

BREAKING THE BARRIERS: EXPLORING EXPERIENCES AND  
CHALLENGES OF LATINX STUDENTS SEEKING TO TRANSFER FROM  
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE TO 4-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

by

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Abstract

The Latinx population is growing quickly in the United States; however, that growth is not mirrored in higher education degree completion rates at four-year institutions. A primary reason for low degree attainment is that Latinx students are not transferring from community colleges to four-year colleges or universities and obtaining bachelor's degrees at the same rate as other student populations. While we know that Latinx students often face financial challenges and have to work while attending college, we do not know much about the non-financial reasons that may also limit their transfer to four-year colleges. This qualitative study explored, from the student perspective, the transfer barriers and institutional constraints that challenged their educational success. Those barriers ranged from juggling home life and its unstable conditions, to dealing with mental health in silence, to experiencing microaggressions in and out of the classroom. However, connecting with culturally sensitive student support services and utilizing their cultural and personal assets made navigating community college easier. The study relied on semi-structured interviews and used CRT/LatCrit and Community Cultural Wealth theories as lenses in a methodology of counter-storytelling, allowing students' voices to identify the barriers and the supports they received as they prepared to transfer to four-year colleges or universities. Recommendations and future research directions are also discussed.

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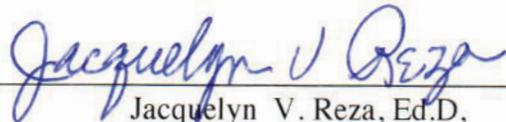
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Dream Deferred (1951)

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore  
And then run  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?

—Langston Hughes (Hughes, 1995)

The United States K-2 education system has been a pathway to a better life and social mobility for many immigrant families. However, some groups such as Asian immigrants benefited from advantages, while others such as Latin American immigrants confronted multiple barriers and discrimination in American schools (Crosnoe & Lopez Turley, 2011). This means some children succeed while others have their dreams deferred, as depicted in the poem by the social activist, novelist, and playwright of the Harlem Renaissance, Langston Hughes (Dredge & Tabor, 2012). Latinx (pronounced La-teen-ex) people comprise one of the racial/ethnic groups who are more likely to have

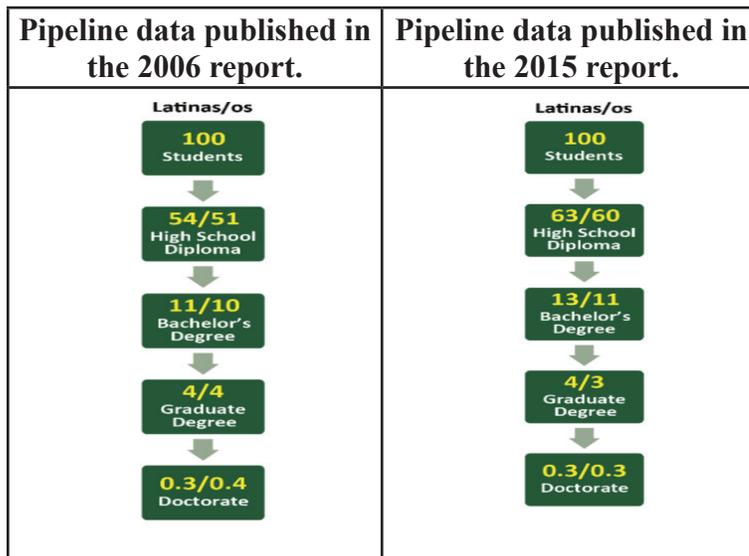
their dreams deferred due to the multitude of challenges they face in the pursuit of a college degree (Ocasio, 2014). In California,

out of every 100 Latina (female) elementary students, 63 graduate from high school, 13 receive an undergraduate degree, 4 graduate with a master's or professional degree, and fewer than one (0.3) graduate with a doctorate. For Latino (male) students, the numbers are even lower. Out of every 100 Latino (male) elementary students, 60 graduate from high school, 11 receive an undergraduate degree, 3 graduate with a master's or professional degree, and fewer than 1 (0.3) graduate with a doctorate. (Pérez Huber et al., 2015, p. 1)

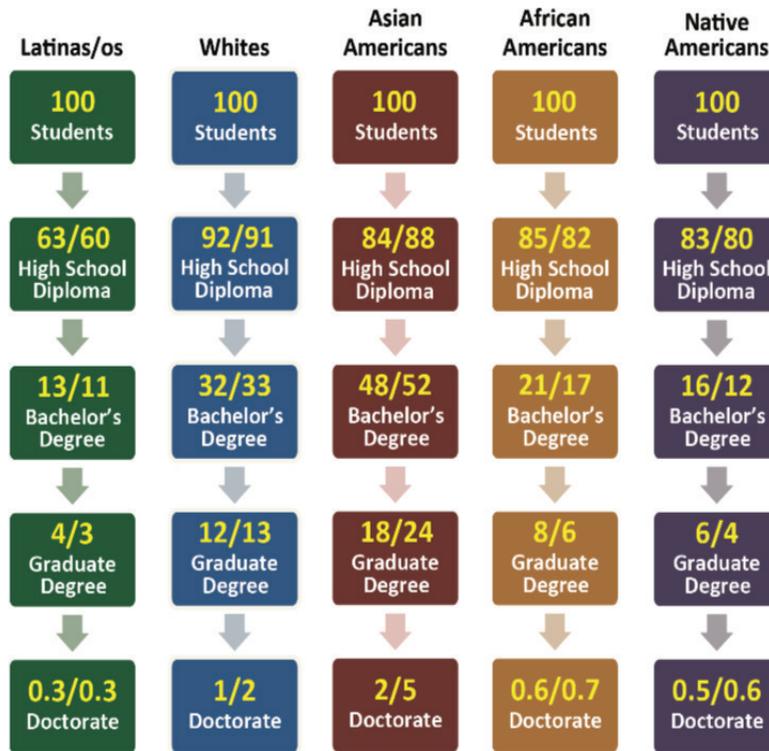
Figures 1 and 2 below present outcomes of research report surveys of 10 years' findings. They were prepared by UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center (CSRC) for the Latina/o Education Summits. Figure 1 shows the summary of 10 years of study on Latinx degree attainment. The information in the left box displays the results presented in March 2006 (Pérez Huber, Huidor, Malagon, Sanchez, & Solórzano, 2006); the information on the right was presented in November 2015 (Pérez Huber et al., 2015). Figure 2 is an overview of the 2015 report comparing the degree attainment of five different major ethnic groups. These outcomes are due in part to institutional barriers, microaggressions on college campuses, and commitments to family and work. Latinx students face multiple institutional challenges (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). In high school, these institutional challenges include racial, cultural, and language barriers in standardized tests that lead to lower scores, and placement into ESL programs or developmental English and Math, which delays students from taking college-level courses (Hern & Snell, 2014; Salas, 2014).

