Identity Exploration and Cultural Competence: Academic Advisor Leaders

Learn the Latinx Undergraduate Student Experience

by

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ABSTRACT

Individuals of Latinx origin are the largest minority group in the United States, and the fastest growing enrollment demographic in institutions of higher education. Yet, the achievement and opportunity gap that is demonstrated by Latinx students compared to their White counterparts continues to widen. Latinx individuals often experience cultural barriers in postsecondary education, especially in the academic advisor relationship. This study aims to help academic advisor leaders learn the Latinx undergraduate student experience in an effort to improve cultural competence in working with this population, and grow their leadership practices to help their direct reports working with Latinx students. The data for this research were collected via an action research study using observations, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews as data collection methods. The findings indicate that learning through testimonios and personal narratives grows awareness and appreciation for Latinx individuals, but also strengthens workplace relationships. This correlates with improved leadership practices and cultivating an environment of inclusivity. The study's participants experienced the emotional impact of engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion work and vocalized a strong desire to continue learning about work in this space. The findings indicate the need for additional professional development in learning about the Latinx student experience, and additional resources dedicated to engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion work in the university.

DEDICATION

For Lina and Lizzie, never let the world underestimate you.

I love you both to the moon and back.

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This dissertation and entire doctoral journey would not have ever been possible without the love and support of my husband, Eric. As my partner in this life, you encourage me, believe in me, and hold our family together. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and hanging in there with me. I love you to infinity and beyond.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Labels, like Spanish or Hispanic or Latin, come and go, but identity is something totally

separate. What matters is who I am.

Sara Ines Calderon

Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitated the integration of

the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to

it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal

critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the

transformation of their world.

Paulo Freire

Statement of the Problem

The growing Latinx population in the United States correlates with a growth of

Latinx students in postsecondary education. Like all ethnic groups, members of the

Latinx community have developed specific, cultural intricacies that are important within

their respective communities. As such, they have specific needs related to their cultural

identity. Online post-secondary education has become so prevalent that even traditional

brick-and-mortar institutions have developed competitive online degree programs,

allowing all students an avenue to a flexible educational experience. Southern New

Hampshire University (SNHU) is one of the largest providers of online education and has

a growing Latinx student population. As a critical component of the higher education

experience, academic advisors serve as the key connector to the university for the

students they serve. The functional relationship with an academic advisor can vary and may include course selection, coaching, mentoring, and/or career guidance, among other things. The relationship between an advisor and student is critical to a student's retention, persistence, and ultimately, completion. This relationship requires a level of cultural competence on the part of the advisor to meet the needs of Latinx students.

Acknowledging the increase in the Latinx student population in higher education and the critical role of advisor-student relationship, the problem of practice for this study is that academic advisor leaders may not have the cultural competence to prepare their teams to meet the cultural needs of the growing population of Latinx students. Given the intense growth of the Latinx student population at SNHU, academic advisor leaders must explore and develop their cultural competence to meet these needs; this can best be accomplished through a social learning environment, a Community of Practice. If the Latinx population growth trends continue as expected, the long-term implications for the U.S. economy and social stability will depend in part by addressing the issues of Latinx educational attainment. This study sought to understand how online academic advisor leaders can develop cultural competence and advising/coaching practices to meet the needs of Latinx undergraduate students.

Larger Context

The following section will provide an overview of the Latinx population in higher education; followed by a synopsis of academic advising, including its history and applicability to learning environments in higher education.

Latinx Population

For the purposes of this research study, the term 'Latinx' is utilized to describe anyone identified of Hispanic, Latino/a, and specific national backgrounds including Dominican, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and other countries in Latin America. While the term Latinx is relatively new, the prevalence continues to grow, especially in the academic space (Pew Research Center, 2020). The Latinx history detailed here begins during the early 20th century, although historical documents indicate educational efforts were underway during the colonial era when Spanish missionaries worked to impart Catholicism and Spanish language on the indigenous communities of the southwestern United States (MacDonald, 2013).

Repatriation of Mexican-Americans occurred regularly during the Great Depression, a result of the purchase of several state territories as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War in 1848 (Conan, 1998). As Arizona entered statehood in 1912, the previously Mexican citizens in the territory were automatically considered U.S. citizens, and as a result, Mexican-American children were forcefully sent to "Americanized" schools, but separated by color (MacDonald, 2013). During this time, Latinx elite citizens had minimal access to higher education, and what little access they did have was provided by private Catholic colleges that appeared to cater educational opportunities towards similar values of these elite families. This mostly occurred in Texas and California. Colorado and New Mexico, in contrast, welcomed the identification of "Hispanos" and developed Spanish-speaking colleges for their citizens in the early 1900s (MacDonald, 2013). During this period, junior colleges provided educational pathways for many Mexican-Americans throughout the era of segregation.

These junior colleges were popular due to their affordability and accessibility, offering an education for commuters--which meant that Latinx female students could remain in the family home while studying. This was very common throughout the midwest, the south, and the southwest. As the Latinx population in the country grew, so did their presence in higher education, especially during the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s. During this time, programs and projects surrounding ethnic studies were launched, including the creation of departments of Chicano and Puerto Rican Studies. Major gains were amassed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, when many Latinx scholars reached terminal degrees.

While the documented history of the education of Latinxs in the United States is a much shorter period than that of colonial settlers, Latinx individuals have faced hardship in accessing an equitable education as compared to their White counterparts. Institutional neglect by the American educational system continues to be prevalent**;** Latinx students are more likely to attend overcrowded and underfunded K-12 districts (Garcia, 2018). Although the Latinx population in the United States continues to rise, and Latinx enrollment in institutions of higher education has increased accordingly, Latinx students demonstrate lower retention and persistence in postsecondary education compared to their White peers (NCES, 2017). In fact, the 6-year post-secondary graduation rate of Latinx students versus White students is 10% less (NCES, 2017). This is exacerbated by the fact that Latinx students tend to be disproportionately low-income and first-generation college students, characteristics that make them more likely to drop out.

The number of individuals identifying as Latinx in the United States has increased from 9.6 million in 1970 to nearly 60 million in 2018. Between 2005 and 2010, the Latinx population grew faster than any other ethnic group (Pew Research Center, 2019).

As of the most recent data available, people of Latinx origin make up 18.7% of the U.S. population (Census.gov, 2021). It is anticipated that by the year 2050, people of Latinx origin will comprise nearly 30% of the U.S. population (Census.gov, 2021). Between 2000 and 2015, the college-going rate among Latinx high school graduates grew from 22 to 37 percent. Yet in 2018, only 34% of Latinx high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary education (NCES, 2017). To compound the issue, the degree completion rate within six years after graduating high school remains lower for Latinx students compared to their non-Latinx peers, at approximately 10% less (NCES, 2017). This disparity is leaving many Latinx individuals stuck in low- and middle-wage jobs, resulting in implications not only for the individual, but for the U.S. economy in general. Only 22% of the Latinx population in the U.S. has achieved an associate's degree or higher, compared to 39% of the general population (NBC News, 2020).

The education and opportunity gap between Latinx students and their counterparts are of concern in the United States due to the increasing Latinx population and the economic and social implications for American society. With Latinx individuals representing 25% of students enrolled in public schools across the United States (NCES, 2013), and more than 40% of the enrolled public school population in nine states (Fry & Gonzales, 2008), understanding the sociocultural factors that impact educational success for this group is imperative for educators, communities, families, and policy makers (Marrero, 2016).

Castillo-Montoya (2019) explains that while it is apparent that colleges and universities have become increasingly ethnically diverse, as well as socioeconomically diverse, not many colleges or universities have made the adjustments and systemic

changes needed to incorporate and embed diverse programs and services to enhance students' educational experiences. There has been a growth in demand for postsecondary institutions to reexamine and adjust how commitments to diversity are enacted, being more purposeful in many ways.

More recently, following the very public and tragic death of Black individuals at the hands of law enforcement officers, the U.S. has experienced a resurgence in calls for racial justice, improvement of equity in all sectors of business and community; and this has subsequently affected higher education. While it is easy to simply release a "Diversity Statement" on the commitment to honor all identities, setting the example and following up with significant action is quite different, and often a step many institutions are hesitant to take. Since the murder of George Floyd, the racial disparities in higher education spaces have been unveiled across the country (Inside Higher Ed, 2020). In fact, Whitford (2020) notes the fact that many college presidents have a tendency to release "one and done" statements; or a one-time concern. Because the messaging coming from college leadership sets the tone for the organizational culture and environment, it is critical these messages must address the racial inequities in higher education. These efforts must be embedded within the entire operations of the institution and all staff should undergo the professional development necessary to address these cultural competence gaps. With the role of an academic advisor so critical to student success, it is in this vein that exploring and developing cultural competence is crucial.

National Climate

Beginning in March, 2020, educational institutions across the globe began to shut down due to the global pandemic, COVID-19. The rapidly spreading virus has to-date

infected over 42 million U.S. citizens, and has resulted in over 600,000 deaths. No area of the country has been unaffected by the virus. In fact, the fifth known case in the U.S. was a student on the Tempe campus of Arizona State University (Vandell, 2020). The pandemic forced all levels of education to shift to a virtual or online model of delivering instruction. Some institutions have struggled with this pivot, and the financial effects have reverberated throughout the postsecondary landscape. Because of this, several institutions have instituted furloughs or layoffs due to the financial and public health crisis (Inside Higher Ed, 2020).

As a result of the pandemic, the economic effects have been incredibly damaging. Due to major sectors of business effectively shuttered (theaters, bars, some restaurants, gyms, salons, etc.), the country's unemployment rate rose to over 13% in summer 2020 (BLS, 2020). Historically, in challenging economic times, enrollment in higher education has increased. This is due to higher education serving as a way for individuals to finish degree programs, reskill, or stack credentials, and may result in eligibility for a career change. The prevalence of online education programs has allowed for an increase in enrollment in online institutions (Inside Higher Ed, 2020) during the pandemic.

Academic Advising

Prior to the American Revolution, the model for higher education in the United States mirrored the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, two British institutions created to develop young men into upstanding citizens and future clergymen (Gillispie, 2003). The relationship between "faculty" (i.e., clergymen) and students was very paternal and disciplinary. Post-Revolutionary War, colleges and universities in the newly formed United States began treating the male students as free-thinking individuals instead of

future clergymen, with faculty members beginning to serve as guides for academic development, also considered "vocational guidance" (Gordon, 1992, Gillispie, 2003). A part of this guidance and development included the expectation that a student and their guide develop an understanding of themselves, their aptitudes, their abilities, interests, resources, and limitations. This practice continued well into the 19th and early 20th century, as World War I served as the catalyst for using industrial psychology practices to place military recruits into specific occupations. "Seeing the utility of the methods employed by the army, universities adopted the study of psychometrics in personnel placement and established vocational guidance centers that utilized occupational aptitude assessments as a tool for advising students in their academic pursuits" (Gillispie, 2003, p. 2).

The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) serves as the national clearinghouse and global organization for academic advisors. In 2006, NACADA re-established their mission and vision,

> NACADA is the leader within the global education community for the theory, delivery, application and advancement of academic advising to enhance student learning and development. (NACADA, 2006). With this vision, NACADA's mission is to:

- Address the academic advising needs of higher education
- Advance the body of knowledge of academic advising
- Champion the educational role of academic advising to enhance student learning and development

- Affirm the role of academic advising in supporting institutional mission and vitality

- Encourage the contributions of all members and promote the involvement of diverse populations. (NACADA, 2006h)

NACADA defines academic advising as,

Academic advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students' educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and timeframes. (NACADA, 2006)

Thus, academic advising has evolved into an integral and crucial component of the postsecondary experience, academic and otherwise. Advisors serve as the conduit for a student to the larger institution. An advisor's role can morph into counselor, cheerleader, motivator, mentor, coach, and more.

Online Academic Advising

There is evidence to suggest that a student is less likely to drop out if there is regular connection and interaction with a college or university representative, such as an advisor (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977), regardless of modality. This is especially true during their first year of postsecondary education. Distance advising is described as being able to offer a minimum set of core services relating to academic advising which assist distance learners in identifying and achieving their maximum educational potential (Varney, 2012). NACADA's Guidelines for Advising Distance Learners note two

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components that are critical for student success in online education; 1) provide appropriate student support services for distance learners as they would for students on campus, and 2) provide a single point of contact for the services commonly accessed by distance learners (NACADA, 2010). These two critical components would suggest the crucial nature of the relationship between student and academic advisor.

<div align="center">**Local Context**</div>

The following section will provide context for the problem of practice, the concern that academic advisor leaders lack the cultural competence needed to best support Latinx students of the Latinx population in higher education; at the local site for this action research study: SNHU. Similar to the larger context, student demographic data will be discussed, along with advising practices in the online school environment.

Southern New Hampshire University

SNHU was founded in 1932 as a school for bookkeeping and accounting, specifically for military spouses. The institution has grown exponentially to become one of the largest providers of online postsecondary education (Lederman, 2019). As SNHU has grown so rapidly, so has the enrollment of Latinx students. In a matter of just two years, the enrollment of Latinx students has increased from 9% to 11%, demonstrating an active growth of 1% per year (2018). In addition, due to the aforementioned pandemic and poor economic conditions of the country, enrollment in postsecondary education is expected to increase steadily until national employment rates are leveled (Inside Higher Ed, 2020). Because SNHU's strength lies in its successful, efficient, and well-respected online degree programs, the fall 2021 enrollment rush was the largest the institution had

ever experienced (Personal Communication, 2021). Along with the increased enrollment, the Latinx population has also increased to 12% from 2018.

Due to the university's rapid growth, the institution recognized that in order to continue providing appropriate service to its students nationally and internationally, the availability of staff could not be isolated solely to New England. After much exploration, in spring 2019, the institution announced it would be opening a new operations center in Tucson, AZ to expand hours of availability reach students in the western part of the U.S. The operations center, opened in early 2020, will eventually serve as a hub for up to 350 employees in the roles of advising, admissions, and student financial services; as well as IT support and leadership roles. While the Southwest Operations (SWOPS) Center is not providing direct educational services in Tucson, the presence of SNHU in the Tucson community offers expanded awareness of postsecondary educational opportunities to the region. According to SNHU President, Paul LeBlanc, Tucson was attractive for a number of reasons, but its diversity was at the top of the list (Keane, 2020).

The Tucson Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), located in Pima County, has a large Latinx population. In Pima County it is estimated that 38% of the total population is of Latinx descent, and is expected to grow to 50% by the year 2050 (Census.gov, 2021). The university selected Tucson for its SWOPS Center because of the cultural diversity in Tucson, the warm climate, and for the reasonable cost of living. With its close proximity to the U.S.-Mexico border, Tucson embraces the rich cultural heritage of Mexico, the Tohono O'odham Nation, and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe.

Given the institutional growth of SNHU, its move to open an operational center in the southwest, and the shifting national demographics, it is to be expected that the

university must be prepared to serve Latinx students in the best way possible in order to promote student success measures such as persistence, retention, and completion. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) indicates that when higher education institutions have growing Latinx populations, it is not enough to simply grow their numbers, but that this population of students must be properly served to encourage success (AACU, 2020). What that "service" looks like will vary across institutions. One of the most important ways an institution can "serve" Latinx students is by following the guidance of a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). HSIs are colleges and universities whose enrollment is at least 25% Latinx. This federal designation offers HSIs access to funding to improve equity in degree programs, faculty professional development, and additional resources to improve services to Latinx students. SNHU is currently classified as an "emerging" HSI, according to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (2019). Garcia (2017) posits that improving success indicators and student outcomes of Latinx students is only one step of developing a culture of "servingness." She further espouses that having a Latinx-serving identity could be based on encouraging a culture for serving Latinxs. Culture in this sense reflects the social order, rules, and understandings that connect people within an organization. There is evidence to demonstrate that the social order within HSIs may help Latinx students feel connected with faculty and staff on campus who speak Spanish or foster the development of their own racial/ethnic identity (Garcia, 2017).

SNHU Demographics

SNHU's headquarters reside in a state with minimal ethnic or racial diversity. New Hampshire's population is over 90% White (Census.gov, 2019), and SNHU's student experience staff (admissions, advising, and financial counselors) are 81% White and only 3% Latinx. This particular area of the country is known for its lack of ethnic diversity, New Hampshire holding the second highest population of White individuals. SNHU has experienced immense growth over the last decade, and recently there has been an effort to intentionally address needs for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. This has been compounded by the increased visibility and awareness of the need for racial justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion at all levels. As part of the institution's efforts at improving its commitment to equity, SNHU has developed a Social Justice Fund that is meant to improve the experience of students of color (President's Message, 2020). As part of this work, SNHU has created an Inclusion Council that specifically addresses tactical changes that may be made institution-wide. An example of this is the evaluation and update of the university's Criminal Justice program and curriculum (President's Message, 2020). As SNHU's core values include "Embrace Diversity," it is only prudent for the student experience staff to learn to work the best way possible to ensure Latinx student success. Fortunately, SNHU has launched new DEI initiatives to address some of the racial and ethnic disparities. This includes workstreams to modify curriculum, a Social Justice Fund dedicated to addressing gaps in services for students of color, and improved professional development for front-line staff.

Although the enrollment of Latinx students continues to rise at SNHU, the retention rate of Latinx students (continued enrollment from year one to year two) remains low. The year-over-year retention rate is 18% for Latinx undergraduate students

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at SNHU, compared to 59% nationally. Improved cultural competence of faculty and staff is one way to improve the retention, persistence, and completion rates for Latinx students.

