

Reflection Paper

I originally learned about food insecurity and about the Cougar Pantry in one of my classes and we talked about what food insecurity was, how it affects college students and what were the measures that the university were doing to combat food insecurity. We also discussed how the pantry is one of the ways to address food insecurity. The class felt relevant to myself and my community as we are prone to face food insecurity. As I wanted to pursue graduate school and due to the of lack of research experience, I decided to do an independent study with one of my professors and I knew that I wanted to research something around the Latino community as I identify as Latino. My professor shared with me a finding from the Cougar Pantry report, Latinos reported mental health benefits from using the pantry, and that no other ethnic or racial group reported mental health benefits from using the pantry. We tried to make sense of why they reported mental health benefits, and that is when I began to research the finding. I conducted a literature review to explore a surprising quantitative finding from a recent evaluation. My professor recommended me to apply to PSA, Pacific Sociological Association, and present my research paper at PSA 2023 in Washington. I then began to explore mental health among Latinos, experiences at school and the important of food for Latino culture. I applied and submitted a research proposal to PSA and was accepted to present but unfortunately due to family and personal issues I was unable to attend.

I broke up the research of scholarly articles in three parts; looking at food and culture, sense of belonging and mental health. Using the library's databases, I searched food and culture, via the Sociological Abstracts and Google Scholar databases and found a few articles and I would look at the citation and what sources the article would use to help expand my search. At first, I kept finding articles that only talked about health and food insecurity, both important

topics but were not directed at what I was seeking and had to narrow down my search. The articles that talked about food and culture were limited. It was the opposite for sense of belonging research, there was an abundance of articles and distinct aspects of sense of belonging for Latinos. I decided to look for how Latinos thrived in school and what challenges they faced in college by using key words such as “success” “retention” and “barriers.” The difficult part was picking what articles would help me better understand Latino’s experiences in college. I used Sociological Abstracts and Academic Search Priemer to find my articles. For mental health I used the PsycInfo and Google Scholar databases and it was difficult to find articles that talked about Latinos and mental health that would connect to my research paper. Also, I was trying to use articles that had qualitative data but once again, it was very limited research on Latinos college students and mental health. What I really found helpful was how easy it was to access scholarly articles and how fast the Interlibrary Loan would share articles if requested.

After looking deep into the literature, I soon realized that there is so much to explore in the research of pantry, Latinos using the pantry, mental health, differences between genders, food insecurity. I believe that my paper is looking at one small fraction of the larger issue and one way that can help Latinos in college. I feel motivated as there is still a lot to explore, this finding goes way beyond doing research for an independent study. If I can bring new knowledge to help other Latino students, it will be a way of giving back to my community and giving thanks to the previous researchers who have contributed to improving the college experiences and success for Latinos, which I am benefiting from. I would want to return the favor by also adding new knowledge and findings to help new students. I hope Latinos can improve their mental health and connect with their cultural identity while in college.