The challenges for Latinx students continue when they enroll in college. It is especially difficult for first-generation college students to figure out basic logistics and

services to help them succeed (S. Sanchez, 2012), including creating the required class schedule, registering, and identifying support (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Once enrolled in community college or at a four-year university, Latinx students face financial burdens due to tuition increases which tripled in the California State University and University of California systems over the past 20 years (Murphy, Cook, Johnson, & Weston, 2014). For economically disadvantaged Latinx students, the decision to enroll in college is directly impacted by the increase in tuition and loan debt (Rodríguez, Rhodes, & Aguirre, 2015). With this said, on a personal and sociocultural level, obtaining an education is often made to seem unattainable starting in K-12 education, especially when teachers—who are gatekeepers and necessary supporters in our schools—have low expectations for their Latinx students (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2000). Students who are neither challenged nor active learners in K-12 often will not see the college experience as rewarding and likely will not invest the effort and resources needed to become part of a college community (Braxton et al., 2000).



*Figure 1:* The U.S. Latinx educational pipeline, by race/ethnicity and gender. The first number in each box represents females; the second, males. Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000, 2012).



*Figure 2:* Comparative educational data for five ethnic groups. Modified from Pérez Huber et al. (2015).

Racial discrimination and microaggressions are also factors that make navigating higher education distressing for students of color (Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017; Solórzano et al., 2005). Microaggression is defined as a “systemic form of everyday racism based on race/ethnicity often in combination with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname” (Pérez Huber et al., 2015, p. 17). Students of color, including Latinx students, experience microaggressions in day-to-day interactions on college campuses and online. An example of an online racial microaggression was presented by Minikel-Lacocque (2013) in her qualitative case study. A Latinx student engaged in an online newspaper discussion. The author of the initial post was White and claimed that the policy “on university admission[s]” was racist because it did not do much to help minoritized students get prepared for that college.

The author (a) assumed that all minority students were not prepared for college and (b) misinterpreted the policy itself. The Latinx student who responded to the post stated that she felt offended because an assumption was made and it was insensitive.

In addition to racial microaggressions, there are race-related stresses and stereotype threats. These are defined as situations in which people feel they will validate the stereotype of their ethnic group (Steele, 2010), as do Latinx students who worry that they will not perform well in university classes because of a negative stereotype that they are not as smart as White students. The fear of conforming to stereotypes “damages character by causing low self-esteem, low expectation[s], low motivation, and self-doubt,” which contribute to lower performance by these groups in stereotyped situations in college and beyond (Steele, 2010, p. 46).

Aspects of family can be presented as strengths but they can also be hurdles for Latinx students when their parents place great pressure on their offspring to support the family, which can impede full-time student enrollment (Duran, 2011). In other words, Latinx students’ work commitments to financially contribute to the family unit affect postsecondary educational pursuits (Gándara & Cuellar, 2016). Students who perceive the need to dedicate more time to family commitments and work rather than to completing requirements needed to succeed in their studies tend to have a lower Grade Point Average (GPA) (Kim, Rennick, & Franco., 2014). Furthermore, the level of education their parents completed influences how well prepared they are for college, including how well prepared they are to even manage the application process (Stevenson, 2009).

Navigating a higher education institution is more difficult for students of color, including Latinx students, because of the many additional challenges they face that most White students do not experience. Those challenges range from institutional barriers to financial challenges and from cultural to personal hurdles. However, given the importance

of a college degree, both to individuals and to society as a whole, it is important to find ways to overcome these challenges and hurdles to improve Latinx graduation rates.

### **Background of the Problem**

Historically, in the U. S., Latinx students have not been well-represented in higher education (Kim et al., 2014; Salas, 2014; S. Sanchez, 2012). Many who attend community college fail to transfer and continue at four-year institutions (M. Sanchez, 2012). The *Majority Report* by the Education Trust-West (2017) reports that historically in California, the Latinx community has experienced discrimination in education since the 1800s. It started when California became a state in the 1800s and Californians with Mexican backgrounds were considered outsiders. The history of “racial formation” stems from colonial times and has affected both the Anglo-American and Latinx communities (Benitez, 2015, p. 40). For the Latinx community, racial formation goes back to Spanish origins that influenced Latinx culture, identity, thoughts, and favoritism toward eurocentrism and “whiteness ... a system of beliefs, policies and practices that enable white people to maintain social power and control” (p. 56). Both have been shaped by the concept of whiteness, which was created by European colonizers who have informed current cultural practices and the representation of whiteness (Benitez, 2015). Both the norms for being a successful student and the norms for how educational institutions have been designed and operationalized conform to the concept of whiteness.

Today, discrimination continues; as an example, in 2017 the U.S. president rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, “putting over 240,000 DACA youth in California at risk” (Education Trust-West, 2017, p. 7). Although not all DACA recipients are Latinx, this decision has affected many Latinx living in the United States.

## **Latinx Population Growth**

The 2010 U.S. Census reported that, of 308.7 million people living in this country, 50.5 million (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011), or about 16.6%, were of Latinx origin. In California the total population is 37,253,956; of that number, the Latinx population is 14,013,719 million, or 37.6% (Ennis et al., 2011). The Latinx population grew by 43% between 2000 and 2010, increasing four times more than the general population, which grew only 10% during this time (Ennis et al., 2011). Lopez & Krogstad (2015) state that in 2014 California became the state with the largest Latinx population. And although the 2007 and 2009 U. S. Census Bureau data predicted an increase of near 59.5 million in 2050, the new projection states only 49.8 million in 2050 (Lopez & Krogstad, 2015; Ocasio, 2014). However, these numbers are not mirrored in degree attainment. As the Latinx population continues to grow, Borrero (2011) adds that the word “minority” will no longer be accurate when describing this ethnic group, because numerically they will no longer be one.

## **Transfer at the National Level**

In the United States, Latinx students are neither transferring from community colleges to four-year colleges and universities, nor obtaining bachelor’s degrees at the same rate as other student populations (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). Nationally, only 13.9% of the overall population of Latinx adults received a bachelor’s degree, in comparison to 30.3% of Whites, 19.8% of Blacks, and 52.4% of Asian and Pacific Islanders (Kim et al., 2014). According to Rodríguez, Martinez, and Valle (2016), as of 2011, 16.5% of young adults ages 18 to 24 matriculated in college, an increase of 13.6% since 1972. Additionally, the number of Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) has increased to 370. However, the overall rate of Latinx students matriculating to institutions

of higher education is still low given the increasing Latinx population in the U.S. (Kelly, Schneider, & Carey, 2010).

### **Transfer at the State Level**

California's statewide high school dropout rate for Latinx students was halved from 27% in 1994 to 13% in 2015, and the number of Latinx students completing associate's and bachelor's degrees during that period has doubled (Education Trust-West, 2017). Nonetheless, Latinx students still experience the lowest college completion rate among racial groups (Kim et al., 2014). California's Latinx population is 36.6% of the total population, but research indicates that only a small proportion of that number obtain a bachelor's degree due to multiple barriers (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Total enrollment for Latinx students in California community colleges is 29.6%, while 25% comprise the California State University student population and 15.7% comprise the University of California student population (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). More recent research indicates that in "fall 2016, 67,000 students transferred into the University of California (UC) and the California State University (CSU) systems, with seven out of 10 transfers enrolling [in] the CSU [system]" (Bustillos, 2017, p. 9). Of the 67,000 students who transferred, only 4,100 (6%) Latinx students transferred to the UC system, and 20,000 (30%) went to the CSU system (Bustillos, 2017).