Advising at SNHU

The academic advising role at SNHU is one of three primary student experience roles related to the student pipeline: admissions, financial services, and academic advising. Upon admission to the university, students are connected to an advisor. Advisors carry a caseload of 250 students and are typically, and are typically assigned to a specific set of degree programs (e.g. Social Sciences, Business, etc.). The advisor proactively reaches out to the student via email, and email continues to remain the primary source of contact between the student and advisor throughout the student's enrollment and attendance. Thus, the academic advisor remains the primary connection for the student to the university as a whole. The growth in enrollment at SNHU has placed a burden on the advising staff as the institution works to keep up with additional staffing. The average caseload per advisor is 250 students, a level that is in line with standards set by NACADA (2019). What the structure of advising at SNHU suggests is that while the communication between advisor-student is proactive, meaning that advisors reach out to students directly, it is minimal. During each eight-week term, each student on the caseload is contacted 1-2 times, about once every four weeks (Personal Correspondence, 2020). This minimal contact limits advisor opportunities to build a strong student-advisory relationship, something that is necessary in assisting Latinx students to succeed.

Role of the Researcher

As a native of Tucson, Arizona, and a first-generation Latinx college student, I experienced what many students in Tucson do when completing high school and preparing for postsecondary education. In Tucson, the options for postsecondary education are minimal. The area has one community college district--Pima Community College, and one four-year university--the University of Arizona. A number of small, private vocational schools dot the area as well. As a resident of Tucson, the expectation of pursuing higher education leads to the choice between the community college and the university. I attended K-12 education in the city's two largest districts--Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) and Sunnyside Unified School District (SUSD) and graduated from the latter. SUSD is located on the south side of Tucson, an area characterized as predominantly Latinx, low-income, and has a very established population, with many immigrants from Mexico and Central America residing in the area as well.

As an alumnus from SUSD, I was expected to attend the local community college or university. I was a first-generation college student with no experience, nor expertise to rely upon when it came time to navigate the college-going pathway. I opted to attend Arizona State University as a freshman and like many first-generation students, dropped out after one semester. I had failed a course, achieving Bs and Cs in my other courses. I had not made friends, I was not engaged in the institution, I did not join any clubs or organizations, and I only saw my advisor once--on registration day. Although I opted to leave ASU, I continued my postsecondary education at Pima Community College immediately following and subsequently transferred to the University of Arizona, completing my undergraduate degree there.

When I began working in higher education in 2010, I recognized the value in the human connection of academic advising. I learned how critical the advising role is to a student who may arrive at their college or university having no idea how to navigate any process or system. Although I possessed sufficient grit to complete my undergraduate education, I believe I would have been far more successful academically, I would have been more engaged, and I would have had a more positive experience if I had connected with an advisor or other type of mentor. I did not know how to find that mentorship in my undergraduate experience. However, my graduate experiences far exceeded expectations in advising support. In fact, when pursuing my masters degrees, I attended a fully online institution--Western Governors University (WGU)--and the advising model was one of great strength. Each student is paired with a mentor (advisor) who meets with their caseload weekly throughout the entirety of the program. I was able to develop such a strong relationship with my mentor that I insisted that I continue on her caseload when I re-enrolled for a second master's degree. I know I would not have been as successful as I was had I not had such a supportive relationship with my mentor.

I later worked with a TRIO Upward Bound program, a program designed to promote academic and social readiness for entrance into postsecondary education for low-income and first-generation students. It was during this time that I truly developed my skills in advising with students of marginalized backgrounds and I recognized the importance of relationship building in advising students. Working with a number of Latinx students, the need to facilitate relationships not only with the students, but with the entire family is critical to support a student's future successes.

As my role at SNHU has evolved, I have embraced a leadership role in the DEI space within the SWOPS Center, and within the institution at large. I serve as a professional development facilitator for introductory DEI workshops and currently mentor new staff as they engage more with the university. As a result of the chaotic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the racial unrest occurring in the country, I conducted my research as a participant-researcher and was determined to navigate the process nimbly, in an effort to be adaptable and flexible as possible as conditions changed throughout the pandemic.

My lived experiences as a native Tucsonan, Latinx, and first-generation student informed this research and served as the catalyst for emphasizing cultural competence in the important advisor-student relationship, and from a leadership perspective.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice I addressed with this study is the lack of cultural competence of online academic advisor leaders. The intervention implemented was a Community of Practice for Academic Advisor Team Leads (TLs) that centered on shared learning and skill building to explore identity, power, privilege, and understanding the Latinx undergraduate student experience.

Research Questions

RQ1: What perceptions do online academic advisor leaders possess in regards to the needs of Latinx undergraduate students?

RQ2: How do online academic advisor leaders respond to participation in a community of practice centered on identity exploration and the Latinx student experience?

a.   What knowledge and skills do they gain from participating in a community of practice?

b.   How do they describe their confidence in exploring their own identity in this process?

c.   How does participation in the community of practice inform their leadership and coaching to be more culturally competent?

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the larger and situated context related to my stated problem of practice; academic advisors at SNHU SWOPS Center do not have the necessary cultural competence to meet the needs of Latinx undergraduate students. The intervention was the development of a community of practice for Academic Advisor TLs, a space for shared learning and skill building to explore identity and cultural competence as it relates to the Latinx student experience.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND LITERATURE REVIEW

We need to do a better job of educating Latino students...These are bright, hard-working

young people who, when given the opportunity and equipped with college degrees, have

the potential and drive to contribute enormously.

Ricardo Sanchez

I know Hispanic Americans to be resilient, family focused and willing to do what it takes

to improve their status in a country they love. It's our job as education advocates--and

Americans--to ensure that a low-quality education is not acceptable for any child in any

community and to keep working to remove all barriers to student success.

Lizette Gonzalez Reynolds

Theoretical Perspectives and Literature Review

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the larger and situated contexts related to

academic advisors lacking the cultural competence to assist Latinx undergraduate

students. This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical perspectives that guided

this research. The chapter begins with an overview of the Cultural Proficiency

Continuum Framework (CCPEP, 2020), which provided the context with which to

understand cultural competence and the experience of developing said competence. What

follows is an overview of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Paris, 2012) as the basis for understanding the

experiences of Latinx students in higher education, and for developing the proposed

innovation. Next, I present an overview of Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) to

provide the context in which the intervention took place. Finally, I provide a summary of existing disciplinary knowledge and close with a review of my previous cycles of research. For reference, the definition of culture that is used in this research is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization; and the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Theoretical Perspectives

I selected three frameworks that guided this research. Below you will find an overview of each framework, beginning with the Cultural Proficiency Continuum Framework, which guides the process of movement from being culturally destructive to culturally competent.

Cultural Proficiency Continuum (CPC) Framework

Cultural competence is defined by the Georgetown University Center for Cultural Competency and the Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice as, "a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals and enable that system, agency or those professions to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (Cross, et al., 2020). The Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice (2020) lists the elements of cultural competence as: 1) assessing cultural knowledge; 2) valuing diversity; 3) managing the dynamics of difference; 4) adapting to diversity; and 5) institutionalizing cultural knowledge. These five elements should be manifested at every level of an organization including policy making, administrative, and practice. Further, these elements should be reflected in the attitudes, structures, policies and services of the organization.

The continuum of cultural proficiency is described as a leveled process of addressing knowledge, practice, values, and behaviors. See Figure 1

Figure 1
Cultural Proficiency Continuum

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum

Cultural Destructiveness	*Cultural Blindness*		*Cultural Competence*
Cultural Incapacity	*Cultural Precompetence*		*Cultural Proficiency*
Compliance Based Tolerance for Diversity		*Transformation for Equity*	
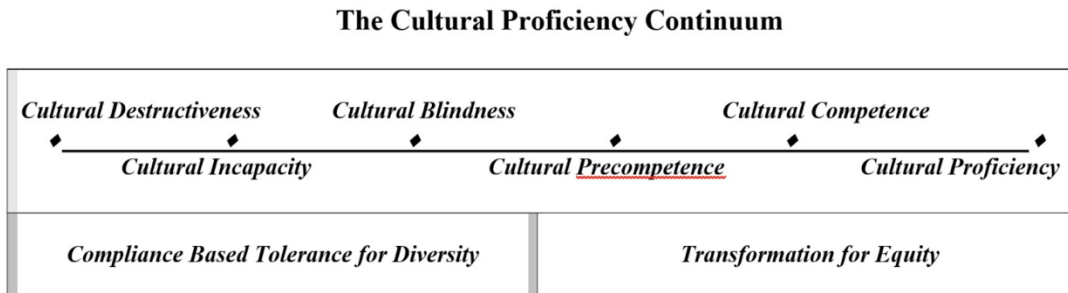
The continuum pictured above offers a visual representation of movement from a place of cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency. The aim of movement across the continuum is to move away from belief systems that are tied to tolerance in a compliant manner and advance to a place of equity and inclusion. The aim of this study is to facilitate the exploration of movement within the continuum of cultural proficiency and to work towards a level of cultural competence.

CPC in Education

The CPC is a model that has been effectively established in preservice teacher preparation programs. Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell, (2010), discuss the effectiveness of infusing cultural proficiency not only in frontline teachers, but in all educational settings. This is consistent with the findings of Brion (2019), who posits that cultural proficiency is a leadership trait that is critical not only for the successes of individual students, but also for the school as a whole. The examples set by Brion (2019) include a real-world example of the entirety of the school culture developing a shift in thinking from a deficit

viewpoint to an asset perspective. This is concurred by Ward (2013), who suggests that cultural proficiency acknowledges assets of the entirety of a school community. With the suggestion that all cultures contribute to the rich diversity of a school environment, so too does the appropriate multiculturalism in the staff makeup as well (Lindsey, Lindsey, & Terrell, 2010).

Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell, (2010), and Ward (2013) note the growth that occurs when implementing the CPC, especially at the reflection phase of the process. Self-assessment is critical in examining practices that can be effective in working with multicultural students. Domingues, et al. (2015) concur with the need for self-assessment and inclusion of the whole student in improving educational outcomes. Additionally, Lindsey and Lindsey (2014) suggest that educational leaders must investigate why some populations of students are not succeeding at the same level of other students and what, in fact, the educational system is doing to prevent their success. Spies and Cooper (2020) suggest that the lack of cultural proficiency is one major reasoning for the poor outcomes of minoritized students, particularly Black and Latinx students, and that students learn more effectively when their values and cultures are represented, respected, and valued throughout their educational experience.

CPC and the Latinx Student Experience

The CPC model has been largely effective in K-12 environments, particularly in California, where school leaders are examining the benefits of growing a culturally proficient system. This approach has improved student outcomes, especially for minoritized students (Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014). Ward (2013) suggests the technical components of improving cultural proficiency in educational staff begins with learning

about other cultures and lived experiences; thus the appropriate application of the intervention used in this study. Domingues, et al., (2015) also note the need to approach cultural proficiency changes with a holistic approach, and that addressing gaps in student achievement cannot exist in a vacuum, but must include the student and possibly their support system. This can easily be transferable to higher education spaces where the same challenges of retention and persistence of Latinx students exist.

Later in this chapter I provide detail on strengths-based advising strategies that can and often do improve student outcomes, especially for minoritized and first-generation students. In this case, the CPC is effective in allowing advisors to self-reflect and understand where they can improve on their own cultural proficiency in working with Latinx undergraduate students.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) is an educational approach to address the specific cultural experiences of working with minoritized students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). CRP was originally developed in the contexts of multicultural education in the U.S. (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Ladson-Billings' original research challenged the traditional deficit paradigms that are so often associated with students of color (1995). Although CRP was originally applied to K-12 environments, it has come to be applicable to all levels of education (Benyehudah, 2018; LeMoine, 2001). CRP is founded upon three principles (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160): 1) students must experience academic success; 2) students must develop and/or maintain their cultural competence; and 3) students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. To this end, CRP learning environments are designed to

be inclusive, which means helping students to value and understand their own cultures and the "cultures of their peers." CRP allows students to explore their own cultural identities within the context of their in-and-out of classroom experiences; and affords them the opportunity to share experiences with their peers (Love, 2015; Petchauer, 2015). CRP also supports the idea that a student's culture is not monolithic, but is a varied and layered experience. This recognition can help mitigate stereotypes and biases (Milner, 2017).

The tenets in Ladson-Billings' theory are linked by the context of cultural specificity and interactions between individuals at differing levels of privilege. As it relates to this study, the components of CRP underscore the importance of understanding the vast perspective of Latinx students in regards to cultural proficiency in interactions with advising professionals. CRP offers the ability to provide successful culturally competent interactions in the educational environment, including academic advising contexts. This framework also allows for commonalities regarding accepted practices and policies in culturally competent institutions. Ultimately, Ladson-Billings' (2014) framework can be used to describe the culturally competent environment created for the students who are supported within them.

For this study, CRP provided the overview and guidance to develop an understanding of the Latinx undergraduate student experience. As critical components of a student's journey in postsecondary education, CRP applies to academic advisors, and in the case of this study, the TLs in helping students achieve academic success. When correctly implemented, culturally relevant pedagogy has been shown to help students

develop skills that support academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2011, 2017; Patel, 2017; Scott & White, 2013).

Ladson-Billings' framework was critical in serving as the catalyst for furthering the importance of cultural relevance and responsiveness. In 2012, Django Paris moved beyond relevance into a sustainable pedagogy for minoritized students. Paris (2012) offers that Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) embodies research and practice in the resource pedagogy tradition and as a way that supports the value of multiethnic and multilingual simultaneously.

> The term culturally sustaining requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people— it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. (p. 95)

Ultimately, this extension of Ladson-Billings' original work aims to support students' multiculturalism and multilingualism; effectively helping students to exist and flourish in both their own cultures, and within the dominant culture--essentially a sense of pluralism (Paris, 2012). Additionally, CSP suggests that preservation of a student's cultural identity and language helps to combat the deficit way of approaching students of color in particular. Without the efforts of CSP, students will inevitably continue to be asked to lose their heritage and community ways with language, literacy, and culture in order to achieve in the U.S. education system (Paris, 2012). Unfortunately, this is particularly prevalent in low-income communities, which often have schools that are predominantly enrolled by students of color. For this study CSP provided a way to help the participants

understand the experiences of Latinx students who often exist in the margins, and how educators should help these students bridge their dual identities.

CRP in Higher Education

Benyehudah (2018) suggests that the needs of nontraditional students would be better met by adjusting pedagogical delivery. Students would not only improve their academic performance, but may experience less stress. Given that many nontraditional students attend postsecondary schooling while juggling multiple jobs and family responsibilities, a collaborative model of education may have a positive impact on improving the stress level for these students. Marginalized students, many of whom are nontraditional, continue to experience a lack of solidarity in the postsecondary classroom, at the hand of the dominant culture. Additionally, Sleeter (2012) concurs that in postsecondary education, students are taught the same curriculum the same way-- primarily in predominantly White institutions (PWI). There is little attention paid to the cultural differences and the need to have both instruction and supporting interaction delivered in a culturally responsive manner. Sleeter (2012) continues to address the fact that education reforms are well aware of the racial achievement gap, but have done little to address any of the cultural specifications that are needed to improve this.

Furthermore, Gay (2002) as cited in McLanahan (2018) solidified the direction of CRP. In 2002, in a move that echoed Ladson-Billings' original assessment that in order for educators to build students' cultural competence, examining their own personal biases and values is critical in gaining an understanding of their own culture and identity.

CRP in Professional Practice

In addressing the application of CRP in the field of advising and student affairs, the connections have gone largely unstudied. However, there have been multiple applications of CRP in higher education learning spaces. For the purposes of this study, CRP was integrated into the intervention as a whole in order to impress upon the participants the dual places that Latinx students exist and offer insight into their experiences. CRP also served as the basis for the participants to examine their own identity and biases that may affect Latinx students' success.

One of the most critical components of CRP is allowing students to challenge the status quo; essentially to have a voice in the direction of their own education (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This tenet is very much in line with SNHU's Core Values of Exude Passion, Challenge the Status Quo, Do the Right Thing Every Time, Exhibit Grit, and Embrace Diversity (SNHU Employee Handbook, 2020). Cupjoy and Dennis (2018) suggest that CRP in the higher education space allows individual's backgrounds and lived experiences to be assets to their experience in the postsecondary world. Yosso's (2006) model of community cultural wealth concurs with this; that students of color rely on their culture and background to connect to their educational experiences. The overall practice seems to be that in higher education spaces, minoritized students are often approached in a deficit lens; Yosso (2005, 2006) challenges that practice and asserts that students of color bring strengths, knowledge, and experiences, which provide the lens with which they experience postsecondary education.

Moving further, CSP is applicable in teacher education, to facilitate the engagement with students to bridge their own heritage with the dominant culture and

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language. Lindo (2020) also posits that educators who engage in CSP aid students in developing positive cultural identities by adopting asset-based approaches in their pedagogy as opposed to the prominent, deficit-based lens, which views diverse cultures, languages, and identities as barriers to learning.

Community of Practice

Etienne Wenger (1998) describes Communities of Practice (CoP) as a social learning process where people or members of a particular group interact and learn from each other as they engage in collective functions for over a period of time. Central to the function of CoPs is that individual participants learn and improve their practices by sharing a vision, developing a sense of individual and collective responsibility, and collaborate in problem solving and innovation (Wenger, 1998). This social process indicates that learning is not necessarily "intentional" but simply a product of the interconnectedness and interdependence of CoPs. Furthermore, Wenger (1998) believed in the importance of defining a CoP and learning what a community of practice is and is not (p. 72-73). According to Wenger (1998), communities of practice are characterized by the following: 1) Domain, 2) Community, and 3) Practice. A graphic representation of the CoP framework is located in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Community of Practice Model

Domain — What we care about
Community — Who cares about it
Practice — What we do together about it

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Learning takes place in a context of meaning, practice, community, and identity. Identity is not static, but is a process of becoming; individuals' simultaneous membership in one or more groups (which may or may not be communities of practice) may facilitate or limit belonging to a particular CoP. Learning in CoPs appears when there is mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire among all or most members (Wenger, 1998, p. 72-85). In CoP, meaning is derived through a negotiation of these interrelated parts. Members may agree or disagree, for example, as such communities are not necessarily homogeneous groups. However, it is in negotiating their collaborative functioning and collective understanding that they are able to come together in this act of mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998).

