 experiences, we also reflected on how diverse curriculum, or lack thereof,

and culturally relevant teaching coincided with the spirit murdering we faced.

Diverse curriculum can be defined as a curriculum that is inclusive of the

experiences and histories of a variety of individuals from protected categories. Diverse

curriculum can be illustrated in many ways in a teacher's mind. For some teachers having

diverse picture books suffices as their step towards diversity or including ethnic names into their word problems. Unfortunately, these efforts are not enough to make-up for the lack of diversity in school curriculums today. There is a lack of diversity in the voices being represented and a lack of diversity in the perspectives presented (Kerkhoff & Cloud, 2020). In Kerkhoff and Cloud's 2020 research, they described a teacher who showcased different black scientists in her classroom who came from diverse countries like the United States, Nigeria, and Brazil. Another teacher brought in news reports and readings on congenital twins in India and the United States and asked students to analyze the different responses and assumptions concerning the mutation. These examples are good representations of diverse curriculum, but they rely on a teacher's intentional inclusion. They are not embedded in the mainstream curriculum.

When the curriculum denies perspectives and diverse voices it negates the stories and history of a people. As Givens described in his book Fugitive Pedagogy (2021, p. 88), "All references to Africa and black people portrayed them as objects in white people's journey to expand democracy and civilization or relegated them to footnotes." It is important to note that the absence, singular perspective, and altered history of minorities in American textbooks and curriculum creates a narrative where Europeans are the leaders of all major historical events.

When researcher Heidi J. Torres (2019) examined the effects of a world culture unit on elementary students, her results concluded a "positive development related to intercultural competence" (p. 571). After the unit concluded, many students had a better and more in depth understanding of their own culture, comparisons between cultures, and the amount of diversity within cultures.

Attempting to bring diversity into the classroom curriculum, whether it be racial, religious, or linguistic, can present its own set of challenges as well (Ungemah, 2015). This is especially true when the teacher is not fully prepared for the outcomes of their attempts at promoting diversity. Ungemah (2015) shared the stories of three teachers who all tried to provide more diverse readings in their various high school English classrooms. Each vignette demonstrated an outcome that was not expected when the decision to have diverse readings began. This showed that while bringing diversity into the classroom was extremely vital, it was also equally necessary for the teacher to be aware of and able to prepare for possible outcomes to not further perpetuate a negative experience with diverse curriculum.

According to Christy M. Byrd (2016), "Three of the main goals for teachers are to increase student achievement, increase student engagement, and to reduce the achievement gap." Culturally relevant teaching is proposed to be a powerful method in helping to do just this. But the question then becomes does it work?

A study was completed by Christy M. Byrd (2016), which used a diverse group of students and various surveys. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether students' perceptions of culturally relevant teaching and school socialization related to academic outcomes and racial attitudes. Culturally relevant teaching is teaching that focuses on teaching students with keeping their diverse cultural identities in mind. Students were asked about grades they usually get in school, their interests, and school belonging using the Relatedness subscale of Basic Needs Satisfaction scale adapted for school (Ryan & Deci, 2019). The results of the study lend support to the idea that culturally relevant teaching was considered "good teaching" (Ladson-Billings, 1995), but

it also indicated that a focus on race and culture in the classroom was also beneficial. Diverse instructional practices are linked to improved outcomes aligning with research on genuine student-centered instruction (Newmann et al., 1996). Students learn better when they are more connected to what they are learning.

Rationale for Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze how our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering contributed to the formation of our identities. Our journey to further grasp and interpret our concept of Cultural Spirit Nurturing was best analyzed through an autoethnography. Experiences that are considered examples of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Murdering are very singular and personal. Autoethnography as a research method allowed us to dissect and interpret our experiences as we advanced through grade school, middle school, and high school and then moved into the workforce as educators. An autoethnography granted us the ability to merge Cultural Spirit Nurturing with Critical Race Theory. Under the umbrella of Critical Race Theory, we used LatCrit (Latino Critical Race Theory), MusCrit (Muslim Critical Race Theory), BlackCrit (Black Critical Race Theory), counter storytelling, and intersectionality, to interpret our lived experiences. An autoethnography allowed us to provide multiple counter-stories that challenged how culture, race, language, etc. were viewed in a K-12 setting. Through our autoethnographies and our own counter stories, we began the process of regaining our voice.

Significance of Study

The significance of the study was that we reflected on our educational lives and how our individual lived experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit

Murdering shaped us into the educators we are today. Our analysis served as a counter-story and as an antidote for the silencing that BIPOC individuals have experienced for generations. Due to the nature of the experiences, our counter-stories reflected K-12 experiences that are inconsistent to that of average white American students. The K-12 system in the United States predominantly revolves around aspects of white culture, including cafeteria food, history lessons, holidays, language and dialect, middle-class principles, values, etc. (Yosso, 2005). Our perspectives, via our diverse intersectionalities, provided mirrors for many members of different social categories.

This collection of autoethnographies also challenged Jean-Francois Lyotard's notion of the différend (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). According to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in their book Critical Race Theory (2023), "the différend occurs when a concept such as justice acquires conflicting meaning for two groups" (p. 53). An example they cited was an undocumented person who suffered discrimination in their place of work but was not able to complain for fear of deportation (p. 53). This fear could also transfer to other BIPOC in that they may be afraid to speak up and go against others which would cause them to continue to stand out more than they already do. The existence of narratives describing this event through the point of view of an undocumented immigrant provides a different perspective through which to interpret the law. What would the application of the différend be in an educational setting? For many parents who push for book bans and legislation that negates BIPOC experiences, a différend exists. According to many advocates for book bans, their efforts protected their children "from information that's portrayed as being harmful to personal esteem, pride in country, or proper understanding of society, science, history and economics" (Lenihan,

2023). Students and parents belonging to BIPOC communities could similarly express

this sentiment from their perspective. The relationship between the colonizer and the

colonized persists today through legislation like book bans, that ultimately is another

form of Cultural Spirit Murdering. Many of the books included in book bans include

stories written for or by BIPOC. A plethora of studies exist that demonstrate the benefits

of diversity, not only for our diverse students but also for white students. Additionally,

there was insufficient credible evidence demonstrating the contrary (Lenihan, 2023). In

many ways, our accounts served as language for proponents of Cultural Spirit Nurturing

and for fellow BIPOC experiencing Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Murdering.

According to Eric Schmid (2021), our last census demonstrated a slow rate of

growth overall, with many Black families leaving St. Louis City, but it also revealed a

growth of diverse population from the past 10 years. The growth was not only specific to

St. Louis City, but included St. Louis County, St. Charles, and St. Clair counties. With

many Black families moving in search of a better education for their children, it was

interesting to deduce how much insight Missouri educators had regarding their student

population if Missouri's White population was over 80%. Teacher exposure to concepts

like Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering provided awareness of their

increasingly diverse student populations through Professional Development or teacher

programs in universities.

How can Cultural Spirit Nurturing open the doors for other programs like the

MAS Program in Tucson, Arizona? The MAS Program in Tucson was a program where

students learned about Latino history. It became an incredibly popular program with

Latino families and a successful one as well. Dropout rates went from 50% to almost

negligible, with many students continuing their education (Delgado, 2013). Yet

legislators worked hard to make the program illegal and ultimately succeeded in 2010.

The program, according to advocates for the ban, was "designed to increase racial

solidarity" and "aimed at the overthrow of the American government or inculcation of

racial resentment" (Delgado, 2013, pp. 1521-1522). Florida's decision to reject an

Advanced Placement course on African American studies demonstrated the continued

effort to suppress and colonize BIPOC communities (Heyward, 2023). These decisions

suggested that the right of minority groups to gain an understanding of self and an

education that promoted mental health and an intact cultural spirit, were at stake.

Research Questions

Through analysis, using autoethnographies as our research method, we offered an

interpretation to the following research questions:

1. How have our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit

   Murdering as students and educators shaped our identities?

2. How have our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit

   Murdering influenced how we work with our students and how we teach?

Keywords and Definitions

Anchor Baby - used to refer to a child born to a noncitizen mother in a country which has birthright citizenship, especially when viewed as providing an advantage to family members seeking to secure citizenship or legal residency

Autoethnography - A qualitative research approach that analyzes the personal experience of the researcher to understand better the cultural context they identify (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011)

BlackCrit - Black Critical Race Theory

Chicano/a - an American of Mexican origin or descent

Counter-Storytelling - narratives that challenge the traditional perspective of white America (Miller, 2020)

Critical Race Theory - a set of ideas holding that racial bias is inherent in many parts of western society, especially in its legal and social institutions, on the basis of there having been primarily designed for and implemented by white people.

Cultural Identity - a multidimensional construct that develops over time through an active process of assimilation, acculturation, and development; influenced by many factors including race, ethnicity, spiritual/religious backgrounds, geographic locations during childhood years, cultural values, and traditions (Tang & Bashir, 2012)

Culturally Relevant Teaching - teaching that focuses on teaching students with keeping their diverse cultural identities in mind

Cultural Spirit Nurturing - Experiences rooted in positive and authentic acts that promote the development of individual identities and spirits within a framework of culture.

Desi – of, from, or characteristic of India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh; a person of South

Asian birth or descent who lives abroad; a loose term used to describe the people,

cultures, and products of the Indian subcontinent and their diaspora, derived from

Sanskirt meaning "land, country"

Diversity - the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of

different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.

Diverse Curriculum - curriculum that is inclusive of the experiences and histories of a

variety of individuals from protected categories

Hijab - Head covering for Muslim women

Hispanic - relating to Spain or to Spanish-speaking countries, especially those of Latin

America

Imposter Syndrome - a psychological phenomenon characterized by persistent self-doubt

and a fear of being exposed as a fraud despite evidence of success (Knudson, 2019)

Intersectionality - theoretical framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of social

identities such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status,

religion, age, and ability (Adams et al., 2018)

Islam - the religion of the Muslims, a monotheistic faith regarded as revealed through

Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah

Islamophobia - the presumption that Islam is inherently violent, alien, and unassimilable,

and expressions of Muslim identity correlative with a propensity for terrorism (Beydoun,

2016)

LatCrit - Latino Critical Race Theory

Latina/Latino/Latinx - a person of Latin American origin or descent,

Microaggressions - subtle yet powerful expressions of bias that can have profound effects

on individuals and communities (Thiel, 2019)

MusCrit - Muslim Critical Race Theory

Muslim - a follower of the religion of Islam

Orientalism - traits considered characteristic of the peoples and cultures of Asia,

especially the Middle East, in a stereotyped way that is regarded as embodying a

colonialist attitude

Racial Profiling - the unjust act of using a person's race as the foundation for shaping the

behaviors and perceptions that are often associated with certain racial groups (Teasley et

al., 2018)

Racism - prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or

institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular

racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.

South Asian - relating to or characteristic of the southern part of Asia or its people.

Countries included are: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka;

Afghanistan and the Maldives are often considered part of South Asia as well

Spirit Murdering - a product of racism which not only inflicts pain, but it is a form of

racial violence that steals and kills the humanity and spirits of people of color

(Williams,1987)

Spirit Nurturing - experiences rooted in positive and authentic acts that promote the

development of individual identities and spirits within a framework of culture

Urdu – official language of Pakistan

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In the complex landscape of education, the intersectionality of race, power dynamics, and social identities was a focal point for scholarly research. This literature review navigated the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate,1995), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2021), and the nuanced notion of Spirit Murdering (Love, 2013). CRT, as articulated by Delgado et al. (2023), served as a foundational lens for understanding the intricate dynamics of racism, power structures, and their impact on education. CRT, which got its start in the 1970s in reaction to the shortcomings of the civil rights movement (Delgago, 2023), not only identified systemic racism but also went out on an activist mission focused on improving social structures. We examined CRT's branches, such as LatCrit (Perez Huber, 2010), MusCrit (Beydoun, 2016a), and BlackCrit (Dumas & Ross, 2016) which offered distinct perspectives on the experiences of the Latino, Muslim, and Black communities, respectively.

The second conceptual framework, Intersectionality, offered a lens through which the interconnectedness of social groups and identities was explored. In rejecting the isolation of advantages or disadvantages to single identities, Intersectionality emphasized the interplay of various factors in shaping distinct experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 2021). This framework became increasingly pertinent in understanding the multifaceted nature of discrimination and privilege within educational settings (Kayi-Aydar et al., 2022). The third conceptual framework, Spirit Murdering (Love, 2013), offered an analytical lens through which to examine how racist structures, though flexible in their

application, denied people inclusion, safety, acceptance, and nurturing. The concept of

Spirit Murdering encompassed the principles proposed by Gloria Ladson-Billings, who

utilized culturally responsive pedagogy and defined it as an educational approach that

empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by incorporating

cultural references to convey knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Through our research, we developed the concept of Cultural Spirit Nurturing which was

informed by Spirit Murdering, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the scholarly work of

Tara J. Yosso, namely her research on community cultural wealth (2005). As we

embarked on this literature review, the aim was to unravel these frameworks, critically

analyze their application, and contribute to a nuanced understanding of their implications

for educational equity.

In the subsequent sections, we focused on a specific tenet of CRT, conducting a

comprehensive analysis to shed light on its significance and implications within the

broader context of educational equity and diverse school environments. Moreover, the

review explored the role of counter-narratives (Ellis, 2011) grounded in CRT (Ladson-

Billings & Tate,1995) and how the various discourse study methods served as promising

approaches to challenging traditional perspectives and fostering educational equity.

Through this exploration, we endeavored to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on the

role of theoretical frameworks in shaping educational practices and addressing issues of

race and inequality. This chapter aimed to outline the literature reviewed by the

researchers, three female educators composed of a Black American, a Mexican

American, and a South Asian, Muslim American. This literature review outlined Critical

Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings & Tate,1995), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2021),

and Spirit Murdering (Williams, 1991; Love, 2013) as it related to the autoethnographic study.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework: CRT, Intersectionality, and Spirit Murdering

Our literature review included relevant works for our research on Cultural Spirit Murdering and Cultural Spirit Nurturing in relation to our experiences in the K–12 educational system. Our research utilized critical race theory as a framework, situating the discussion within the theory and practice of critical race theory. Critical Race Theory, Intersectionality, and Spirit Murdering formed the foundation of our research. Our primary lenses were intersectionality, counter-storytelling, and spirit murdering. Using autoethnography as our research method, we analyzed and provided an interpretation of how our experiences of Cultural Spirit Murdering and Cultural Spirit Nurturing contributed to the formation of our identities as students and, later, as educators. Our experiences with racism, spirit murdering and nurturing, and counter-storytelling in K–12 schools were contextualized in this review.

Critical Race Theory

The five central tenets of CRT encompass racism as ordinary and enduring (the usual way, common everyday experience), interest convergence (there is little incentive to get rid of racism because of the advancement it provides white America or racial justice only advances when it aligns with the interests of white people), social construction of race (race and races are constructs derived from social cognition and interactions), differential racialization (racializing different minority groups at different times due to convenience/need), intersectionality and anti-essentialism (identities overlap

and can have conflicting elements), and counter-storytelling (minority voices detailing

experiences specific to POC) (Delgado et al., 2023). There is also an activist component

to CRT. It aimed to identify how society was structured along racial and hierarchical

lines and how to improve it. It aspired to both analyze and improve our current social

environment (Delgado et al., 2023). This literature review focused on a particular tenet of

Critical Race Theory (CRT), further examining a crucial area within this theoretical

construct. By narrowing our focus, we aimed to thoroughly examine the selected tenet,

shedding light on its significance and implications within the broader context of

educational equity and diverse school environments (Ladson-Billings & Tate,1995). This

focused analysis contributed to a deeper understanding of CRT's application and

effectiveness in addressing issues related to race and inequality in education.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided a foundation to analyze the role that race,

racism, and power play in many sectors, but for our research, its foundation in education

(Delgado et al., 2023). This foundation was developed in the 1970s through Critical

Legal Studies and radical feminism after realizing advancements from the civil rights era

were lacking. Founding Father Derrick Bell played a significant role in CRT's

development through his work in Critical Legal Studies and interest convergence thesis

(Delgado et al., 2023). The concept of legal indeterminacy, taken from critical legal

studies to create CRT, was that there was no single correct answer in every case. Creators

also examined precedents like *Brown v. Board of Education*, which was regarded as a

victory but whose original intent was weakened by postponements and lower-court

interpretations (Onwuachi-Willig, 2019). From feminism, CRT creators drew inspiration

from their work of patriarchy, power, and the construction of social roles. CRT authors

also incorporated objectives of the civil rights movement, like rectifying historical

wrongs (Delgado et al., 2023).

CRT examined the roles that systemic racism played in society and the effects it

had on individuals and communities. CRT was used in education to interpret tracking,

multicultural and bilingual education, school discipline, and disputes over curriculum and

history (Taylor et al., 2015). CRT recognized the increasing resegregation of schools in

America and the biological racism found in educational practice. When analyzed through

CRT, the curriculum identified its Anglocentric qualities and recognized that many

educators apply a deficit theory method when educating minority students (Taylor et al.,

2015).