Given this statistical landscape, it is urgent that both policymakers and educators address this problem on a state and national level. The dismal transfer rate of Latinx students is one of the systemic failures of higher education, and it directly impacts the advancement of the community because the community needs a college-going culture, a culture that empowers young people to think about going to college (Ramirez, 2011). Yet Latinx students in California often begin their K-12 education in schools with little or no preparatory resources to help them succeed in college (Ocasio, 2014). They enroll

in schools that offer less community and parental engagement, fewer after-school support programs, and inadequate curricular offerings compared to schools in higher-income neighborhoods (Ramirez, 2011). Given this preparation, high school Latinx students generally enter college unfamiliar with strategies for succeeding academically, and without the resources to plan and complete the steps to transfer. Although many enter community college with hopes of continuing on to the university, many do not transfer despite the robust academic support services, open access to tutoring centers, and skilled professional counseling offered at community colleges (Ramirez, 2011).

Despite Latinx students' hard work and determination, they face many challenges in higher education, and many continue to only dream of living in America and belonging to a community filled with opportunities, rewards, and freedom as well as enjoying a successful life in peace (Chang, Torrez, Ferguson, & Sagar, 2017). As the Latinx community continues to grow, it is crucial that this rapidly growing ethnic group increases its baccalaureate degree attainment to improve the overall socioeconomic success of the United States (Stevenson, 2009). The outcome of having "socially conscious leaders capable of creating sustainable social change" is what is needed today (Nickels, Rowland, & Fadase, 2011, p. 46). Access to opportunities in higher education allows educated Latinx to obtain employment in higher-skilled professions rather than in the low-skilled trades such as construction, cleaning, domestic help, janitorial work, or housekeeping.

### **Temporary Solutions at the State Level**

Temporary fixes, such as providing community colleges funding for job training programs through Career Technical Education (CTE) (a short-term skill training course) to develop students' skills related to the demands of the workplace (City College of San Francisco, 2017), do not address the larger problem of Latinx students not

continuing with their education at four-year colleges or universities (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). Carnevale, Jayasundera, and Hanson (2012) reported that in the United States by 2020, two out of every three jobs will require employees to have a level of training that includes postsecondary education. CTE is viewed as an option for training. However, the authors also acknowledged that African American and Latinx workers are employed disproportionately in minimum-wage jobs that support the food services sector (Carnevale et al., 2012). Latinx students participating in CTE programs have a greater chance of finding employment, but many Latinx individuals who neither participate in CTE nor obtain a degree will continue to be paid only minimum wage (Carnevale et al., 2012). CTE provides better job options for some Latinx workers, but the rest who only have a high school diploma will, sadly, contribute to the populations that could soon put California's economy below the national average (Pérez & Ceja, 2010). Therefore, community college administrators must pay attention to programs that increase the transfer rate of Latinx students to four-year colleges or universities. One way of addressing this crisis is by investigating the barriers these students encounter in the transfer pipeline.

### **California Master Plan for Higher Education**

Undoubtedly, access to opportunity coupled with access to affordable education results in opportunities for better careers, as has been the goal of the California Master Plan for Higher Education (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012) since 1960. The plan assured "students equal access through multiple pathways to quality postsecondary education in the State" (p. 10). It was revised three times over the course of 40 years, and each revision renewed the promise of the original plan (UCOP, 2004). For example, there is a reference in the state law regarding lawmakers enacting Education Code 66202 in 1976 with the intent that the CSU and UC systems would meet the State's goal of offering

educational equity to transfer students. Similarly, Education Code 66741 expands on the notion of Education Code 66202 and adds that community college students are to receive priority consideration for transfer agreement programs, priority for major of choice, and equal treatment in the program of choice (UCOP, 2004). Nevertheless, severe funding cuts and fee increases in the community colleges (CCC), CSU, and UC systems have broken that promise. Over 2.9 million students attend community college in California every year; 70% of those students do not transfer to four-year universities within six years (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

Historically, the Latinx community has experienced discrimination in education since the 1800s (Education Trust-West, 2017). As the population continues to grow, the word “minority” will no longer apply to the Latinx community. Currently, degree attainment at a national and state level is still low and temporary solutions such as the CTE are not viable options for creating socially conscious leaders with a college degree. Therefore, access to education should continue to be available, as required by the California Master Plan.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

To address the issue of the low transfer rate of Latinx students from community colleges to California State Universities (CSUs), Universities of California (UCs), or private universities, we need to know more about the challenges they face and the supports they find effective to determine the best ways to enable more Latinx (and other) students to transfer to four-year institutions. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the lived experiences of Latinx students who desire to transfer from

City College of San Francisco (CCSF) to a UC, CSU, or to a private institution. Current research addressing the critical issues facing Latinx students in the public education system does not include their perspectives, but instead, relies on the dominant school discourse (Fernandez, 2002; Ramirez, 2011), such as the discourse on achievement gaps. This dominant discourse focuses on the deficit thinking model, which inherently blames students and their families for their shortcomings in school. The majoritarian stories are also viewed as fact, beginning with the history taught in schools, educational policies, procedures, and regulations that set the norm (Love, 2004). Therefore, in this research project my purpose is to capture the stories of students who are often absent or silenced within the discourse of system research. This study generates information to help stakeholders understand students' perceived obstacles in the transfer process as well as illustrating other factors contributing to the low rate in transferring to an institution of higher education.

### **Research Question**

The following question, modified from Stevenson (2009) and Ramirez (2011), guided the study and highlighted the voices of Latinx students regarding their perceived challenges: What factors do Latinx students at City College of San Francisco perceive as supports for and barriers to navigating higher education as they prepare to transfer to four-year colleges or universities?

As the Latinx populations continue to grow, they must, at a minimum, keep up with current workforce demands, and obtaining a bachelor's degree allows them to be more competitive economically. Exploring Latinx community college students' experiences and uncovering their perceived transfer barriers and effective supports can help to identify institutional and student-centered factors that facilitate or inhibit their

transfer goals, and thus assist in developing policies and procedures to support their academic track (Salas, 2014). Moreover, this study provides administrators, faculty, and staff insights regarding how Latinx students maneuver within an urban community college. Ultimately, it provides information regarding current areas of strength and ways to improve Latinx transfer rates in this type of setting.

### **Brief Conceptual Review**

This qualitative study relied on Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), an expansion of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and community cultural wealth to interpret the experiences of Latinx students at City College of San Francisco who plan to transfer from the community college to a UC, CSU, or private institution. The LatCrit theoretical framework allowed me to analyze how different types of oppression have impacted the lives of Latinx community college students in society and institutions of higher education through a combination of phenomenological and counter-narrative informed in-depth, semi-structured interviews which were conducted one-on-one and in focus groups. Further, it provided contextual lenses for examining Latinx community college student experiences and the patterns of institutional barriers affecting their integration into the community colleges and their success in them (Ramirez, 2011).