CoP in Higher Education

Nistor, et al., (2014) identified the sense of belonging that comes from participating in a CoP, especially in the higher education landscape. While institutions of

higher education can develop as a very large CoP, interwoven in this larger perspective are smaller CoPs that organically form to address more local concerns. Often these smaller CoPs are formed from geographic proximity or from shared knowledge and social closeness. Annala and Mäkinen (2017) describe in detail the importance of CoPs in higher education, in particular as they relate to curriculum development in the three tenets of CoPs: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Wenger (2011), as cited in Merry and Orsmond (2020), indicated that the participatory nature of learning needs to be considered greatly in higher education spaces. In the development of the CoP as a whole, outcomes are not solely about the individual, but on the relational and social learning of the entire CoP.

Kim, et al., (2018) note that the effective implementation of CoP can facilitate improvement in basic academic skills, including low-achieving students. This correlates with improved satisfaction with the students' own academic and out-of-class experiences. Hodgkinson-Williams, Shay, and Sieborger (2008) concur in the effectiveness of the CoP in postsecondary education because it challenges the notion that learning is individual and at the heart, self-directed.

CoP as Professional Development

Because my study and intervention focused on the collective learning of the participants, the CoP model served as the medium for professional development. Wenger and Snyder (2000) provide significant direction to organizations both in and out of academia, noting that CoP can drive strategy, generate new business, develop and promote industry best practices, grow professional skills, and assist with recruiting and retaining talent. Hodgkinson-Williams, Shay, and Siebörger (2008) continue to espouse

this with their description of workplace practices and how CoP relates to growing talent. In the case of SNHU, the institution has recently invested in and implemented several CoPs in an effort to improve the student and employee experience, such as the Voice of Customer CoP, the Workplace DEI CoP, and the Student Equity CoP.

Stoszkowski and Collins (2017) note that in CoPs participation is critical for learning, but like in online learning spaces, some participants will be a part of the core group of individuals who lead discussions, another set will be active participants responding to the core group, and the last third will be sporadic or not participating. Having a virtual discussion and CoP with a small group allows for more even participation among the entire group.

I selected each of the theoretical perspectives to guide this research because collectively they address the challenges of cultural competence and working effectively with minoritized students. In particular, the two pedagogical theories, CRP and CSP, work to challenge those that work directly with students to examine their own identity and biases that may have an impact on the advisor-student relationship. In designing this study, I purposefully chose to include exploration of identity as it relates to building cultural competence. In this way, the CPC, CRP, and CSP are all appropriate frameworks to address these gaps.

Additionally, I opted to implement my study using the CoP framework due to the social learning connected to CoPs. Given the small sample size of my study, and the fact that all participants were peers, facilitating a CoP allowed for collective learning and collaboration in a social setting.

Related Literature

I used the following related literature and disciplinary knowledge to inform the content and learning experiences that I designed for the intervention. Through participating in the LSE CoP, the TLs gained new perspectives in working with and coaching their staff through the Latinx student experience.

Latinx Student Experiences

Latinx undergraduate students often face the cultural imbalance that occurs when attending PWI. Even in online settings, the higher education environment can be jarring for Latinx students to experience, when often they are the only, or one of only a few students of color (Lozano & Rivera, 2016; Reyes-Barrientez, 2019). Lozano and Rivera (2016) and Kiyama (2010) also note that Latinx students are often unsure of where to find support or resources, which can subsequently lead to decreased persistence and retention. Having faculty members and support staff that are of the same ethnicity as students has been shown to be effective in Latinx student success, which allows the student to connect with potential mentors along their postsecondary journey (Lozano & Rivera, 2016; Zell, 2009). Zell also notes that Latinx students often enter postsecondary education lacking the social and cultural capital that would have an impact on their academic success, including the norms, values, and expectations associated with higher education (2009).

Schwartz, et al., (2007) indicated that acculturation and ethnic identity were important factors in academic performance and prosocial behavior in the academic environment. Latinx students can and do benefit from an educational experience where their cultural norms, beliefs, and values are supported. For example, Dayton, et al.,

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(2004) found that Latinx students have a preference of support systems that demonstrate compassion and empathy to their lived experiences. Yamamura, et al. (2010) emphasized the importance of validating the Latinx student experience including their culture, means of communicating, and ways of knowing. This is congruent with Rendon's (1994) findings that validating students of color both in and out of the classroom is critical for overall student success.

One component of the Latinx student experience is that students seem to thrive in postsecondary education if they remain close to their families (Dayton, et al., 2004). In traditional campus-based programs, Latinx students may experience challenges at balancing familial pressures and responsibilities. In fact, lowered persistence and retention in Latinx students has been cited to be intricately correlated with burdens of family and employment (Arana, et al., 2011). For non-traditional students, such as those largely served by SNHU, postsecondary enrollment and completion can feel unnatural and be a disruptive and disjunctive process (Rendon, 2002).

Essentially, online education, like that provided by SNHU, can offer Latinx students the flexible option of balancing academic, employment, and family responsibilities. Provided those online students receive the same support and encouragement as in-person students, Latinx students can succeed if paired with the correct culturally competent services. Thus, building awareness of cultural differences and applying culturally competent student support interventions should influence student persistence intentions and increase degree attainment. Furthermore, "To better address this problem, both in research and in the design of institutional retention policies and programs, minority students' perspectives need to be considered on their own terms, not

in terms of their compatibility with dominant group values and behaviors" (Lohfink &

Paulsen, 2005, p. 409).

First-Generation Students

There exists an intersectionality between Latinx students and first-generation

college students. First-generation college students are those students whose neither parent

attended postsecondary education (NCES, 2017). Of the approximately six million Latinx

students enrolled in postsecondary education, an estimated 61% are considered first-

generation students (NCES, 2019). Fundamentally, the lived experiences of Latinx

students often correlate with the experiences of first-generation students. The student

characteristics at this intersection inform how a student views the institution they are

attending, the interactions with peers, faculty, and staff members they encounter; and

how these interactions arise can affect a student's willingness to persist in their

postsecondary journey (Terenzini, et al., 1994). The way these intersectional identities

interact with the institution can effectively make or break a student's experience (Castro

& Cortez, 2016). Thus, it is important to be mindful of the intersectional identities when

working with Latinx undergraduate students. Choosing to attend college can be a

disruptive process, not only for the student, but for the family as well. This can cause a

challenging transition to adapt culturally to a new environment (Terenzini, et al., 1994).

First-generation students experience culture shock whether they are online or on-campus

attendees, compounded with their experiences as Latinx students, they are sure to face

adversity in connecting with the larger institution (Tinto, 1975). Lohfink and Paulsen

(2005) agree that class-based differences can compound the adversities that also face

minoritized students; this is especially true in the students' first term.

Advisor-Student Relationship

Galarza (2018) noted that development of cultural awareness comes from interactions with others to develop a sensitivity for the various perspectives and lived experiences. Interactions with others may improve relationships by reaching a shared understanding. Applying a level of cultural competence to advising can mean that services are designed and implemented with the intention of fitting the needs of students with varied lived experiences. In addition, the consideration of the cultural backgrounds of students lends itself to improved academic achievement. Light (2001) suggests that providing good advising may be the single most important, yet underrated, characteristic of a successful college experience. As noted in chapter one, the advisor-student relationship is a critical component of a student's academic success, serving as the primary connection to the institution at large. Thus, culturally competent advising practices may affect college-going expectations and equity in accessibility (Suvedi, et al., 2015). Hatch and Garcia (2017) found that academic advising and faculty advising are among the most important factors in a student's persistence and retention. In particular, the role of an advisor pairs well with students of color as well as first-generation, low-income students because they often rely on advisors for advice and guidance beyond academic scheduling; students respond better when advisors are completely present and connected to the student they are working with; combined with strong faculty advising to connect to the academic experience (Arana, et al., 2011; Arteaga, 2014). The frequency with which a student engages with an advisor is considered one of the most crucial aspects of developing the strong relationship needed for a successful experience (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). To further compound this, Jain, et al. (2016) suggested that universities

must tailor their student experiences for non-traditional students and suggests professional development for advisors working with older students, parents, Veterans, or those rejoining the workforce. Paired with the right encouragement, structure, support, and guidance, Latinx students can achieve academic success.

Advising

For the following section, I will address two different theories related to the practice of advising. Advising is defined by O'Banion (1994) as, "a process in which advisor and advisee enter a dynamic relationship respectful of the student's concerns. Ideally, the advisor serves as teacher and guide in an interactive partnership aimed at enhancing the student's self-awareness and fulfillment"; and by Winston, et al., (1982) as,

> A developmental process which assists students in the clarification of their
>
> life/career goals and in the development of educational plans for the realization of
>
> these goals. It is a decision-making process by which students realize their
>
> maximum educational potential through communication and information
>
> exchanges with an advisor; it is ongoing, multifaceted, and the responsibility of
>
> both student and advisor. The advisor serves as a facilitator of communication, a
>
> coordinator of learning experiences through course and career planning and
>
> academic progress review, and an agent of referral to other campus agencies as
>
> necessary.

There are several theorists that have been successfully implemented in the practice of advising. For the purposes of this study, I will focus on two: Arthur Chickering's Seven Vectors (1969), and Laura Rendon's Validation Theory (1995).

Chickering's Seven Vectors

The Chickering Seven Vectors is a psychosocial theory that posits the different "tasks" or levels of activity that a student must undertake when developing their identity (Chickering, 1969). Chickering identifies the first vector as developing competence. This competence is applied to intellectual skills, manual skills, and interpersonal relationships. Essentially, the student must develop competence to understand, analyze, and synthesize information; physically accomplish tasks; and establish working relationships with others.

The second vector is the ability to manage emotions. In this vector, or stage, students become more self-aware and learn to regulate their emotions. Since college can be a trying time for new students, especially, it is common for students to experience intense fear, anger, happiness, and sadness.

The third vector, or stage, is to learn to be autonomous in their thoughts, emotions, and actions. In this vein, students must learn to act on their own and take responsibility for themselves. In this stage, students learn to problem solve on their own and recognize the independence of others.

The fourth vector is the development of mature interpersonal relationships. This phase, perhaps more at the forefront now, is the phase where students form long-lasting friendships, and recognize uniqueness and differences in others. Students learn to be emotionally intimate and retain meaningful friendships and relationships.

The fifth vector addresses the development of identity, and effectively allows the student to view how they are seen by others, how they want to be perceived.

The sixth vector is developing purpose; why they are in postsecondary education, choosing to earn a degree. The student may vocalize solely to seek employment, but the development of purpose goes deeper in that students discover what parts of their academic experience to be most fulfilling.

Lastly, the seventh vector is the phase of developing integrity. This stage allows a student to humanize values and apply them to their own behavior. In this stage students are usually challenged with experiences that challenge their previously held beliefs. Being in diverse environments often forces a reflective decision to change their belief system; and students develop the integrity to challenge those beliefs and reconcile perhaps a new way of thinking.

Chickering's Seven Vectors apply to the function of advising because of the close relationship that is developed as advisors guide students through their postsecondary journey. The identity development that occurs in higher education can effectively have an impact on the rest of a student's life. Terenzini (1994) agrees, "[advising] is something that is done in conjunction with the student, but for some students it may also be a self-affirming process as the student discovers new competencies or reaches levels of achievement previously thought unattainable".

Rendon's Validation Theory

Laura Rendon (1995) developed the approach Validation Theory in a study that worked with students of color, non-traditional age students, and community college students to discuss doubts, apprehension, and concerns they experienced when returning to or attending college for the first time. Their experiences told the researchers that invalidating experiences both in and out of the classroom disrupted their self-belief and

caused them to question their presence in postsecondary education. For several nontraditional students the lack of structure in higher education is jarring, coupled with an unfriendly environment, the experience can be overall negative.

On the contrary, Rendon found that validating experiences both in and out of the classroom helped students stay the course. When a faculty member takes the time to understand the student perspective, calls on a student by name, and/or makes themselves available beyond class time helps to validate a student's journey. Outside of class, Rendon found that students who experience validation at the hands of advisors, student affairs staff, or even their peers also demonstrate the grit to persist. What was the key to this change was the validating experience they had in or out of the classroom.

Thus, Rendon's Validation Theory was developed with six components:

1) Validation is an enabling, confirming and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal development.

2) When validation is present, students feel capable of learning; they experience a feeling of self-worth and feel that they and everything that they bring to the college experience is accepted and recognized as valuable. Lacking validation, students feel crippled, silenced, subordinate and/or mistrusted.

3) Like involvement, validation is a prerequisite to student development.

4) Validation can occur both in- and out-of-class. In-class validating agents include faculty, classmates, lab instructors and teaching assistants. Out-of-class validating agents can be 1) significant others, such as spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, 2) family members, such as parents, siblings, relatives and children and 3) friends, such as classmates and friends attending and not attending college 4)

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college staff, including faculty who meet with students out-of-class, counselors/advisors, coaches, tutors, teaching assistants, and resident advisors.

5) Validation suggests a developmental process. It is not an end in itself. The more students get validated, the richer the academic and interpersonal experience.

6) Validation is most effective when offered early on in the student's college experience, during the first year of college and during the first weeks of class. However, validation should continue throughout the college years. (Rendon, 1995)

In this way, advisors can successfully support a student with their goals with a level of support that validates their experience with empathy and care (Terenzini, 1994; Castro & Cortez, 2016). This is particularly true in the first few weeks of a student's experience. Validation Theory posits that this is the most critical time to engage with and validate a student's experience.

Previous Cycles of AR

The following section details the cyclical nature of action research and provide a summary of the previous cycles of research that were conducted as part of this study. The cycles of action research here will give context to the way the intervention was developed and the cycles' application to the study as a whole.

Cycle 0

Through the process of investigating this problem of practice, the focus has remained on Action Research (AR). According to Mertler (2017), AR is a systematic inquiry by educators to gather information about their particular environments and apply

potential solutions in a cyclical manner. As I mentioned in chapter 1, my professional experience has largely been in the student affairs area of higher education. I've grown and developed my expertise through engaging in advising first-generation students in an appreciative model of advising, which then translates to a strengths-based approach. I sought new employment and was offered a non-academic, non-student facing position with SNHU as they launched their new operations center in Tucson. Because of my experiences in working directly in the Tucson community, I was selected to be the public facing representative for the new SNHU operations center. Through the process of changing employment, I adjusted my problem of practice. Because my position was new for the university, and the university's presence in Tucson was also new, there was no clear direction for the role--including a lack of performance indicators, nor where the role fit into the larger Tucson structure.

As I moved through my onboarding experience, I learned that the university held a core value of "Embracing Diversity," yet efforts at implementing purposeful DEI initiatives were relatively recent. Additionally, because SNHU has a small campus located in Manchester, NH, most of the efforts had been focused on in-person students as opposed to the larger online population. Having these efforts primarily focused on campus-based students had not allowed for any professional development, nor large efforts toward engaging with employees who serve the online community. That said, I learned that there had been some minor initiatives at addressing the rising enrollment of Latinx students in the online space, efforts were not prioritized because of the poor retention and persistence exhibited by this population.

After beginning my new position, I sat with my own center leadership, as well as the leaders of the student experience teams to gather an understanding of what could be the possible needs related to my skills and expertise. I explained that I had experience in the advising function, that I was skilled at working with Latinx students, and that I was able to champion DEI efforts. Through this early onboarding, I learned that some student-facing staff had vocalized a need to better understand how to work with Latinx students. They experienced language barriers, communication barriers, and at times, cultural barriers. With the assistance of my supervisor, my advisor, and SNHU's Office of Diversity Initiatives (ODI), it was discovered that the best way I could rethink my problem of practice was to work toward growing the cultural competence and cultural responsiveness of student-facing staff in working directly with Latinx students.

I subsequently gathered public data on the enrollment percentages of Latinx students at SNHU and looked at the increase over time. Additionally, I sought out information related to the demographics of the student experience staff, to compare the imbalance of racial and ethnic representation to solidify my problem of practice.

Cycle 1

Building on what I learned in my cycle 0 research, in cycle 1 I conducted a cultural competence self-assessment with a sample of SNHU advisors at the Tucson office. This gave me a better understanding of the dynamics within the Tucson team. As mentioned in chapter 1, the group of advisors assigned to the SWOPS office remains largely White. Thus, the homogeneity of this group would indicate a need to develop cultural competence in not only working with Latinx students, but regionally understanding the cultural differences in Arizona compared to the New England area.

I used a cultural competence self-assessment originally developed for use in behavioral health. The instrument, "Cultural Competency Assessment Instrument," was developed by the University of Illinois at Chicago. I selected this instrument because of the ease of adaptability to adjust the content toward use in advising practices. I secured permission to use the instrument and adapt it as needed. I shortened the survey from its original 24 items to 22 items and adjusted the verbiage from health care to advising. Following the IRB approval from both ASU and SNHU, I administered this survey anonymously to 26 academic advisors. I left the survey open for one week, during which I received 17 responses. While the survey itself was largely focused on the academic advisors' perception of their own ability to meet the needs of multiculturally diverse students; one question focused on the support of their supervisors in learning about cultural competence. The results of this particular question showed a majority of respondents did not receive support from their supervisors in this respect. After analyzing the survey data, I decided to focus the study on working with TLs to improve cultural competence within their respective teams.