LatCrit, MusCrit, & BlackCrit

Certain CRT branches were consistent with our autoethnography, such as LatCrit

(Latino Critical Race Theory), MusCrit (Muslim Critical Race Theory), and BlackCrit

(Black Critical Race Theory). These branches developed literature specific to Latino,

Muslim, and Black experiences.

LatCrit examined immigration policies, language rights, and discrimination based

on accent or national origin (Delgado et al., 2023). LatCrit literature examined the impact

of shifting away from family reunification policies in response to an increase in non-

European immigration (Romero, 2008). Since the 1980s, laws have been passed that

restrict immigration solely to the needs of the labor force, imposed restrictions on family

reunions, and labeled it as a "public charge" (Johnson, 2003, p. 460). In response to the

attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the federal government enacted the

Homeland Security Act and PATRIOT Act. Immigration was transferred to the

Department of Homeland Security with the implementation of the Patriot Act, alongside

Customs and Border Protection, Transportation Security Administration, Federal

Emergency Management, and the Secret Service (Romero, 2008). These legal revisions

muddled the difference between an individual who enters the country without proper

documentation and an individual who has committed a crime. The blurry distinction

solidified the labels of "alien" and "criminal" as synonymous: "criminal aliens

(deportable for their post-entry criminal conduct), illegal aliens (deportable for their

surreptitious crossing of the U.S. border), and terrorists (deportable for the grave risk they

pose to national security) are all deemed dangerous foreigners for whom criminally

punitive treatment and removal are uniformly appropriate and urgently necessary"

(Miller, 2005, p. 113). Racialized immigration laws and citizenship have played a

significant role in U.S. history, influencing the treatment of immigrants from Asia, the

Americas, and Europe alongside the classification of indigenous populations and

enslaved people from Africa. The state's continual exclusion of certain racial, gender, and

class groups from citizenship or authorized entry into the U.S. led to the use of physical

appearance as a proxy for citizenship. Robert Chang (2012) asserted that individuals who

identify as non-White in the United States faced stigmatization as "aliens"

(undocumented), leading to the emergence of a psychological border. The term "illegal

alien" has become a cliché in popular culture, the media, and routine immigration

enforcement and monitoring procedures (Johnson, 2003, p. 460).

MusCrit asserted that the perception of the Muslim American experience was

frequently one of homogeneity because of the racialization of religion and the attribution

of being part of a collective (Ali, 2021). This group persistently faced discriminatory

practices, violent acts, acts of bigotry, and microaggressions, as well as total injustice.

The system of Islamophobia is dynamic and fluid; it is based on irrational fear and hatred

and is used by law enforcement and lay actors to target Muslim Americans (Wajahat et

al., 2011). According to Beydoun (2016a), in terms of the law:

> Islamophobia is the presumption that Islam is inherently violent, alien
>
> and inassimilable, and expressions of Muslim identity correlative with
>
> a propensity for terrorism. Islamophobia is rooted in understandings of
>
> Islam as civilizational antithesis, and perpetuated by government structures
>
> and private citizens. Finally, Islamophobia is also a process, and namely,
>
> the dialectic by which state policies targeting Muslims endorse prevailing
>
> stereotypes and in turn, embolden private animus toward Muslim subjects.

The current state of Islamophobia in America is characterized by hatred toward Islam and

Muslim Americans, whether it came from law enforcement, businesses, state agencies, or

private citizens (Ahmad, 2004).

Modern Islamophobia, although presented as a novel phenomenon, has

epistemological roots in Orientalism, which, by definition, are traits considered

characteristic of the peoples and cultures of Asia, especially the Middle East, in a

stereotyped way that was regarded as embodying a colonialist attitude (Nayak & Malone,

2009). These systems predated the United States' founding. Islam and Muslims were

portrayed by Orientalism as a subservient civilization (Beydoun, 2016b) and a constant

threat (Bayoumi, 2006). These deeply ingrained systems surfaced during times of crisis

and shaped contemporary perceptions of Muslims as dangerous and suspicious. Many

immediately resorted to stereotypes of a violent foreigner or Islamic menace following a

domestic terrorist attack in the United States (Bayoumi, 2006). Following the 9/11

attacks, research observed the revival of well-established Orientalist prejudices (Volpp,

2002). These stereotypes portrayed Muslims as innately violent, unyieldingly aggressive,

and resolute in their quest to dominate the Western world. In line with Volpp's

observations, Orientalist stereotypes were present in multiple aspects of modern

American society, such as political discussions and communication (Board, 2015),

portrayals in television and film (Shaheen, 2003), conversations and patterns on social

media (Lajevardi et al., 2022), and the revival of "anti-Muslim demonstrations" and

rallies (Abdalla & Chen, 2023). These stereotypes perpetuated damaging misconceptions

deeply embedded in the United States' history, persistently suggesting an inherent

incompatibility between Islam and the values of freedom, democracy, and human

advancement.

Singling out Muslim Americans commenced well before the events of September

11th, but it formalized as official state policy in 2002 with the establishment of the

Department of Homeland Security ("Public Law," 2002). As previously stated in this

literature review, the Department of Homeland Security played a vital role in

consolidating the state's immigration and emigration policy. The institution served as the

principal hub for supervising and enforcing substantial federal and local anti-terrorism

monitoring, as permitted by the Patriot Act of 2001 (Uniting, 2001). The Patriot Act

created a "war on terror", viewing Muslim Americans as presumed or potential terrorists,

and increased governmental suspicion and surveillance of Muslim American

communities (Bonet, 2011, p. 2). Muslims and immigrants were impacted by the same

legislative change in very different ways.

Language had a crucial role in maintaining inequality, like other social factors such as ethnicity, gender, class, and race, which contributed to the uneven and hierarchical transmission of knowledge (Kubota and Lin, 2009). According to Lippi-Green (2012), when ethnolinguistic minorities and non-native English speakers, such as those who use African American Vernacular English, are discriminated against, it leads to them feeling inferior. Linguicism was defined by Skutnabb-Kangas (1988) as:

> …the ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate,
>
> effectuate, regulate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and
>
> resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are
>
> defined on the basis of language (on the basis of their mother language)
>
> (p. 13).

Linguicism can be defined as the practice of establishing preferential differences in favor of those who are native speakers of a certain language or dialect, such as Standard English. Linguistic discrimination, like racism, was a social phenomenon that utilized distinctions to develop and uphold a system of supremacy (Cho, 2017). In the Latinx community, language serves as a piece of their identity and language maintenance contributes to the nurturing of their culture (Garcia, 2020). Due to the educational hardships faced by Mexican Americans, who have historically been an overlooked minority group, the first push for language laws in education began in 1968 with the passage of the Bilingual American Education Act (BEA) (De La Trinidad, 2015). The BEA awarded resources to states with substantial need, including those with a notable population of children encountering difficulties in English language competency. The purpose of this funding was to help with a range of activities, such as bilingual education,

parental education programs, initiatives that promote the connection between a child's language and their culture, and efforts to encourage collaboration between schools and families (Punches, 1985). The Bilingual Education Act was the first federal law to acknowledge a different method of educating individuals who speak a language that is not prevalent inside the regular school system. This educational approach questioned existing standards while also recognizing, to some extent, the prejudice experienced by immigrants and their children in the United States (Scassa, 1996).

The Bilingual Education Act allocated funds to support bilingual programs with little specific criteria, but the 1974 Supreme Court ruling in Lau v. Nichols made these programs mandatory (Punches, 1985). The Lau case was initiated on behalf of Chinese-speaking students in the San Francisco education system. Although almost two-thirds of these pupils received instruction solely in English, the school system provided targeted language assistance for Spanish-speaking students while disregarding the needs of Chinese-speaking students (Moran, 2005). Initially, it seemed that the students' efforts would be hindered, as both the trial judge and the court of appeals decided against them. Ultimately, the United States Supreme Court concluded that the San Francisco school system had willingly committed to comply with the Office for Civil Rights' stipulations upon accepting federal funding ("US Department", 2020). Lau recognized a specific problem, namely that an English-only curriculum can effectively exclude public school children who have not yet attained proficiency in the language. The Bilingual Education Act initiated the advancement of linguistic rights, while Lau recognized the presence of a lawful privilege to be exempted from such inequities (Moran, 2005).

CRT in the field of education was the epitome of the Black theorization of race. CRT was used as a tool to analyze race and racism and, in its founding in education and legal studies, was an effort to respond to and find meaning in institutionalized racism as it was experienced by Black people (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

BlackCrit, with its unique lens, enhanced our comprehension of the marginalization of Black bodies in education. By providing a specific framework that centered on the experiences of Black individuals, it enabled a more profound analysis of how anti-blackness functioned within educational institutions. This lens brought to light the disproportionate discipline, marginalization, and denial of resources and opportunities that Black students faced (Dumas & Ross, 2016). BlackCrit disrupted the notion of colorblindness and underscored the urgency to confront the specific ways in which anti-blackness perpetuate inequality in education.

BlackCrit challenged the notions of multiculturalism and diversity in education by highlighting the specific experiences of Black individuals and how anti-blackness operated within educational institutions (Coles, 2023). It critiqued the superficiality of multiculturalism and diversity initiatives that often failed to address the structural inequities faced by Black students. BlackCrit emphasized the need to go beyond surface-level representation and instead focused on dismantling the systems of oppression that marginalized Black bodies in education (Dumas & Ross, 2016).

Counter-Storytelling

In the context of critical race theory (CRT), storytelling served as counter-narratives traditionally shaped by the perspective of white America (Miller, 2020). Educational research introduced counter-narratives (Miller, 2020) as a promising

approach to fostering educational equity in diverse schools and communities. These

narratives, rooted in critical race theory and various discourse study methods such as

narrative inquiry, life history, and autoethnography, aimed to challenge traditional

perspectives (Delgado, 1989). It was a shared tradition among minority groups to

transmit history orally across generations (Hughes & Bontemps, 1958). This practice

offered a distinct viewpoint, frequently challenging mainstream ideas, stories, and

history, and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding. In some cultures,

storytelling is a cherished tradition, providing a unique avenue for learning that goes

beyond conventional educational approaches (Decuir-Gunby et al., 2019).

While stories and counter-stories were positive in nature, an equally significant

destructive role can stem from them as well. Stories and counter-stories indicated to us,

as researchers and participants, how to escape the grasp of unjust marginalization. We

were given the authority to determine when it was fitting to reallocate the power of

marginalization by utilizing stories and counter-stories.

As stated by Richard Delgado (1989), "The same object, as everyone knows, can

be described in many ways" (p. 61). There does not exist a single accurate or

comprehensive description (Delgado et al., 2023). The same is true of events. CRT

asserts that narratives shared by marginalized individuals were crucial for contesting the

prevailing supremacy in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By creating counter-

narratives that exposed the enduring presence of *-isms* (racism, linguicism, etc.),

individuals from marginalized groups assumed authoritative roles in investigating and

sharing their own experiences (Martinez, 2016). Counter-storytelling sought to challenge

implicit assumptions and unexpressed underlying beliefs of social systems and unequal

power dynamics within them (Cho, 2017). Hence, counter-storytelling played a crucial

role in exposing the facade of impartiality, disregard for racial differences, dominance of

white culture, and belief in a fair system based on merit. This empowered the narrator to

challenge the existing social order (Matias, 2013). According to DeCuir-Gunby and

Walker-DeVose (2013), counter-storytelling helped racially and linguistically excluded

communities develop a feeling of community. This approach underscored the

significance of collective experiences and emphasized that people within these groups

were not in seclusion but could acquire significant insights from the firsthand accounts of

others.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality, as a concept within the framework of CRT, came from a need to

understand the unique experience of being both Black and a woman. Kimberlé Crenshaw

first presented the idea to show how Black women's experiences often fell between the

gaps of feminist and anti-racist legal approaches. Crenshaw aimed to show criticism of

the "problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually

exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (Crenshaw, 2021, p. 139). In her

research, Crenshaw drew attention to the struggle of the Black woman in America and

argued that they were often excluded from feminist and antiracist discourse due to the

limitations of existing frameworks (Crenshaw, 2021). Crenshaw contended that the

system in which we look at feminism and racism cannot simply bring in the plight of the

Black woman, it must evolve in a way that recognizes the unique experiences that Black

women bring to the table. Much like with the intersection of being Black and a woman,

many individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups also have a unique

experience. Belonging to multiple groups, be it race, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, etc., has played a pivotal role in how one is seen in the world and how the world sees them. The experience of intersectionality goes far deeper than simply being "the sum of racism and sexism" (Crenshaw, 2021, p. 140), and is necessary to fully comprehend and address the specific needs of those who belong to one or more marginalized groups.

We used the term intersectionality to critically examine inequalities and injustices in American society based on multiple social categorizations. Intersectionality is supported by core principles, which included the social construction of identity, the idea that multiple forms of oppression are not additive but interlocking, and the recognition that systems of power are deeply embedded in social structures (Singh, 2022). Scholars like Crenshaw and Patricia Collins explored these foundational concepts, refining, and expanding the theoretical framework. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that emphasized the interconnectedness of social identities such as race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, age, and ability (Adams et al., 2018). Intersectionality also suggests that these various advantaged and disadvantaged groups, at the personal, group and community, and systemic level, are not independent from one another and instead are all connected in a way that creates "specific experiences of oppression" that cannot be reduced to one identity over another (Adams et al., 2018, p. 46). Intersectionality recognized that our experiences as individuals are shaped by the intersection of these specific identities and became a critical tool for understanding complex systems of privilege and oppression. These intersections occurred at the same moment not just in one's personal experience but also at all three levels of social organization, the individual, cultural, and institutional (Adams et al., 2018). This section

of the literature review looked at how intersectionality became a pivotal tool for

analyzing complex systems of privilege and oppression. It sought to provide an overview

of the key themes, debates, advancements, and limitations in intersectionality research

and provided an overview of its historical context, theoretical foundations, applications,

and ongoing debates.

When looking at the research surrounding intersectionality, it mainly centered on

how various identities intersect and interact. It was the idea that different forms of

discrimination were connected and could not be addressed on an individual basis (Singh,

2022). The examination of race and gender was the most common, thanks to researchers

Crenshaw and Collins; however, studies have expanded to include sexuality, class,

disability, and more. These studies explored how these identities intersect and shaped

individuals' experiences and social realities. According to Singh (2022) intersectionality

was akin to a road with multiple intersections; these various intersections created

experiences and needs that were unique to each individual person. Nigerian writer,

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) asserted in her TED Talk "The Danger of a Single

Story",

> People are made up of multiple stories and identities, and they are not
>
> defined by just one of these aspects in their life. Therefore, it is of utmost
>
> important to understand, confront, and address the issues of intersectionality
>
> and its implications in multicultural education courses and professional
>
> practice in information organizations.

Intersectionality gave nuance to the fact that there are a myriad of ways and explanations

that gave context to what makes every individual unique in their experiences and

livelihoods. Intersectionality covered multiple facets of human identity, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, religion, etc. (Singh, 2022). Within that, we acknowledged that while individuals can share similar social categories, it does not necessarily mean that everyone within that group shared the same experiences and perspectives. It was important to understand that not all individuals within an identity category experienced the same level of oppression and privilege. We, as researchers of intersectionality, also understood that while many areas were included under the umbrella of intersectionality, there were still aspects of humanity that do not often enter the conversation. Researcher Mary Romero (2008) brought attention to the inclusion of citizenship status within intersectionality. Romero (2008) pointed out this inclusion by making the connection to immigration law and how the enforcement of immigration law was often based on race. We also recognized the use of the term *alien* versus *citizen* when discussing the importance of intersectionality in this sense and how "the three major social structural positions that the state has used to construct 'alien' are race and ethnicity, gender, and class" (Romero, 2008, p. 135).

While intersectionality has significantly advanced our understanding of social identities, it was not without its challenges and critiques. The complexity of intersecting identities made it difficult to create straightforward policies or solutions that addressed all aspects of an individual's experience. With this understanding of intersectionality, in both what was included and what was excluded, we, as researchers, used our own intersectional identities to show how each of these identities played a role in our lives. The researchers' identities included a Black woman, a Mexican woman who was a first-generation American, and a Pakistan/South Asian woman who was also a first-generation

American Muslim. These intersecting identities were a significant factor in the spirit

murdering/nurturing we encountered in our K-12 education.

Spirit Murdering

Legal and CRT scholar Patricia Williams first conceptualized spirit murdering as

"a product of racism which not only inflicts pain, but it is a form of racial violence that

steals and kills the humanity and spirits of people of color" (Williams, 1991). Bettina

Love later defined spirit murdering as being excluded, unprotected, unsafe, uncherished,

and unaccepted due to the unchangeable yet adaptable nature of racist systems (Love,

2013). At the heart of Love's concept was the idea that certain social structures and

educational systems contributed to the destruction of a person's spirit, and robbed them of

their sense of self-worth, agency, and potential (Wright-Mair & Pulido, 2021). This

notion went beyond physical harm and extended into the realm of emotional and

psychological violence, which highlighted the insidious ways in which systemic

injustices eroded the vitality and resilience of individuals (Johnson & Bryan, 2017). This

was most prevalent in school settings in which students of color were subjected to

incidents of physical and psychological spirit murder at the hands of teachers, bus

drivers, and other school officials, the people who were supposed to protect them, love

them, and teach them (Love, 2019).

