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**Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC)
on Research and Capacity Building for Minority Entities**

An Autoethnographic Approach to Understanding Skill Enhancement Strategies for Minority Researchers With Disabilities



Presenters: Dr. Perry Sanders and Dr. Dytisha Davis
LU-RRTC State-of-the-Science Conference
September 28-29, 2017
Atlanta Georgia

Presentation Objectives

- + Examine the research skill building and career development lived experiences of a Native American who is blind serving as a disability and rehabilitation researcher at a National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR)-sponsored Rehabilitation Research and Training Center based at a historically Black college/university
- + Present results garnered through the method of auto-ethnography, self-reflective stories, and narratives.
- + Share key findings that can be used by the field to empower Indigenous communities to solve problems based on their shared beliefs, values, customs, challenges, wisdom, and aspirations, and build researchers' and students' with disabilities, minority early career investigators', and faculty members' research leadership skills and careers.



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BACKGROUND

+ Need:

- + According to the 2014 American Community Survey, an estimated 3,906,100 noninstitutionalized individuals between the ages of 16 and 64 years in the United States reported having a visual disability (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2016).
 - + Of this total, 59,300 identified as Native American (1.52%);
- + Based on educational attainment, 5,600 identified as a Native American with a visual impairment having a baccalaureate degree or higher.
- + National U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and state vocational rehabilitation agency-level (Bell, 2010) data indicate that Native Americans with vision disabilities continue to represent marginal labor force participants.



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BACKGROUND

+ Need:

- + Recently released disability statistics from a 2014 American Community Survey report indicated that an estimated 30.1% of noninstitutionalized Native Americans with visual disabilities were employed nationally compared to 41.2% of Whites with vision loss (Erickson et al., 2016).
- + The place of Indigenous disability and rehabilitation research represents a marginalized situation whereby too few tribal college/university (TCU)-based and Indigenous researchers in general are available to provide answers to relevant service and policy questions and address the assistive technology needs of tribal community members with disabilities.



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Self-Reflection Questions

+ Self-Reflection Question(s):

- What factors influenced my development as a researcher who is blind. In trying to answer this question, I asked the following **reflexive (probing) questions**:
 - What role did family play in my skill and career development as a minority researcher with a disability?
 - What role did my secondary and postsecondary educational experiences play in my development?
 - How has my work at the RRTC facilitated my research skill development and growth, and what new skills and insights have I gained?



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METHOD

- This research represents an evocative autoethnography.
 - narrative presentations and self-reflective stories (Anderson, 2006)
- Autoethnography represents a postmodern process to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experiences (auto) to understand cultural experiences (ethno; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).
- This qualitative method draws on the author's lived experiences to offer an in-depth perspective of the phenomena situated in the specific cultural context through their lens view (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).
- Perry has multiple positions in this inquiry that include his Native American cultural heritage, disability, and employment as a researcher at an RRTC based at an HBCU.
- These various positions ultimately contribute to his current worldview on minority disability researchers' scientific skill building and career development facilitators.



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METHOD (continued)

+ Procedure:

+ Data Collection

- The data examined through Perry's self-reflection, however, are based on his firsthand lived experiences.
- Moreover, the presentation of Perry's "realities" through a multitude of positions filters a more complete picture of the "truth" and helped to enhance the data's validity.



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METHOD (continued)

+ Procedure:

+ Data Collection

- The study's questions were designed to reflect lived experiences and perspectives on career development challenges as a researcher with a disability.
- Emerging themes and skill building factors included familial and postsecondary educational supports, assistive technology, professional and community engagement opportunities, and peer-to-peer mentorship. Skill building challenges were also presented..



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RESULTS

Self-Reflection Question

What role did family play in my research skill and career development as a minority researcher with a disability?

- Family Support
- Educational Support
- Professional Support



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RESULTS (continued)

Self-Reflection Question

What role did my secondary and postsecondary educational experiences play in my development?

- Rehabilitation Teacher and Rehabilitation Counselor
- College Education
- Assistive Technology
- Success in becoming a researcher (doctoral program experience)



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RESULTS (continued)

Self-Reflection Question

How has my work at the RRTC facilitated my research skill development and growth, and what new skills and insights have I gained?

- Peer to Peer Mentorship
- Knowledgeable about research grant proposal writing, grant implementation and management
- Plethora of research approaches



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Limitations of Results

- + This research is an evocative autoethnography representative of one author's lived experiences. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to the population of all minority researchers with disabilities.
- + This research declares Perry's biases based on his positionality of being a Native American, a person who is blind, and a HBCU-based RRTC investigator. Therefore, his lens view may result in his perspectives differing from faculty scholars without disabilities at minority serving institutions and from researchers who are blind employed at RRTCs at traditionally White institutions.



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Translations/Recommendations for Research Skill Building

Findings	Translations/Recommendations/Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Support Networks▪ Mentorship▪ Technological support▪ Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Family, Peer Relationships & Educational Support▪ Team Based Mentorship & Peer to Peer Mentorship▪ Assistive technology devices▪ Advocating on behalf of persons with disabilities

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Contact Information

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC)

On Research and Capacity Building for Minority Entities

Perry Sanders, PhD, CRC, Research Analyst

6700 N. Martin Luther King Ave.

Oklahoma City, Ok. 73111

Phone: (918) 877-8154

Fax: (918)877-8101

Email: prsanders@langston.edu

RRTC Website: www.langston.edu/capacitybuilding-rrtc