### **Definition of Terms**

- **Latinx (pronounced La-teen-ex):** Individuals whose background is Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, South American, Central American, or of another Spanish culture or origin, as well as Latino/a lesbian, gay, bisexual,

transgender, questioning, or queer individuals (modified from *The Majority Report* [Education Trust-West, 2017]).

- **CSU: California State University:** A university system that consists of 23 campuses. It is the largest four-year public university system in the United States. It bestows undergraduate, graduate, and a few doctoral degrees.
- **UC: University of California:** A university system that consists of 9 campuses. It distinguishes itself from other public institutions of higher education by having more competitive admissions requirements. It bestows undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees.
- **California Community Colleges:** A segment of California's public higher education system. The system consists of 72 separate districts and 114 campuses. It is the largest higher education system in the USA, and it serves more than 2.1 million students.
- **Microaggression:** A subtle form of racial assault towards people of marginalized groups that results in feelings of rejection, race-related stress, and stereotype threat (Ong, Burrow, Fuller-Rowell, Ja, & Sue, 2013; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009).
- **Phenomenological Study:** Investigates how people experience a specific phenomenon such as bullying, grief, and more (Leavy, 2017).
- **Counter-storytelling:** A process of telling the experiences of people of color (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).
- **Critical Race Theory (CRT):** A theoretical framework used to examine and confront racism embedded in the multidimensional levels of society (Yosso, 2005).

- **Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit):** A theoretical framework that grew out from CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It provides a lens for analyzing Latinx individuals' multidimensional identities (Villalpando, 2004).

The three tiers of the higher education system are not consistently providing Californians access to opportunity through affordable education, as stated in the California Master Plan for Higher Education. Further, Latinx students, among the historically underserved populations, are the most affected, as their degree attainment does not mirror population growth due in part to the barriers described in the literature review.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature review is organized into four different sections: (1) institutional barriers; (2) sociocultural barriers faced by Latinx students in higher education; (3) cultural and family barriers; and (4) solutions to support Latinx students. Much of the literature review offers an extensive focus on Latinx student retention and the causes behind college dropout. Nevertheless, minimal research has been conducted that explores Latinx students' experiences and their perspectives on factors that contribute to the difficulty of transferring to CSUs, UCs, or private colleges to obtain a baccalaureate degree. In the following section, I review relevant information on the institutional, personal, and cultural barriers Latinx students face in institutions of higher education. Then, I discuss institutional challenges in the community college, four-year college or university, and racial microaggressions. I review personal barriers such as economic challenges and then discuss cultural/family hurdles. There are a few studies such as the qualitative focus groups conducted by Yosso et al. (2009) that describe how racial microaggressions based on language, accent, culture, and immigration status shape undergraduate Latinx college experiences. In these examples, the students were able to overcome the adverse campus climate by creating community and skillfully navigating between cultures. The final section will describe research similar to my study, such as that conducted by Yosso et al. I expect that my research will contribute to the literature by (a) providing information on other types of barriers postsecondary Latinx students face in

addition to racial microaggressions, and (b) describing how students succeed despite the obstacles they encounter in the process of transferring to a four-year college or university.

### **Institutional Barriers**

Degree attainment of Latinx students in higher education in the United States is low (Kim et al., 2014; Salas, 2014; M. Sanchez, 2012) and it is equally important to recognize that these students have faced discriminations and other challenges in California. The Education Trust-West (2017) report explains, for example, that when California became a state in 1850, Californians with Mexican background were considered foreigners. In 1863, school segregation was legalized, and funds were withheld from schools that admitted non-White students. In the 1930s, Latinx residents were the largest of California's non-White ethnic groups, yet hundreds of Mexican Americans were also deported. The report adds that in 1931, the *Alvarez v. Lemon Grave* case decision overturned the separation of Mexican from White students, which constituted to the first successful school integration court decision of the time. In 1945, the *Mendez v. Westminster* case overthrew school segregation in California, which influenced the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. In 1968, many students in East Los Angeles walked out to protest inequality in the school system. The *Lau v. Nichols* case in 1974 gave support to all English learners in public schools, many of whom were Latinx. In 1982, *Plyler v. Doe* guaranteed access to K-12 education to students without legal status, many of whom, again, were Latinx. However, in 1994, California voters passed Proposition 187, which prohibited undocumented people from accessing medical care or any other non-emergency services in California. Proposition 209 passed in 1995, prohibiting the use of race in the application for publishing employment or contracting. Proposition 227 (1998) forbade bilingual public

education without parental waivers. On a more positive note, AB 540 passed in 2001, allowing qualified nonresidents and undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at California public colleges and universities.

In recent years, there has been a little more integration when compared to the 1930s; however, the legacy of segregation and discrimination remains. For example, *The Majority Report* (Education Trust-West, 2017) shows that in 2011, Governor Jerry Brown signed the California DREAM Act, which gave undocumented students an opportunity to apply for financial assistance to pay for California public colleges and universities. A year later, in 2012, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was approved by President Obama, indicating the issue's place in the national spotlight, and by June 2016 millions of California youth were exempted from deportation. Also in 2016, California voters passed Proposition 58 to overturn most conditions of Proposition 227, reinstating bilingual education and aligning with the state's roadmap to support English learners. This was also the year that state officials publicly pledged to protect Latinx, Muslim, LGBT, undocumented, and any other vulnerable students and their families. In 2017, however, President Trump revoked the DACA program, putting thousands of DACA youth at risk of deportation (Education Trust-West, 2017). However, California passed bills to protect undocumented students and students from mixed-status families in the K-16 education system (Education Trust-West, 2017), but California legislative support is still needed to support Latinx students in higher education.

### **Community Colleges**

One path to obtaining higher education and entering skilled occupations is the community college system. According to Salas (2014), the California community college system has always bridged community colleges and four-year universities, vocational

training, and completion of general education requirements. As cited by Salas (2014), in 1987, California Assembly Bill (AB) 1725 added “developmental education, English as a Second Language, Basic Skills, noncredit adult education” (p. 30) and Career Technical Education (Salas, 2014). California community colleges provide pathways to baccalaureate degrees because tuition is lower than at a four-year university and the class schedule is flexible. Students can take day, evening, and weekend classes. These colleges also accept students with a lower GPA and lower college admission scores (Settles, 2012). To further emphasize the role of community colleges, S. Sanchez (2012) explained that many Latino students consider community colleges (CCs) because of the low tuition fees, option to register part-time, and more. However, attending CCs is still overwhelming, and the registration process is complicated, especially when it comes to figuring out the class schedule, registering, and identifying support services to help them succeed.