Please see results in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Results of Cultural Competency Self-Assessment

Count of I receive feedback from supervisors on how to improve my practice skills with students from different ethnic minority

Agree
11.8%

Neutral
17.6%

Strongly Disagree
41.2%

Disagree
29.4%
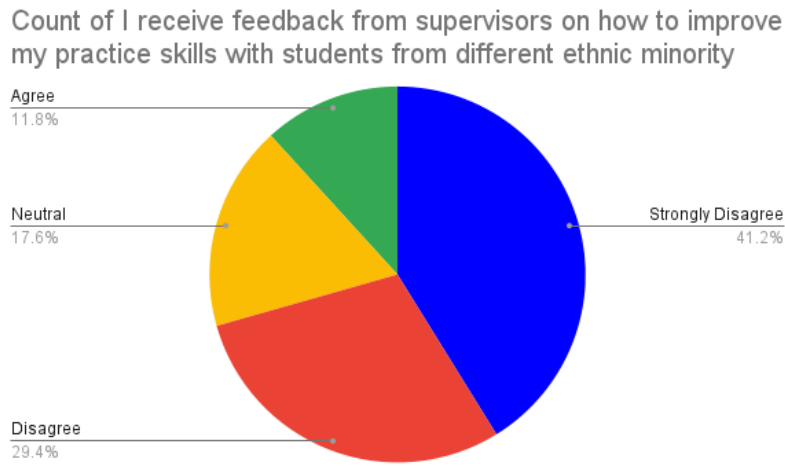
Summary and Implications of Study

To summarize this research thus far, in chapter 1 I provided a larger and situated context of the lack of cultural competence within the SNHU advising staff. I also provided an overview of the role of an academic advisor and their role within the SNHU global campus. Based on the needs of the study, I identified three theoretical perspectives that are guiding the proposed innovation and data collection. The Cultural Proficiency Continuum Framework (2020), Culturally Relevant and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy to guide the teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Paris, 2012), and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 1998) to approach the method through which participants engaged with the study. Together, these three theoretical perspectives, frameworks, and pedagogies allowed me to conduct the study with the most efficacy to have an impact on exploring identity and cultural competence in advising leaders.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Until we get equality in education, we won't have an equal society.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor

Our role as Latinos in education entails grappling with long-term issues around social justice and socio-economic equity so we can devise solutions that affect not just our community, but America at large.

Omar Yanar

Methods

In the following chapter, I detail the research methods used in the study. First, I describe the basis of approaching this study in an action research method; and subsequently describe how it aligned with the presented theories from Chapter 2 and responded accordingly to my research questions. Following, I provide a description of the setting, the participants, my role as a researcher, an explanation of the intervention, and explain the data sources and collection methods that were conducted. To conclude, I briefly describe the analysis strategies that were utilized as well as how I addressed trustworthiness and ethical concerns. As described in Chapter 2, the problem of practice that I addressed with this qualitative study is that SNHU SWOPS advisors did not have the cultural competence to meet the needs of Latinx undergraduate students. The research questions were:

RQ1: What perceptions do online academic advisor leaders possess in regards to the needs of Latinx undergraduate students?

RQ2: How do online academic advisor leaders respond to participation in a community of practice centered on identity exploration and the Latinx student experience?

a. What knowledge and skills do they gain from participating in a community of practice?

b. How do they describe their confidence in exploring their own identity in this process?

c. How does participation in the community of practice inform their leadership and coaching to be more culturally competent?

Theoretical Alignment & Research Design

The completed study utilized action research (AR). AR is a systematic investigation by educators who have a vested interest in improving educational practices (Given, 2008; Mertler, 2017). AR is a cyclical process whereby the researcher is working to improve practice by incorporating a stated change. AR is especially effective in fields of education and social sciences because it offers a way to successfully transfer research into practice (Given, 2008). Susman (1983) details six components of AR:

1) reflexive critique: ensures the researcher reflect on processes to make interpretation, biases, assumptions, and concerns;

2) dialectical critique: social reality is shared through language, and involves significant dialogue;

3) collaborative resource: indicates the role that both the researcher and participants play--effectively participatory action research;

4) risk: indicates the acknowledgment and addressing of fears, biases, and judgments;

5) plural structure: action research embodies varied views, commentaries, and critiques and can lead to multiple interpretations; and

6) theory, practice, and transformation; in action research theory informs practice, which then refines theory in a continuous and cyclical process; noting that theory and practice are intertwined.

AR is grounded in the values and practices of its participant communities. As action researchers attend to the values and practices of their participant communities, they must also focus on understanding their own subjectivities and how they affect the research process. Action researchers understand that biases and subjectiveness cannot be eliminated, rather than on trying to eliminate them. Because of this, I approached this study with a level of reflexivity in an effort to explore and challenge my own assumptions and how they shaped my interpretation of the data.

Given that the primary purpose of conducting AR is to explore and change practice in an effort of having a greater impact, it is crucial for a researcher to determine an approach to their study that is in line with the goals of the research, but also with their own lived experiences. In the case of this completed study, AR applied to my context as a higher education professional with expertise in academic advising, as well as my experience as a Latinx, first-generation student in higher education.

The origins of AR are recent--developed in the latter half of the last century as a challenge to traditional research methods of the researcher being an outside observer. AR helps to understand the world and make necessary changes and follow with a period of

reflection (Given, 2008). AR is typically a non-positivist approach to social inquiry,

offers a critique of conventional research methods, and involves the researcher and

participants working together to address challenges. AR is especially effective in the

social sciences when challenging the social hierarchy and systemic inequities that are

prevalent in the community. AR typically fits with a qualitative approach because it

offers a well-rounded and holistic perspective, works well with small populations in local

communities, and provides access to marginalized populations (Given, 2008). See figure

4 for representation of epistemology, methodology, and methods.

Figure 4
Epistemology, Methodology, Methods

Setting and Participants

  The local and situated context of this study was Tucson, AZ at the SNHU

SWOPS Center and the study involved TLs.

Setting

The SNHU SWOPS Center serves as a workplace for three units of student experience departments; admissions, financial services, and advising, all working with undergraduate students. The SNHU SWOPS Center has six teams of advisors, each with a TL, who serves as a middle manager and supervisor to frontline advisors.

The SWOPS Center opened in early spring, 2020 and less than one month later, closed to in-person work due to the COVID pandemic. Therefore, the initial plan for the proposed intervention had been in person and face-to-face. The setting changed as a result of the pandemic to virtual engagement and took place via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. The study took place during the months of May and June, 2021.

Participants

I utilized purposeful sampling to select participants for the study. The target participants were the aforementioned six SNHU SWOPS Advising TLs. This level of middle management offered the opportunity to engage in professional development with the intention of helping the TLs explore their own identity, power and privilege, implicit bias, and the Latinx student experience; as well as the opportunity to have TLs consider possibilities of how their experiences in the intervention could inform how they support advisors and review advising policies and procedures. The Advising TL group included three females, two males, and one non-binary individual. The ethnic makeup included four White participants, one Black participant, and one Latinx participant. The professional experience and time employed in this position with SNHU varied between less than one year to less than two years.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Gender	Ethnicity	Time in Position
Participant A	F	Latinx	> 1 year
Participant B	F	White	> 2 years
Participant C	M	White	> 1 year
Participant D	M	White	> 1 year
Participant E	F	Black	> 1 year
Participant F	Non-binary	White	> 2 years

Role of the Researcher

Recall in Chapter 1 that I detailed my own experience as a Latinx, first-generation student pursuing higher education. My role currently at the SNHU SWOPS Center is that of public relations, having the title of Director of Community Impact. Essentially, I serve as the primary public point of contact for the SNHU operations in Tucson. This role, still evolving in focus, has allowed me to be involved in some leadership decision making for the SWOPS Center, but not be integral for the day-to-day operations. My reasoning for pursuing the study of my problem of practice is because my professional experience in higher education is largely in the student affairs area, specifically advising, and working directly with Latinx and first-generation students. The AR focus of this study undoubtedly held an influence on my role as both a researcher and educational

practitioner. Inevitably, my personal beliefs and lived experiences influenced my interactions with study participants, how data were collected, and how data were analyzed. My hope was to understand the perspectives of my participants and their own lived experiences, which in turn have affected their cultural competence. For the entirety of the study, I served as a participant-observer with the intention of encouraging intimate discussion and interactions; the expectation was that this level of intimacy provided richer data. Cresswell and Guetterman (2019) note the role of observer-participant is critical in the collaborative nature of AR.

The Intervention

Latinx Student Experience Community of Practice (LSE CoP)

The intervention took the form of a Community of Practice investigating the Latinx undergraduate student experience through the advising leadership lens. Wenger (1998) defined the characteristics of communities of practice with the following: 1) Domain, 2) Community, and 3) Practice. In the case of this intervention, the domain was the Latinx undergraduate student experience; the community was the TLs and myself; and the practice was the intervention, detailed below.

For the intervention I created a seven-week curriculum, divided into two themes: identity exploration, where the participants explored their own power, privilege, and implicit biases; and a review of the Latinx student experience with two testimonios of the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students. I utilized the following curriculum materials when designing the intervention:

1. We Rise Toolkit, a product of We:Rise and JASS, a women's movement organization based in Canada. The intervention used the Power Flower exercise

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with the participants. This exercise allows the participants to reflect on the intersectional identities they hold and which of those identities give them power in society. This is a reflective tool to help participants understand their role in society as it relates to power and privilege.

2. Harvard Project Implicit, public online bias tests to measure implicit biases. Each participant was asked to take an implicit bias test and share their results in their electronic journal. This was to allow participants a reflection of where hidden biases may exist.

3. The Privilege Walk, an activity in real-time to visualize a person's privilege. While there are multiple forms of a privilege walk, this particular version focused on a visual representation of how that would look in person.

4. Social Justice Toolkit, a publicly available curriculum toolkit. The toolkit provided two activities that were included in the intervention. The first, Race & Me, was a worksheet for participants to reflect on how they view race in general, and their own race. The second, Identity Signs, is a movement activity where participants move across a space as individual statements about identity are read by the facilitator. The activity is conducted silently to allow participants to engage deeply in their own movement, and to observe their peers.

5. Liberating Structures, a system of facilitation which encourages freedom from traditional structures of professional development. Liberating Structures provided discussion prompts throughout the intervention.

6. New York Times mini film series, "A Conversation on Race" (2015).

7. Testimonios

The intervention format included weekly, synchronous virtual sessions that lasted 60 minutes, spanning seven weeks. Each session included the exploration of a topic/concept through both direct teaching and a shared, collaborative experience. The beginning of each virtual session included a weekly "check-in" to gauge the pulse and commitment of how each participant was feeling. This practice of a "check-in" has been implemented in several spaces at SNHU--allowing for the development of camaraderie and safety in meetings and gatherings. The check-in was followed by a short, direct teaching presentation, an activity or experience that was completed collectively, and a wrap-up discussion.

Paralleling the synchronous virtual sessions, as part of the intervention, each participant maintained an electronic journal. Participants utilized electronic journals throughout the study to respond to pre-session prompts, and post-session reflection. Each session was preceded by a short reading and/or writing assignment to establish a shared language and understanding related to the topic/concept and solicit participants' thoughts and views prior to the direct teaching and experience of each session.

The post-work for each participant included a journaling activity in which each participant responded to the following prompts:

1. What did you learn at today's session?
2. Why do you think this is important?
3. Where do you think you can go from here? How can this be applied to your work with your direct reports?

The timeline for the intervention follows in Table 2:

Table 2
Intervention Timeline

Week	Topic	Pre-Work Asynchronous	Activity Synchronous	Post-Work Asynchronous
W1	Introduction to DEI	What does DEI Mean to You?	Social Contract Expectations Group Norms Weekly check-in	Journaling
W2	Identity and Power	Describe intersectionality	Weekly check-in Power Flower	Journaling
W3	Identity and Privilege	Where Do I Fit?	Weekly check-in Virtual privilege walk	Journaling
W4	Implicit Biases Experienced by Latinx Individuals	Project Implicit Tests	Weekly check-in Impressions of Latinx individuals	Journaling
W5	Microaggressions Experienced by Latinx Individuals	That one time I said or did...	Weekly check-in Reading & Discussion	Journaling
W6	Latinx Student Experience	What do students need?	Weekly check-in Reading & Discussion	Journaling
W7	Latinx Student Experience	End of Study Reflection	Weekly check-in Reading & Discussion	

Qualitative Design

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the intervention followed a qualitative design

approach to determine the response to the stated problem of practice. Qualitative research

allows attention to detail, data that is rich and deep, and takes into account opinions and perspectives that are not always obvious (Butin, 2010). The following section details the data collection instruments that were used, followed by a brief description of the data analysis process.

Data Collection

I utilized observations as my first data collection tool. Observation is the process of gathering open-ended, firsthand information by observing individuals at a designated research site (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). As mentioned earlier in the chapter, I served as an observer-participant. In this case, observer-participant is a role where researchers take part in the activities being conducted and can record information as it occurs (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Creswell and Guetterman, 2019). The observations collected included the recorded synchronous virtual sessions where the participants engaged together in a direct teaching presentation, followed by the activity or experience, and ended with a short discussion. I opted to utilize observations as my first data collection tool because it offered a way to gather information first-hand in my role as participant-observer.

A second data collection tool as part of the LSE CoP included documents and artifacts. Qualitative data collection can include documents such as personal journals or diaries (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). In the case of the LSE CoP, the participants maintained a PLAY notebook, an electronic journal that was accessed by both the participant and researcher (Wolf, 2010). The PLAY notebook collected the individual thoughts and experiences of each participant. The participant journal served as an effective tool in qualitative data collection to gauge responses and growth throughout the

study (Given, 2016). In the case of the Latinx Student Experience CoP, the PLAY notebook was a Google Doc that was updated in real time and was accessible to both the participant and the researcher. While the participants engaged in their PLAY notebooks on an inconsistent basis, the data collected from the PLAY Notebooks were rather rich and involving. A sample PLAY notebook is included in Appendix A. Using document analysis in qualitative research is considered a component that is crucial to the depth and richness of the study as a whole. I also maintained a researcher journal throughout the intervention and reviewed the journal entries simultaneously through the intervention, and also after the study was completed.

Lastly, the study used semi-structured interviews as a concluding activity. In qualitative research, interviews may be conducted face-to-face or virtually, or even in a focus group (Butin, 2010; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). At the conclusion of the entire study, each participant engaged in a semi-structured interview where they were asked specific questions related to the overall experience of participating in the LSE CoP. Five of the six participants completed their interviews the same week as the final synchronous session. The final participant completed their interview the week following due to a scheduling conflict. The interviews were structured with six primary questions, but the discussion during these interviews was free to expand and diverge from the specific questions. During the interviews the participants were free to share their overall experience and how it related to their learning and leadership practices with their respective teams. The semi-structured interview questions are located in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

I used a thematic analysis approach to analyze the data collected in the study. I utilized thematic analysis to identify themes and trends that were developed over the course of the study, and subsequently developed assertions. A complete overview of the data analysis process is detailed in Chapter 4.

The detailed timeline for the study is located in Table 3

Table 3
Study Timeline

Phase	Time Frame	Procedures
Preparation for the Study	Late January-February 2021	• Obtained IRB Approval from ASU
Presentation and Recruitment	March - April 2021	• Secured IRB approval from SNHU • Prepared PLAY Notebook in Google Docs and secured in ASU Google Drive • Presented study to Advising and SNHU SWOPS leadership • Distributed consent forms and assigned participants to Google Drive • Determined meeting dates/times for group virtual meetings • Introduced participants to Google Docs and PLAY Notebook • Set up standing Zoom meetings • Set up researcher journal in Google Docs.
Intervention	May 2021-June 2021	• Participants recorded in PLAY Notebooks • Virtual synchronous sessions held • Conducted member checks
Post-Intervention	June-July 2021	Post intervention one-on-one semi-structured interviews

Data Analysis	July 2021-August 2021	• Thematic Analysis • Prepare assertions

Ethical Considerations

As an embedded researcher-practitioner, it was crucial for me to ensure the quality of the data collection, especially in a qualitative study such as this. The following section discusses the steps I took to mitigate subjectivity and threats to the validity of the study across the data collection, data analysis and the presentation of the findings.

Subjectivity and Cultural Intuition

As this action research study took place within my own context, it was imperative that I examined my own biases through reflexivity. Ivankova (2015) notes the importance of clarifying researcher bias. In the case of the LSE CoP, as a member of the population whose experiences were included, I was inclined to share my own personal experiences, as a part of my own cultural intuition. As a part of Chicana feminist theory, cultural intuition helps me draw from my own personal experiences, collective and professional experiences, and communal experiences as a way to connect to the research (Delgado Bernal, 2016). In addition, cultural intuition is tied directly to the need to advocate for social justice within my own sphere; this is a point that is important to understand my lens as it relates to facilitating this study. While my own cultural intuition and ties to this research are clear, in an effort to mitigate this possible bias, I presented curriculum components that were unique to both me and the participants.

Trustworthiness

I conducted member checking throughout the intervention. Member checking involves sharing results with the participants for accuracy of account, to ensure the data

reflects their perceptions accurately (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Additionally, the triangulation of data from multiple sources (observations, artifact analysis, and semi-structured interviews) helps to build a coherent justification for themes identified (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given (2016) discusses that trustworthiness in qualitative research is achieved by implementing studies that are credible, dependable, and can be confirmed (p. 76). For the LSE CoP, I utilized researcher notes, data recordings, and descriptive codebooks to document data appropriately. These types of materials promote trustworthiness by documenting the entirety of the processes of the data collection, including how data is gathered, documented, and analyzed (Given, 2016).

Validity

Validity of research data is the extent to which the data that has been collected accurately measures what it is expected to measure (Mertler, 2017). In the case of qualitative research, validity must include data that is credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Mertler, 2017). Threats to validity can occur in processes and procedures. In an effort to mitigate this threat, I ensured that each step of the intervention was followed according to the stated timeline. In the analysis phase, I shared my data analysis with a peer to allow for fresh eyes to ensure I was on track.

Institutional Review Board

All components of the study were submitted to both Arizona State University's and SNHU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review and approval. Because this study involved human subjects, I ensured all ethical guidelines were followed and followed guidelines to mitigate any risks.

Summary

The preceding chapter provided an overview of the research design, the intervention, and data collection methods. This is in addition to providing an overview of the trustworthiness and validity of both the data instruments and data analysis methods. The LSE CoP was intended to explore identity and cultural competence with TLs, while learning the Latinx undergraduate student experience.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS AND ASSERTIONS

We need to help students and parents cherish and preserve the ethnic and cultural

diversity that nourishes and strengthens this community and this nation.

