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Ethnographic Paper

Introduction

The United States of America is commonly referred to as a “melting pot”, blending diverse peoples into one through assimilation, integration, and intermarriage. However, the experience of all the diverse groups of peoples in this country is certainly not shared “as one”. People of different demographics tend to experience and understand race in vastly different ways. For example, males and females, whites and blacks certainly have unlike experiences in this country. As the nation stands today, Chicanas have a distinctive perspective as well that sets them apart from many of the other races in the US. For the purpose of this study, the researcher was curious to learn how the nation’s current political climate combined with societal handicaps for women affected the lives and experiences of Chicana University students. In order to analyze these questions and better understand how Chicanas understand and experience race in the U.S., ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in the form of formal interviews. The collected data strongly indicated overwhelmingly similar opinions that implied Chicanas were at some form of a disadvantage in virtually all of the topics explored with this study.

Group Description

The subjects in this study were all females, chosen primarily based on the principles of gender: “the set of culturally and historically invented beliefs and expectations about gender that one learns and performs. Gender is an “identity” one can choose in some societies, but there is

pressure in all societies to conform to expected gender roles and identities” (Brown 675). In compliance with the human subject guidelines, all of the participants were between the ages of 18 and 65 and in “full possession of their mental faculties.” All of the subjects were able to identify themselves as either a Democrat or Republican. These views were taken into account in reaching a rational conclusion about the varied understandings and experiences of race in the United States. Five individuals provided their insight into various facets of their life at University and their political preferences and how, if at all, they felt their race played a role in those aspects. The subjects were selected without any prior relationship or knowledge of their backgrounds so as to remove any bias from their potential responses. The group at the focal point of this study were Chicana female undergraduate students. This classifies as a group based on multiple shared factors such as gender, race and status (student). Hispanics in America face racism, especially in the past year after the election of Donald Trump as the President. Additionally, women all over the world have many disadvantages in society. The researcher believed it would be interesting to see how one’s experience and understanding of race is affected when these factors are combined. Additionally, the researcher thought it would be noteworthy to study how certain aspects of being a student (i.e. gaining financial aid, admission to colleges) are affected by race.

Methods

Ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in the form of interviews in order to collect direct and relevant data. An interview is “a research strategy of gathering data through formal or informal conversation with informants” (Brown 109). The interviews were transcribed and used to assess the opinions and viewpoints of each participant involved in the study. Participant observation is another commonly used form of ethnographic fieldwork that is defined as “a type of observation in which the anthropologist observes while participating in the same activities in

which her informants are engaged” (Brown 51). The main issue with this form of data collection is that it leaves a lot up to one’s imagination in that the researcher does not receive any explicit data from the subjects that are being studied, rather any data analysis in this case is implicit. Ultimately, the strategy of conducting interviews was chosen since it provided direct answers from the subjects, therefore diminishing any scope of error or guesswork. The inclusion of transcripts from each interview that was conducted was fundamental in ensuring that all of the information was accurately composed and applied.

Uniformity is key in conducting ethnographic fieldwork. The methods of conducting each interview remained constant. All of the interviews took place in the University Center, a familiar and populous environment, where subjects could feel a sense of comfort. Before each conversation began, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and thanked for their willingness to participate. Most importantly, all of the participants were assured of the absolute anonymity of their responses in this study. The names of the participants were not recorded; their responses are simply denoted by their initials. Additionally, each subject was informed prior to the interview that they held the right to withdraw their consent could be withdrawn at any time. The interview questions that the researcher formed were created with the intent to remain neutral and objective. Throughout the interview process, the researcher held back any form of feedback to the subjects while recording their responses to the questions. Each participant was asked the same set of questions; the only differences between the questions asked to each participant were the follow-up questions pertaining to each individual’s unique response. Any follow-up questions were asked in the same neutral and objective manner. All of these regulations were implemented by the researcher with the intentions of removing any possibilities of bias from the data collected, so as not to skew the conclusions of the study.

Data Analysis and Conclusion

Social science research has increasingly sought to conceptualize race as an intricate concept in which context, societal relations, and institutional dynamics are key components. Utilizing a specially designed study, multiple measures including gender, political preference, and financial status were analyzed to capture race as “lived experience” and assess their impact on Chicanas’ in the United States.