Contrary to popular belief, the community college system has not provided a pathway to four-year bachelor’s degree attainment for Latinx students or other historically underrepresented ethnic groups (Settles, 2012). Only seven to 20% of Latinx students have transferred from junior colleges to four-year universities in California (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). For example, Los Angeles, California, has 13 community colleges, with five of those community colleges (Compton, East Los Angeles, Los Angeles Mission, Los Angeles, and Los Angeles Trade-Technical Colleges) being “intensely segregated institutions, with 90% to 100% minority students” (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 21). All 13 CCs have a low transfer rate, ranging from 15% to 33%, with an average of 28%. Unfortunately, most students enrolling in any of the 13 community colleges are reported to have attended “weak high schools” composed mostly of Black and Latino students (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012, p. 20). A weak high school was defined as a secondary school in the Southern California region where “only 23% to 65% of high school freshmen persist to senior year” (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez,

2012, p. 6). The remaining students contribute to a 57% statewide dropout population (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012). Therefore, the role of community colleges is pivotal when students come from “weak high schools” because they have the responsibility to prepare students for higher education.

### **Factors Impacting College Access**

Although the Latinx group is growing fast in the USA (Rodríguez et al., 2016), and constitutes a majority in the elementary school system in California, Latinx students are more likely to enter the K-12 school system with significant challenges that impact their access to college. According to Rodríguez et al. (2015), there was a 13.6% increase in Latinx K-12 enrollment from 1972 to 2011, and by 2011 the Latinx population reached its highest point, with a record 16.5% increase. Yet, academically, they perform lower than other ethnic groups (Settles, 2012). Their struggles can be attributed to a range of factors, including limited English proficiency, lack of family support, work obligations, and cultural gender roles (S. Sanchez, 2012).

When choosing a college, many Latinx students opt for one based on the admission process, academic programs, and financial aid available (Salas, 2014). However, many get discouraged before they even begin their college journey due to financial difficulties and the complexity of the admission process (Rodríguez et al., 2015). California colleges and universities have selective college entrance requirements, which also pose a challenge to students who want to apply to multiple schools. California offers three different public higher education systems, which consist of 114 community colleges, 23 California State Universities (CSUs), and 10 Universities of California (UCs) (Johnson & Mejia, 2017). The eligibility requirements for each system are specific and range from an open enrollment process at a CC level to course completion and test score

requirements at CSUs and UCs. These requirements make the eligibility criteria complex, which often discourages Latinx students' participation in college (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Factors such as standardized test scores, placement into an ESL program, or developmental English and Math discourage students from transferring because the course sequences are too long. These factors also delay students' transfer opportunities for those who do plan to transfer to a four-year college (Hern & Snell, 2014; Salas, 2014).

As Hern (2012) stated, developmental English and Math are intended to give students who are less prepared a chance to catch up and get ready for college-level courses; however, the remedial course sequence "has become the place where college dreams go to die" (p. 60) because students cannot take any college-level courses until they complete their remedial courses. Furthermore, community college eliminates 90% of students who place three levels below or more in college math due to the number of semesters they spend taking remedial/developmental courses. They drop out before they even get to complete their first college-level course (Hern, 2012).

### **Microaggressions and Stereotyping**

Latinx students also experience racial microaggressions that make it difficult to persist and complete a bachelor's degree. Multiple researchers (e.g., Ong et al., 2013; Yosso et al., 2009) define microaggression as a subtle form of racial assault towards people of marginalized groups that results in feelings of rejection, race-related stress, and stereotype threat. Sue et al. (2007) added microassault, microinsult, and linguisticism (discrimination based on accent, language deprivation, English only, and pronunciation) (Oropeza, 2014). For instance, scholars such as Yosso et al. (2009) found that "interpersonal racial microaggressions" include "verbal and nonverbal racial" assault from professors, college personnel, and peers towards Latinx students (p. 667).

Yosso et al.'s (2009) qualitative study involved 37 Latinx students (19 males and 18 females) attending three elite universities who they interviewed in 8 focus groups. In these interviews, many of the participants described how racial joke telling was insulting, offensive, and hurtful. Also, a student described one of many verbal assaults: as she and a group of students who danced in the Folklorico group walked across campus carrying their costumes and talking a little loudly, they were called "fuckin' beaners" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 669).

Pérez Huber (2011) defines *racist nativist microaggressions* as a type of microaggression based on how Latinx individuals are perceived. These microaggressions account for Latinx individuals' perceived immigration status to subordinate Latinx students on a college campus. For example, Ojeda, Navarro, Rosales Meza and Arbona (2012) conducted a study with 115 Latinx college students (87 women and 28 men) who attended a diverse southwestern university in a metropolitan city. The participants responded to a "perceived ethnic discriminations" questionnaire; the results revealed that many students stated they were viewed as burglars and delinquents by their teachers. The researchers also found that some students of Mexican ancestry faced discrimination not only from students from the dominant culture, but also from those in their own culture because they were viewed as either too Latinx or not Latinx enough, which added a layer of stress while attending college. Studies such as Ornelas and Solórzano (2004) examined the lived experiences of Latinx students in higher education in relation to institutional support and difficulty of the transfer process from community college to four-year university towards the outcome of those pursuing an education. Research also demonstrates that Latinx students are able to create a sense of community in the university when they rely on their cultural wealth from home to survive and respond to rejections (Pérez Huber, 2009; Yosso et al., 2009). This will be discussed further in a section titled Cultural and Family Hurdles.

### **Sociocultural Barriers**

Latinx students also face multiple personal and sociocultural barriers to success in college, including teacher expectations. Obtaining a college degree is made to seem unattainable, and that notion begins in K-12 education, especially when teachers of the dominant culture have low expectations for their Latinx students. Rodríguez et al. (2015) emphasized that teachers are very influential in these students' college decision making. Additionally, according to Rodríguez et al. (2015), there is a correlation between classroom experience and the decision to go to college. Therefore, students who are not actively learning or who do not believe that they are acquiring knowledge do not see the college experience as rewarding and do not invest the mental energy needed to be part of a college community (Braxton et al., 2000). Teachers' low expectations, coupled with the students' lack of understanding about the benefits of a college degree and the push for quick job placement, combine to reduce the chances of Latinx students attending college (Rodríguez et al., 2015). Ocasio (2014) asserted that the lack of K-12 academic preparation contributes to low college attendance. By the time Latinx students enter high school, lack of college preparation continues, and fewer students are advised to take college preparatory courses by their counselors (Ocasio, 2014; S. Sanchez, 2012). Furthermore, the level of education that Latinx parents have completed has a significant influence on how prepared their children are for college (Stevenson, 2009). The more education parents have, the easier it becomes for parents to help their children with the complexity of navigating the hurdles of higher education.

### **Economic Barriers**

Many Latinx college students face financial struggles and job security issues (Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2017). Stevenson (2009) found that low-income Latinx families begin planning their children's educational path in the

eighth grade; nevertheless, the majority face major financial hardships that prevent them from helping their children enter and complete higher education. Stevenson (2009) also asserted that low-wage jobs and limited English proficiency also affect Latinx students' enrollment in college. To make things worse, colleges and universities' funding cuts from state governments in the U.S. have forced increases in students' tuition. Murphy et al. (2014) observed that tuition at the University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) systems have tripled in the past 20 years. UC annual tuition and fees for resident full-time undergraduates was \$4,354 in 1995-96 (Vega, 2014) and today is \$35,300 living on campus and \$32,400 living off campus (UC website, n.d.). CSU annual tuition and fees for residents "increased from \$1,428 in 2001/02 to \$5,472" effective fall 2011 (CSU, Historical Tuition Fee Rates, n.d.), and in Spring 2018 CSU tuition increased to \$5,742 (CSUOC, n.d.).