Cesar Chavez

On a national level there is this tendency to portray Latino culture as a monolithic entity,

which is a really inaccurate way of seeing ourselves. There is as much diversity in the

Latino culture as there is in any kind of American culture.

Benjamin Bratt

Data Analysis and Assertions

The purpose of my AR study was to explore the impact of a professional development series centered on exploring identity and cultural competence with academic advisor team leaders (TLs) in an effort to help these leaders learn and understand the Latinx undergraduate experience, and subsequently implement their learnings with their respective teams. The following chapter details the data analysis process and the assertions identified through this qualitative study. I utilized thematic analysis (TA) to identify the overarching themes within the data sets. I conducted three phases of data analysis; the first of which was a preliminary analysis conducted simultaneous to the data collection phase. The final two phases of data analysis included TA to develop the macro themes within the study, as well as the assertions contained within. Following the assertions, I respond with answers to my research questions.
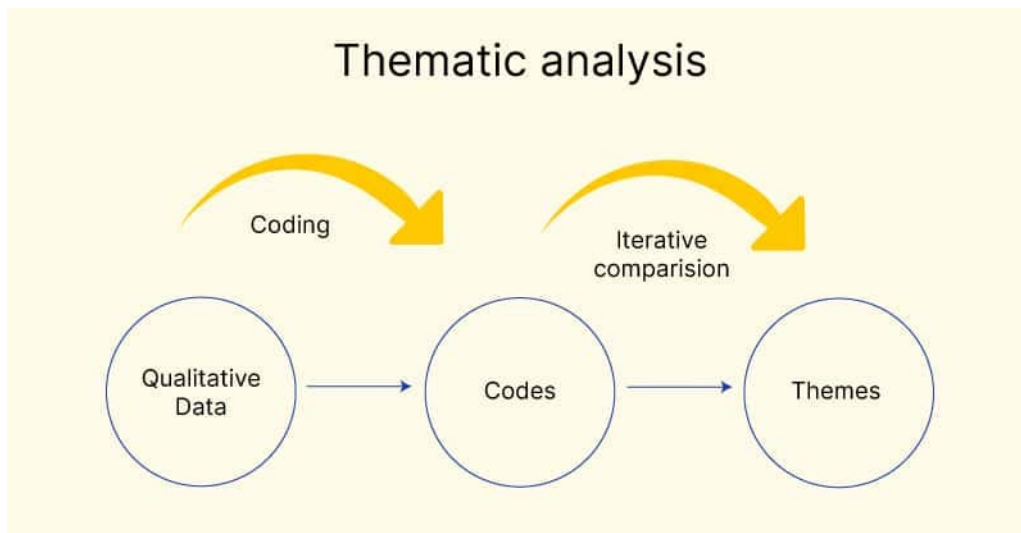
Data Analysis Process

In order to begin the data analysis process, I utilized thematic analysis (TA) to identify patterns and meanings within and across my data sets. TA is a data analysis method that helps the researcher to identify patterns of meaning across datasets. TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. In this way, TA is a method of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, TA is especially useful in PAR projects where the researcher is embedded within the data collection process, as opposed to a passive observer, and this was effective in this study due to my own role as participant-observer. TA was also my chosen analysis method because it helped me identify macro themes that arose from each data set, and then subsequently, respond to my research questions.

TA is also especially helpful in examining the perspectives of different research participants (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). The flexibility of TA allowed me to focus on the meaning of the thematic elements across all the data sets. Accordingly, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that for newer researchers in the qualitative area, TA is a good fit in analyzing data due to the flexibility and accessibility in examining data that can sometimes be confusing and overwhelming. TA includes seven steps of analysis: 1) transcription; 2) reading and familiarization; 3) coding; 4) searching for themes; 5) reviewing themes; 6) defining and naming themes; and 7) finalizing the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As I continued to dig deeper into the analysis, the themes that materialized pushed me to continue analyzing the thematic elements as they emerged across the data sets. In

this case, TA helped me move from the initial coding phase to identify the common themes across data sets. In the case of my study, my participants have helped to inform ways to improve leadership practices as they relate to working with Latinx undergraduate students. As I identified common themes across the data sets, I recognized that TA was the best way for me to analyze the recurring observations and how to interpret those observations (Hawkins, 2021). See figure 5 for a visualization of TA.

Figure 5
Thematic Analysis

Data Analysis Phase One

In the first phase, as I was collecting data, I began to conduct analysis simultaneously. This was a natural progression, as my role was embedded within the intervention as both a participant and a researcher. As the intervention was taking place, I began conducting early analysis after each synchronous session. I opted to review each recorded session and took notes in a researcher journal as I rewatched each video on a week-by-week basis. At this point, I engaged in step 1 of TA, transcription. Doing so helped me prepare for the following week's session and allowed me to prepare for

additional data collection. While this review was taking place, I made notes in my researcher journal of elements of mood or feeling that were conveyed during each session--both from myself and from the participants. An example of some notes in my researcher journal:

> This session proved to be far more emotional than I had anticipated, as both these participants opened up about very personal parts of their lives. As my study is focused on participatory action research, I allowed myself to participate as well and was able to share some of my own personal stories. While initially challenging, expressing my emotions similarly to the participants was cathartic.

Continuing on with this analysis, after each weekly session I made notes of key points that arose during discussion prompts. For example, during one particular activity, two White participants vocalized observations of the activity of their Black colleague. I felt that this was relevant to continue examining and I also used those notes further in my data collection.

In my researcher journal I made notes of my own observations that were relevant to the teaching, activity, and discussion taking place in order for me to revisit these key points during further analysis, or to include in further discussions. During this phase I also chose to read and re-read the participants' PLAY Notebooks to identify early themes that were emerging from their journaling. The early identified themes were also recorded in my researcher journal. This helped me to see that the topics of reflection in their PLAY Notebooks coincided with the recordings of the synchronous sessions. I completed phase one of my data analysis when I finished conducting the semi-structured interviews.

Data Analysis Phase Two

Following the completion of the intervention and subsequent data collection process, I began phase two of my data analysis by engaging in step 2 of TA, familiarizing myself with the data by reading and rereading. I uploaded the video recordings as well as the transcripts to Dedoose. I opted to use software to help organize my data and keep the initial coding process concise. I chose to analyze each dataset separately, so I created three separate projects, one for each type of data.

At this point, I began step 3 of TA, the coding process. Because the semi-structured interviews were the freshest in my memory, I opted to begin the coding process with the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed automatically using Zoom, which I then uploaded to Dedoose. Using descriptive coding, I began reading and coding the data line-by-line. I did not have a preliminary set of codes, but rather I let the codes emerge while rereading my data. Descriptive coding aligns with the inductive approaches recommended in TA. TA can be useful in allowing the analysis of what is actually in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some of the early codes identified included vulnerability, learning, critical thinking, and emotional impact.

Following the completion of the first round of descriptive coding, I completed a second round of coding with the semi-structured interviews using simultaneous coding. I found simultaneous coding to be a seamless transition because I noted that many parts of the transcripts appeared to be applicable to multiple codes. According to Saldana (2016), simultaneous coding is when a researcher applies more than one code to an excerpt of data. I completed one round of simultaneous coding on each data set. Some of the

simultaneous codes that emerged included the above initial codes such as learning, but combined with leadership and representation.

I began conducting descriptive coding on the second and third data sets, opting to code the PLAY Notebooks after I completed the semi-structured interviews, and ending with the synchronous sessions. I followed this with a second round of coding using simultaneous coding on both of the aforementioned data sets as well.

At this point, I felt that I had a strong enough understanding of the recurring codes in my datasets and I was comfortable conducting a third round of coding on all three sets of data to further identify patterns and unusual codes or outliers. For the third round of coding, I engaged in step 4 of TA and began searching for themes using concept codes. Concept codes are useful in applying codes to larger excerpts (Saldana, 2016). Using concept coding allowed me to formulate initial themes, where larger sections of each transcript were able to be applied to one overarching code. One sample of a concept code was leadership, as this was prevalent across the datasets, but also within individual pieces of data. The leadership code applied to the TLs' reflections in how they work with their team members and how to coach them accordingly.

Data Analysis Phase Three

After completing the three rounds of coding, I began steps 5 of the TA process, reviewing themes. In order to do this, I extracted the code sets as well as a table of code co-occurrence. This helped me identify the prevalence of specific codes and allowed me to highlight the codes that were applicable to the themes I had been reviewing. I also downloaded a word cloud from Dedoose to visually represent the codes that were most prevalent. Doing so helped me ensure that I was identifying themes that were significant

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in my coding and analysis thus far. Because I analyzed each data set independently, this analysis work of seeing where and how often themes came up across datasets was important not only for finalizing themes, but also as a way to use method triangulation. Method triangulation is effective in qualitative research because it allows for the convergence of multiple sources of data and supports the trustworthiness of the findings (Carter, et al., 2014).

After extracting the code occurrence and word cloud, I used a digital whiteboard to categorize the most frequently occurring codes across all three data sets. This helped me identify the appropriate themes that were common across the three types of data. Using Miro, the digital whiteboard, helped me visualize the macro or meta themes that were prevalent in the entirety of the data. At this stage I continued to name the themes. Naming the themes helped me categorize them accordingly, which is part of step 6 in TA. For example, under the theme of Learning, a code related to professional development was placed. This code was also placed under the theme of Leadership, as this applied also to the role of the participants as leaders and working with their direct reports in encouraging them to pursue professional development related to DEI.

As I worked in the digital whiteboard space, I continued to make notes in my researcher journal as certain details manifested to make connections between and across themes. I also began to develop higher level themes that applied to the research questions, as well as the assertions that were applicable to the study at large. It is at this point that I began step 7 of the TA process, finalizing the analysis, which is described below in the definition of the identified themes, the assertions, and the responses to my research questions.

Themes

As mentioned above, using TA allowed me to identify and examine the prevalence of themes across the specified data sets. It is important to note that the themes identified were prevalent not only across data sets, but across participants. In table 4, a list of the major themes are described.

Table 4

Major Themes and Descriptions

Theme	Description
Learning	The overall theme of learning was prevalent throughout the study. All participants noted the learning that was taking place by hearing from the perspectives of others, listening to first-hand accounts, and a desire to improve the professional development experience.
Leadership	Due to the position of the participants, the perspective that the intervention was delivered was with a leadership lens. The focus of much of the study was how what the participants learned could then influence their leadership practices and be a part of their team interactions.
Systemic Challenges	The systemic challenges that were prevalent in the study were some that are inherent in society and societal expectations. For example, some of the challenges associated with privilege and the implicit bias that Latinx individuals experience. However, more locally affect was the workload and busyness attached to being a TL and the lack of space and time to fully engage in DEI work.
Emotional Impact	Overall the work of improving DEI outcomes can be very emotional. This study was no exception and the emotional impact was apparent. In particular, participants struggled with reconciling their past behavior with current societal standards. This was also attributed to the impact of their upbringing.

As I named and defined the larger themes from the TA, I began developing assertions that were revealed from the analysis. The five assertions that were created are applicable to several of the named themes, and two major areas related to the roles of the

TLs: leaders and learners. In the section that follows, a full description of each assertion is included, as well as the identification of the themes that each assertion is tied to.

Assertions

In the section that follows, I detail the assertions that I created through my TA process. According to Nolen and Talbert (2019), there are certain conditions that must be in place for qualitative researchers to assert their findings. The conditions include being fully transparent of the data analysis strategy, the study relating to existing literature, and the role of the researcher is clearly described. In the case of the LSE CoP, the assertions detailed below are a result of the comprehensive TA and with my role as part of the PAR nature of the study. The relation to the literature will be detailed in chapter 5.

Assertion 1: TLs learned from testimonios and personal narratives of Latinx individuals, as well as from each other.

A large component of the intervention included the sharing of personal narratives. Personal narratives were presented in the forms of testimonios of Latinx individuals and through the sharing of personal stories from myself and other participants in the study. While each session included discussions and reflection surrounding the personal experiences of Latinx individuals, the style of the learning also allowed for participants to share their own stories. Discussions during each session allowed for all participants to share personal stories, whether it be about childhood experiences or more recent occurrences that impacted their current behavior and understandings. Allowing space for shared learning and the sharing of personal experiences helped to develop a newfound understanding of self and of one another. In recounting stories from their personal upbringing, participants reflected on experiences with extended family. For example,

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Participant B expressed her challenges of growing up with an extended family that behaved in a racist manner and how guarded she feels around them. Participant A spoke of her family's unwillingness to speak Spanish in their home, despite being fully bilingual, due to their perceived need to be completely assimilated into American culture.

One participant, Participant E, shared the impact of her upbringing and family dynamic as not only a person of color, but as a child of immigrants.

So, I am first-generation born here, family of immigrants from Panama and my father was Jamaican-American. I did not know the term 'Afro-Latino' until I was in graduate school. For 30 some years at this time this was all new to me; you know my mother kept it very separate because her rationale was. And these were her exact words 'you will have enough to contend with in this country as a Black woman, do not add anything else to it.

Reflecting helped participants frame their current cultural competence in their work as TLs.

Diving into the topic of implicit and explicit bias, participants engaged in the learning of the large assumptions made about Latinx individuals. For example, some of the assumptions presented included that all Latinx individuals speak with accents or are all dark-skinned. One particular session also included a video from the New York Times mini-film series on exploring race, biases and identity. The film, "A Conversation with Latinos on Race," (New York Times, 2016), offered first-hand accounts of Latinxs as they navigated experiences in business, academia, as immigrants, as natural-born citizens, and of the very grey identity that encompasses being Latinx. Because being Latinx is

considered an ethnic designation rather than a racial one, participants came to the realization that Latinx individuals live in the area of 'not this, nor that,' especially in identifying racial identity. I shared my own experience of feeling challenged filling out demographic information because of this; I am not White, nor Black, nor Asian, nor American Indian, but I must select a racial identity before selecting an ethnic one. This crisis of racial identity continues to be challenging for many people of Latinx heritage, one that asks, 'where do we belong?' Consequently, the participants vocalized a lack of awareness and understanding of this identity crisis of how Latinx people live in a 'neither-nor' space. The discussion that ensued focused on the benefit of hearing first-hand accounts and personal experiences of Latinx individuals. In this way, growing awareness via first-hand experiences helped to develop TL's cultural competence in working with teammates and students.

For example, Participant B noted, "I had no awareness of or thought of this because I hadn't personally endured that. So, I think it's very eye-opening. And like I said, it struck an emotional chord with me for sure. I think that that reminder of just putting yourself in someone else's shoes and really learning their story at the very minimum is really, really powerful."

Similarly, Participant C also noted the impact of the session on intersectionality and the learning that took place.

I learned that different elements of intersectionality have a lot to do with our personal identities, as well as how we see and interact with the world around us. I also learned that I'm not impacted as directly by certain pieces of intersectionality (i.e. race & gender) as others might be, especially when it comes to how I'm

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treated or the type of opportunities that either are or are not afforded to me.

Meaning, I've never really had to worry about losing out on opportunities or

being treated unfairly simply because of my race or gender. This was an important

eye-opener because it showed me I have more to learn about this topic and can be

more intentional about doing the work and working to effect change in my daily

work and life.

As Participant C recognized his own privilege associated with his identity, he recognized

that he had never had to experience the biases and stereotypes that Latinx individuals

have had. His last statement of wishing to be more intentional and inclusive shows that

learning from these first-hand experiences caused a shift in his thinking. At the end of the

intervention, Participant C noted the willingness to serve as a leader within his new team,

as he began transitioning to a new position. He expressed commitment to deepening his

learning and using what he gleaned from the intervention to mentor new academic

advisors.

There was value in hearing from first-hand experiences and personal narratives.

Allowing the space within the intervention to listen to these experiences helped TLs

develop an awareness of the needs of others. The shared experiences and first-hand

accounts of others also allowed TLs to develop empathy for the lived experiences of

others; other co-workers, other advisors, and students. The TLs' learning in this manner

relates to the overarching themes of learning, leadership, and emotional impact.

Assertion 2: TLs learned that representation is critical for Latinx students.

As the participants engaged throughout the intervention, a recurring topic of

discussion was 'representation.' The participants discussed the testimonio, *Máscaras,*

Trenzas, y Greñas (Montoya, 1994), as the reality of the author's experience came to fruition. She never had anyone to connect with, not in undergraduate school, not in law school. I shared my own experiences with attending undergraduate school with zero connection to the university at large; I also shared my own daughter's experience of attending a large, research university as a freshman. Even not being a first-generation student, my dark-skinned daughter struggled to find a place where she could fit in as she was surrounded by the predominantly White student population.

The discussion surrounding representation was emotionally charged; the TLs learned that Latinx students perform better academically when paired with an advisor who is also Latinx. In reading the testimonios the overwhelming response from TLs was clear, representation matters. When Latinx students are able to see themselves represented in faculty and staff members at their institution, they are more likely to connect to the school and develop a sense of belonging.

Participant F's comment in a discussion illustrates this idea,

Leaning into that session, the question that you had asked is like what do Latinx students need to be successful? And the biggest thing that really stood out to me from the narrative was representation, and I felt like in that session I was like so passionate about how representation is important.

Similarly, Participant A noted how her own experience in undergraduate school may have been different had she connected with other Latinx students and staff. She vocalized that she took this process as an opportunity to learn and recognize her role in cultivating an inclusive environment for her team members--especially those team members of color. She shared, "Then I realized I think when we want to improve the

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experience of Latinx students, I feel like it's just a much bigger picture. It is about helping employees feel comfortable so that they can do that with their students to help them feel comfortable as well."

While this study focused on representation for Latinx students in particular, the consensus that manifested across the TLs was that representation matters for all marginalized communities in all spaces. For example, one participant recognized their own need for representation within the queer community. This coincided with further discussions around systemic barriers that impedes full representation in PWI. Ultimately, what the TLs learned from this experience is how critical representation is in all marginalized communities.