One key aspect of spirit murder, as defined by Love, was the systemic neglect and

devaluation of the cultural identities of marginalized individuals (Love, 2019). When

institutions failed to recognize and celebrate the diverse backgrounds and experiences of

students, it led to a sense of alienation and a disconnection from one's own cultural roots

(Lubienski, 2003). Love argued that this erasure of identity was a form of violence that

undermined a person's sense of belonging and self-esteem (Love, 2019). Love

emphasized that spirit murdering was not just about physical harm but also about the

emotional and psychological damage that occurred when educational environments failed

to acknowledge and value the identities, experiences, and histories of students (Love,

2021). Love advocated for an abolitionist approach to education, which involved

dismantling oppressive systems and replacing them with educational practices that foster

liberation, joy, and a sense of belonging for all students (Love, 2021).

Spirit murdering also took the form of microaggressions. Microaggressions were

subtle yet powerful expressions of bias that have profound effects on individuals and

communities (Thiel, 2019). Microaggressions manifested in various forms, such as jokes,

comments, gestures, or even looks, and they have a significant impact on individuals and

contributed to a hostile or unwelcoming environment (Kohili & Solorzano, 2012).

Microaggressions took many shapes and were not limited to specific

demographics (Davis, 1989). An example of a microaggression might be someone

complementing a person of color on their ability to speak English, which then implies

surprise at their language skills. The overall effect of microaggressions were detrimental

to the mental and emotional well-being of individuals (Davis, 1989). Over time, they

contributed to feelings of alienation, imposter syndrome, and lowered self-esteem (Kohili

& Solorzano, 2012). Moreover, in a broader societal context, microaggressions

perpetuated stereotypes and contributed to the reinforcement of systemic inequalities

(Martinez-Becerra, 2020). To create truly inclusive spaces, organizations and

communities must actively work to eliminate microaggressions. This involved not only

addressing individual behaviors but also examining and challenging the underlying

structures and systems that perpetuate inequality. Encouraging diverse representation, promoting cultural competency, and fostering an environment where individuals feel empowered to speak out against microaggressions were crucial steps toward building inclusive communities (Kohili & Solorzano, 2012).

Another aspect of spirit murdering researched was racial profiling. Racial profiling was the unjust act of using a person's race as the foundation for shaping the behaviors and perceptions that were often associated with certain racial groups (Teasley et al., 2018). It was often associated with determining who is and is not considered a criminal and which group they belong to (Moore, 2015). This system puts individuals from ethnic and racial minority groups at a disadvantage and is categorically applied to stereotype and target young, black men, particularly by law enforcement (Weatherspoon, 2004). Not only did law enforcement utilize racial profiling to target black men, it was also ruled by the Supreme Court that a "Mexican appearance" could be classified as probable cause under the Fourth Amendment (Romero, 2008). Skin complexion, as well as other physical characteristics, are used as visual signs that are used to determine who is an illegal alien (Romero, 2008). One's appearance is also often used in racial profiling of Muslims in the wake of 9/11. Muslims who have a beard, wear a headscarf, or other traditional Islamic clothing are often targeted more hastily and violently by police as they are perceived to be radicals or national security threats (Beydoun, 2016a). The consequences of this often result in Muslims feeling pressured to downplay their religious identity and the feeling that they must assimilate more into American society (Beydoun, 2016a).

By delving into the historical context, multifaceted manifestations, and the profound psychological repercussions of spirit murder, a nuanced understanding emerges, paving the way for a concerted societal effort to dismantle entrenched systemic injustices (Pulido & Wright, 2021). This collective endeavor aims to forge a future where the spiritual essence of every individual is not only acknowledged but also accorded the utmost respect, value, and protection from harm.

Acknowledging the historical context of spirit murder necessitated an exploration of its roots, tracing the origins of cultural, social, and institutional dynamics that perpetuated harm over time (Revilla, 2021). This historical lens illuminated the complex interplay of power structures, prejudices, and discriminatory practices that contributed to the subjection and erasure of specific individuals or communities (Love, 2016).

Examining the manifestations of spirit murder involved meticulous analysis of its contemporary expressions, ranging from overt acts of violence and discrimination to more subtle, insidious forms embedded within societal structures (Pulido & Wright, 2021). This comprehensive examination revealed how spirit murder permeated various facets of life, affecting individuals across diverse contexts, and reinforcing systemic inequalities (Revilla, 2021). The psychological impact of spirit murder emerged as a critical facet as it delved into the profound and lasting effects on the mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being of those subjected to such harm (Hines & Wilmot, 2018). This exploration recognized the intricate web of trauma, alienation, and disempowerment that resulted from the persistent devaluation and disrespect of an individual's spiritual identity (Pulido & Wright, 2021).

In recognizing and comprehensively understanding these dimensions, society embarked on a transformative journey toward dismantling systemic injustices. This necessitated a commitment to dismantling oppressive structures, challenging ingrained biases, and fostering inclusivity in all spheres of life (Revilla, 2021). Education, advocacy, and policy reform became essential tools in this endeavor, empowering communities to confront and rectify historical injustices while promoting a collective ethos that upheld the sanctity of every individual's spirit (Pulido & Wright, 2021).

Ultimately, the vision was cultivating a future where all individuals' spirits were acknowledged, respected, and protected from harm. This aspiration involved creating an environment that celebrated diversity, embraced equity, and championed justice, and laid the groundwork for a society where the intrinsic value of each person's spirit is an immutable cornerstone (Mullin et al., 2021). Through sustained efforts, society aspired to transcend the legacy of spirit murder, fostering a landscape where every individual could thrive, free from the shackles of systemic injustice (Ramlackhan & Catania, 2022).

As society endeavors to create a future where the spirits of all individuals are cherished and protected, it must confront psychological barriers such as Imposter Syndrome, which undermines self-worth and achievement (Knudson, 2019). Imposter Syndrome, a psychological phenomenon characterized by persistent self-doubt and a fear of being exposed as a fraud despite evidence of success, affects individuals from all walks of life (Knudson, 2019). First identified by psychologists Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes in the 1970s, imposter syndrome could manifest in personal and professional spheres, hindering individuals from recognizing and celebrating their achievements (Davis et al., 2023).

Imposter syndrome often arose from a combination of internal and external factors. External factors included societal expectations, cultural influences, and family dynamics, while internal factors involved personality traits, perfectionism, and past experiences (Davis et al., 2023). Individuals experiencing imposter syndrome tend to attribute their success to luck rather than their abilities, fearing that they would be exposed as incapable.

Manifestations of imposter syndrome show diversity. Common signs include persistent self-doubt, a tendency to downplay achievements, a fear of failure, and an overwhelming belief that success is a result of external factors rather than personal competence (Davis et al., 2023). This internal struggle often led to heightened stress, anxiety, and a reluctance to take on new challenges, hindering personal and professional growth.

Cultural Spirit Nurturing

While spirit murdering and microaggressions can have a detrimental impact on the lives of students, cultural spirit nurturing can have just the opposite (Davis et al., 2024). We defined cultural spirit nurturing as experiences rooted in positive and authentic acts that promoted the development of individual identities and spirits within a framework of culture. Throughout history, Black individuals have actively created alternate strategies to negotiate and oppose injustice (Womack, 2013). Even before the 1950s protests and the Brown v. Board of Education case, they showed ingenuity in challenging societal conventions that limited their access to education (Thevenot, 2021). Still, the 19th Century was a crucial period for the advancement of Black education in the United States, as it witnessed the founding of public schools for Black students

(Thevenot, 2021). After the Civil War, politically organized and highly educated Black

individuals prioritized education as a key aspect of their efforts to achieve racial equality

(Baumgartner, 2019; Mitchell, 2008). Legal disputes to establish equitable and

comprehensive education for marginalized students arose due to socioeconomic

circumstances or oppressive policies. Significant legal cases such as Brown v. Board of

Education (1954) and Lau v. Nichols (1974) ignited discussions over the need for federal

or state legislation to uphold court rulings (Thevenot, 2021). Throughout the last sixty

years, courts consistently recognized the vital importance of education as a fundamental

right in American society (Oakes, 2015). Nevertheless, although education was widely

regarded as a fundamental entitlement for all members of our society, it did not seem to

be distributed in a fair and impartial manner to everyone (Thevenot, 2021). Due to the

dominant culture's influence on public schooling, marginalized students from lower

economic backgrounds frequently experienced powerlessness and a lack of social justice

leaders who have the authority to confront and change the impact of the mainstream

culture (Thevenot, 2021).

Ladson-Billings established a definition of culturally responsive pedagogy as an

educational approach "that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and

politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, attitudes" (Ladson-

Billings, 2009, p. 20). To foster critical thinking and promote socio-political awareness

among students, culturally responsive teachers employed curriculum and teaching

strategies that encouraged students to develop critical perspectives on inequities, their

communities, and their own classrooms (Thevenot, 2021). Culturally responsive

education, encompassing both curriculum and pedagogy, acknowledged the significant

contributions of researchers Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay. Culturally

responsive teaching, as defined by Gay (2010), involved integrating the frames of

reference, prior experiences, cultural knowledge, and performance styles of ethnically

diverse students to enhance the relevance and efficacy of their learning experiences. To

create a fairer learning environment for students from varied ethnic and linguistic

backgrounds, it was necessary to evaluate the curriculum and instructional methods, and

for the teacher to critically reflect on their own teaching approach (Thevenot, 2021).

Public schools should use progressive strategies to acknowledge and integrate the

heterogeneous cultures of students, home nations, and their communities into different

facets of education, such as curriculum, school culture, and teaching methodologies. This

integration includes instructors, administrators, security personnel, and food service staff

employed inside the public education system (Thevenot, 2021). A social justice education

policy aims to revolutionize the way students are educated, leading to innovative methods

of acquiring knowledge. It goes beyond the goal of redistributing resources, promoting

educational equality, and removing oppressive systemic barriers to access and

opportunity (Thevenot, 2021). Nieto (2018) emphasized that culturally responsive

education results in improved educational experiences for children whose cultures have

traditionally faced marginalization or neglect in educational environments.

Culture consists of the acquired, collective, and exhibited habits and values of a

specific group of individuals. Culture is manifested via both tangible and intangible

creations of a society (Yosso, 2005). Culture, characterized as a collection of distinctive

attributes, is not permanent or unchanging (Gomez-Quiñones, 1973). Culturally

responsive education, when implemented over a period, fostered the formation of a

collective identity among persons who have the same ethnic background (Bashir & Tang, 2018). Within the framework of Students of Color, culture was often conveyed through language, embracing diverse elements such as immigrant status, gender, area, physical attributes, sexuality, as well as race and ethnicity (Yosso, 2005). Examining the experiences of minority students using Critical Race Theory, as proposed by Delgado Bernal (2002), helped foster a nurturing and empowering atmosphere for them. Regarding Latina/o families, research argued that culture influenced and tapped into shared sources of knowledge (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002). Research indicated that the African American community and family practices exhibited favorable characteristics and cohesion and emphasized the intergenerational transfer of profoundly spiritual values in these communities (Valencia, 2006, p. 12). Cultural capital, in its traditional sense, was shaped by the values of the white middle class and was considered more limited than economic capital, which encompassed one's accumulated goods and resources (Yosso, 2005). On the other hand, community cultural riches encompassed the diverse array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and social connections that Communities of Color possess, utilizing them to both endure and challenge systemic oppression at macro and micro levels (Oliver & Shapiro, 2006). Yosso (2005) identified six forms of capital through which Communities of Color nurtured cultural wealth, including aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital (p. 77).

Aspirational capital was the capacity to sustain aspirations and ambitions for the future, especially when confronted with actual or perceived obstacles. Resilient persons possessed the capacity to imagine potential outcomes that went beyond their present situation, enabling themselves and their children to do the same, even while without the

necessary resources to achieve their ambitions. According to Patricia Gándara's research

(1995) and other experts, Chicanas/os (those of Mexican heritage born in the United

States) have the lowest educational attainment compared to all other groups in the United

States, which emphasized the concept of cultural wealth. Nevertheless, they continually

upheld lofty ambitions for the future of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). These

narratives played a role in promoting a culture that highlighted possibilities and

opportunities. They tried to provide a historical account that separated parents' current

employment situations from their children's perspective academic accomplishments

(Gándara, 1995).

Linguistic capital, as a component of cultural wealth, encompassed cognitive and

interpersonal abilities developed through communication across multiple languages

and/or dialects (Faulstich Orellana, 2003). The notion of linguistic capital suggested that

Students of Color possessed a diverse set of language and communication skills before

entering school. They participated in a dynamic tradition of storytelling that encompassed

both the act of listening to and recounting a range of narratives, such as oral histories,

cultural knowledge, tales, and proverbs. This storytelling proficiency encompassed

various elements such as memory, meticulousness, strategic pauses, precise comedic

timing, facial expressions, vocal modulation, volume control, rhythmic delivery, and the

use of rhyme. Linguistic capital encompassed the ability to effectively communicate

through various forms of artistic expression, such as artistic work, poetry, or music.

Students cultivated and utilized various linguistic registers or styles to effectively

communicate with different audiences, like how they employ multiple vocal registers for

certain purposes. Marjorie Faulstich Orellana's 2003 study focused on the linguistic

talents of multilingual children who frequently acted as interpreters for their family members or parents. According to Orellana's research in 2003, people in this environment acquired important social skills such as the ability to communicate effectively with different groups of people, an enhanced vocabulary, awareness and understanding of different cultures, a sense of civic and family duties, practical reading and writing skills, strong mathematical abilities, the ability to analyze language, teaching and tutoring skills, and social maturity.

Familial capital, as conceptualized by Delgado Bernal (2002), referred to the cultural knowledge that was nurtured inside a family, incorporating a collective comprehension of the community's historical background, collective memory, and cultural instincts. The notion of cultural richness surpassed typical family structures and questioned established assumptions regarding race, economy, and heterosexuality. It highlighted a broadened interpretation of kinship, encompassing aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends as essential components of the family (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Rooted in a commitment to community welfare, familial capital was instrumental in shaping emotional, moral, educational, and occupational awareness. Family members served as role models, imparting lessons in caring, coping, and providing, influencing the individual's understanding of community and its assets (Elenes et al., 2001). This awareness was cultivated within families and various social group settings, including sports, school, and religious gatherings. Research on African American communities (Morris, 1999), Mexican American communities (Rueda et al., 2004), and teaching methods in the homes of minority students (Delgado Bernal, 2002) significantly influenced the concept of familial capital. It emphasized the importance of social

connections within these communities and highlighted the knowledge and skills present in Students of Color's homes, which they bring to the classroom (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

Social capital, as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2001), referred to the connections between people and community resources that offered practical and emotional assistance in dealing with society structures. Utilizing these peer and social contacts aided in various endeavors, such as identifying and securing a college scholarship. Social networks played a vital role in supporting students, not only by helping them with the admission process, but also by giving emotional support and companionship throughout their higher education journey. Academics emphasized the past utilization of social capital by individuals from marginalized racial and ethnic groups to obtain opportunities in school, legal systems, work, and healthcare. Communities of Color reciprocate by transmitting the information and resources acquired from these institutions across their social networks. An illustration of this historical reliance on social networks was found in mutual aid societies, which were established by immigrants to the U.S. and even by African Americans during periods of enslavement (Gómez-Quiñones, 1994). Studies conducted within the Mexican immigrant community highlighted the significant importance of social networks. These studies demonstrated that families could effectively manage daily obstacles by establishing connections with supporting social networks (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). The tradition of "lifting as we climb" has persisted, as evidenced by the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs since its founding in 1896 (Gurnier, Fine & Balin, 2002, p. 167).

Navigational capital alluded to the aptitude required to navigate social establishments, particularly those that have traditionally disregarded Communities of

Color. This concept was exemplified by the tactics employed to navigate university

campuses that were racially hostile, with a focus on the idea of being academically

impervious. Academic invulnerability referred to the capacity of students to sustain high

levels of achievement even when confronted with stressful events and circumstances that

could potentially undermine academic progress and heighten the likelihood of

discontinuing their education (Allen & Solórzano, 2000). Researchers have examined the

elements that contributed to the academic resilience of Chicano children studying the

individual, familial, and communal aspects that helped them successfully navigate the

educational system (Arrellano & Padilla, 1996). Resilience is understood as a crucial

element that includes internal resources, social skills, and cultural strategies that enabled

individuals not only to endure and bounce back from challenging events but also to

flourish and utilize those experiences to improve future functioning (Stanton-Salazar &

Spina, 2000). Individuals belonging to marginalized racial and ethnic groups utilized

social and psychological strategies to traverse systems characterized by racial inequality

and discrimination (Torres et al., 1993). Navigational capital acknowledged the ability of

individuals to make choices and act within the limitations imposed by institutions. It

emphasized the importance of social networks in helping communities navigate various

domains, including education, employment, healthcare, and the legal system (Williams,

1997).