In terms of politics, when asked about their political party preferences, the overwhelming response of the subjects was that they were Democrats and preferred the policies of Barack Obama over Donald Trump. When followed-up with the question of does race affect this decision, everyone said yes. They feel hurt by the things that he says about Hispanics, and fear his plans like the wall, which NO has already seen prototypes of in her own city. It is evident that the political climate of this country has a direct negative impact on the experience of race for Chicanas.

Gender is “the set of culturally and historically invented beliefs and expectations about gender that one learns and performs. Gender is an “identity” one can choose in some societies, but there is pressure in all societies to conform to expected gender roles and identities” (Brown 675). When questioned about societal expectations of females, the majority of subjects felt that they were inferior to men. XG stated “I don’t believe that society has built things for women with the sole intent of making them for women...Like things are made for women as an afterthought, because we had to fight as women to have these things.” MC however felt that being a Chicana female had its advantages, in that she felt more looked out for by her family. This gives the sense that though the majority of Chicanas interviewed felt at a societal

disadvantage as a woman, perhaps the combined experience of race and gender help to empower rather than hinder one's place in society.

A look into the social and economic situations at University for these Chicana students was consistent with the rest of the data gathered in that they were predominantly at an advantage socially but disadvantage economically. Eighty percent of the subjects that were interviewed currently receive at least one form of financial aid and felt at an economic disadvantage compared to the general population of UCSB. Only one of the girls interviewed felt that she was well-off financially, and felt at an economic advantage over most minorities at UCSB. This implies that students of minority races, including Chicanas, tend to be at an economic disadvantage at University, and heavily rely on financial aid.

On the contrary, in social and academic situations, the subjects felt at a better position than their fellow students. Sixty percent of the subjects felt that their race did have a positive impact on their acceptance into universities, in terms of quotas and affirmative action. Though there were subjects that felt at an advantage during the college admissions process, overall it did not impact why these girls applied to UCSB. In addition to this, the subjects remarkably conveyed the feeling that their closer friends here were Chicana/Latinx peoples. They tended to feel more comfortable with people of their own race, especially at a school like UCSB with a large white population. Cultural relativism is "the idea that we should seek to understand another person's beliefs and behaviors from the perspective of their own culture and not our own." XG stated that she is trying not to care about what someone's race is and "not be so pissed at white people", while NO has not made friends with any white people. It is intriguing that the first race these subjects compared themselves to were whites, and not Asians who also have a large population at this university.

Generally, the subjects feel safe at this school. MC stated, “at the beginning I felt I did not belong, a lot of whites, a lot of Asians, I did not see myself coming here...I feel pretty safe here.” Similarly, NO states “I guess there are times as a minority where I feel uncomfortable when I’m surrounded by large groups of white people but they have never mistreated me.” XG also “felt on the outside many times at UCSB.” These subjects implied that the fact that they were not white had an impact on their comfort levels at times while attending university. However, any true discrimination against Chicanas seems to be a minimum. Only one of the subjects reported feeling that the CAPS staff treated her differently, however when appointed to another staff member that was also a minority, she received proper help. This one case itself is unacceptable and should not happen in the first place. It just goes to show how minorities share a similar struggle and can better relate to each other, which may help explain why the Chicana subjects that were studied mentioned several times feeling different and struggled to relate to the white students at UCSB, not only socially but also economically and politically.

The overarching conclusion stemming from the data collected through these interviews and this study as a whole is that as a combined result of the current political climate and societal standings of females in the United States, one’s experience and understanding of race as a Chicana is significantly diminished. Although there are outlier subjects that feel that being a Latina female has its advantages, or that they are actually at an economic advantage compared to their fellow students, the majority of responses gathered in this subject placed Chicanas at a strong disadvantage in numerous situations in University. On a broader scale, as the nation stands today, it is apparent that Chicanas face systemic difficulties predominantly as a result of their race, and are arguably further handicapped in society by their status as females and deprived financial situations.

Bibliography

Brown, Nina, et al. Perspectives: An Open Invitation to Cultural Anthropology. American Anthropology Association.

Appendix

Prompt: *How do people experience and understand race in the United States?*

Research Questions:

- How does the combined experience of race and gender help/harm one in terms of applying to and attending university in the United States?
- What role does politics play in the experience and understanding of race in the United States?