Finally, being the first in the family to go to college and shouldering expectations to contribute financially to one's parents' household while in school, among other obligations, present immediate, obvious and nearly insurmountable barriers toward pursuing higher education. Therefore, students often receive less financial assistance from their families than students from other ethnic groups, and their college enrollment is affected by the lack of access to this monetary support (Rodríguez et al., 2015; Stevenson, 2009). Kouyoumdjian et al. (2015) also discovered that not having enough money was a challenge shared among many students. Some had partial financial assistance, and others had no funding, which forced them to look for jobs to supplement their income.

Culturally, taking loans is discouraged in the Latinx community because students do not want to be in debt after they graduate (Rodríguez et al., 2015). Thus, their decision to go to college is directly impacted by the increase in tuition and loan debt (Rodríguez et al., 2015). Further, those who are first in their families to go to college are more vulnerable because they lack information about "students' rights and access to in-state

tuition programs” (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010, p. 28). This lack of information, coupled with tuition increases in the University of California and California State University systems, forces most Latinx students to enroll in a two-year community college (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

### **Cultural and Family Hurdles**

It is challenging to overcome traditional cultural barriers such as being the first in the family to go to college. Another cultural barrier is the expectation to make financial contributions to parents’ households. These obstacles add to the already difficult decision to go to college and obtain a degree. Many first-generation immigrant parents did not graduate high school in the United States and do not have a strong level of English language proficiency. This makes it difficult to help their children because of the language barrier. Another barrier explicitly facing Latinas (females) are cultural traditions—for example, they are expected to take care of their family (Dayton, Gonzalez-Vasquez, Martinez, & Plum, 2004). The constant conflict these students experience between academic and family responsibilities makes it difficult to balance work, family, and school (Dayton et al., 2004).

On the other hand, family also serves as a support to students. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that Latinx students depend on their families to succeed. The core values of *Familismo*, interdependence, respect, and education can also empower Latinx students on their college journeys. *Familismo* is defined as “a Latino cultural value...[which] refers to the importance of strong family loyalty, closeness, and getting along with and contributing to the wellbeing of the nuclear family, extended family, and kinship networks” (Ayon, Marsiglia, & Bermudez-Parsai, 2010, p. 745). Collectivism, a term that expresses a source of support from family (Durand, 2011; S. Sanchez, 2012),

is another value that complements Familismo. A family is important because it is the source of strength for Latinx students, but it becomes challenging when Latinx students are caretakers or single parents. As Kouyoumdjian et al. (2015) found, many Latinx students are single parents raising a child and taking a full load of courses. This presents a significant challenge and could prevent many Latinx students from moving forward on their college path. An additional challenge is that Latinx families like to practice collectivism, which places an emphasis on providing support for the family by earning money and providing caretaking for siblings while going to college and attending college close to home (Nuñez & Crisp, 2012): in other words, familismo (Comeau, 2012)I argue that examining behavioral measures of familialism can offer additional insights. This article develops a behavioral measure of familialism based on frequency of contact with family members and demonstrates this measure's utility using 2002 General Social Survey (GSS. Finally, when it comes to helping their children with college-related tasks, some Latinx families do not understand the university experience of their children because college information is marketed to students, rather than to parents, especially if parents are Spanish-speaking (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015).

### **Solutions to Support Latinx Students**

As revealed through the review of the empirical evidence, reducing racial microaggressions, promoting a positive community college transfer culture campus-wide, and developing appropriate support systems for Latinx students are promising ways to close the opportunity gap. However, it is essential to have student input to make or improve an existing or new program that is designed to help Latinx students thrive at a community college and then transfer to an institution of higher education.

To reduce racial microaggressions, Yosso et al. (2009) discovered that when Latinx undergraduates name the racial microaggressions, they “confront [and] outline their effects” (p. 680) and find ways to respond which provide them with a channel to find their voices. Another aspect of this empowerment can be found in the words of Minikel-Lacocque (2013). He offers four elements that foster a positive and nurturing campus environment, which include: (1) students, faculty, and administrators who reflect minority students; (2) a curriculum mirroring the background and experience of the marginalized; (3) “programs (that) support the recruitment, retention, and graduation of students of color” (p. 460); and finally, (4) a college/university mission statement that is committed to diversity.

It is equally important to promote a campus-wide transfer culture in the community college. This can be achieved by recognizing that, besides the contribution of college counselors, staff members and administrators are valuable in supporting students who plan to transfer (Pérez & Ceja, 2010). That support can be demonstrated through implementing institutional policies to promote uninterrupted semester-by-semester enrollment (Pérez & Ceja, 2010). Not enrolling continuously lowers students’ course completion rate. Therefore, developing incentives to help students adopt healthy enrollment behavior (Pérez & Ceja, 2010) is crucial. This, coupled with reducing the cost of college attendance plus strengthening partnerships with the high schools (Pérez & Ceja, 2010), is an effective way to close the achievement gap and create a healthy transfer culture.

Scholars have conducted extensive studies on the linguistic, socioeconomic, and institutional challenges that Latinx students must overcome to pursue higher education, as well as retention and the causes behind college dropout factors. However, not many have explored Latinx students’ perspectives on institutional, socioeconomic, and personal barriers, or how these students cope when faced with challenges. Therefore, this research

will shed light on student experiences and offer insights about improving student services on college campuses.

### **Conceptual Review**

The Cultural Capital and Community Cultural Wealth framework, coupled with Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), an outgrowth of Critical Race Theory (CRT), gives researchers tools to convey the lived experiences of Latinx students through a detailed analysis of the layers of domination they experience (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Moreover, it “requires scholars to challenge dominant ideologies and discourses” (Delgado Bernal & Aleman, 2017, p. 23) as they relate to Latinx communities and their histories. These frameworks challenge the deficit thinking that Latinx individuals lack intellectual abilities, motivation, desire to achieve, and more. Below, I describe an overview of each framework as it relates to this study.