Assertion 3: The TLs experienced discomfort in engaging in DEI work

The core of the intervention was seated in learning about issues in DEI. The first three sessions were focused on the participants exploring their own identities as they sit within the world and the workplace. Due to the inherently challenging nature of DEI activities and the depth of critical thinking that tends to be involved in DEI work, the participants experienced discomfort and strong emotional reactions. This was demonstrated within and across the data sets, and the inclusion of a reflection after each session served as a venue for participants to convey their emotional reactions to the learning. The inclusion of the reflection was intentional, as it allowed me to collect rich data about not only what they were learning, but also about their feelings and thoughts about the LSE CoP.

In one session, participants engaged in a discussion of their own identities and what the world had expected of them. Every participant expressed an emotional response

to this discussion prompt, as they each shared their childhood experiences and how those had an impact on their lived experiences. For example, Participant A spoke of being born to teenage parents and her family and close friends expected her to follow in the same footsteps. Participant B spoke of abuse she experienced as a child. Participant D and E both spoke of the prevalence of alcoholism in their families. The emotional nature of these discussions brought forth discomfort and emotions not generally discussed amongst work colleagues. This emotional reaction put participants in the frame of mind to challenge previously held beliefs. This was especially true when we discussed implicit and explicit biases. Participant D noted,

> She [Participant E] really said something that sat with me when we were talking about privilege and really you ask the question, what does that mean to us? And I said, well, you know, I think it means different opportunities for different individuals and [Participant E] was able to chime in and say, well, that's not necessarily true. But here are some things that we refer to as white privilege. I sat with that challenge to my thinking.

Emotional reactions became so prevalent in the process of engaging in this intervention that often, when conducting a quick check-out at the end of each session, several participants noted they felt the need to sit with their thoughts because they were processing the experience with visible facial reactions. All participants vocalized that the sessions caused them to think critically about their interactions in the workplace; in fact, each participant reflected on their own critical thinking and documented this in their PLAY notebooks. At the close of the intervention, Participant C noted the surprising nature of the emotional aspect; how he would often end a session feeling angry over the

inequities that exist in the world, but with a renewed sense of commitment to improve his own part in that accordingly. The discomfort that arose from the process of deep thinking was prevalent in each participant's experience as they conveyed the emotions they experienced throughout the intervention. This emotional reaction served as a catalyst to each participants' commitment to improving their workplace relationships. Throughout the intervention the participants experienced discomfort as they expressed emotions not usually conveyed in the workplace. The process of learning about representation through first-hand experiences caused an emotional reaction and was, at times, uncomfortable. In this way, the learning applies to the overarching themes of learning, emotional impact, and systemic barriers.

Assertion 4: TLs recognized that they can improve team dynamics by cultivating belonging and inclusivity.

A major part of the intervention included reflections on the TLs' roles as leaders. Growing their leadership skillset was included as part of the research questions and was intentionally included in their weekly reflections. Going through the emotional impact of the intervention, every participant vocalized how learning to be vulnerable and authentic within the workspace grew their appreciation for one another and reminded them to view their team members as human beings who can contribute to the workplace, versus solely the function of their respective jobs. At SNHU, moving into a leadership role with supervision comes with the expectation to cultivate a positive and strong team dynamic. As leaders, they are responsible for an inclusive team environment, with the hope of cultivating a sense of belonging for their team members. It is the role of the TLs to not only model the behavior of allowing authenticity in the workplace, but to cultivate the

same from their direct reports. In this way, TLs grew their leadership skills by learning about one another in an inclusive environment, as a result of the significant emotional impact.

All participants reflected on their roles as leaders within the SWOPS Center. A large component of the intervention was focused on incorporating what they learned from the intervention within their respective teams and as SWOPS leaders. With intention, each participant vocalized the emotional impact of the intervention and the activities that they engaged in. Participant A noted that she appreciated the vulnerability that was exhibited by her peers and that it helped her form an appreciation for their authenticity and get to know them in a different way. In doing so, she was encouraged to be her authentic self during the synchronous sessions. Furthermore, she later identified the desire to cultivate the same belonging and inclusivity that she experienced and do so with her direct reports.

Participant B indicated the following, "I think that I definitely want to incorporate additional trainings within the team. You know, really, I mean, it was so impactful. The session that you led with [colleague] about diversity, and just some of the questions that were asked, it was so eye-opening to hear other stories."

Participant F also vocalized their journey in coming to terms with their identity of being gender non-binary. They wrote in their journal,

> Since coming to terms with my identity and getting more comfortable in my own
> skin, I have faced new challenges in being a part of these minority groups. The
> assumptions and biases that many folks hold about me based on certain aspects of
> my identity have challenged me in both my personal and professional life. They

have impacted my mental health, my relationships, my sense of safety, belonging,

and worth, and my professional development and advancement.

They further espoused that by allowing themselves to be fully present and authentic, they

could do the same for their teammates and create a more inclusive environment. It was

also Participant F that came to the realization that while certain factors were largely out

of their control when it came to hiring new advisors (and thus, having no control over the

ethnic makeup of the advising team), they could help their team members feel safe and

validated in being authentic with the intention of strengthening their relationships with

students.

The analysis showed that belonging and inclusivity are critical components of a

healthy team at SNHU. TLs allowing space for vulnerability with their respective team

members can serve as positive encouragement to behave authentically without the typical

workplace facade that is typically the norm. Being authentic in the workplace and

approaching team members with empathy brings a sense of belonging and inclusivity to

the team. The primary theme of Assertion 4 is extracted from the overarching theme of

leadership; yet, this assertion is also extracted from the emotional impact theme, as

learning to be authentic and vulnerable can be uncomfortable in cultivating an inclusive

workplace.

Assertion 5: TLs have a desire to engage more in DEI work, but experience

institutional barriers that impede their involvement in this area.

As the intervention flowed, every participant identified the desire to engage more

in DEI work, recognizing the need for this type of professional development not only for

themselves, but for their team members. The analysis showed that the TLs are very

committed to learning more about DEI, and how to incorporate their learning with their team members. However, the needs of the business in relation to academic advising impede their full engagement and investment in this work. Every participant said they felt that their hands were tied when it came to decision making on engaging in DEI work, on hiring decisions to improve representation, and on making allowances for team building to cultivate authentic relationships.

All participants indicated that the day-to-day busyness of their work, including maintaining specific metrics with their team members for green time (available to students) versus red time (time away from students), served as a barrier for further learning in this area. All participants noted the challenge of incorporating some of the things they learned through the LSE CoP within their respective teams. The general consensus was that SNHU is a very metric-driven organization and success is quantified by numbers; percentage of students enrolled and re-enrolled for a subsequent term, percentage of students contacted on any given day, and the measurement of continuous quality improvement (i.e., the expectation that each metric must exceed the previous benchmark). Participants noted the absence of DEI and authenticity in the ways SNHU determines success across advising teams.

Through the TA of the data, it was clear that TLs recognized how the busyness of the day-to-day work and the metric-driven success indicators served as a barrier for time and attention to issues related to DEI. The analysis revealed that participants are very committed to and have a desire to engage further in DEI work, but experience barriers to this. The TLs explained that their weekly team meetings are only held for 30 minutes, which does not allow for anything further than discussions of the business at hand.

Participant B noted that her workload serves as a barrier to fully engage in DEI work and fully implement this work with her team, despite having the strong desire to do so, "I really want to do this work. I wish I had the whole day to really process, and to sit with you and just learn."

The analysis continued to identify that the focus on metrics at the institutional level served as an impediment to allowing advisors to develop strong relationships with students. The quote from Participant E below illustrates this,

> We are very much a metrics driven organization, more so than any place I've worked before, and it's taken some adjusting for me because I came into this position not knowing that we operate mostly as a contact center and that was new. I was thinking, is this the future of academic advising? This resembles nothing that I'm used to even with [previous employer, online university] that is 100% online. They focus more on the student relationship and coaching, not so much around numbers. And that's part of it. You know, to make sure that our students are progressing academically, but it goes back to the individual student in those conversations. So yeah, this has been...it's been different for me because we are very [numbers] focused and we don't create a lot of wiggle room, in my opinion, to focus on the student relationship.

Thus, although the TLs recognize the need for engaging in DEI work, and the strong desire to do so, the pull of the business needs often supersedes any work beyond their regular job duties. In this way, their direct reports also are not often engaging in this type of work beyond their caseload. Participating in the LSE CoP gave the TLs the opportunity to connect as a team and learn about one another in new ways. It also gave

them a dedicated space and time to step away from the busyness of their jobs. It is

unfortunate, because engaging in DEI work can create a more inclusive work

environment and strengthen the advisor-student relationship. The institutional barriers

they experience impede their own growth in cultural competence, and also impede their

ability to then help their teams grow in this area. In the end, this is a detriment to the

strengthening of the advisor-student relationship. The institutional barriers they

experienced are extracted from the overarching themes of leadership and systemic

barriers; these are challenges that may be considered wicked problems, as they will

continue while SNHU is in a continued growth pattern.

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Responses to Research Questions

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Collective findings were established by reviewing the TA of the data and combing

through each data set to formulate responses to the established research questions. TA

helped to establish the assertions, and in doing so, I also was able to identify aspects that

applied to

**RQ1: What perceptions do online academic advisor leaders possess regarding the
needs of Latinx undergraduate students?**

Based on the collected and analyzed data, the TLs described their perceptions of

Latinx undergraduate students and their needs. Overall, the perceptions that were

identified of Latinx students and their needs were positive. The participants expressed

that Latinx students have the need to be heard, and on their own terms. Some of the

keywords that manifested include encouragement, support, and celebration for their

unique perspectives. As mentioned previously, representation was also a recurring theme

that arose when discussing the critical needs of Latinx undergraduate students. Connected

to representation, the participants vocalized that Latinx undergraduate students need to have a positive and strong relationship with their academic advisor; and that this particular relationship in the postsecondary education setting must be one that is welcoming and empathetic. Inclusive environments were also identified as a critical component to ensuring the needs of Latinx students are being met, and this was congruent with the idea that students must be met where they are, on their terms, and not on what the university mandates.

The collected and analyzed data are interesting because the initial perceptions that I had as the researcher prior to the implementation of the intervention were that the TLs approached students of color with a level of color blindness, with differences ignored and everyone treated equally. On the contrary, the data from the study indicate that the learning that took place was impactful in helping the TLs develop an awareness and understanding of the Latinx student experience, and that through this intervention, they improved their cultural competence.

RQ2: How do online academic advisor leaders respond to participation in a community of practice centered on identity exploration and the Latinx student experience?

a. What knowledge and skills do they gain from participating in a community of practice*?*

While faced with some challenges, as explained in Assertion 5, overall, the experience was a positive one. Every participant agreed that the LSE CoP was a worthwhile experience and a positive use of their time. In addition, each participant identified that they had been challenged in their thinking and previously held beliefs

about Latinx individuals. For example, one participant noted that he challenged his own view that all Latinx people were automatically of Mexican decent, due to the close proximity of Tucson to the U.S-Mexico border. Until this experience, he had not cognitively recognized the many layers and identities that Latinx individuals encompass, and Latinx people can be of a variety of nationalities including Dominican, Cuban, Guatemalan, and other countries in Latin America. Similarly, other participants identified their new learning about other cultures as a strength of the LSE CoP, noting they grew an awareness of the indigenous influence in the Latinx community within Tucson. Moreover, every participant identified the need for more inclusivity and belonging not only from the workplace perspective, but with the advisor-student relationships as well. As mentioned previously, representation was a critical topic that arose; and the participants developed the understanding that representation is critical for all marginalized populations.

b. How do they describe their confidence in exploring their own identity in this process*?*

The TLs made note of the sometimes, challenging nature of the discussions surrounding identity. This was especially true as they discussed their childhood experiences and upbringing, noting that these were discussions that never occurred within the workplace. They expressed some initial trepidation about this process, but followed up with a sense of catharsis and relief. They noted a newfound appreciation for their coworkers, and that the LSE CoP gave them the opportunity to get to know their colleagues on a deeper, more personal level that was previously clouded the busyness of their day-to-day work. They expressed that because the focus of their own team

development had been put on hold to manage the needs of the business, this process gave them the opportunity to be present and immersed in learning about themselves as well as their peers. In particular, one activity generated significant responses in getting to view first-hand how others perceive themselves. The activity, Identity Signs, was a visual representation of the parts of identity that resonate with each person. Some of the White participants noted that some of the factors of their identity (e.g. ethnicity) were not things that were at the forefront of their minds on a day-to-day basis as it was for a Black participant. In this way, the participants' confidence grew throughout the study as they learned to break down barriers and truly learn about themselves and their peers authentically in a safe manner.

c. How does participation in the community of practice inform their leadership and coaching to be more culturally competent?

Throughout the study, the participants were prompted to reflect on their roles as TLs and if what they gleaned from their participation could be influential and embedded within their respective teams. One factor that arose continuously throughout was cultivating an environment of belonging and inclusivity, with the intention of then informing practices with advisors working directly with students. As identified and explained in Assertion 4, the TLs hold the responsibility for developing high functioning teams and encouraging authenticity with their team members. All participants were relatively new leaders, most in their leadership roles for less than one year. Overall there was an apprehension of how to navigate challenging conversations with their team members; but also a demonstration of a strong commitment to do so. Additionally, reflecting on their own identity, as in RQ2b., allowed the participants to see how they

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could include activities and discussion prompts within their respective teams to encourage more authentic and genuine conversations around DEI.

Summary

The preceding chapter provided an in-depth overview of the data analysis process, including the analysis method utilized. The chapter also provided short definitions of the major themes that arose from this study. Following, I identified five assertions that I gleaned from the thematic analysis that I completed; these five assertions demonstrate the learning that took place throughout the study. Finally, I responded to my original research questions. The chapter that follows includes a discussion of the findings and future implications.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Your great strength is knowing who you are.

Oscar de la Renta

We have to be visible. We are not ashamed of who we are.

Sylvia Rivera

In trying to become 'objective,' Western culture made 'objects' of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing 'touch' with them.

Gloria Anzaldua

Discussion and Implications

The following chapter provides a summary overview of the entirety of the action research study and provides a discussion of the implications, limitations, and concluding thoughts.

The problem of practice that I addressed through this dissertation is that academic advisors have a lack of cultural competence in working with Latinx undergraduate students. My intervention was centered on professional development in the form of a community of practice for Academic Advisor Team Leads, who serve as direct supervisors for academic advisors. The intervention allowed for exploration of identity as it relates to cultural competence and learning the Latinx undergraduate student experience. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What perceptions do online academic advisor leaders possess in regards to the needs of Latinx undergraduate students?

RQ2: How do online academic advisor leaders respond to participation in a community of practice centered on identity exploration and the Latinx student experience?

a. What knowledge and skills do they gain from participating in a community of practice?

b. How do they describe their confidence in exploring their own identity in this process?

c. How does participation in the community of practice inform their leadership and coaching to be more culturally competent?

Discussion of Assertions

While my study took place within my local context, there were instances with my assertions where I was able to connect to previous research and theory. This helped me frame the potential for future research and implications for practice.

In chapter 2, I highlighted the three theoretical perspectives that guided my research. These theories included the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (Center for Culturally Proficient Educational Practice, 2020); Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP), (Ladson-Billings, 1995); and Communities of Practices (CoP), (Wenger, 1998). These theories collectively provided the overall guidance for the study, but also helped me identify and establish my assertions and respond to my research questions.

Learning from Others

As the TLs progressed through the study, they heard from important testimonios, first-person narratives of significant experiences. In addition to the testimonios included in the intervention, the TLs had the opportunity to hear from each other, which resulted in them growing awareness and appreciation for the lived experiences of others. The assertion indicates that learning from others, hearing first-hand personal narratives, is

important in developing cultural competence, and that hearing first-hand accounts is powerful. This concurs with an important aspect of CRP where learning from minoritized students is critical in education spaces (Yosso, 2006). This assertion concurs with Ward (2013), that learning about the experiences of others results in improved cultural proficiency, which is in line with the aims of CCPEP and the CPC (2018) in helping educators to learn from their students.

Allowing the space for the sharing of personal narratives was an important part of the intervention, and for understanding the needs of Latinx students and validating their experiences. Doing so contributes to their success both in and out of the classroom (Rendon, 1995). Dayton, et al., (2004) concur with this and found that Latinx students, in particular, are more likely to succeed when their lived experiences are valued. Furthermore, I found that while this study primarily focused on the experiences of Latinx undergraduate students, the ability to share personal narratives and lived experiences allowed for a greater understanding of our peers. This shared learning experience helped to grow an appreciation for the TLs and what they individually bring to the team, an assertion that is congruent with the CoP model (Wenger, 1998), where in a CoP, participants develop a sense of community as they learn and grow.

Representation

It was very clear from the results of this study that representation is critical not only for Latinx students, but for all minoritized individuals. The TLs expressed heightened awareness of the need for representation in all spaces, and grew in their knowledge of how representation can help students and staff develop a sense of belonging. In this way, CRP is of particular importance. Love (2015) indicates that CRP

helps minoritized students experience their own culture within the dominant one, and how it applies accordingly. The TLs learning of the place of Latinx students applies to understanding their lived experiences. Furthermore, CSP helps students to bridge the dual identity of retaining their own cultural identity, but succeed within the academic space (Paris, 2012). In academic spaces, including within the advising function, non-traditional students, including minoritized students, must experience solidarity both in and out of the classroom to foster academic success. The TLs method of coaching their advisors to is of critical importance, students must be validated. This also concurs with Rendon (1995), who posits that when validation is present, students grow in their capability to learn. Suvedi, et al., (2015), posit that culturally competent advising practices contribute to college success practices, and contribute equity in the classroom.