Resistant capital referred to the knowledge and skills cultivated through

oppositional behaviors that challenged inequality (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

Based on the historical resistance shown by marginalized communities, this cultural

richness entailed the conservation and transmission of different aspects of community

cultural capital (Deloria, 1969). Japanese communities in internment camps demonstrated

resilience against racism by preserving a wide range of cultural assets (Wakatsuki

Houston & Houston, 1973). In Tracy's research, African American mothers consciously

guided their daughters to be agents of resistance, instilling in them the ability to assert

their intelligence, beauty, strength, and worthiness of respect in response to societal

devaluation of Blackness and Black women (Leadbeater & Way, 1996). Academic

research also examined the challenges faced by Latina mothers as they taught their

children to value themselves and develop independence in the face of systems of

inequality including racism, capitalism, and patriarchy (Villenas & Moreno, 2001). These

studies examined how caregivers from marginalized backgrounds deliberately instructed

their children to adopt behaviors and attitudes that actively oppose the dominant norms,

promoting resistance against racial, gender, and socioeconomic injustice. These young

women were acquiring the ability to resist and challenge race, gender, and class

disparities by utilizing their physical, intellectual, and emotional capacities (Yosso,

2005).

        Studies consistently highlighted the positive impact of a strong sense of ethnic,

racial, and cultural identity on students' academic achievement, particularly among

Latina/Latino students. Researchers such as Delgado Bernal (2002) found that a robust

ethnic identity correlated with heightened motivation and resilience in pursuing academic

goals among Latina/Latino students. By incorporating cultural identity into education,

students were nurtured and could excel in school without compromising themselves.

These students were given the opportunity to be exactly who they were, wholeheartedly,

without any apology.

Summary

This literature review examined the intersectionality of race, power dynamics, and social identities within the realm of education. The three primary conceptual frameworks under examination were Critical Race Theory (CRT), Intersectionality, and Spirit Murdering. Critical Race Theory (CRT), which emerged in the 1970s, provided a fundamental framework for comprehending racism, power dynamics, and their influence on the field of education (Delgado et al., 2023). The review also explored many branches of Critical Race Theory (CRT), including LatCrit (Delgado et al., 2023), MusCrit (Delgado et al., 2023), and BlackCrit (Dumas & Ross, 2016) providing valuable insights into the experiences of Latino and Muslim populations. Counter-storytelling (Delgado, 1989) which was based on Critical Race Theory (CRT), was advocated as a highly effective method for questioning dominant narratives and promoting educational fairness. The review highlighted the significance of narratives expressed by marginalized groups in challenging societal dominance. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2021), which emerged from the necessity to comprehend the unique encounters of Black women, was regarded as a crucial instrument for examining intricate frameworks of advantage and subjugation. The review emphasized the interplay of different social identities and how they influenced people's experiences and social reality. It focused on how diverse factors interacted to shape experiences of oppression in educational environments. The third framework, Spirit Murdering (Love, 2013) was presented as an analytical perspective to investigate how racist systems prevent the inclusion, safety, acceptance, and nurturing of individuals, hence influencing the development of identities among students and educators. The concept of Spirit Murdering, as theorized by researchers such as Patricia

Williams (1987) and Bettina Love (2013) was examined as a manifestation of racial

violence that deprived and extinguished the humanity and essence of individuals

belonging to marginalized communities. In the concept of Spirit Murdering, we adopted

the principles put forth by Gloria Ladson-Billings, who defined culturally responsive

pedagogy as an educational method that empowered students intellectually, socially,

emotionally, and politically by utilizing cultural references to convey knowledge, skills,

and attitudes (Thevenot, 2021). The review highlighted the profound emotional and

psychological effects of systemic injustices on individuals, encompassing

microaggressions and the obliteration of cultural identity. Cultural Spirit Nurturing was

presented as a constructive and genuine encounter that fostered the growth of personal

identities within a cultural context. The literature review concluded by advocating for an

abolitionist approach to education, which involved dismantling oppressive systems and

replacing them with practices that foster liberation, joy, and a sense of belonging for all

students. It emphasized the need to acknowledge historical context, manifestations, and

the psychological impact of Spirit Murdering to work towards dismantling systemic

injustices in education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to outline and provide an explanation of the chosen qualitative research method, autoethnography. Autoethnography, as a research method, was "an approach to research and writing that [sought] to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno) (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273). In utilizing this methodology for our research, we employed both autobiographical narratives, shared our personal experiences and ethnographic insights, and discussed how our cultures and intersecting identities shaped those experiences. We, as the researchers, chose this method as it provided us with an opportunity to share our own experiences as people of color within the framework of Critical Race Theory.

The roots of autoethnography were grounded in the lived experiences of the researchers and reflected their dynamic engagement with the social and cultural context they study. Our aim was to place our personal experiences at the center of inquiry, aiming to understand the cultural, social, and individual dimensions of a phenomenon (Ellis et al., 2011). Being women of color from diverse backgrounds, we underscored the significance of counter-storytelling within our chosen methodology. Counter-storytelling emerged as an integral component and a powerful tool to challenge and counteract the entrenched perspectives often associated with dominant white narratives (Miller, 2020). As Ellis (2011) stated, there was an

> Increasing need to resist colonialist, sterile research impulses of
>
> authoritatively entering a culture, exploiting cultural members,

and then recklessly leaving to write about the culture for monetary

and/or professional gain, while disregarding relational ties to cultural

members.

We asserted our right and opportunity, as members of our respective cultures, to share

our own stories. These personal experiences were used to further shape and added to the

existing research within the fields of CRT, Intersectionality, and Spirit

Murdering/Nurturing. In alignment with the literature reviewed, which emphasized the

importance of counter-storytelling within our methodology to subvert traditional

perspectives, we positioned ourselves as active agents in shaping the narrative

surrounding the phenomenon of spirit murdering. This deliberate choice to engage with

autoethnography served as a form of resistance against the historic and ongoing harms

imposed by collecting and analyzing data from a distance.

This section set the stage for a deeper exploration of autoethnography as a

research method, emphasizing its evolutionary and dynamic nature. Through the lens of

personal narratives and cultural insights, the researchers paved the way for a more

prosperous and complex understanding of the sociocultural contexts within CRT,

Intersectionality, Spirit Murdering, and Nurturing.

Research Design

Both a process and a product, autoethnography offered a means of creating

meaningful research that was accessible and evocative, grounded in personal experience,

highlighted silenced experiences, and provided forms of representation that fostered

empathy with those considered "different from us" (Ellis et al., 2011; Ellis & Bochner,

2000). By using autoethnography as our chosen research methodology, we shared our

experiences and how those experiences contributed to the existing research within the framework of CRT, Intersectionality, and Spirit Murdering/Nurturing.

The use of narrative was central to autoethnography. By sharing our stories from our first-person perspective and in the form of storytelling, we were able to explore and convey our experiences in a way that invited others into our world. Our personal experiences extended beyond individual narratives to analyze the broader cultural contexts that influenced our lives (Chang, 2008). We aimed to connect our personal experiences to the larger social, political, and cultural structure, fostering a deeper understanding of the relationship between the personal and the collective (Chang, 2008).

We each shared stories from our lives in our K-12 education and from our time as educators that addressed the following research questions:

1. How have our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering as students and educators shaped our identities?

2. How have our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering influenced how we work with our students and how we teach?

Our stories provided insight into how our intersecting identities as women of color impacted our upbringing in a predominantly white world and affected the way we taught our students as educators. By sharing our lived realities, we offered understanding of how we viewed the world and how the world viewed us. Utilizing autoethnography provided a platform for self-expression and empowerment. Through our process of narrating our personal stories, we gained new insights into our identities and how our respective cultures shaped those identities (Chang, 2008). We told our stories to counteract the

stories that typically use a "white, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper-class, Christian, able-bodied perspective" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 275).

Participants/Researcher's Role

As researchers, we recognized the significance of our stories in constructing meaning and countering dominant narratives. This study's participants were a first-generation Mexican American woman, a Black-American woman, and a first-generation South Asian Muslim-American woman. Autoethnography allowed us to be both researchers and participants, acknowledging and accommodating subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research (Ellis et al., 2011). As both researchers and participants, we employed autoethnography to share our diverse experiences and how those experiences shaped us into the educators we became. As researchers, we recognized that "different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world" (p. 275).

Limitations and Delimitations

Autoethnography presented a unique set of limitations, particularly concerning subjectivity and bias. In this study, we assumed dual roles as both researchers and participants, relying primarily on memory as our primary source of data. We addressed these ethical considerations by maintaining transparency regarding our subjectivity, acknowledging personal bias, and took measures to mitigate their impact on the research process. Data derived from memory could be considered 'textural data' as "personal memory taps into a wealth of information on self" (Chang, 2008, p. 72). While our lived experiences may not be generalizable, they remain valid. The effectiveness of autoethnography often hinged on the researcher's proficiency in introspection,

storytelling, and qualitative analysis. As researchers with varying skill levels in these

areas, we produced autoethnographic studies of differing quality and depth.

Data Collection and Analysis

In our study, the dual role of researcher and participant was crucial for the depth

and richness of our exploration (Ellis et al., 2011). This unique position allowed us to

engage with our research subject, the lack of spirit nurturing in education, on a deeply

personal level. As Ellis (2011) suggested, "writing personal stories can be therapeutic for

authors as we write to make sense of ourselves and our experiences". Our intersectional,

ethical, and racial identities, shaped by various social and cultural factors, served as

lenses through which we offered nuanced perspectives (Ellis et al., 2011). The use of

memories as a method of data collection added authenticity to our research. Memories,

being inherently personal and subjective, enabled us to tap into the emotional and

experiential aspects of our encounters with spirit nurturing, or the lack thereof, in

educational settings (Chang, 2008). This method provided a visceral connection to the

phenomenon under investigation.

Journal writing, another crucial method employed, acted as both a research tool

and a vehicle for personal reflection (Ellis et al., 2011). Documenting our thoughts,

feelings, and experiences in real-time allowed for a more immediate and unfiltered

capture of our responses to various educational contexts. These journals became

repositories of our evolving perceptions and contributed to the ongoing reflexivity

integral to the research process. The integration of these methods was deliberate and

strategic on our part as researchers. Our journal entries not only served as raw data for

analysis but also acted as a dynamic source for self-reflection (Ellis et al., 2011). This

recursive process enhanced the authenticity and depth of our insights, fostering a

symbiotic relationship between the personal and scholarly dimensions of our work.

Fetterman (2020) suggested that "analysis in ethnography [was] as much a test of

the ethnographer as it [was] a test of the data" (p. 100). Autoethnography, closely linked

to the researcher's experiences, benefited from applying ethnographic data analysis

techniques. Both autoethnography and ethnography shared a focus on culture, context,

individual and societal issues/events, and emphasized holistic analysis. Ethnographic

analytical methods, including triangulation, pattern identification, key events, content

analysis, crystallization, and visual representations, were deemed useful in

autoethnographic research (Fetterman, 2020).

Crystallization, a method used in ethnographic research, allowed the researcher to

capture personal snapshots over time as memories, perceptions, and known facts evolved

(Emerson et al., 2011). Additionally, we utilized analysis methods related to narrative

inquiry, as autoethnography was a type of narrative research. We focused on both the

content and the organization of our stories, honoring our own voice and effectively

communicated our intended message (Ellis et al., 2011). This allowed us to recognize the

significance of our stories in constructing meaning and interpreted our personal

experiences with depth and understanding (Cooper & Lilyea, 2022).

Ethical Issues

Autoethnography as a research method offered valuable insights, but it also

presented ethical considerations that required careful navigation (Edwards, 2021). One

critical ethical issue associated with autoethnography is subjectivity and bias. For

instance, if a researcher was studying a particular cultural practice that they have personal

experience with, their interpretation of the data might have been influenced by their preconceived notions or emotional attachment to the subject. Since autoethnography involved personal experiences and perspectives, subjectivity could introduce bias and influence data interpretation (Edwards, 2021). We were transparent about our subjectivity, acknowledged personal bias, and took steps to mitigate its impact on the research process.

We carefully deliberated on what information to disclose, ensuring that the benefits of sharing personal experiences outweighed potential harms (Edwards, 2021). Moreover, when sharing personal experiences, we placed a high value on protecting the identities of individuals involved. To address this ethical concern, we anonymized or safeguarded their identities by using pseudonyms and demonstrated our respect for their privacy and dignity. It was important to note the lack of extensive guidance available for researchers using autoethnographic methodology, particularly concerning data collection and presentation of results (Emmerich, 2018). However, collaborative autoethnography, involving multiple researchers working together to share personal stories and interpret data, had been proposed as an approach that addressed some methodological and ethical issues associated with autoethnography. This potential inspired hope in our audience about the future of this research method.

While autoethnography was a powerful research method, we navigated ethical considerations related to subjectivity, bias, and the disclosure of personal experiences (Edwards, 2021). By being transparent about subjectivity, acknowledging bias, and safeguarding the identities of individuals involved, we mitigated ethical concerns in autoethnographic research.

Chapter 4: Counter-Stories

Introduction

In this chapter, we, as educators and women of color, reflected on our experiences of cultural spirit murdering and cultural spirit nurturing as K-12 students. Despite our differences in race, religion, culture, background, etc., there is a connection that exists between us. We are all women of color who have, at some point or another, experienced situations that have impacted our lives in both positive and negative ways. We shared these stories to showcase what we have gone through in our lives and how these stories have shaped our identities.

Sara Beg - **Race, Religion, and Culture**

If you asked me ten years ago to reflect on my experience in my K-12 education, I probably would have said it was fine. I would have said that I did not experience any racism from my classmates and that I had a normal experience. When I look back on it now, with more hindsight, knowledge, and understanding, I feel as if my answer is different. I've always known I did not enjoy my school experience, particularly high school. I do not speak to a single person that I went to school with, nor do I care to. In all honesty, try not to think about my time in my K-12 education too much.

It has now been almost 20 years since I have graduated from high school. I have completed two Bachelor's degrees, a Masters, a handful of certifications, have been working as an educator for the last 12 years, and am at the end of my doctoral studies, for which this dissertation is being written. Over the course of the last 10 or so years, with the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016, and my own growing understanding of racism, microaggressions, spirit

murdering (Williams, 1987), and the like, have caused me to reevaluate my experiences through a new lens. The writing of this autoethnography has provided me with an opportunity to look back and reflect on my K-12 educational experience in a completely different way.

There are moments that occur within our lives that are so meaningful and significant that they can alter us in ways we don't always realize. These moments, no matter how large or small, can impact our lives both in positive and negative ways. Sometimes, one might not even realize the significance a moment has had until later in life. The stories I share in Chapter 4 are just that. They are things that happened in my life that I did not fully recognize and understand the significance they held until years later. With workplaces recognizing the impact of racism and adopting the new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion standards, I was given opportunities to share my experiences as a minority. I was able to reexamine the events that occurred throughout my life and was seeing them through the eyes of an adult with more understanding. As they were happening, I did not realize that these things would impact the way I interact with others as well as how I view myself. It is for this reason that I am using autoethnography as the method to share my stories about race, religion, and culture and how the experiences in my life have shaped who I am today.

American, Asian, or Something in Between

"So, what are you?" "Where are you from?" or some variation of the two are questions that almost every non-white person has heard at least once in their life. These are the questions that I have heard much of my life with the correct answer never being satisfying enough for the questioner. When my answer is St. Louis, the question then

becomes "No, but where are you REALLY from?" The answer is still, and always will be, St. Louis.

The need to label every individual is something that is very prevalent in American culture. Whether the label is related to race, ethnicity, or nationality, there needs to be an identifier. There is a need to constantly categorize people, to put them in a box, with a nice label on it that fits what their perceived idea of you is. On every form, every application, there is a section to provide your race. This was also the case for standardized tests in school. When I was in grade school in the 90s, the identifiers, from what I can remember, were White, Black, Asian, Hispanic, and other. For all our state tests, we had to choose one of these to identify ourselves. With my parents being from Pakistan, which is in Asia, today I bubble in "Asian." However, at some point in my childhood, I must have been told that I am not *really* Asian because I do not fit what their perceived definition of Asian was. I did not "look" Asian to them. What did that even mean? What does Asian look like? Pakistan is in Asia, my parents are from Pakistan, so therefore, how could I not be Asian? Asia is a massive continent that has nearly 50 different countries and even more ethnicities. At the time, however, being that I was a child, my underdeveloped brain did not fully understand why I would not be considered Asian. But instead of questioning it, I just accepted that maybe I wasn't Asian. People from Pakistan, India, and the rest of South Asia and the people from China, Japan, Vietnam, and the rest of East and Southeast Asia look drastically different. East and Southeast Asian was what people thought of when they heard Asian, so because I wasn't that, perhaps I wasn't Asian.