#### **Cultural Capital/Community Cultural Wealth**

Cultural capital, a sociological concept first used by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, refers to “any set of non-economic goods and services that can assist people to improve their social standing or status” (Barker, 2013, p. 361). In other words, cultural capital is the representation of the values and experiences one acquires over time from family, friends, mentors, or teachers; it is the attitude, attire, language, degree attained, and connection in society, describing our existence in society (Hinton, 2015; Payne, 2015). Cultural capital is “embodied,” “objectified,” and “institutionalized” (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Embodied cultural capital refers to the sense of culture, style, manners, inherited properties, and traditions (cultural events) a person has. Objectified cultural capital consists of things that one owns, such as works of art, scientific instruments,

cultural goods, and expensive possessions at home (Nash, 1990; Winkle-Wagner, 2010; Xu & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). School syllabi are also considered cultural artifacts, as stated by Monkman, Ronald, & Theramene (2005). Finally, institutionalized cultural capital is the recognition of academic credentials or qualifications held by an individual (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

Bourdieu is recognized as the creator of the concept of cultural capital. His work became important in the critical study of cultural practices in the 1970s (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). The wide range of his work extends across established academic disciplines and combines empirical analysis and theoretical frames. His cultural capital work primarily focuses on how cultural capital is interconnected with the role of culture in the reproduction of social structures, including education. As noted by Hinton (2015), cultural capital is associated with Pierre Bourdieu, while social capital is associated with Bourdieu and James S. Coleman, an American sociologist. The term “social capital” (p. 299) explains aspects of human interaction. Being able to navigate the hidden curriculum is part of social capital at school as well in the family unit. It relates to the habitus, which are aspects of cultural capital referring to the attitudes a person possesses (Hinton, 2015; Payne, 2015). It is the “durable effects” (Barrett, 2015, p. 5) of the perceptions of learned attitudes and behaviors, social environments, and how these shape individual behaviors, ways of thinking, the perception of the world, assumptions, emotions and one’s probabilities and possibilities in life (Barrett, 2015; Barrett & Martina, 2012). Our habitus is what guides us through life, and it often goes unrecognized (Payne, 2015).

The concept of cultural capital is also linked with organizational habitus, a concept derived from Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction (Barrett & Martina, 2012). Organizational habitus encompasses the notion that cultural practice, knowledge, and access to cultural capital through an elite social network is how success is recognized and rewarded (Monkman et al., 2005). This concept was first used in education by Patricia

McDonough in 1997. Payne (2015) states that McDonough developed the concept of organizational habitus when she conducted her study on how colleges select students for their campuses. She disrupted the structure and activities that created social inequality in admission staff by attempting to add diversity in college admission staff (McDonough & Robertson, 2012). This change came after she wrote an extensive work, *Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity* (1997). McDonough (1997) looked at the college decision-making process. She conducted interviews with graduating seniors, parents, and counselors in addition to collecting case studies; she concluded that college is complex because access to different colleges is different due to the organizational habitus, the cultural practices in effect during the admission process before students are admitted to their college of choice. Besides access, her work also focused on equity, which she documented while looking at students' experiences and the factors (colleges, high school, parents, friends, and the media) that influence their decision to go to college (McDonough, 1997). The notion of organizational habitus helps us understand how schools contribute to the production of social inequities. Therefore, individual habitus and institutional/organizational habitus are important concepts because they either help or hinder students' success in college.

### **Using Cultural Capital to Understand Latinx Students' College Challenges**

Hinton (2015) recognized that cultural capital belongs more to those who are well-off and have power. As such, students with high socioeconomic status navigate higher education more easily because the culture of the home is acknowledged every day in their program of study and other places. Black and Latinx students, who mostly come from low socioeconomic status families and get the least support in school, do bring cultural capital to school. However, the cultural capital that non-dominant group(s) of students bring to the classroom is usually ignored and not valued (Hinton,

2015). Many scholars agree that educational institutions tend to reward students who possess the assets for navigating the system. In higher education, students who do not have those assets often leave as a result. That is, these students end up leaving or not attending college because they anticipate that they will not be accepted or approved by the educational system because they do not hold the cultural capital rewarded by the mainstream (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). However, culturally responsive teaching can change that. According to Hammond and Jackson (2015), culturally responsive teaching is an educator's ability to recognize how students learn and how they make meaning of what they are learning. It is the instructor's responsibility to respond in a positive and constructive way using students' cultural knowledge as a bridge to help them connect new concepts to what they already know. Therefore, when students' cultural knowledge is part of the curriculum and pedagogical practices, then they can be challenged to think critically, which also helps to make learning stick. Starting with or centering on the students' existing cultural and experiential knowledge enables educators to facilitate activities in which students' brains can be "stretched beyond [their] comfort zone with cognitive routines and strategy" to get smarter (Hammond & Jackson, 2015, p. 49). This pedagogical approach to teaching allows students and teacher to engage in a more meaningful way and thus enhance students' learning. As students make connections between their current knowledge and new content, they develop fluid intelligence as they process complex information more effectively.

Culturally responsive teaching can also be used as a technique to empower students to learn the "culture of power" (Delpit, 1988, p. 282), which means learning the codes or rules of the classrooms. These rules are specific strategies with which to communicate and present oneself (i.e., ways of talking, writing, behaving, and addressing issues). When students learn the codes/rules of the classroom (mostly reflections of

the dominant culture) and are explicitly told what those codes are, students are able to acquire power and thus navigate higher education more easily (Delpit, 1988).

Continuing with the concept of cultural capital, Monkman and colleagues (2005) added that concepts of cultural and social capital can be used to find out how teachers could or should facilitate inclusion and access to opportunities for students. As mentioned earlier, social capital relates to having access to resources (knowledge, practices, and artifacts) through participating in the social network (Payne, 2015). Therefore, teachers, through their social network, can help students find internships and even jobs. Cultural capital helps us understand why social class influences school access. Hence, social and cultural capital, coupled with other assets, like the ability to manage finances and access information, could mediate the social reproduction of inequity.

As the Latinx population increases and the need to support students' success becomes greater, it is important to look at the issue through a cultural capital theoretical framework. This tool was used to uncover and better understand the inequities in higher education. Research conducted from this perspective can potentially contribute to a plan to support Latinx students who plan to receive a college degree. The definition and role of cultural capital have evolved. As Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) stated, historically, the definition of Bourdieu's cultural capital is limited and defined by White, middle-class values and beliefs. This view limits the value of culture and resiliency that Latinx students have when they come to college. However, more recent researchers, such as Tara Yosso, have expanded Bourdieu's cultural capital concept. Yosso (2005) questioned the traditional interpretation presented by Bourdieu and added the concept of community cultural wealth. She argued that the notion of community cultural wealth incorporates cultural assets in a more meaningful way. Community cultural wealth incorporates all the mechanisms communities of color use to fight and withstand domination. Specifically, community cultural wealth recognizes the "aspirational, linguistic, familial, social,

navigational, and resistant capital” (Rodríguez et al., 2016, p. 38; see also Rios-Ellis et al., 2015) that Latinx students have, and these provide them with multiple forms of cultural capital (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Rodríguez et al., 2016). According to Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) and Peralta, Caspary, and Boothe (2013), aspiration capital allows students to have hope and aspirations, and linguistic capital is the capacity to speak both English and their native language—in this case, Spanish. Familial capital focuses on the ability of Latinx students to maintain a healthy relationship, form a bond with others, and connect to resources. Social capital allows students to network with people as well as to community resources and to be able to navigate the institutions of society. Navigational capital is the ability to get the information they need to facilitate their success in college. Finally, resistance capital is the ability of Latinx students to persist in college or university despite the systemic racism they face.