At a PWI like SNHU, recognizing a student's cultural identity and their need for representation helps mitigate biases and stereotypes within the student population, and with faculty and staff as well (Milner, 2011). Ward (2013) suggests the same, that cultural proficiency within the faculty and staff makeup works to acknowledge assets of an entire school community. Lindsey, Lindsey, and Terrell, (2010) emphasizes that multiculturalism contributes to the richness of the institution's environment, but that must be applied to the faculty and staff makeup as well. Most importantly, Lohfink and Paulsen's (2005) statement of representation that an institution must consider the perspectives of minoritized students on their own terms, and not from the perspective of the dominant culture, in this case, a PWI like SNHU.

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Emotional Impact

As indicated in the assertions, the TLs experienced heavy emotions as the study progressed. This was especially true in the TLs exploring their own identities. CRP suggests this is an important step for educators to examine their own biases, in an effort to work more effectively with minoritized students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). This self-assessment is in line with the CPC, which tells us that self-assessment is a critical part of improving skills in working with multicultural students (2014). Domingues, et al., (2015) concur with the value of self-assessment in addressing the needs of minoritized students.

In higher education spaces the exploration of identity is often left to the individual and is not part of the institution as a whole. This study allowed for participants to explore their own identity in a safe space, where the emotional impact of learning from the experiences of others could be deeply felt, but allow for deeper engagement. The CoP model of learning focuses on the relational and social aspect of learning; this was particularly true for the TLs as they all vocalized the participatory nature of the CoP and how much their appreciation for one another grew. In this case, the outcomes were not solely about the individual, but on the relational and social learning of the entire CoP (Wenger, 2011).

Belonging and Inclusivity

A large component of the assertions was focused on the leadership development of the TLs. Allowing for the emotional nature of identity exploration cultivated an inclusive environment, and the relational nature of the CoP model served as a crucial piece of that cultivation (Wenger, 1998). CoPs are naturally collaborative and this collaboration serves as a catalyst to developing a more inclusive environment, with the

intent of helping team members feel a sense of belonging. Wenger (1998) suggests that the collaborative functioning and collective understanding of CoPs help participants come together in an act of mutual engagement.

In regards to the importance of cultivating an environment of inclusivity for students, the aforementioned collaborative environment lends itself to improved academic success. TLs helping foster an environment of inclusivity with their team members can then help those advisors cultivate the same inclusivity and belonging for their students. CRP suggests that students would experience improved academic success if their education was approached in a collaborative manner (Benyehudah, 2018). At SNHU, advising is largely prescriptive. Making small modifications to approach advising in a strengths-based and appreciative model could help improve minoritized student outcomes.

Institutional Barriers

The data analysis showed that the TLs have a strong desire to engage in work that helps them learn about issues in DEI, and to help their team members grow as well. In chapter 4 I noted that a major part of the assertions that I developed specifically apply to institutional practices at SNHU. In particular, the time limitation continues to serve as a barrier to full engagement in DEI practices. Cultural competence is a skill that will continue to be of importance as the ethnic makeup of the country continues to shift toward a more multicultural society. Being leaders at SNHU, the TLs can serve as models in developing cultural competence, as Brion (2019) posits that cultural competency is a leadership trait that is critical not only for the successes of individual students, but also for the school as a whole, which is in line with the CPC model. This is in line with Ward

(2014), who suggests that cultural competence acknowledges assets of the entirety of a school community. In the case of SNHU, allowing for dedicated time and providing professional development support to improve cultural competence skills can not only improve the advisor-student relationship, but the entire institution; and can ultimately have an effect on enrollment, persistence, retention, and completion. Using a CoP model can help structure professional development in a way that allows for collective learning and collaboration; but more importantly, CoPs can be effective in addressing needs to local challenges (Nistor, 2014).

Discussion of Limitations

The following section details limitations that were experienced during the study. The limitations described were barriers that I specifically identified, but worked to mitigate and ensure I was able to collect sufficiently rich data.

Time Allotment for Study

Throughout the preparation of this study, and subsequently, during the execution, there were several barriers and limitations that I experienced related to the timing of the study. In particular, the IRB process at SNHU was slow and the response to any changes that needed to be made served as a barrier to getting started. The specific guidelines indicated that full approval would take two weeks. Unfortunately, due to staffing shortages and several layers of authorization needed, this delayed the official approval. While I received acceptance eventually, this delayed the study implementation timeline and put me in a position where I felt incredibly rushed to get to the data collection phase, to then rushed through the data analysis process. I initially had planned to begin implementation in mid-late March, but due to the aforementioned delays, I did not begin

the study until early May. Because SNHU and ASU do not share an institutional agreement where one IRB can serve as approval for both institutions, there was a significant delay in getting started, which then resulted in a shorter data analysis period than I had anticipated. In order to mitigate this limitation, I prepared the documents and data analysis structure ahead of time to ensure I stayed on top of data analysis concurrently with data collection.

As with any project or study at SNHU, I had to acquire significant leadership approval prior to even submitting the application for IRB approval at SNHU. I worked closely with the Vice President of Southwest Operations, as well as the Senior Director of Academic Advising for SWOPS to discuss with them the study's intentions as well as the curriculum in a step-by-step manner. This also delayed the submission to IRB, as I could not submit the application without written permission of the leaders overseeing the affected department. Once the approval was received, and I received the appropriate IRB approval, I worked closely with the Senior Director of Academic Advising, who supervises the TLs, to schedule the intervention accordingly. The Senior Director was very accommodating and allowed me to utilize a part of her regularly scheduled staff meeting time for the intervention facilitation.

Pandemic

An additional limitation that was experienced arose as a result of the ongoing pandemic. The initial intent when designing this intervention was to be implemented in person. There were several activities that would have been more impactful had they been completed in person. In particular, one activity, Identity Signs, was intended to be facilitated in person, as seeing the movement of your peers in a room can be very

powerful. With the ongoing pandemic, I was forced to pivot the implementation of the intervention to a virtual format. While I did collect rich data, I do feel that had I been able to implement this in person I would have had the opportunity to collect additional artifacts, which would have supplemented the data I did collect. The ability to do so in person would have afforded the participants the opportunity to also connect more closely in person. In order to mitigate the limitations experienced as a result of the pandemic, I prepared participant resource kits and sent them out via USPS mail prior to the beginning of the intervention. The kits included hard copies of all team activities, printed copies of testimonios, and a resource list. This helped the participants place themselves within the study and we were all participating in the same activities together, as opposed to a lecture type of teaching experience.

Timing and Scheduling

Due to the aforementioned challenges with the busyness and workload of the TLs, working around their schedules was a challenge. Although the time for the intervention was dedicated and set, the fact that the study took place at the beginning part of the summer served as a limitation. This is traditionally when many employees take vacation time and thus, there were participant absences each session. Unfortunately, there was not a single session of the intervention where all six participants were there together. It is difficult to speculate on the impact this had on the study, because I feel confident that I was able to gather strong data, but I do feel that the study would have been more effective on the participants' growth and development had they been able to share in this learning experience for all sessions, and engage as the CoP as the study was designed to be. One of the ways I worked to mitigate this was to follow up with participants later in the week

of their missed session. This way, I worked to collect data from all participants, regardless of attendance.

Implications for Practice

As mentioned previously, the initial intention when designing the study was to specifically target this professional development with academic advisors. However, targeting this study to the TLs added an additional layer of professional development focused on leadership. Given the focus on cultural competence, the focus of the intervention can be replicated and applied accordingly to other leadership roles. This is especially true in the realm of the student experience teams. Recall from chapter 1 that the student experience teams include the functions of admissions, financial services, and academic advising. The topic of cultural competence is of significant importance to an institution such as SNHU, as the university has a growing Latinx student population. Moreover, the entirety of the staff and faculty makeup of the university are also factors to consider in addressing professional development for improving cultural competence. Developing culturally competent faculty, in particular, could serve as an improvement to the academic success of all students, regardless of ethnicity.

This study's focus on examining cultural competence in the context of Latinx undergraduate students provided a new experience for the TLs. Given SNHU's emphasis on improving equity for minoritized students, this study potentially can serve as a catalyst to further professional development with a Latinx student focus, which is an area that has yet to be addressed at SNHU. While not a direct result of this study, the SNHU leadership team is exploring the role of advising and engaging in conversations on how to improve the function of an advisor related to the student relationship, and balance that with the

needs of the business. This study can contribute to further evidence of the need to improve advisor-student relationships.

Implications for Research

The area of cultural competence professional development continues to be largely targeted to the K-12 environment. This is especially true in the current context of the unfortunate battle over critical pedagogy in schools. This study's focus of professional development for higher education professionals can serve as a catalyst for further research in the role that cultural competence plays in academic success for non-traditional students. Additionally, there has not been significant research in DEI work in online education. Moreover, the need for professional development in this space is clear at SNHU and additional research in this area could be important for PWI across the country, especially in online institutions. It would be interesting to learn the impact on online learners when faculty undergo this type of professional development. One consideration in this space is reviewing the traditional Carnegie Classification system of institutions of higher education. The classification system, while important in determining the allocation of research dollars, does little to factor in the increasingly diverse student population and the needs of those students when determining measures of success.

I had always had intentions of conducting this professional development series directly with academic advisors. Due to the nature of the operations at SNHU and the SWOPS Center, access to academic advisors is limited. Recall in chapter 4 that I relayed the information that the academic advisors are largely evaluated on the metrics of time-- time on red or time on green. Future research could be effective in engaging academic advisors directly with this type of cultural competence professional development.

Because the focus of this study was centered on the leadership development of the TLs as it related to cultural competence, future research could help frame the relationship between academic advising professionals and their supervisors. Since the study was focused on leadership development and how the TLs could apply their learning to their respective teams; the advisor-supervisor relationship can serve as a focus on how belonging and inclusivity are cultivated within the student experience environment.

Lastly, the TLs' roles within the university serve as the first line of middle management functions. The opportunity for researching this particular level of management and leadership is vast. The leadership development of the TLs was a crucial component of the study and further research in this leadership role could help to develop strong recommendations for improving the leadership practices of new leaders in postsecondary institutions. My findings ended with the TLs demonstrating strong willingness and desire to engage further in DEI work, but struggling to find the time and resources to do so. Additional research will be helpful to explore how to improve the balance of the needs of the business and the need for expanded cultural competency.

Closing

The previous chapter provided a discussion and overview of the analysis of the assertions noted in chapter 4. I also included potential implications for practice as well as implications for future research. Ultimately, the study provided the opportunity for the participants to engage in leadership professional development that they would not normally have been given the opportunity to participate in; and the future implications include the possible replication and expansion of this professional development centered on improving cultural competence in leadership roles.

It is important to note that my role within the study was of critical importance. My lived experiences as a native of Tucson, AZ, of a first-generation, Latinx student have greatly informed this dissertation and will continue to inform my research moving forward as I continue to work to improve leadership practices related to cultural competence in working with minoritized students. The cultural intuition with which I approached this research will continue to guide my future research endeavors.

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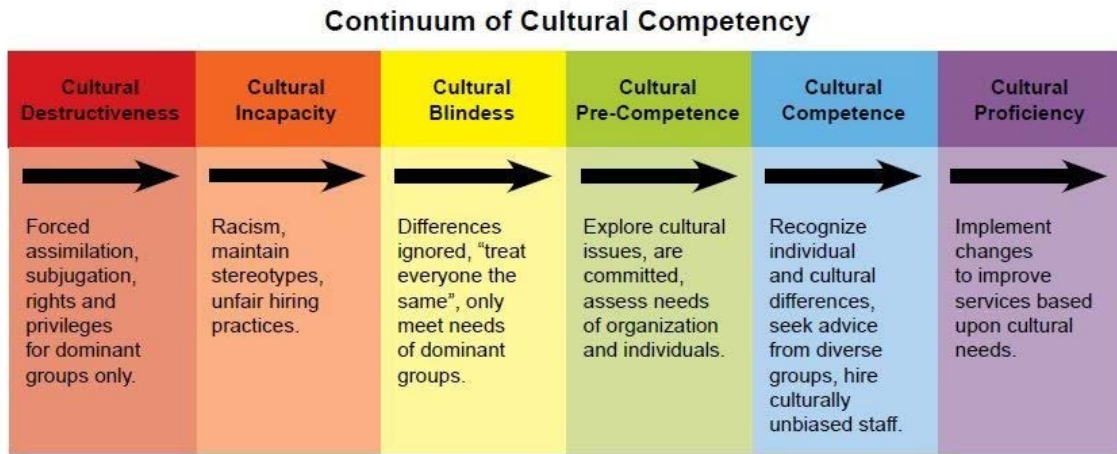
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APPENDIX A

SAMPLE PLAY NOTEBOOK

[MODULE 1
Pre-Work: What does Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion mean to you? Look at the Cultural Proficiency Continuum map. Where do you think you currently fall?

Continuum of Cultural Competency

Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindess	Cultural Pre-Competence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
Forced assimilation, subjugation, rights and privileges for dominant groups only.	Racism, maintain stereotypes, unfair hiring practices.	Differences ignored, "treat everyone the same", only meet needs of dominant groups.	Explore cultural issues, are committed, assess needs of organization and individuals.	Recognize individual and cultural differences, seek advice from diverse groups, hire culturally unbiased staff.	Implement changes to improve services based upon cultural needs.

Post-Work:
What did you learn at today's session?
Why do you think this is important?
How can this be applied to your work with your team?

MODULE 2
Pre-Work: Describe Intersectionality. How does intersectionality affect your view of the world?
Post-Work:
What did you learn at today's session?
Why do you think this is important?
How can this be applied to your work with your team?

MODULE 3

Pre-Work: Describe your own power and privilege and how both of those affect your experience with the world.

Post-Work:
What did you learn at today's session?
Why do you think this is important?
How can this be applied to your work with your team?

MODULE 4
Pre-Work: Take a Project Implicit test
Explain here what you thought of your results.

Post-Work:
What did you learn at today's session?
Why do you think this is important?
How can this be applied to your work with your team?

MODULE 5
Pre-Work: That one time I did...What are microaggressions and why are they a factor in understanding Latinx students?
Share a time when you may have done or said something that could be considered insensitive, inappropriate, or out of line.
Post-Work:
What did you learn at today's session?
Why do you think this is important?
How can this be applied to your work with your team?

MODULE 6
Pre-Work: What do you think Latinx students need to be successful in postsecondary education?
Post-Work:
What did you learn at today's session?
Why do you think this is important?
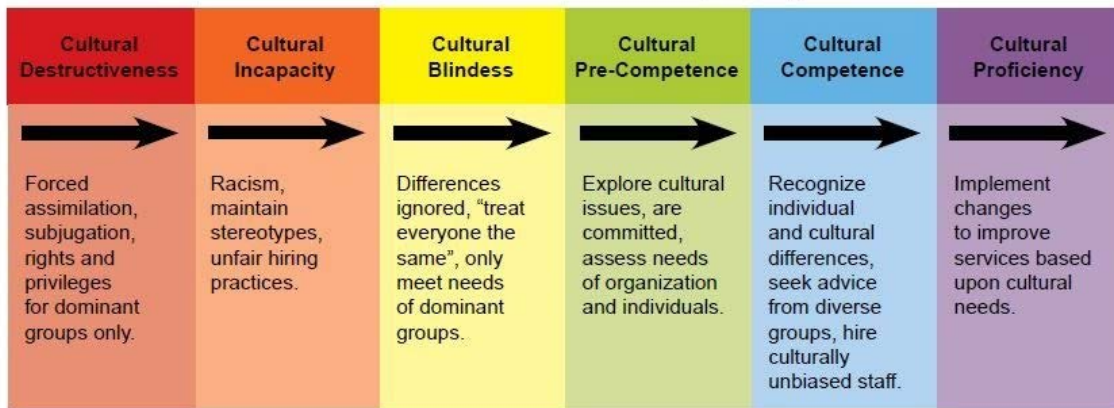How can this be applied to your work with your team?

MODULE 7
Overall Reflection
Revisit the original Cultural Proficiency Continuum. How would you describe your level of cultural competence?
How do you think you can help your team with cultural competence?

Continuum of Cultural Competency

Cultural Destructiveness	Cultural Incapacity	Cultural Blindess	Cultural Pre-Competence	Cultural Competence	Cultural Proficiency
→	→	→	→	→	→
Forced assimilation, subjugation, rights and privileges for dominant groups only.	Racism, maintain stereotypes, unfair hiring practices.	Differences ignored, "treat everyone the same", only meet needs of dominant groups.	Explore cultural issues, are committed, assess needs of organization and individuals.	Recognize individual and cultural differences, seek advice from diverse groups, hire culturally unbiased staff.	Implement changes to improve services based upon cultural needs.

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Before participating in this study, what were your expectations of the project as a

whole?

   a) Did the project meet your expectations?

        i. If so, tell me how…

       ii. If not, tell me how it was different.

2) How did participating in this study make you feel?

3) Tell me about what you found most impactful.

4) Tell me about what you found least impactful.

5) Do you feel as though your perspectives of working with Latinx students has

changed? Why or why not?

6) How do you think you will incorporate what you learned from this Community of

Practice in your work at SNHU with academic advisors?

APPENDIX **C**

CURRICULUM MATERIALS

Power Flower: Our Intersecting Identities

Overview: Every one of us has multiple, nuanced identities that help form our lives. Just as our own identities are complex so too are those of the women we work with. Gender, race, ethnicity, age, education, among others intersect and interact to shape who we are and what challenges and contradictions we confront. As an introduction to a broader analysis of power, the Power Flower promotes a fuller understanding of intersectionality that helps us become more integrated and sensitive human beings and more effective leaders and activists.

Purpose: The Power Flower explores our intersecting identities and the ways that they contribute to both oppression and privilege, illustrating how power is relational and always dynamic. Intersectionality shapes our potential for both exercising authority and becoming compelling, collaborative and transformative organizers and leaders. By reflecting on how these forces operate in people's lives, we deepen our understanding of how identity, power, subordination, and exclusion affect our organizations, ourselves as individuals, and our social change strategies. We realize that to solve the injustices of our time, we need to join forces across our identities to build interconnected movements and action strategies.