From that moment on, I filled in the "other" bubble instead. While I do not have an exact memory of this event taking place, I can only assume that it is what happened considering I only ever filled in the "other" bubble. I do not remember this happening. I don't know what grade it was in; how old I was when it happened. I know that it happened because it wasn't until I was a freshman in college and had a conversation with my friend whose family is from Syria that I realized that I had been wrong. She told me that she fills in "Asian" on everything she does. I was so surprised by this because she is Arab and does not fit the preconceived notion of what is Asian, the American idea of what is Asian. She said that since Syria is in Asia and they want to have broad categorizations for everything, she is going to put Asian. Because of my experience in elementary school, I had always had the mindset that Asian only referred to East Asian and that bubble wasn't for my kind of Asian. I didn't fit the norm of what Asian was. I had simply believed what someone in grade school had told me and continued to hold that belief most of my childhood. My Asian identity had been taken away from me and I didn't even realize it. My spirit was murdered. The choice to place billions of people into only five categories and the refusal of American culture to recognize that multiple types of people exist led to my lack of an Asian identity as a child. It has taken me a long time to come to terms with the fact that I spent my entire childhood not identifying myself as Asian. I had been othered throughout my childhood; made to feel that my Pakistani identity was not something worth being categorized, and that my Asian-ness wasn't valid.

Still, to this day, I recognize that when I state that my race is "Asian" I still get looks of confusion because I am not seen as Asian. When the selections for race on any application or standardized test are so broad, it makes it difficult to put billions of

different people into tiny little categories. For example, people of Arab or Middle Eastern

descent, do the ones from Asian countries put Asia? Do the ones from African countries

put African American? Or do they all put white because many of them are white in skin

tone? This is something I have always struggled with understanding because of what

happened to me as a child. Understanding that my spirit was murdered as a child has

changed the way I view race, both my own and the races of others, as an adult.

Fabricated Fears

On September 11, 2001, commonly referred to as 9/11, the United States

experienced one of the deadliest terrorist attacks in its history. It was indeed a defining

moment that brought significant changes to the country and the world at large. On that

day, 19 militants associated with the extremist group al-Qaeda hijacked four commercial

airplanes.

Two of the planes were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in

New York City, causing the collapse of both towers, and resulting in massive destruction

and loss of life. Another plane crashed into the Pentagon, the headquarters of the United

States Department of Defense, near Washington, D.C. The fourth plane, United Airlines

Flight 93, crashed into a field in Pennsylvania after passengers attempted to regain

control from the hijackers.

The attacks killed nearly 3,000 people and injured over 6,000 others. The impact of 9/11

was profound, leading to far-reaching consequences, including the launch of the War on

Terror by President Bush, the invasion of Afghanistan, the implementation of the USA

PATRIOT Act, and significant changes in airport security measures. It also sparked

debates on issues such as national security, civil liberties, and foreign policy.

While the perpetrators claimed to represent Islam, it's essential to note that their actions do not represent the beliefs or practices of most Muslims around the world. The attacks prompted widespread condemnation from Muslim leaders and communities globally, who emphasized that terrorism goes against the teachings of Islam, which promotes peace, compassion, and justice.

This day seemingly started off like any other school day. I woke up and got ready for school, which now included putting my hijab on since I had just started wearing it full time a few weeks earlier. I got to school and went to my classes. Everything was still normal, and it was a regular day. Then a friend of mine stopped me in the hall and asked if I had heard what happened. She told me that something crashed into the World Trade Center. I had no idea what the World Trade Center was, because that is what I heard, and continued to my next class. I don't think I fully processed what she had said. At the time, it didn't really mean anything to me because it was a comment made in passing about a place I had never heard of. I did not fully understand the gravity of the situation until later as more information became available about the attack. It became clear that whatever had happened was incredibly serious because it was all anyone, including the teachers, were talking about. Some classes even stopped teaching and they watched the news.

Following 9/11, more information about what happened became known. It was said that Muslims were the terrorists that had hijacked the plane and caused the crash and the deaths of so many people. As a Muslim, I could not begin to comprehend or even believe this to be true. This is not what Islam is. Islam is a religion of peace; it is not one where people commit such heinous acts that kill people. The killing of innocent life goes against everything Muslims believe in. The Qu'ran states in chapter 5, verse 2, "...if

anyone kills a person…is as if he has killed the whole of humankind, and whoever saves

the life of a person is as if he has saved the life of the whole of humankind."

When the attack first happened, I had one teacher, out of the eight teachers I had

that semester, who said anything to me about what happened. It was my Astronomy

teacher. This was a teacher I had just met this school year. It wasn't a teacher I had any

significant relationship with, but he also wasn't a teacher I disliked. I enjoyed his class. I

always paid attention and made sure my homework was done. Science was never my

strongest subject, but his class was one that I always looked forward to. Before class

began, he pulled me to the back of the room in the storage closet and told me that if

anyone says a single word to me about what happened that I should come to him

immediately and let him know what was said and who said it. At the time I just said okay.

At the time, I don't think I fully understood what he meant. Why would anyone say

anything to me? I had nothing to do with what happened. I knew that the news was

saying that it was Muslims who committed the crime but that's not what Islam was.

These people who committed these acts could not be the ones who represented Islam to

the world. But now, years later and being a teacher myself, the fact that he came to me

and gave me his support is something that I will never forget. His kindness to me that

day, when the rest of the teachers said nothing, showed me that I had someone I could

turn to whenever I needed it. This was one of the few times throughout my educational

experience that my spirit was nurtured.

At first, no one at school really said anything to me about 9/11 or about me

wearing a hijab. As time went on though, people started asking more and more questions.

From September 11, 2001, through the rest of high school, which included the start of the

war on terror, the war in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq, and the rise of Islamophobia, I

received a wide range of questions from everyone surrounding me in school.

      After the attack on the towers, I would get questions like "Were you happy when

the towers fell?" "Are you going to do a jihad here?" When it came out that Osama bin

Laden was behind the terrorist attacks, the questions turned into, "Do you know Osama

bin Laden?" "Is Osama bin Laden your uncle?" Then when the Iraq war started, Osama

bin Laden was replaced with Sadaam Hussein. People were not very creative with their

line of questioning when it came to this. I never really understood how anyone could ask

such questions to people. How bold can you be to ask someone if they were happy that

nearly 3,000 people lost their lives? Additionally, most of the people who were asking

these questions knew me. I had been in the same school district since kindergarten. These

were people I went to elementary school, middle school, and then high school with. I

wouldn't say they were all my friends, but they were people I knew. When I think back

on it, I'm still shocked that people could say those things out loud. In the beginning, I

joked around with them. I always answered their questions no, but I said it in a way

where they didn't have to feel bad for asking the question. My constant need to make

sure no one is ever mad at me played a huge role in how I responded to questions that

were asked to me. In my head, I wanted to tell them to shut up and to leave me alone, but

out loud, I gave them the answers they wanted to hear. The answers that would make

them feel better about me being Muslim and looking different from the rest of them. If

they knew how these questions were making me feel, how they were slowly murdering

my spirit and my pride in my differences, would they have still asked these questions?

When it came to my hijab, however, the questions people asked me were on another level of ridiculous. I had technically started wearing the hijab that summer on my 15th birthday. My birthday was at Six Flags that year and I wore my hijab out in public for the first time. Of course, I had worn it to the mosque multiple times, but this was different. This was out in the real world. I've been asked over the years why I had decided to start wearing hijab, and honestly, I don't think it was something I fully thought out. I knew that in Islam, women were supposed to wear the hijab and many of my friends in the Muslim community wore it, so I did too. That was really all there was to it. I didn't spend a lot of time thinking about it or going over the pros and cons; I decided I wanted to wear it and so I did. Throughout the summer, it was very much an off and on kind of thing. I went to a wedding and didn't want to wear it there, so I didn't. There was a sleepover at a friend from school's house that I was invited to, and I didn't wear it there either. But I did mention that when school started, I would be wearing it.

The first day of school came, and I went with my hijab on. I'm sure I got a few stares, but no one really said anything to me about it, at least not that I remember. After 9/11 happened, this changed. I cannot say for certain what was the reason for the questions, was it because I was the only one in the school who wore hijab or was it because Islam was in the media and news more and it was being shown that Muslims who wore the hijab were forced and oppressed. I was even asked once if my parents made me wear the hijab. This was clearly a question that made no sense. My older sister, who also went to the school, didn't wear hijab. My younger sister, who was 2 grades below me, also didn't wear a hijab. Why would my parents make me wear it and not them? It was most certainly a choice I made for myself.

The questions people asked started off innocent enough. "Why do you wear that?" "What does it mean?" "Does the color mean anything?" But then, they started to go a little more off the deep end. "Are you hot in that?" "What happens when you take that off?" "Do you shower with it on?" At first, I answered the questions honestly. "Yes, it can get hot but it's not too bad." "Nothing happens, it's just fabric." "No. I do not shower with cloth on my head." As the questions continued, and I kept getting the same ones repeatedly, I started to get frustrated and decided that stupid questions started to get stupid answers. Question: What happens when you take that off? Answer: My head falls off and I die. Question: Do you shower with that on? Answer: Sure do. Lather, rinse, repeat. Was this the best way to handle this situation? Probably not, but I was in high school, which is enough of an answer to why I responded the way I did.

Cultural Mis-identity

I have written and rewritten this section several times already. Constantly going back and forth on whether I need to include a section on my cultural identity. On the one hand, it makes sense to include it; race, religion, and culture are all interconnected for me. On the other side of that, my relationship and, for lack of a better word, trauma with culture is not as much of an experience as my other two stories. There is no defining moment related to my culture that I can share here that could evoke the same response as my previous stories. Yet, after silencing the constant negative voice in my head telling me that this section might not be worth writing, I made the decision to write it anyway.

I have always had a great love and appreciation for my culture. Desi, South Asian, Pakistani, whatever you want to call it, culture has been a huge part of my life. Be it with the food, the clothes, the movies, the textiles, or anything in between, I am all for

representing my culture. However, I cannot say the same was true when I was younger. I did not appreciate it as much as I could have. My resilience to the culture of my parents is, when I look back, something that I am not proud of.

As a child, I felt embarrassed about showing people I had a different culture. I was always worried that I was going to stand out more than I already did if I showed any kind of love for it. So, I didn't. It also didn't help that no one knew anything about my culture. People had heard of India, but no one really knew what Pakistan was, even though it's right next to India. It also didn't help that the closest thing to representation of Desi culture on television was Apu from The Simpsons.

At home I loved the culture. But, if I was at school, that love disappeared. It made me more other than I already was. It was to the point that almost my entire life, I never corrected people on how to pronounce my name. I allowed the people around me to say it the "American" way. In my head, I was screaming to myself "it's not pronounced that way!" but out loud, I never said a word. When people did find out what my culture was, not that it was a secret, or more specifically where my family was from, I was asked if I was the feather or dot kind of Indian.

My parent's native language, Urdu, which is a huge part of any culture, was also something I felt embarrassed about. While my parents and grandparents spoke Urdu at home, we (my sisters and I) often replied in English, even though I have a full understanding of the language, I was so terrified of being made fun of for my American accent that I never even tried.

This section is not much of a story. It does not offer the same emotional gut-punch as the previous two stories did. While I have always loved my culture, as a child, I decided to

not share my appreciation of it with the people in school. My fear of being different

outweighed my love for the culture. I share this section to show that sometimes, our

spirits are not murdered by others, but we can murder our spirits ourselves.

Nurturing Education

Growing up in my K-12 education, and even in my undergraduate experience, I

had, maybe, three teachers of color: my band teacher, my chemistry teacher, and a

professor in undergrad. The rest of my teachers were white and certainly never Muslim.

Even the one class I took on Islam was taught by a white, Catholic, man. When I decided

to become a teacher myself, I did not initially think of myself as being the teacher I never

had. At the start of my career, I taught in an Islamic private school. There were some

parts of this that I absolutely hated, the pay, the fact that the parents all knew me because

the school was at the mosque I grew up in and they knew my parents, and that I didn't

really have a mentor to guide me in my first few years of teaching. But despite that, and

even though the majority of the teachers were not Muslim, it was also an incredible

experience to be surrounded by so many Muslims, to be able to openly say the words I

said at home without weird looks, to not be the one and only Muslim, brown girl in a

space, and to be able to pray two of the five daily prayers at work every single day. My

time in private school did not last very long for a multitude of reasons. The switch from

private school to public school is not something I regret as there were many benefits to

being in a public school setting. It did mean, however, that I would be back to being the

"other" as there were not many Muslims in the field of education.

When I began teaching in public school, I worked, and still do today, in a setting

where the student population is predominantly Black, and the teachers are predominantly

white. The school I worked at, however, had a diverse staff with both white teachers and

teachers of color. I was the only Asian teacher on staff, but I was not the only Muslim.

One of the 6th grade teachers was Muslim as well and was absolutely thrilled to have me,

a Muslim woman who wore hijab, on staff with him. It was amazing to talk to him each

day and share inside jokes about praying or fasting or just saying words in Arabic that

only we knew. This was the nurturing of my spirit that I never had as a child. I was

finally in a setting, outside of my own community, where I was accepted and able to be

myself with no hesitation. The teachers of color were the ones I gravitated towards the

most. There was a connection and kinship I had with these educators that I never

experienced before with people who weren't Desi or Muslim.

There was that connection with the students as well. When I first started in public

school, the students paid very little attention to my hijab. It did not seem to faze them; it

was just a part of who I was. The thing that threw them off though was my skin color as

many of them thought I was mixed with a Black mom and a white dad. Once I corrected

them and let them know that I was Asian and my family was from Pakistan, it opened a

whole new world to them and gave them knowledge that they might not have gotten had

their teacher been anyone else. I used this as an opportunity to change the way I would

approach things with my students. I wanted to ensure they received an education that I

did not have. I wanted to expose them to cultures and experiences from around the world

to broaden their minds and to celebrate themselves as well as others.

Representation Matters

The school years between 2019 and 2022 were unlike any other I had previously

experienced. The year began with a district restructuring that split grade levels up with K-

2 buildings, 3-5 buildings, 6th grade centers, junior highs, and high schools. Staff and students were shuffled around the district to brand new buildings and parents had to keep up with the changes. The beginning of the 2019-2020 school year was chaotic in a way that was different from the traditional chaos of a new school year. Then the end of the 2019-2020 school year ended abruptly with the lockdown related to the spread of Covid-19. The following school year, 2020-2021, was almost entirely virtual with its own set of unique challenges relating to virtual teaching. When we returned for the 2021-2022 school year, we still had some Covid-19 guidelines, but were back in the classroom just like any other previous school year.

On the first day back at school after winter break in January 2022, I received a phone call from the office letting me know that I would be getting a new student that day. This was completely unexpected as teachers are supposed to have 24-hour notice prior to a new student entering the classroom. But, since the restructuring of the district in 2019, many of the protocols were not necessarily being followed as closely as they should have been or previously were. I tried my best to not be frustrated with the fact that I was given no notice for a new student and was therefore completely unprepared.

I introduced myself to him, "Hi, I'm Ms. Beg. I'm your teacher this year, what's your name?" When the student told me his first and last name, I realized that he had an Arab, Muslim last name. Even though I'm probably not supposed to do this, I looked at him and asked, "Are you Muslim?" He looked right back at me and said yes. I told him I was too and the look of joy that spread across his face was undeniable. He responded with a very loud and excited, "REALLY?!" I then asked him where he was from, and he

told me Palestine. I let him know that my family is from Pakistan and that I have a lot of Palestinian friends. Another joyous and loud, "REALLY?!" came from him.

The happiness he had when he realized that his teacher was also Muslim was amazing. Immediately, my annoyance that a new student showed up on my roster with no warning disappeared. I do not think this student would have ever imagined that he would have a Muslim teacher when he came into school that morning. At the end of the day, I walked him to his car and spoke to his father who was also equally as ecstatic to see a Muslim as his son's teacher. The next day I introduced myself to his older sister and mother. His sister informed me that he had come home and immediately told everyone that his teacher was Muslim. He couldn't believe it and was so excited to share with everyone. I will never forget the look on his face when we made that connection. I thought to myself what it could possibly have meant to have a Muslim teacher growing up. I could never have even dreamed something like that happening. This small gesture of letting him know that I was Muslim too is something that, I hope, will stay with him as it has stayed with me.