Key Terms/Concepts:

- Ethnographic Fieldwork
- Gender
- Cultural Determinism
- Cultural Relativism

Interview Questions

1. What does race mean to you?

MC: Race means color

CV: There shouldn't really be an idea of races, colonialism & there is more of just a human race as a whole

NO: Race is what you identify yourself as

AV: I guess who you are

XG: Race is fake, just a way to keep people in boxes and keep colonialism alive. Culture is real, ethnicity is real. But race is a construct we all participate in.

2. As a female, how have you benefited/not benefited from certain privileges our society has constructed?

MC: Yeah, I guess, being a Latina female there are advantages. Everyone looks after you and your family, but there are more restrictions in my household like when I'm going out with my friends my mom always asks me a bunch of questions like: "How far are you going" "With who?" "What time are you going to go?" I always had to be back before the sun set, as opposed to brother, who had no questions asked when he would go out

CV: I feel I am more at a disadvantage than an advantage with job wages and rape culture and all that

NO: As a female, like we're viewed inferior especially to men. Like mainly in the workforce, but I haven't experienced it yet but from what I've seen, women get paid less than men. And like I haven't really been discriminated against like oh I'm a girl like I can't do this and that, like social wise, but like in the workforce.

AV: I guess how people view you and stereotype you benefit you, I have benefitted like my family has gone through stuff and I have pushed myself to be where I am right now

XG: I like to think that I am beautiful and have a beautiful soul and these qualities of beauty have benefited me because society values beauty. I don't think I benefit from most other things that society has constructed for women because I don't believe that society has built things for women with the sole intent of making them for women...Like things are made for women as an afterthought, because we had to fight as women to have these things.

3. Do you feel your race had any impact on what schools you were accepted to?

MC: I think so, I heard that if schools have 26% Hispanics in their population they receive a grant, also I was not the best student at my school, I had the lowest GPA out of all of the 4 other students from my high school that were accepted here to UCSB, I think my race definitely helped

CV: Yes, I feel like some schools wanted to diversify their student body

NO: I don't think so, I don't know I haven't thought about statistics like how many Latinos are at UCSB

AV: Probably because we are minorities and they wanted to add more diversity, because I saw some statistics and there were barely any Hispanics in some of the schools

XG: Personally, I don't think it affected what schools I got into. I came in as a zoology major and switched to Sociology & Chicano Studies. The people reading my applications couldn't have planned for that. Affirmative action is real and true, but I don't think I was accepted to meet a fucking quota. I'm worth something.

a) Did it affect why you applied to UCSB?

MC: A part of me was hesitant because my friends and everyone used to say that this school was just whites and Asians, so it played a role, but at the end of the day I visited here, and I agree but there are a good number of Chicanos.

CV: No

NO: No, basically like being Mexican, regardless of whatever school you apply to like you're still going to be a minority like especially in the UCs, I guess the state schools are a little more diverse like Channel Islands or Fullerton, but UCs you're going to be a minority regardless

AV: I heard that UCSB was a Hispanic serving institution so that made me more comfortable here to have more people of the same race

XG: Nah, like I said, I'm more than a quota. I didn't apply with intentions of being accepted based on race.

4. Do you have political party preference?

MC: I just follow up with my parents, I am a democrat

CV: Democrat

NO: I identify as a democrat

AV: Democrat

XG: I mean what even are political parties at this point. I voted as a democrat and identified as one before this election. Now I feel like there's serious reform that's got to happen.

a) Do you identify more with the policies of Donald Trump or Barack Obama?

MC: Barack Obama

CV: Barack Obama

NO: I love Obama

AV: Barack Obama

XG: Obama

b) Does your race play a role in this decision?

MC: Yes, because Obama was more lenient towards the Latino race and less harsh with referring to them in specific terms unlike Donald Trump

CV: I think it kind of has to, yes

NO: It does, big time, especially with all the racist comments that Trump has been making, I can experience what he's saying with building a wall because where I live they are building prototypes and I've literally seen them, it's affecting me

AV: Yes

XG: I guess my race does play a role to a certain extent because I'm hurt by the shit Trump says. But I don't really see how race would affect the way I feel about his environmental policies and all the other dumb shit he says.

5. How would you describe the type of people you have befriended at this university?

What are their races/genders?