Note: The Power Flower can be used after and in conjunction with the Identity Flower which introduces the concept of intersectionality at a basic level. You will need to make adjustments in the step by step process for this exercise, depending on whether you combine these two activities. The Power Flower, itself, can be used to analyze different layers of our identity from the very personal and social to the organizational and political. Depending on time, you may just want to focus on the social dimension and only mention the organizational and political aspects briefly.

Time: 1 hour and 45 minutes Materials and Space Necessary:

- ● Sheets of paper in a variety of colors with flower outline (see below)
- ● Markers and/or crayons

- • Tape or glue
- • Flip chart
- • Newsprint
- • Handouts and readings
- • Empty wall

Process:

Prior to exercise:

● Before the exercise, draw the power flower on a large piece of paper and place it on the wall. Label each petal to represents a different category, which can include: sex, race, ethnic group, class, language, religion, family type of arrangements (single, extended, etc.), age group, education, marital status (married, divorced, single), ability/disability, location (urban/suburban/rural), geographic region (origin), geographic region (current), etc. The central part of the flower represents a person's nationality. The inner petals indicate the individual's specific identity e.g. gender: female; religion: Muslim, etc. The outer ones represent the specific identity of those in power, e.g. gender: male; religion: Catholic. In creating the flower, choose 6 - 7 categories of identity that you think most relevant to your context and write them on the respective petals. In the exercise, each person will fill out their own characteristics. See below for sample of the social dimension of identity.

Adapted by Lisa VeneKlasen and Valerie Miller, originally designed by Bev Burke, Barb Thomas, et. al.

Credit:
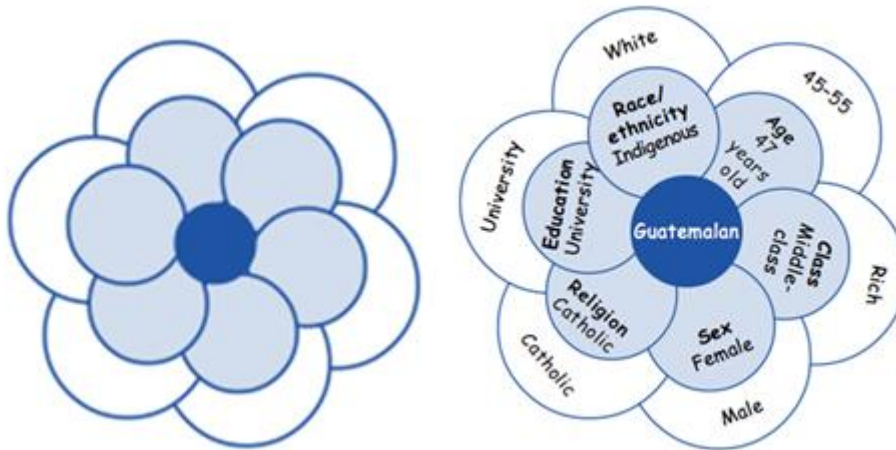
In plenary:

- ● Introduce purpose of exercise – highlighting that this is a way to reflect on who we are in relationship to those in power and what characteristics we draw on in our leadership and movement-building. If the group has not done the identity flower, you might mention that we draw on multiple layers of identities in our lives and work. Explain that we will be using the symbol of a flower to map a few key elements of our identities and their relationship to power.

Note: To further introduce the process you might consider the following as an explanation or use it in the wrap up.

We are members of more than one community at the same time and so can experience oppression and privilege simultaneously. As some academics say, we possess multiple identities, multiple social characteristics. We have, for example, professional identities and identities as wife or mother. How does this work? A doctor is respected in her profession but may suffer domestic violence at home in her private life. She experiences both privilege and domination at the same time. Intersectionality is an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with other social characteristics or identities and contributes to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Just as gender-blind programming is likely to fail, so are blunt instruments that slot people into simple categories like "poor", "young", "rural", etc. By reflecting on how these multiple aspects operate in our own lives, we can gain a better sense of ourselves and our relationship to power and understand how these factors influence others. Since everyone is made up of different characteristics, we need to find points of connection and action with people across these differences so

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that we can tackle the multiple forms of discrimination we face whether they be due to class, race, gender, age etc.

- ● Describe the flower: Each petal represents one category of identity, point out the specific categories that you have chosen for the purpose of the exercise, and mention some of the others as well so they get the concept. The central part of the flower represents a person's nationality. The inner petals indicate the individual's specific identity e.g. sex: female; religion: Muslim, etc. The outer ones represent the specific identity of those in power, e.g. sex: male; religion: Catholic.
- ● Discuss each category and the characteristics of those who have most power in the society. Using the drawing on the wall, fill in these dominant characteristics for that category in the outside circle of each petal. (For example, which sex or which ethnic group has the most power.)

Individually:

- ● Hand out pieces of paper with pre-drawn flowers on them to each person.
- ● Ask everyone to work by themselves and write in the outer petals of their flowers

  those dominant characteristics that were agreed on by the group for each respective

  category.

- ● Have each person write their own identity for each petal/category on the flower's

  inner circle.

- ● When finished, ask them to think about the following questions and jot down some of

  their ideas:

o How many of your personal characteristics are different from the dominant

identity?
o Which characteristics cannot be changed?
o What does this say about your own power or potential for exercising power? o How might this influence your work as an organizer/facilitator?

In plenary:

● Hold a "garden or flower show" in which the flowers are affixed to the wall. Everyone takes a stroll around the show and stops before a flower where each participant gives some of her reflections regarding the questions above, especially the last two.

In small groups: Going deeper:

- ● What does the exercise reveal about us as a group? In particular: What are the

  differences and similarities in relation to the dominant power? How can that influence

our work?

- ● What does this exercise tell us about identity and power more broadly?

In plenary:

- ● Present and discuss responses from small groups.
- ● Synthesize key ideas and deepen reflections, emphasizing, for example, that each of

us has a complex identity made up of different aspects and that those using power over – in other words oppressive forms of power – use these differences to pit us against one another, or to discriminate against a whole set of people and ideas, etc. Here you could make reference to patriarchy and the Master's House as examples of how these dynamics come together and silence us.

The Complexity of Individual Identity

This analysis helps reveal the relationships between women and the processes of subordination that affect their lives. Because each individual has many identities, individuals can be dominant in one relationship and subordinate in another. For example, being a woman or man is only one part of an individual's identity. Other aspects such as age, class, race, and ethnicity also affect that person's social relations and power. While each situation presents a unique configuration of power imbalances and dynamics, in most hierarchies of power, wealthy males are dominant. To be effective as activists, we need to take these things into consideration in our leadership, our strategies and within our organizations.

● Further analysis: If you feel it's useful, after you have concluded your discussion on aspects of social identity and intersectionality, you can go deeper by looking at organizational identity and/or political identity. The elements for organizational and political identity usually differ more than for social identity between cultures and contexts. Some possible dimensions are:

Organizational Identity:

- ● Category of the organization: e.g., government, NGO or type of NGO, private sector, community-based or peoples' organization, social movement, coalition, labor union, women's organization
- ● Structure: e.g., collective, hierarchical, voluntary, paid, professional, business
- ● Position within the organization: e.g., director, head of specific program, member,

    trainer, technical specialist, lobbyist, volunteer

    Political Identity:

● It is difficult to prescribe a process for analyzing political identity. The categories – left, right, and center – are common in most contexts, but the shades of difference in political identity in different contexts cannot be universalized. This analysis can be broken down in terms of political tendency or political party affiliation.

Handouts: You can use these examples to discuss intersectionality. You may want to share various readings on Intersectionality as well.

Examples of Intersectionality:

Globally

Traffickers target specific groups of women and girls – those who are vulnerable because of racial, sexual, class, and descent-based discrimination. They are often tricked into leaving their homes and countries by the promise of better work opportunities. Gender considerations alone cannot accurately describe or respond to the problem. Sex workers in the Netherlands have organized and won many rights of protection. However, these rights are mainly enjoyed by white, Native-Dutch sex workers but missing from the lives of darker- skinned, immigrant women.

USA

Women of color are subjected to racial discrimination in the USA. Additionally, their experiences will be shaped by class, ethnicity, education, sexual and gender identity and age which have their own social and political dynamics of privilege, power and oppression. Depending on the intersections of these identities, women will be treated differently in different contexts. A middle class African-American university professor, for example, while sharing some experiences with an African-American woman who works as a cleaner in a non- union hotel, will likely deal with different kinds of vulnerability, discrimination and power.

India

When a young girl is assaulted at a school bus stop in India, the first reaction is to demand better police security on the road. However, community consultations plus statistical and contextual analysis reveal that this is less of a police security issue per se. Rather, the assault reveals discrimination against Dalit girls and women who are part of the untouchable caste, usually poor, often dark-skinned, and whose families are without formal education. To respond to this kind of discrimination and aggression demands a different set of remedies and solutions beyond increased policing. The intersection of gender, race, class, education and social status needs to be factored into any response as well.

Canada

In Canada, experience shows that single, black women have a particularly hard time finding apartments – landlords buy into various stereotypes based on race, gender, and marital status and consider them unreliable. On the basis of sex or race alone, this discrimination would not be fully understood. Courts would fail to see that there is bias against those who are single, black and female. If they are poor or immigrants, class and other biases also enter the picture.

Identity Signs

Materials & Media:
- ❏ Identity signs
- ❏ Clips, tape, or something sticky to hang the signs

Set Up:
Hang up the identity signs around the room—ideally, before the workshop begins so they are part of the space from the very beginning. If you think they'll be a distraction, hang another piece of paper in front of each one

Goals & Learning Outcomes:
To allow a space for participants to talk about their experiences and their identities in a more personal way and to provide an opportunity for others to learn from those personal stories
To highlight that people with similar identities can experience different levels of salience, self-awareness, and can be differently impacted by their intersecting identities
To talk about how we experience our identities on a day-to-day basis
To highlight how everyone may experience pain, ostracism, or discrimination, yet feel it within the context of different identities

Framing:
"For this activity, we are going to be moving around the room in response to some questions I am going to be posing to the group. The questions are going to be related to your identities, others' perception of your identities, and your experience of your identities. You can choose to share or not share after the questions. (During most rounds, not everyone will share after every question.) This activity is really about getting to know each others' experiences and having time to reflect on how we all can have similar or wildly different experiences rooted in our identities or experiences of them."

Process Steps & Talking Points:
Ask participants to prepare themselves to move around the room. (Make sure that the room is set up in a way that will allow all participants to move around the room easily to be under or close to the different signs.)
Give the directions for the activity: "I am going to read a series of questions and would like you to choose an identity that you feel answers the question for you. If you have more than one identity that could be true for that question, we encourage you to pick only one as a response. We then will have time to talk about why we answered the way we did and to speak to what that experience was like. After, I'll read another question and we will continue the process like that. You do not have to share at any point, however, and I encourage you to consider how much you are sharing in order to make space for others. Does anyone have any questions about the instructions of the activity?"
Read the first prompt, provide time for participants to move around and give time for sharing and processing. Repeat.

Depending on the time you've allotted for the activity, you may also want to debrief the activity after the fact.

Statements for the activity:
The part of my identity that I am most aware of on a daily basis is_____.

The part of my identity that I am the least aware of on a daily basis is_____.

The part of my identity that was most emphasized or important in my family growing up was _____.

The part of my identity that I wish I knew more about is _____.

The part of my identity that provides me the most privilege is _____.

The part of my identity that I believe is the most misunderstood by others is _____.

The part of my identity that I feel is difficult to discuss with others who identify differently is _____.

The part of my identity that makes me feel discriminated against is _____.

Debrief/Process Questions:
What was that activity like?
What did you notice about the way that people were distributed around the room that struck you?
Were there any identity categories that you wish had existed but were not options?
Anything else you'd like to add before we move on from the activity?

Wrap Up:
To close up this activity it is good to summarize some of the major points that were brought up in the debrief and/or to thank everyone for their honestly/vulnerability in what they were willing to name or share in the actual activity itself. Even if some people don't verbally share, moving under/near the signs may bring up a lot of emotion or may take a lot of courage; therefore, it is good to highlight your appreciation of the group's participation.

Co-Facilitator Notes:
It is good to have a few moments to discuss which statements you want to read and which you want your co-facilitator to read. You can also read all the statements and your co-facilitator can facilitate people sharing their thoughts/experiences or lead the debrief.

Bring Your Style:
You can orient this activity around a specific subset of identities so as to generate more in-depth discussion about one area or subset of social justice work. You could do this

activity around identity signs related to sexuality and include signs like: sexual history, sexual interest, sexual orientation, gender identity, attractions to others, etc.

This is also an activity that you can include your own participation or not. If it is a small group and it would feel negatively voyeuristic to not participant, then you may want to consider answering the questions as well.

Challenges & Tips
This activity is labeled as "high trust" because it provides a lot of opportunity for personal and deep sharing and participants often need to feel comfortable, safe, and ready to share personal stories and experiences with each other. Without pre-established trust, participants may not be ready/willing to do this.

Depending on the group and the way folks learn/take in information, you may want project onto a screen the statements that you are asking as you go along so that participants can read them. We would not necessarily recommend providing participants with the statement sheet because they may be distracted by thinking about the statements that come later.

Sexual Orientation
Race
Class

Gender Identity
Gender Presentation

Sex
National Origin

Ethnicity
Immigration Status

Religious Affiliation

Race & Me

Materials & Media Required:
Participant handout
Writing utensils

Set Up Required:
N/A

Goals & Learning Outcomes:
Participants will be able to identify what their self-identified racial identity is
Participants will be able to report how salient they believe their racial identity is from a personal perspective
Participants will be able to discuss how their racialized experience differs (or is similar) to that of at least one of their fellow participants

Framing:
discussions of race and racism are often separated from our own experience
we are going to spend time reflecting on our own identities and experiences
after we do that, we will ask you to pair up and debrief some of your reflections

Process Steps & Talking Points:
Distribute the handout to participants and let them know they have approximately 5 minutes to work on it. (Let participants know they don't have to compose full sentences in response to the questions, but can simply write bullet points.)
After the 5 minutes have elapsed, ask individuals to pair up and to work through a few the debrief questions on the back of their handout.
Bring the large group back together, and (if time allows) ask the pairs to share their biggest takeaway from the experience.

Debrief/Process Questions:
What was it like to do this activity?
What was it like to share your reflections with your partner?
What is your biggest takeaway from this experience?

Wrap Up:
For some of us race and racism affects other people or are concepts that feel removed from us.
All of us have a racialized experience and that experience is heavily influenced by how others interact and view our race.
It is important for each of us to spend time reflecting on our own racialized understand and experience in order to better see our personal stake and place in the larger race/racism discussion.

Co-Facilitator Notes:
If you and your co-facilitator do not need the time to check in with each other about the flow of the workshop, it can be good if both of you can do this activity along with the participants (and debrief together). If there is an odd number of participants, then one of you can pair off with that individual and fill in for a participant.

Bring Your Style:
You do not have to debrief this activity in pairs: you can jump straight into a large-group discussion, or leave it simply as a reflective activity.

Challenges & Tips:
This activity may be challenging for some individuals who have not previously considered these kinds of questions. White people and people of color may have significantly different reactions, responses, and emotions during this activity; it is important to acknowledge this, as these responses arise in the room. Dig into those differences as there is deep learning possible from understanding just how varied are realities are when it comes to having to think about race.

Race & Me Worksheet

How would you classify or identify your race?

Do you believe or experience your race as a salient part of your identity?

Do you think that your race is an important thing to understand about yourself?

How do you believe other people view/see your race?

How does your race influence (or not) your choice to study your subject and/or your choice to pursue your professional path?

OTHER RESOURCES

Harvard Project Implicit: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/

Sample Privilege Walk: https://youtu.be/4K5fbQ1-zps

New York Times Mini Films on Race:
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/your-stories/conversations-on-race

APPENDIX D

IRB APPROVALS

IRB #: IRB-FY2021-4
Title: Latinx Student Experience Community of Practice
Creation Date: 1-27-2021
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Esperanza Freitchen
Review Board: Global Campus Board
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member	Amy Markos	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	ampost@asu.edu
Member	Esperanza Freitchen	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	e.freitchen@snhu.edu
Member	Esperanza Freitchen	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	e.freitchen@snhu.edu

MODIFICATIONS REQUIRED TO SECURE APPROVAL

Amy Markos
Division of Educational Leadership and Innovation - West Campus
602/543-6624

Dear Amy Markos:

On 3/23/2021 the ASU IRB reviewed the following protocol:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Exploring Identity and Cultural Competence: Academic Advisor Leaders Learning the Latinx Student Experience
Investigator:	Amy Markos
IRB ID:	STUDY00013621
Funding:	None
Grant Title:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	• APPENDIX D.pdf, Category: Resource list; • Consent Form-SNHU version, Category: Consent Form; • IRB Social Behavioral 2019_Freitchen_LSECoP v3.pdf, Category: IRB Protocol; • Privilege List, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them); • Recruitment Script v3.pdf, Category: Recruitment Materials; • SAMPLE PLAY NOTEBOOK.pdf, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them); • Semi-Structured Interview Questions, Category:

	Measures (Survey questions/Interview questions /interview guides/focus group questions); • SNHU Approval, Category: Consent Form; • WE:Rise, Category: Participant materials (specific directions for them);

The IRB determined that modifications are required to approve the protocol. The modifications are considered minor and can be reviewed by the Chair or designee on behalf of the committee. The modifications required and their reasons are listed here:

1. Add PI's affiliation to ASU in the introduction section of consent form.

2. Revise the sentence 'De-identified data collected as a part of this

study will/will not be shared with other investigators for future research purposes' to state 'De-identified data collected as a part of this study will not be shared with other investigators for future research purposes'

You are asked to submit:

- A letter with a point-by-point response to the above.
- A copy of all revised documents in "Tracked Changes" format or similarly notated to indicate what changes were made.
- A "clean" copy of all revised and requested additional documents.

If you have questions, you can email research.integrity@asu.edu

Sincerely,

IRB Administrator
cc: Esperanza Freitchen
       Esperanza Freitchen