As a teacher, I strive to create experiences for my students that not only enriches their love for their own histories and cultures but also to enrich their understanding of other cultures as well. These actions, no matter how small, have more of an impact on our students than we realize. I have been given the opportunity to nurture the spirits of my students in a way that my spirit was not nurtured as a child. I became the teacher that I never had growing up. I can make a difference in a student's life by nurturing their spirits and allowing them to embrace their differences instead of shying away from them. Through stories and through sharing, students

Final Thoughts

I wish I could say that the racist and ignorant comments and questions I received as a K-12 student were isolated incidents. In the years since I started working in public school in 2015, I have, unfortunately, been on the receiving end of several offensive comments and microaggressions. During a meet the teacher night at school, I had a parent, as she was sitting down to talk to me, point to her head and ask me where my dot was. When I told her I wasn't Hindu, she then went on to tell me how much she loved Indian food. I informed her I wasn't Indian either. When I eventually made the decision to stop wearing hijab, I had several teachers ask other people in the building if I was going to get kicked out of my house now that I didn't wear hijab anymore. I had, once again, had a teacher tell me how much she loves India and Hinduism and has the Hindu goddess Ganesh tattooed on her leg. I told her I wasn't Hindu or Indian and her response was a simple "oh." I had a teacher wish me a Happy Diwali even though I am not Hindu. This same teacher told me how great it was that my dad went to college in America because English is his second language. She also wished my family in Palestine well even though I am not Palestinian. A former assistant principal told me that he was so surprised at my English because I didn't have an accent at all. Another teacher told me that two Black teachers in the building, who apparently didn't like anyone, would like me because of my skin color. When talking about a student asking me where I was from and why kids don't always like my answer, the teacher responded, "Well, you don't really look like you're from here anyways." These microaggressions have a constant and consistent place in my life. There are times when I do not even realize I am on the receiving end of offensive comments because of how often they happen. Despite all the

negativity, racism, and ignorance I faced, there were also brief moments of positivity. After the election of Donald Trump in 2016, a coworker wrote me the kindest note of encouragement and let me know that no matter what was set to happen, I would be supported.

When I reflect on my time in K-12, I am not usually met with the best of memories. I recognize that my school experience, especially post-9/11 was maybe not as traumatizing as others around the country may have faced since it was not physical trauma. Yes, I was called a terrorist on occasion, but no one ever tried to pull my hijab off my head, but I was, on occasion, "randomly selected" at the airport for an extra security check. At the time, I did not feel as if it was a traumatizing experience. As I share these stories, I am in my head thinking why these stories are worth sharing. Am I making a bigger deal out of this than it really was? I made it through high school, does it really matter that some people weren't as nice. Is anyone in high school ever really that nice? These are the thoughts that are constant. Even now, as I am writing this out, I am wondering if my story is going to add any value to the world. Still, even with all the doubt I have in my head, I share my story with the hope that it can add something to the already existing research.

Shared Experiences

As a first-generation American Muslim, I experienced the world in a way that was different from my peers in my K-12 educational setting. In almost every setting I was in, I was the other. Yet, these experiences are not unique to me alone. I am not the only one who has struggled throughout their educational journey. These are moments that people everywhere have encountered in one way or another. Whether they are positive or

negative, our experiences shape our identities and make us who we are. By sharing these stories, we find connections to the people around us who may have had similar experiences. As first-generation Americans, Martiza and I share that connection. Despite our differences in race, religion, upbringing, etc., that commonality is there and unites us in our experiences.

Maritza Caldera - **Mi Veredicto**

Safety

Even in my earliest memories of going to school, I distinctly remember having a love for learning. In my household we only spoke Spanish, so all my knowledge was in Spanish. All my vocabulary, stories, music, cuisine, TV shows and artists, games, and experiences existed in a language I couldn't use when I entered school. I was 5 years old, going to school for the first time, leaving my parents to be with a whole new set of adults and kids, and I couldn't even speak the language. The feeling is very limiting and overwhelming. The intense desire to engage in something eagerly yet finding it frustratingly unattainable. No one wants to be limited, on the contrary people thrive on hopes and dreams and the conviction that they can achieve anything they put their mind to. Embarking on my K-12 journey with such a big limitation was a huge hurdle to overcome. Luckily, I was placed in an English Language Learner program (ELL). My most vivid memory of ELL is of having a Spanish-speaking Hispanic teacher. In many ways I was twice as lucky, because teachers who are both Spanish speaking and Hispanic are far and few, this was one of the perks of living in a diverse neighborhood, with higher demand comes a slightly higher chance of finding one of these rare teacher gems. She was my first and last Hispanic teacher ever. I'm quite confident I graduated ELL in the

2nd grade. I was no longer going to be pulled from my regular class to go to ELL and I

remember feeling very proud of this accomplishment. I knew enough English to join the

rest of the native English-speaking students. I didn't feel inadequate for being in ELL

classes, as many of my friends were also in the program, and they were intelligent.

However, I was proud of not needing help and I felt like I had overcome that limitation. I

possessed sufficient English skills to fully participate in my classroom, but I soon

recognized there was still a wealth of knowledge that eluded me. With my Hispanic

friends I was able to connect in a way I couldn't with other students. I understood the

references they made, I related to the experiences they had, the food they ate, and their

family outings. From an early age I knew there were things we did, and they were always

going to be different from my non-Hispanic classmates.

My elementary school was diverse and not the token minority kind, where there

were 1 or 2 students of color. We had Indian students, Hispanic students, Black students,

Asian students, and White students. I encountered languages beyond English and

Spanish. I was also exposed to other cultures besides my own and white American. As an

adult I remember telling friends where I used to live when I was little and them telling

me, "Oh you lived on the *Indio* side". *Indio* means Indian in Spanish, and this was true

we truly did live on the *Indio* side. In the apartment building I lived in; we had South

Asian neighbors both upstairs and downstairs and I can still remember how often and

strongly the hallways smelled of spices and garlic. We had such a large South Asian

population that on the last day before winter break during our assembly there was a

special dance performance in between a Christmas play and awards for things like perfect

attendance. I still remember how much I loved watching everyone dance and the feeling

of excitement and joy I felt looking at their beautiful tops and long flowy skirts topped off with a saree. There were girls wearing hot pink, baby pink-, purple-, yellow-, and orange-colored traditional Indian outfits. Each of them adorned with bangles on their wrists and ankles, standing in a line barefoot. I wanted so badly to be one of them. I remember the moms also dressed in sarees, that had clearly choreographed the dance, running around, and putting all the students in a perfect line getting them ready to dance. The music started and before I knew what Bollywood was, I witnessed my first Bollywood performance. It was music I had never heard before, dance moves I'd never seen before, clothing I'd never worn before and yet there I sat wishing this performance would never end. It was such an eye-opening experience to see something so different from anything I had ever been exposed to and yet felt so connected to it and felt so appreciative to have witnessed its beauty. The performance wasn't part of my culture, but it was like look - here's a whole school building appreciating something that is so different from the norm. I often think about this experience, especially now as a teacher. This was my first explicit brush with cultural spirit nurturing. By "explicit," I mean a deliberate and premeditated approach orchestrated by my school. The goal of this performance was to celebrate the significant South Asian demographic within our school community and to introduce the culture to other students. Regardless of their cultural background, each student experienced this performance differently within a positive framework. These experiences of diversity demonstrate the nurturing of cultural spirits. My first implicit exposure to cultural spirit nurturing was attending a diverse school. A diverse school for me, a diverse student, nurtured my cultural spirit. Because minorities often have similarities within their differences. We might not eat the same food, but we'll

both eat with our hands. We might not speak the same language but we'll both have different accents or dialects. Our food looks different and smells different, just like theirs. We might eat with tortillas, and they'll eat with pita bread. There's a collective camaraderie among minority groups - we understand the experience of being different. White people enjoy our cooking but not always our presence, and as a student, being among a diverse group of students reduced my apprehension.

That was the first and last time I experienced any explicitly planned cultural spirit nurturing experience in my K-12 journey. Of course, I met students from countries around the world and learned about their culture through interactions, but it was never a school wide event, or anything directly given by teachers. The next few times I was excited about anything cultural was when I heard a random "Miguel" or "Maria" in a math story problem or during that super short history lesson about the Alamo and the Mexican-American War. I didn't have a connection when I was learning about history or literature through traditionally used stories and books. It wasn't until I was in college learning about the role that Mexicans played in the history of the U.S. that I ever felt a sense of curiosity to learn more beyond what was on the page. I didn't learn about the floating gardens that the Aztecs built until I was an adult. I'm proud to know that I am a descendent of a people that were creative, ingenious, problem solvers and resourceful enough to come up with solutions using nature in their favor. This pride would have come in handy when I was early in my K-12 journey and it was a missed opportunity to nurture my cultural spirit. I feel like I might have pictured myself pursuing a different destiny, perhaps as an engineer or an immigration lawyer. This must be how my white classmates felt seeing someone that looks like them in all the books, a sense of assurance.

Cultivating cultural spirit through lessons and curriculum can also wield significant influence. When I reflect on the many accomplishments of my ancient and modern predecessors, I can't help but hear a little voice saying strength, resilience, AND intelligence belongs to us Mexicans as well. We had it too.

The Mexican Laborer

In fifth grade, we moved into my uncle's house. Although his town drastically differed from ours, he lived relatively close by. It was a white neighborhood. All my neighbors were white, and they were old. I couldn't go outside and randomly meet up with a swarm of kids who went to my school and lived in the neighboring apartment buildings. All there was an occasional grandkid. The first thing I remember about my school was that I was the only Hispanic in my grade. I couldn't speak Spanish with any of my classmates, we didn't eat the same food, we didn't spend our weekends the same way, our parents didn't know each other from work nor could they effectively communicate in their native languages, we didn't have shared experiences of visiting our "ranchos" (villages) in Mexico or going to get-togethers with our 20 cousins, we didn't dress the same, we didn't watch the same shows, we didn't listen to the same music, we didn't have much in common. How does this affect student performance? The next thing I remember about my new school was being placed back into ELL. I was bothered and agitated. Did they think I was dumb? What had I done to prompt them to make this decision? I had already graduated, and they were taking something I had already accomplished from me. With this, they told me I wasn't proficient in English. My previous school and ELL teacher were wrong. I wasn't on par with my classmates. It was a tiny classroom with me, a Polish student, and the teacher. She was white, and so was he. To me, it felt like a waste

of time. We'd go over concepts I already knew, vocabulary I'd already seen, and grammar I'd already used. I remember becoming somewhat of a smart aleck, answering the way those kids answer that they think they know everything. I felt like my intelligence, knowledge, and abilities were being questioned, and I was over it. It didn't last long before my new ELL teacher didn't pull me for ELL anymore, but the bitter taste lingered. I felt like my cultural spirit was being murdered, whether intentionally or unintentionally, because despite demonstrating my proficiency in English, they still doubted me.

As a current EL teacher, I know that ELL programs today require testing and a trail of documents demonstrating a need for EL services. Students cannot be placed based solely on the fact that they speak a second language; instead, they must demonstrate their need for services or lack thereof through testing. Families have the option to decline services. However, this choice is often overlooked or not fully understood due to the lack of information within the ELL community, such as my parents. I was the epitome of a good student. I never talked back, was an A/B student, always completed my work on time, and was rarely absent. However, this experience cast doubt on my abilities in the eyes of my classmates, teacher, and myself.

I went on to middle school and eventually ended up in honors math. We lived with my uncle until the middle of 8th grade when we were finally able to purchase our own home. Our very own house that my parents bought from my uncle and aunt, who were upgrading to a bigger house. Fortunately, our new house wasn't surrounded by older couples. We finally had kids in our neighborhood, and they weren't all white. As soon as I walked into my new middle school, I saw the diversity I remembered from my elementary years. I got my schedule, and at this school, they placed students who were in

honors math into honors science as well, so I'd have to be placed in both. I had advisory

early in my schedule, and right away, another Mexican girl, who later became one of my

best friends, asked to see my schedule. Right away she said "Whoa! Honors?! So, you're

not like us, you're smart!" It wasn't the first time I heard something like that. Not that I

was smart, but that I wasn't like them. Mexicans are hard workers, they're laborers,

illegals with accents and broken English, they're not book smart. I didn't feel smart. I

liked learning and that combined with the first–generation pressure to excel from my

parents this meant I had to be something; and to be something I had to get good grades. I

hated that. I hated when people painted Mexicans, as nothing more than labor. And I'm

not talking about the Mexicans that have blue eyes and fair skin, because those aren't the

ones that they're talking about either. I'm talking about the kind that are cast as

housekeepers and landscapers in shows and movies. I'm talking about the ones like me,

my dad, my family. The dark ones, the tan ones, with clear indigenous features. My

minority wasn't known for their intelligence. It was back to normal for the rest of my

classes. Social Studies, ELA, and my elective classes were filled with Hispanic, Black,

Middle-Eastern, Asian, and White students. My honors science and honors math on the

other hand did not. I was back in my old neighborhood when I entered these classrooms. I

was the only Hispanic again. These kinds of spaces were and still are uncomfortable.

They come with preset assumptions and judgements. Imagine being in a classroom and

people asking if you've ever been to Mexico, you respond no, and them asking why not. I

can't tell them that I can't go because my mother doesn't have her green card yet and if

we go, she won't be able to come back with us. I didn't need to conceal that with my

Mexican friends; they understood the unspoken. As a teacher, I've encountered a few

students who also couldn't go to Mexico, and I refrain from asking why. If another

student does question, I share my own childhood experience of being unable to go until

my mom received her green card. It lessens the pressure and eases anxiety. Cultural

sensitivity and awareness can only develop through exposure and dedicated efforts to

nurture cultural spirit. What additional advantages do teachers from diverse backgrounds

offer?

Nurturing Cultural Spirits

The Bollywood performance I experienced was the highlight of my K-12 journey,

and I can only imagine what impact a performance like that had on all my South Asian

classmates. Recognizing culture and seeing it in my school building made me feel safe,

welcomed, and provided me the green light to be proud and unashamed of being my

authentic self. Watching this performance, which showcased a fragment of South Asian

culture, evoked such intense emotions in me. I recognize that a similar performance

highlighting Hispanic culture could have elicited equally intense or possibly even

stronger emotions. These kinds of moments are the moments that spark joy, pride, and

curiosity about our ancestors, history, and origins.

My first year at my current school is when I had my first Mexican students. I was

out for the first 2 months after having my baby two days before school started. I came

back nervous and anxious, the way you feel when you're a new student. I was a new

teacher, with new students, in a new school building. My students are especially shy

because I teach English Learners. They are slow to warm up and it takes a real

commitment to build strong relationships, enough so that they will trust me and our

environment enough to practice and use a language that is new to them and that they're

not perfect or proficient in. I had one 4th grade student, Paulina, who was very shy, the

only Hispanic in her grade, and was making slow progress with her English proficiency.

Practice is a crucial component of mastering a new language. Every time I had the chance

to connect, I connected. When she told me about her weekend, which usually consisted of

going to church and then eating some food, I'd ask her what the church vendors were

selling this time. For us Mexicans, after mass, there was always either a taco truck, a

mom selling tamales, or an *elotero* (corn street vendor) selling corn out of his little cart

right outside the church doors, waiting for everyone to come out. We connected. The first

time she told me, I told her that when I was little, I would always beg my parents for an

elote preparado (corn topped with mayo, cheese, lime, and chili), and she lit up. She sat

up straighter, her voice got louder, she made eye contact, and she answered - they ate

tamales that time and sometimes the mom that was selling the tamales was her mom, she

had to wait extra time at the church because she had to wait for her mom to be done

selling and then clean up. We found out that I had been to her church a couple of times.

She began to open up to me. Our home countries would come up a lot, obviously in an

EL classroom, and her classmate would tell us that she'd never been to Kenya but that

her dad goes all the time. Claudia mentioned that neither she nor her parents had visited

for a while. As a daughter of immigrants, I knew what this was code for. They hadn't

gone because they couldn't go unless they planned on never coming back. I responded,

"Yea my husband hasn't gone in a long time either. Hopefully, he'll get the chance soon.

He hasn't seen his family in 15 years". She knew I was born in Chicago, which meant

that I could go, but when I told her that he couldn't go yet because he was an immigrant

who was born in Mexico, she understood he faced constraints. She then shared her

excitement about visiting, describing what her parents told her *rancho* (village) looked

like, and the family members she would get to see and finally meet. After this initial

conversation, she would bring up Mexico and Mexican culture all the time. When we

learned about holidays from various cultures, she mentioned eating posole on

Thanksgiving instead of turkey and celebrating on Christmas Eve instead of Christmas

day, and I readily affirmed that my family follows the same tradition. Our small group

began talking often about the things we did differently compared to traditional American

culture, which brought us closer together. Paulina, especially, put in extra effort for me.

She meticulously reviewed her writing, crafted stronger sentences, revisited passages,

practiced responding to questions, checked her grammar, and the list goes on. She pushed

herself because she felt safe making mistakes and learning in our supportive

environment. She knew I had her back because I had once been in her shoes, learning

English just like she was now. I remember working hard for teachers that I liked and

respected. I made sure to include a unit about ancient Mesoamerican civilizations. We

learned about the Chinampas (floating gardens) used by the Aztecs, the irrigation systems

developed by the Olmec, the sophisticated writing systems of the Maya, the intricate

artwork found in various Mesoamerican cultures, as well as their impressive

advancements in engineering, mathematics, and astronomy, among other achievements.