MC: With my roommates it's sort of a forced friendship, one of my roommates is half-Latina half-Caucasian and she was raised by a Japanese stepfather, we don't really connect like in terms of a friendship that will last forever, my other roommate is Asian, there is a language barrier, hard to understand what she says, closer friends here from my classes and my building are Latina

CV: Mostly Latino, Chicana, mainly females

NO: Basically, I have only surrounded myself with Mexicans, like my friends that came here from my high school they were Mexican, so like we also found like groups like especially in like San Miguel like they have a Latino floor so we've made friends through that, so like for me I haven't made friends with white people even though I am surrounded by them

AV: Mostly pretty mixed, one is Indian, one is Chinese

XG: My best friends here are 2 Chicanas. I'm rly trying to heal myself and not be so pissed at white people so I really don't care what someone's race is, like if we vibe we vibe. Persian friends, Chicano friends, Filipino, white, black, Korean.

a) Do you ever feel that you are at an advantage or disadvantage in any social situations at University because of your race?

MC: Feels at an advantage in Chicano studies class. My parents have gone through that, certain clubs here are specific to my race so I feel more included there even though they include everyone, taking sociology my professor asked

about our culture, yes, I had Christmas and some traditions, but this one girl said, “I’m white I have no culture”, I have a distinct culture while others here do not

CV: Not significantly, but I do notice a slight distance between each race

NO: Um I don’t think that I’ve ever felt like oh just because I’m Mexican I can’t participate in stuff

AV: Sometimes disadvantage as a minority figure

XG: Not rly, I think this university rly does its best to make space, and to teach people to take steps back and forward. Like if some white guy interrupts me in section I just continue my thought. I think people need to learn to be bold and to understand and be able to claim their space.

6. Do you currently receive any form of financial aid?

MC: Yes, FAFSA and Pell Grant

CV: Yes, scholarship, the Dream Act

NO: Zero dollars

AV: Yes, FAFSA and Pell Grant

XG: Hella loans

a) Do you feel that you are at an economic advantage or disadvantage compared to the general population of students attending UCSB?

MC: Disadvantage because I had to apply to both of those and still paying out of pocket, I talked to my roommates and told them it was hard for me to come up with 2000 out of pocket, they kind of compared my position to theirs, my Asian roommate said I pay out of state tuition 2000 is whatever, my other roommate

didn't apply for financial aid because both of her parents have a good financial situation

CV: Economic disadvantage

NO: My parents make good money despite being a minority so I am supported well through them, I guess I might be at an advantage because I don't struggle to buy textbooks and stuff like that when others, especially minorities might

AV: Economic disadvantage

XG: Disadvantage for sure, I didn't realize I was working class until I came here and was surrounded by girls wearing Lulu Lemon.

7. How would you describe your personal comfort level and sense of safety on our campus?

MC: I will not lie, at the beginning freshman orientation I felt I did not belong, a lot of whites, a lot of Asians, I did not see myself coming here, everything was so fast-paced. I'm a first gen student, everyone at orientation was like "my brother told me to take this and that" ...well MY brother was a college dropout. I feel pretty safe here.

CV: I feel fairly comfortable and safe

NO: I feel safe they have like room checks and RAs, I guess there are times as a minority where I feel uncomfortable when I'm surrounded by large groups of white people but they have never mistreated me

AV: Pretty comfortable, I don't feel threatened or anything

XG: I'm pretty comfortable, at night walking ill call someone usually because I do get spooked. I never rly go to or leave a party alone, and I always carry some form of protection

8. Do you feel you have experienced any form of discrimination at UCSB?

CV: No

NO: Not so far

XG: I've felt on the outside many times at UCSB but not because of its official staff & faculty. Mostly because of the students and the harsh divide that continues to grow between the white and colored students on campus. Like I really don't feel that a professor or TA, counselor, anyone has treated me differently. But the students do.

AV: No not from what I've seen

MC: I personally wasn't aware of that, I went to CAPS and talked to this one lady who was white but she didn't seem very genuine when trying to make me feel better, just printed out worksheets and told me to read them and called them a panic attack, I did not feel fine, came back a few days later to a black lady someone referred me to and she was like have you come here before who have you talked to and when I told her she was like well she can't really relate to what you're going through,

a) Did the black woman help you?

MC: Yes, she pulled from her personal issues, and made it feel like what I was going through was normal and told me to go do something other than schoolwork to distract myself.