**Research Experience and Reflection**

Throughout the course of the semester my research process has grown and changed as I developed new skills and gained new knowledge. I have been a psychology major longer than a criminology major, while the fundamental principles of academic research are similar across both fields, this class has significantly strengthened my research process. Additionally, it has provided me with valuable approaches to both conducting research and exploring previous research as well as provided me with new skills helpful for analyzing results. For example, through this course I learned about another database called socindex which has doubled my scope of research by providing me with another reputable way to find academic journals. This database has allowed me to expand my research ability to not only this course but to my other courses and personal research interests. Furthermore, in this course I learned to use R Cloud, a website used to analyze data. I now have experience using R Cloud, SPSS, and Jamovi to conduct statistics. More valuable knowledge I gained from this course was to use flashcards to organize my sources. When conducting research, one must cycle through a wide array of articles before finding the ones used. This method allowed me to organize and keep track of the articles I planned to use as well as organize the different themes I wished to focus on in my literature review. This method has extremely reshaped my research process and I will continue to use it moving forward.

My process for evaluating and selecting resources for my research assignments first involved using keywords in Psycinfo and Socindex such as Head Start, Hispanic families/parents, parent involvement, and parent-teacher communication to search for and narrow the scope of results to just those involving my topic. After this I reviewed the different sources that appeared by first inspecting the abstract to see if it was relevant to my topic. If it was, I would then inspect the results and the discussion sections of the article. When choosing the articles to use I particularly was interested in finding qualitative research. I wanted to include personal experience directly from parents to emphasize their issues communicating with teachers. I felt as though qualitative data added to the emphasis more so than quantitative data did. I used quantitative findings to support the qualitative responses. I excluded any article that included high school or college aged participants. I did include some articles that involved parents of middle school aged children however, I made sure to support the findings with other articles that focused on younger aged children which found similar results. Overall, the main thing I looked for when discriminating between articles were those focused on Hispanic and Latino and Spanish speaking families of younger aged children.

The most significant challenge I faced when conducting research for this course was the sample. As stated previously, when exploring past research to familiarize myself on the topic, I focused primarily on parent involvement practiced by Hispanic and Latino families and the barriers they faced. After collecting data, only white and black parents were represented in the sample. To overcome this problem, I had to redirect my research to focus on racial differences and parent involvement in minority families. I did have to incorporate additional sources due to these challenges in order to further my knowledge on parent involvement in minority parents and the barriers for involvement. The barriers to involvement were similar across minority groups including Hispanic and Black families. This consistency created a smooth transition from Hispanic parent involvement to minority parent involvement in general.

While this is the third research course I have taken throughout my college career, I feel as though my confidence level for conducting and engaging in research has increased due to the unique insights learned and the practice gained through the span of the class. The hands-on approach to this course has allowed me to engage directly in the research process and contribute actively to an occurring issue. This course also allowed me to directly engage with participants by going out in the field to hand out fliers for our survey directly to parents. This is something I had not previously experienced in my other research classes. With that said, this course allowed me to gain further experience and practice writing research papers which is an important skill needed for both criminology and psychology.

Through this course and the research process involved I have learned to “think like a researcher.” Thinking like a researcher to me involves incorporating personal interest to explore a deeper issue. To think like a researcher is to use a critical lens to explore and sort through past research in order to build background knowledge on a chosen topic. Through this background knowledge, researchers must identify gaps in research that can be explored and filled. A researcher must be able to narrow their scope of research to explore just the issue they are focused on. Additionally, researchers must be able to identify and acknowledge problems with previous research while also using it as a template to further their exploration. Researches must be able to connect research to real world issues and defend the importance of their study. All of these combined are what it means to me to “think like a researcher.”