She would share how she would go back home and essentially take on the role of a

teacher with her parents, explaining everything we learned in EL. Sometimes, it wasn't

just about the exciting topics like Mesoamerica, but also basic concepts like nouns and

verbs. I had shared with her that my son was taking Mexican candy to hand out on

Valentine's Day, and when Valentine's Day came, she said came to my class to show me

she'd brought Duvalines and Rockaletas (Mexican candy) to hand out. She made sure to let me know what the verdict was among her classmates. Teachers would tell me how much she started participating in class, how well she was doing in all her classes, and overall, how much growth she was showing. I'm in no way taking credit for all her achievements because after all it wasn't me writing those papers, or telling her what to share in class, but I really do feel like she felt safe. The way I had felt safe when I was amid my Hispanic friends in my elementary school. She grew so much that year not only in her English proficiency but as a student. She came out of her shell, was willing to make new friends, and try new things. That was her last year in EL, she scored a 5.5 out of 6 on the ACCESS Test and all she needed was a 4.7. Her score the previous year was a 4.2. It might not seem like a big difference, but there are students who are born in the United States and remain lifelong EL learners. She had to demonstrate English proficiency in Listening, Reading, Speaking and Writing and it's not an easy test to pass. Although I didn't get to see her as much when she went to 5th grade, she'd still visit, come in and say hi, drop by in the mornings, bring me drawings and on her last day of school she wrote me a goodbye note. She thanked me for making her feel "comfy and stress free in your class", for helping her decorate her water bottle with stickers, and she let me know that she would miss me so much. This sounds to me like the culmination of a bunch of cultural spiritual nurturing experiences. Every interaction where I celebrated her culture, her differences, her food, her experiences I nurtured her cultural spirit. These moments were important for her spirit, and she used them to manifest external growth academically and personally.

Reflecting on my journey through education, I've encountered both the nurturing and the murder of cultural spirit. From the warmth of diverse classrooms to the cold isolation of stereotypes, these experiences have shaped my understanding of cultural identity in education. Now, as we delve into another narrative, I am struck by the parallels between my own struggles and those of Denise grappling with similar challenges.

Denise Ross - **Race and School Matters**

With our 40th high school reunion approaching this June, a group of my classmates and I gathered for dinner. The evening was filled with laughter, reminiscing, and debates about which elementary school was the best in our district. We discussed our favorite teachers and shared memories that left a lasting impression on us. As I listened to their stories, I found myself reflecting on my own K-12 experiences and comparing them to those of my peers, some of which were pleasant, while others made me question, "Why me?"

As I reflected on most of my K-12 experiences, I can say that I cherish many of the memories and have formed lifelong friendships along the way. However, I must also acknowledge that there were moments of discomfort and unease that led me to question the intentions of those responsible for my well-being. In Chapter 4, I find myself revisiting these experiences with a deeper understanding than I had at the time they occurred. It is for this reason that I chose to employ autoethnography to share my stories.

Fun While it Lasted

Recalling the anticipation of starting school, I couldn't wait for kindergarten. My mom, already at work, left my grandmother to get me dressed and ready, and my

stepfather escorted me to school. I remember feeling incredibly proud as I walked down the halls, observing all the open doors leading to the nicely decorated classrooms. Upon reaching my designated classroom, both teachers warmly greeted us at the door and introduced themselves. Mrs. Pile stood as the primary teacher, while Mrs. Faison assumed the role of Teacher Assistant, and both were Black. After ensuring that I was comfortably settled, my stepfather left. The first day was everything I had imagined, filled with the lively sounds of children talking and playing, occasional cries, story time, free play in designated areas, artistic activities, and of course, food. The teachers made the experience enjoyable, and I quickly made new friends. Because I knew much of what was being taught, due to my being home for a year, the teachers always had some enrichment work planned for me to go along with each lesson. This made me feel particularly special. Each day felt rewarding due to the positive learning environment and engaging activities. The teachers always treated us with kindness using only a firm voice when necessary. This positive foundation nurtured my spirit, rooted in authentic acts that contributed to the development of my identity. I left kindergarten feeling supported and that I could accomplish anything.

In third grade, I experienced corporal punishment when I was paddled by the principal for allegedly throwing snowballs. I thoroughly enjoyed playing during recess, regardless of whether it was with girls or boys. In Cleveland, we would go outside for recess even in the snow! There was just one rule - No Throwing Snowballs. However, on this day, I happened to join the wrong group of people to play with. The boys were furious because they were caught, and they decided that if they were going to be punished for throwing, then I should be punished along with them. Despite my innocence – I was

dodging them – the biased teacher sided with other boys, leading to an unjust

punishment. I was taken aback when I heard "Denise Ross" called by the principal. I

tried pleading my case with the white, male principal, but he would not listen. While the

principal didn't paddle me as harshly as he did the boys, it was the principle of the matter

that bothered me. I distinctly recall glancing over and seeing the smirk on the biased

teacher's face as tears streamed down my cheeks. This incident shattered my perception

of school as a safe and enjoyable place. More importantly, I began to wonder if these

incidents were happening to me because I was *Black,* and the teacher and principal were

white. I began to participate less and less during class discussions and during recess I no

longer wanted to play with just anyone. It was here that my spirit was first murdered by

people who were supposed to protect me. "This is most prevalent in school settings in

which students of color are subjected to incidents of physical and psychological spirit

murder at the hands of teachers, bus drivers, and other school officials. People who were

supposed to protect them, love them, and teach them" (Love, 2019).

    Fourth grade proved to be somewhat different. It marked an unforgettable period

for three reasons. Firstly, it followed the loss of my grandmother, secondly, this teacher

was *Black* and lastly, the teacher made it memorable for all the wrong reasons. This

teacher, akin to the wicked witch of the West, rarely left her desk, wearing a perpetual

scowl as she dictated our activities. The class consisted of both fourth and fifth graders,

and she blatantly favored the fifth-grade side, which seemed to empower them whenever

she left the room. They would do things like throw paper balls at us and tell us if we told

on them, they would tell her it was us who threw the paper. So, we of course picked up

the paper and didn't tell. We knew the teacher favored the fifth graders and possibly

would not believe us if we were to tell what happened. But we were more afraid of the

punishment that might be issued to us. The teacher gave punishments such as writing

sentences hundreds of times or making students stand in class for longer durations based

on the rule that they had supposedly broke. Since corporal punishment was allowed in

our schools at the time, no one went home and complained to their parents about the

punishments enacted on us in class. Because this teacher used fear as a tactic to keep us

in line, we were afraid of what would happen the next day in class. She would find a way

to issue some kind of consequence to avenge our telling our parents on her. We were not

willing to take that chance. In addition to the corporal punishment, if we didn't finish our

work in class, we had to complete it during recess, or it would become part of our

homework, requiring a signature from our parents. I always made sure to complete it so

that my mother wouldn't need to sign it. I should not have had to have this type of fear.

The joy of attending school evaporated, and I began fabricating illnesses to avoid

attending. I must admit I was somewhat confused, because of what I'd gone through the

year before with the white teacher and administrator. But this time it was by someone

who looked like me. These experiences contributed to the gradual murder of my spirit, a

consequence of the teacher's actions. It left me feeling like I was the problem. This

erasure of identity is a form of violence that undermines a person's sense of belonging

and self-esteem (Love, 2019). I wished that my grandmother was still alive so that I could

stay home with her again, where I was safe.

Faith Restored

My mother decided it was time for a change, so we made a big move to St. Louis,

Missouri. She enrolled me in fifth grade, and I eagerly anticipated the new adventure. I'd

heard nothing but good things about the school I was going to attend, so I was ready to

dive in. The first day of school finally arrived, and my cousin and I walked there with

some friends. The warm greetings from the teachers and even the cafeteria staff

immediately struck me. As I entered the classroom, I noticed for the first time that my

teacher was a man, a Black man. He introduced himself, and then it was our turn to ask

questions. Most of the students had been together since kindergarten and knew each

other, so from the start, it was obvious to everyone that I was the "new" girl. However,

due to previous experiences, I had become rather reserved, earning the label of the "shy"

girl who didn't speak much. During summer visits to St. Louis, I had made a few friends

who lived near my aunt and were also in my class. They were already familiar with my

"accent" from Ohio. It wasn't until I was called upon to read aloud in class that the rest of

my classmates got to hear my accent and began to mock it, teasing me at every

opportunity. My teacher noticed my sadness and reluctance to speak in class. Sensing

something was wrong, he asked me about it. I hesitated at first, but he reassured me that it

was safe to share, and I didn't need to worry about other students bothering me. Once I

started talking, I couldn't stop. I poured out my experiences of being teased, mistreated by

previous teachers, and unfairly punished. Tears flowed, and Mr. Wallace apologized for

what had happened, assuring me of my safety. Though I believed him, I remained

somewhat guarded, needing more time to fully trust him and my new school. Sensing

this, Mr. Wallace nurtured my spirit by emphasizing that school was a safe space where I

wouldn't be punished just for being a kid. He reminded us every day how important we

were and of our potential to do great things. He treated all of us with respect, listened to

our concerns, and was fair in discipline. I greatly appreciated and needed his support. To

get me to feel more comfortable in class, Mr. Wallace asked what interests I

had. Coming from an NFL town, and a sports family, I had memorized all the NFL

teams and the cities they played in. So, for a writing activity we were able to write about

any topic and of course I wrote about the teams. I was asked to read my paper to the

class, and they loved it. From that moment on, I would talk football with the boys about

the games, the girls stopped teasing me about my accent, and Mr. Wallace would not

allow me to "disappear" into the crowd, and the fabricated illnesses went away. For this I

thank him.

Middle School Blues

Due to overcrowding of sixth graders, my middle school decided to create a self-

contained classroom in the seventh and eighth grade building across the street. Our

teacher, an older White male, originally a Language Arts teacher, now had the task of

teaching all subjects except math. Most of the class excelled in reading, and I noticed

how he treated those who struggled. Even in sixth grade, when we worked in small

groups during reading, some of my classmates displayed signs of what I now recognize

as anxiety. This stemmed from the teacher's tendency to slam things on the table or yell at

them when they made mistakes. These outbursts not only affected the targeted students

but also caused the rest of us to feel tense, as we would jump at the sudden noise or

yelling.

It became evident that the teacher favored my group, evident in the way he

interacted with us and often used us as examples. While this may have seemed flattering,

I couldn't shake the feeling of sympathy towards the other students who didn't receive the

same treatment. This disparity caused discord among us, leading many of us to confide in

our parents, who promptly reported the behavior to the principal. Unfortunately, despite

these complaints, nothing changed, and the teacher seemed to feel empowered by the lack

of consequences for his actions. This created an environment that to me felt like I was

walking through a minefield, trying not to step on a mine and not get blown up.

        The teacher wasn't the only obstacle I faced in sixth grade. Being in the self-

contained classroom, we also encountered mockery from other students. Not a day passed

during lunch or special activities without someone making derogatory remarks or calling

us derogatory names like 'retards.' They would even mock us with sounds and gestures

resembling sign language, as if we were deaf. What saddened me was that some of these

individuals knew us and understood that we were just like them, normal. My only refuge

was the band room. There, I could lose myself in playing my clarinet, surrounded by my

best friend Staci, and feel carefree. Mr. Geisz, our band teacher, was exceptionally kind.

He recognized the uniqueness of each student and encouraged it. He never raised his

voice; instead, he addressed any issues privately after class. He never subjected anyone to

public embarrassment. I valued that; it was what I needed.

Seventh grade presented a new set of challenges in the form of a bully. Once again, my

distinct accent made me stand out during class discussions or when reading aloud. Now

in seventh grade, I had grown accustomed to people mocking my speech. However, there

was one girl and her friends who persistently targeted me. Ignoring her in class one day,

she took offense and accused me of thinking I was superior because I came from Ohio. I

realized informing the teacher would not be beneficial because he behaved as if he was

afraid of certain students, and she was one of them. Despite my efforts to ignore her, she

became increasingly infuriated. Eventually, she passed me a note threatening to make my

life miserable. I crumpled the note and focused on my work, hoping she would leave me alone. Unfortunately, I was mistaken. One day after gym class, she confronted me and declared she would be waiting by the buses to fight me. Fed up with the bullying, I responded defiantly, agreeing to meet her there. Strangely, she never showed up, and she never bothered me again. Over the years, we have become cordial and even take pictures together at class reunions. When I finally asked her why she had targeted me, she claimed not to remember any such behavior. The remainder of middle school was normal. No bullying, no biased teachers, no harsh punishments.

High School Drama

My district had a unique setup. After middle school, you transitioned to Junior High for eighth and ninth grade before advancing to high school for tenth grade. Some of the teachers from the middle school followed us there which made the transition smooth. Most of the teachers were understanding and nurturing. It was a safe place. We were able to be our authentic selves. Many of us ninth graders wished we could remain at Hanley Junior High, but we understood the need to move on.

Tenth grade proved to be smooth sailing, devoid of any drama or issues. However, it wasn't until my junior year that I encountered a teacher who, once again, wasn't the most pleasant. He was my math teacher. I struggled in his class, and whenever I asked a question, I was met with anger and humiliation. Often, I'd be directed to the board to work out a problem in front of the class, receiving no assistance from the teacher whatsoever. There were occasions when I stood at the board for over ten minutes while my classmates stared at me, silently urging me to hurry up. Despite my pleas to sit down, my requests were ignored until he deemed it appropriate for me to do so. Even then, I

received no help with the original problem. Instead, I found assistance from a previous

teacher. This experience discouraged me from asking questions, a habit that persists to

this day. Once again, my spirit was murdered by another teacher. I was transferred to a

different class for the second semester. There the teacher took the time to explain the

problems, step by step, and welcomed questions. It was a totally different experience.

Welcome to Our Class

During 2022-2023, I had a student from Honduras who did not speak English. I

could sense her nervousness and perhaps a bit of fear when she was brought to my

classroom. However, the adult who brought her assured her that I was friendly, would

take care of her, and would introduce her to potential friends. Before I said anything to

her, I pointed to the board. I knew she would be coming, so I wrote a welcome to her on

the board in Spanish. She smiled after reading it. While I only knew basic words in

Spanish, I used Google Translate to communicate with her initially. I introduced her to

the class, and they were thrilled to meet her. They even installed Google Translate on her

computer and theirs so they could converse with her. As they exchanged questions, I gave

them space to interact. It was evident that the students had a sense of joy and belonging

(Love, 2021). We located Honduras on a map, made its flag, and researched popular

foods from the country. During recess, I introduced her to Ariana, a student in another

fourth-grade class who also spoke Spanish but knew some English. They were able to

visit each other's classrooms. I received a message from Luz's family via the ESOL

teacher. They were very thankful for the way in which she was welcomed into our class.

Her parents said she was so excited, told them of the friends she made, and her kind

teacher. Each day Luz would come to class, I'd greet her with *Buenos Dias*, she would

smile and reply the same. This was done to empower her socially and emotionally, using

cultural references (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). I wanted her to feel included. I also

wanted her to know that just because she was the new girl who spoke a different language

did not mean that she was not a part of our class. I didn't want her to feel like I felt when

I moved to a new state, started a new school, and was treated differently because of the

way I spoke. My goal was to not have Luz feel alienated and disconnect her from her

culture (Lubienski, 2003). Gradually, she began to open up, and shared some of what her

life was like in Honduras. She shared one story that really touched us. The ESOL

teacher came and asked me the day before if she could come and share one of Luz's

stories with the class and of course I said yes. She told us about how she and her family

wanted to come to America so her and her siblings could go to better schools and so her

dad could get better work for the family. However, on the way here, not all the family

made it to Missouri. Some of them were sent to a different place that she didn't know of

which made her sad. It was her favorite *tio* and *tia* (uncle and aunt). Her mom and dad

have been trying to find where they were sent but haven't been able to find them yet.

After she told her story, the entire class, without any prompting, got up, and gave her the

biggest group hug.

　　　Luz began to thrive in my class. She was quickly picking up on English and was

learning basic math. The ESOL teacher said she was a hard worker and loved our

school. She attributed much of Luz's progress to her feeling comfortable in my

classroom and her classroom community. I contributed it to the teachers who nurtured my

spirit which in turn taught me how to nurture the spirits of the students I am entrusted to

daily.

From Trauma to Healing

   The memories I have of my K-12 experience are both traumatic and healing. Traumatic because teachers, who were entrusted with the safety and well-being of their students, did not always ensure it. These teachers brought their biases into the classroom, a space where they should not have been allowed to exist. Their biases and actions were responsible for murdering my spirit on multiple occasions, and the effects can still be felt as I type this today. However, just as there were teachers who contributed to this pain, there were also those who nurtured it. These teachers worked diligently to affirm their students with positive feedback daily, actively reaching out to help instead of waiting for us to seek it. They did not consider my race as a factor in their support. All that mattered was to provide a positive learning environment where their students could learn, thrive, feel supported, and nurtured. It was incredibly empowering for a teacher to recognize the good in you rather than constantly pointing out negatives. I deeply appreciated that. I knew this was the kind of educator I would strive to be, one who culturally nurtures the spirits of all students. Whenever people come to observe or visit my classroom, there is one thing they all say that is the same: how calm and welcoming my room feels, and how calming my voice is. I attribute this to my experiences during my time in K-12 and the cultural spirit nurturing I received. I want students to know that they have a safe place in my classroom, and they are respected, valued, and included.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of our study was to analyze how our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering contributed to the formation of our identities as people and as educators. Autoethnography was utilized as our method as it was the most useful tool for us as we sought to understand and make sense of our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering. The experiences we described were very singular and personal and played a significant role in our lives. Autoethnography as a research method allowed us to dissect and interpret our experiences as we advanced through elementary, middle, and high school and how those experiences impacted us in our teaching careers. The use of autoethnography granted us the ability to merge Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering with Critical Race Theory. Under the umbrella of Critical Race Theory, we used LatCrit (Latino Critical Race Theory), MusCrit (Muslim Critical Race Theory), BlackCrit (Black Critical Race Theory), counter-storytelling, and intersectionality to interpret our lived experiences.

Critical Race Theory had five central tenets which included racism as ordinary and enduring, interest convergence, social construction of race, differential racialization, intersectionality and anti-essentialism, and counter-storytelling (Delgado et al., 2023). These tenants, along with the branches of LatCrit, MusCrit, and BlackCrit, provided us with literature that we were able to explore to give deeper meaning to our experiences. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2021), which was the concept that we as humans have many different intersecting identities and there was not one single identity that was the cause for anything, allowed us to explore those identities and how they shaped our lives.

Counter-storytelling gave us the opportunity to share our stories without the fear or repercussions of being silenced. Bettina Love's (2013) concept of Spirit Murdering described which racist structures withhold inclusion, safety, acceptance, and nurturing from individuals. By exploring the concept of Spirit Murdering, we developed the idea of Cultural Spirit Nurturing, which were experiences that were positive and authentic acts that promoted the development of individual identities and spirits within a framework of culture. We utilized autoethnography to share our stories of both Cultural Spirit Murdering and Cultural Spirit Nurturing to understand that every experience, whether positive or negative, had an immense impact on our identity and our lives.

The significance of our study lied in our reflection on our educational lives and how our individual lived experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering shaped us into the educators we are today. By examining our encounters with these dynamics, we aimed to provide a counter-story to the longstanding silencing of BIPOC individuals in educational discourse. Our diverse perspectives challenged the dominant narrative of the K-12 system, which often centered around white culture and values, thereby providing mirrors for individuals from various social categories.

Additionally, our narratives served as a voice for advocates of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and for BIPOC individuals who grappled with the nuances of both nurturing and murdering of their spirits in educational contexts.

Our study not only highlighted the importance of acknowledging and addressing Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering within educational settings, but also emphasized the urgent need for policies and practices that foster inclusivity, diversity, and cultural competency in schools.

Summary of Study

As autoethnography served as both a process and a product, it allowed us the opportunity to provide multiple counter-stories that challenged how culture, race, language, religion, etc., were viewed in a K-12 setting. Through our autoethnographies and our own counter-stories, we began the process of regaining our voice. Our analysis served as a counter-story and as an antidote for the silencing that BIPOC individuals have experienced for generations. Due to the nature of the experiences, our counter-stories reflected K-12 experiences that were inconsistent with those of average white American students. The K-12 system in the United States is centered around white culture and the white experience. Our perspectives, via our diverse intersectionalities, provided mirrors for many members of different social categories. By sharing our stories, we aimed to answer our research questions about how our experiences shaped our identities and influenced our implementation of Cultural Spirit experiences for the students we teach as educators. While autoethnography raised ethical concerns regarding subjectivity and bias, we navigated these by being transparent and considering the potential impacts of sharing personal experiences. Despite these challenges, autoethnography allowed us to delve deeply into our memories and reflections, enriching our research with authenticity and depth.

In reflecting on our K-12 education, we went on a journey marked by evolving perspectives and profound realizations. Initially, we might have described our experience as unremarkable, lacking overt racism, and characterized by a sense of normalcy. Over time, as we've gained more understanding and insight, our perspectives have changed.

Our memories revealed a complex story involving both personal growth and societal change. In the time since our high school graduations, we have pursued higher

education, professional development, and profound self-reflection. The rise of

movements like Black Lives Matter, the presidency of Donald Trump and a heightened

understanding of racism and microaggressions have prompted a reevaluation of our own

experiences through a new lens.

      The process of writing an autoethnography provided us with a unique opportunity

to revisit our educational journey and examine it from multiple angles. We recognized

that certain moments, both significant and seemingly mundane, have left lasting

impressions, shaping our identity and worldview.

      We delved into three distinct yet interconnected themes: cultural identity, post-

9/11 experiences, and the impotence of representation in education. Sara recounted

instances of cultural misidentification, the impact of 9/11 had on her Muslim identity, and

the profound impact of experiencing diverse representation in her career as an educator.

Maritza described experiences of navigating challenges in a predominantly English-

speaking environment, reflected on how the absence of cultural representation affected

her Mexican identity, and highlighted the significant influence that fostering cultural

pride had on both academic and personal development. Denise shared stories illustrating

the significant influence teachers wield over students' lives and welfare, emphasized the

value of resilience in navigating challenges, and highlighted the transformative potential

of cultivating a diverse and inclusive education setting that prioritizes every student's

sense of belonging and encouragement.

      Throughout our narrative, we grappled with the complexities of race, religion, and

cultural heritage, and acknowledged moments of adversity and resilience. We highlighted

the role of educators in nurturing students' spirits and fostering a sense of belonging, drawing from our own experiences as both students and teachers.

Ultimately, we recognized that our story was not unique but rather part of a broader tapestry of shared experiences. By sharing our narrative, we sought to foster understanding, empathy, and connection, recognizing the universal nature of human experiences across diverse backgrounds and contexts.

Having explored the diverse impacts of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering on both our identities as students and educators, it was important to consider how these experiences shaped our approach to teaching and working with students. As we reflected on the ways in which our own spirits were nurtured or murdered within the educational settings, we naturally carried these insights into our roles as educators. Thus, the pivotal questions arise: How have our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering as students and educators shaped our identities? And how have our experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering influenced how we work with our students and how we teach?

Shaping Our Identities

Sara Beg

The Cultural Spirit Murdering and lack of Cultural Spirit Nurturing I endured as a K-12 student has had an immense impact on my identity today. Everything I have endured has made an impression on my life. I am a stronger Muslim, South Asian, and American today because of those experiences. The racism and ignorance I faced in my formative years showed me that I should not have had to tolerate such behavior from anyone. I was in control of how I received and responded to the ignorance and

discrimination that came my way. I am motivated by my lived experiences to be an advocate for any injustices that people face throughout the world.

We, as victims of racial trauma, were sometimes never able to overcome and heal from that trauma because it had a constant presence in our lives and was rearing its ugly head. I know that throughout the rest of my life, there will always be someone there to compliment me on my ability to speak English or ask me where I'm from and not be happy when I say St. Louis. I know that when it is Ramadan, and I am fasting I will get the same deer in the headlights look and the question of "Not even water?" when I explain what fasting consists of. My experiences in my K-12 education, specifically those surrounding September 11, have left a lasting impression on my life and how I live it. I am always mindful of where I am and who I am surrounded by. Counting the room, to see if I am the only person of color or not, is something that I do in every situation without even realizing it. But, with the feelings of my past experiences constantly in my mind and my new understanding to call what I experienced what it was, racism, I can respond to these questions in a way that shows that I am proud of my race, religion, and culture.

Maritza Caldera

My experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering as a student and now educator has deeply shaped my identity, influencing how I perceive myself and others, as well as my approach to teaching and learning. As a student, my journey through the education system was marked by both moments of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering. Beginning school as a Spanish speaking child in an English-speaking environment was a daunting experience, highlighting the challenges

of language barriers and cultural differences. However, being placed in an English

Language Learner program (ELL) with a Spanish-speaking Hispanic teacher provided a

sense of belonging and support, fostering a positive attitude towards education and a

determination to overcome obstacles. Experiencing diversity within my school

environment, including exposure to Indian culture through a Bollywood-like

performance, enriched my understanding of the world and instilled a sense of pride in my

own heritage. These experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing contributed to the

development of a strong cultural identity and a desire to celebrate diversity in both

personal and professional contexts.

      Conversely, the transition to a predominantly white neighborhood and school

environment in fifth grade brought new challenges, including feelings of isolation and

inadequacy. Being the only Hispanic student in my grade and being placed back into ELL

despite feeling proficient in English led to questioning of my abilities and frustration with

the education system. These experiences of Cultural Spirit Murdering reinforced negative

stereotypes and undermined confidence in my academic abilities. As an educator, these

experiences inform my approach to teaching and interacting with students. Drawing from

my own experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering, I am

committed to creating inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments where

all students feel valued and supported. I recognize the importance of celebrating diversity

and providing opportunities for students to explore and embrace their cultural identities.

      Additionally, as a teacher from a diverse background, I bring a unique perspective

and empathy to my interactions with students. I understand the impact stereotypes and

biases have on student performance and strive to challenge these narratives by fostering a

culture of respect, acceptance, and mutual understanding in the classroom. By sharing my own experiences and cultural heritage, I aim to inspire and empower students to embrace their identities and strive for success.

Denise Ross

My experiences with both Cultural Spirit Murder and Cultural Spirit Nurturing, both as a student and now as an educator, have greatly shaped my identity and contributed to the way I interact with my students. Drawing from my own encounters with Cultural Spirit Murdering and Cultural Spirit Nurturing, I am committed to celebrating the diversity of my students and ensuring they feel welcomed in the learning environment. I understand the importance of students knowing and embracing their cultural identities. Experiencing racism and harsh punishments in the public education system has had a lasting effect on me first as a student and now as an educator. These effects contributed to my commitment to ensure each student had the opportunity to develop their cultural identity, feel accepted for who they are, and feel included. I also want them to understand that they have my support, something I did not have. Having two strong Black women as kindergarten teachers was my first experience with Cultural Spirit Nurturing in the public school setting. Just noticing that I knew much of what was taught and having enriching work for me daily made me feel special. It wasn't seen as a burden to them. This gave me a firm foundation for the educator I am now. On the other hand, recognizing that I was being treated differently because of my color was something I never expected. Facing the challenges of racism, harsh punishments, and bullying caused me to question myself and created problems with self-esteem, which I still struggle with to this day.

Experiences For Our Students

Sara Beg

As with the impact it has had on my identity, my experiences with Cultural Spirit Murdering and lack of Cultural Spirit Nurturing have had a lasting impact on how I implement culturally relevant lessons for my students. I make a conscious effort to provide my students with the cultural experiences I did not have as a child in K-12. My culture and my religion, which have always been two very huge parts of my life, were not recognized correctly or celebrated. Now, as an educator, I incorporate a variety of backgrounds and identities into my teaching.

As the librarian of my school, I have a unique opportunity to introduce the students to things that might not be experienced in the classroom due to the struggle of fitting in all aspects of the curriculum. I use my time with the students to celebrate everything I can. We recognize Native American Heritage Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, Black History Month, Women's History Month, Asian-American Pacific Islander Month, Pride Month, etc. I incorporate these backgrounds and identities in my lessons to make sure that everyone is represented and celebrated and to introduce students to backgrounds and cultures they might not have experienced or learned about before. It is also important to note that these types of lessons should be happening all year round and not isolated to only specific months.

I know that as an educator, I continue to make every effort to ensure my students who are different do not feel as othered as I always did in school. I want to nurture their spirits with as much intensity as my spirit was murdered. I may not reach every single student every single time, but I do know that the ones I am able to get through to

appreciate my effort. I saw this through my encounters with my students. The student

who could not contain his joy when he found out his teacher was Muslim just like him,

the student who provided me with an update of her countdown to Ramadan, the student

who brought in her Arabic book and proudly read through the letters with me, and the

students who, with no fear or repercussion or judgement, ask for books with LGBTQ

characters. These few experiences alone let me know that I am the teacher to my students

that I never had.

Maritza Caldera

My experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurture and Cultural Spirit Murder have

substantially influenced my approach to implementing Cultural Spirit experiences for my

students. As a first-generation Mexican American, I encountered significant challenges

stemming from language barriers and cultural disparities during my early education.

However, despite these hurdles, I was fortunate to attend my first elementary school

where diversity was celebrated, where I participated in cultural events that instilled in me

a sense of pride, belonging and inclusivity. An unforgettable experience for me was

observing a Bollywood performance, which sparked my curiosity and deepened my

appreciation for cultural diversity. Experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and

Murdering greatly influence how I work with students and how I teach them. Throughout

my journey as a teacher, I've been drawn to creating and taking any opportunity I

encounter to support students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Welcoming my first

Mexican students, I was keenly aware of the importance of creating a nurturing and

inclusive environment, especially for English Learners like Paulina. Students who were

learning a second language like I did, who couldn't express themselves the way they

wished they could like I did, whose parents were new to so many things like mine were. By incorporating elements of Mexican culture, such as traditions, food, and holidays, I witnessed Paulina's transformation from a shy student to a confident learner.

My personal experience as an English learner and a daughter of immigrants allowed me to empathize with many of my students' journeys, like Paulina. By fostering a supportive atmosphere where Paulina felt valued and understood, she flourished academically and personally, exceeding expectations in her English proficiency and overall growth. Being the only Hispanic kid in my classes full of white students has heightened my awareness of the needs of diverse learners. I recognize the impact of cultural stereotypes on student performance and work to challenge these narratives by prompting acceptance and understanding among my students. My journey through the education system has emphasized the importance of having teachers who reflect the diversity of the student population. As a teacher from a diverse background, I bring a different perspective and lived experiences to the classroom, allowing me to connect with my students on a deeper level and motivate them by serving as a model for pursuing their aspirations and ambitions. In essence, my experiences of cultural spirit nurturing have deeply influenced my teaching philosophy. By prioritizing cultural recognition, inclusivity, and empathy, I strive to create a learning environment where every student feels seen, heard, and empowered to succeed.

Denise Ross

My experiences with Cultural Spirit Nurture and Cultural Spirit Murder have had a profound impact on how I intentionally shield my student's spirits from damage. I want to create a classroom that welcomes diversity and promotes equity. My classroom

provides students an opportunity to see their racial and ethnic identities represented. Growing up in the mid-70s as a Black American in school, I couldn't find anyone who looked like me in the posters hanging on the walls or the books we read in class. If Black people were depicted in books, it was often in negative situations that I couldn't relate to. As an educator I make a conscious effort to select diverse books for our classroom library and the posters on our walls represent different backgrounds. As educators, we must be mindful of what we display in our classrooms, as it can erase the identities of students and make them feel alienated. I also aim for my students to feel validated in their cultural identity and have made a commitment to teaching them about their cultures so they can learn from one another. Daily affirmations, positive feedback, and fairness are crucial when nurturing the spirit. This approach ensures when consequences are necessary, the spirit isn't murdered because the students know you care. My school experience would have been much more enjoyable if these practices had been in place with all my teachers, not just a few.

When I received the student from Honduras, I didn't have any books or materials for her to read. Having been a "new girl" myself, I knew how important it was for her to feel included and accepted in our classroom community. I asked our librarian for books and ordered books and materials so she could see her culture represented in our classroom. I remember my teacher highlighting my state to make me feel welcome when I first started at my new school. My teacher nurtured my spirit, and I wanted the same for Luz. My experiences with cultural spirit murder and cultural spirit nurturing as a student impacted the way I designed my classroom to ensure all students are nurtured and welcomed.

Bringing Us Together

As we have gone through and shared our stories, both as students and as educators, the differences we had in our race, religion, culture, and where and how we were raised are apparent. However, despite these noted differences, we were able to recognize the similarities that exist as well. As women of color growing up in white spaces, we all had experiences that were related to our perceived differences, whether they were positive or negative. We were all also able to take those experiences and channel them into our teaching. The spirit murdering and spirit nurturing we went through as students allowed us to know what we needed.

We, as educators and individuals who have experienced the impact of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering, share a collective narrative that underscores the profound influence of these experiences on our identities and teaching philosophies. Throughout our educational journeys, spanning from

Recommendations for the Future

Reality is often far from what we want it to be. The experiences that we had during our K-12 years have had lasting impacts and have shaped our perceptions of life into adulthood. Despite society attempting to address systemic racism and promote inclusivity, many individuals still have their implicit biases and hold onto harmful stereotypes. The journey towards unlearning these deeply ingrained prejudices is ongoing and requires continuous effort from individuals and society. While progress has been made in raising awareness and encouraging dialogue about these issues, there is still much work to be done in promoting empathy, understanding, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their background or identity. It is crucial to continue advocating

for equality and justice, challenging discriminatory attitudes and behaviors whenever they arise, and striving to create a more inclusive and compassionate society for future generations. Investigating the impact of sociopolitical events on educational experiences could be a research direction. It could involve examining the impact of significant socio-political events, such as the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, the presidency of Donald Trump, and the aftermath of 9/11, on individuals' perceptions of race, identity, and cultural belonging within educational contexts. Another possible recommendation could be a quantitative study examining the relationship between experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing/Murdering and student academic performance. Standardized test scores, grades, and dropout rates among students from different cultural backgrounds could be analyzed. A future investigation on the role of school climate and culture in fostering Cultural Spirit Nurturing or perpetuating Cultural Spirit Murdering. The study could examine the impact of inclusive policies, diversity initiatives, and anti-bias practices on school environments. By pursuing these avenues of research, we can deepen our understanding of how experiences of Cultural Spirit Nurturing and Cultural Spirit Murdering shape identities among students and educators, ultimately informing efforts to create more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

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