These additional expansions of cultural capital provide a broader view of Bourdieu’s original framework. To find solutions to the educational opportunity gap of Latinx students in the community college, educators must have a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers Latinx students experience in college. It is essential to examine the causes of dismissal rates among Latino students to reverse inequitable outcomes. Characteristics such as family structure and family responsibilities play a significant role in Latinx students’ college enrollment (Settles, 2012). Institutional barriers such as severe funding cuts, fee increases (Martinez-Wenzl & Marquez, 2012), and selective college eligibility requirements affect the persistence and college graduation rate. However, acknowledging and supporting students’ cultural capital can change the trends of college completion rates. Therefore, disrupting these disparities will require an understanding of the social, cultural, and economic obstacles Latinx students face when transferring to four-year universities.

### **Critical Race Theory/LatCrit**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework that branched out of the legal studies field in the 1980s (Peralta et al., 2013), pioneered by devoted scholars of color who were committed to exposing the unseen aspect of race in society (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Traditional critical legal studies did not acknowledge race and racism, thereby legitimizing oppressive social structures (Yosso, 2005). CRT was born to expose racism (Parker & Lynn, 2002) and disrupt educational inequity (Vue, Haslerig, & Allen, 2017). It was created as a tool to understand the subtle but pervasive form of racism present after the Civil Right gains (Pérez Huber, 2011). A powerful theoretical framework, CRT helps researchers study the role of racism and how it intersects “with other forms of oppression in the lives of people of color” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 807). As Yosso (2005) explained, “CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices, and discourses” (p. 70). Thus, CRT, coupled with LatCrit, addresses racism in more depth.

LatCrit originated as a social justice project (Villalpando, 2004). A theoretical framework that grew from CRT (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), it is governed by the same five principles of CRT (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), which are discussed below. However, LatCrit addresses issues ignored by CRT that are specific to the Latinx group regarding their language, legal status, ethnicity, citizenship (Rodríguez et al., 2016), phenotype, accent, and surnames (Peralta et al., 2013). According to Villalpando (2004), LatCrit provides a lens by which to analyze Latinx individuals’ multidimensional identities. It gives researchers a tool to capture and coherently voice the experiences of Latinx individuals through a detailed analysis of oppression specific to Latinx communities and their histories (Pérez Huber, 2011; Rodríguez et al., 2015). Additionally,

this frame shows how dimensions of oppression related to Latinx communities maintain a separation between the entitled and the oppressed (Peralta et al., 2013).

CRT and LatCrit assist researchers in analyzing how students are systemically excluded and discriminated against as they challenge the concept of objectivity or neutrality in college systems. They allow researchers to recognize practices and policies that are not easily identifiable, so they can be dismantled and the barriers removed in order to support Latinx students' success in higher education (Villalpando, 2004). Pérez Huber (2009) has demonstrated this approach in her research on microaggressions and xenophobia. Her work articulates the relationship between individual experiences of Chicana/Latinx students with microaggressions and the institutionalized forms of racism which dominate Latinx students and their communities. In her 2009 qualitative study, she interviewed ten Chicana undergraduate students who were attending an elite research university. She used critical race testimonios (testimonials) to highlight how Latinas use community cultural wealth to navigate higher education and challenge microaggressions. Like Pérez Huber's work, Araujo (2011) used this lens to articulate eight migrant farmworker students' life experiences. He wrote about year-one experiences of migrant farmworker students in the College Assistance Migrant Program and how they succeeded when given the tools to help them complete the term. This example reinforces the importance of policies whose purpose is to dismantle discrimination and support students who attend college, but it is also crucial to hear Latinx students' voices to first determine what those barriers/forms of discrimination are.

LatCrit and CRT give researchers tools to voice the experiences of Latinx students. As such, they can be used in five different ways in education (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011). First, they can be used to focus the research on the role of racism and how multiple types of oppression intersect (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011), as well as to verify how they are ingrained in the everyday operation of a college campus (Villalpando,

2004). They also intersect with various forms of oppression related to language, sexual characteristics, social and immigration status, phenotype, accent, surname (Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009), and generation status (Villalpando, 2004). However, each type of oppression can also be contingent upon other categories of discrimination, e.g., if a Latina student is alienated based on her culture, the fact that she is a woman, belongs to a particular socioeconomic class, is an immigrant, and is perceived as an English-language learner all contribute to the alienation. Further, CRT and LatCrit also show that when there is oppression, there is also resistance (Delgado Bernal 2002; Villalpando, 2004).

Second, the two theoretical frameworks challenge dominant ideologies embedded in the educational system, its practices (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011), and equal opportunities in college (Hernandez, Mobley, Coryell, Yu, & Martinez, 2013). Simply said, CRT and LatCrit disclose how advocating colorblindness and race neutrality act as a cover-up to benefit dominant groups (Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). In a like manner, Vue et al. (2017) assert that colorblindness silences and mutes racialized experiences. These academic frameworks confront the “deficit framework used to explain Chicanx educational inequality” as stated by Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001, p. 313). So, CRT in education originates with the notion that race and racism exist, and it disputes the original assertions that colleges make toward being impartial and merit-based, excluding race and being equal to all (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Ramirez, 2011; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009).

Third, CRT and LatCrit can be used to recognize experiential knowledge (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011) and to illustrate the lived experiences of people of color as strengths (Hernandez et al., 2013). This tenet views Latinx identity as an asset, a form of empowerment and strength. It stresses the need to understand that Latinx students’ identities can nourish them and thus empower them personally and in college

(Villalpando, 2004). Delgado Bernal (2002) adds that students' experiential knowledge "allow[s] research to embrace the use of counterstories, narratives, testimonios, oral histories" (p. 109), biographies, escenarios, parables, cuentos, dichos (proverbs), and chronicles (Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009) to highlight the distinctive experiences of Latinx students.

Next, CRT and LatCrit extend beyond the boundaries of multiple disciplines (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009). They allow researchers to draw knowledge and methods from other disciplines such as "ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history, law, psychology, film, theater and other fields" (Yosso, 2005, p. 74) to create an environment where historically underserved students can thrive (Delgado Bernal 2002; Yosso, 2005). Lastly, CRT and LatCrit have social justice as their driving force (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011; Hernandez et al., 2013) They go after changes in the political and social arena to benefit marginalized communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002). CRT and LatCrit work to eliminate racism, sexism, and poverty (Minikel-Lacocque, 2013; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009) and all forms of discrimination based on "race, gender, language, generation status, sexual preference, and class" (Villalpando, 2004, p. 45). They allow and even push student services professionals to create programs and practices to eliminate racist and heterosexist stereotypes towards LGBTQ Latinx students, as one prominent example (Villalpando, 2004).

The strategies described above allow researchers in the field of education to focus their research on the lived experiences of minority groups and demonstrate how racism and other types of oppression intersect within educational institutions (Pérez Huber, 2011). Minikel-Lacocque (2013) argues that CRT invites us to draw attention to Latinx students' life experiences by describing their stories while they are in college. She uses CRT to emphasize students' voices as "expert" (p. 448) sources of knowledge

and disrupts the perception of students of color as victims. Instead, she focuses on recognizing the resilience and assets that students bring to college. In her work, Minikel-Lacocque examined the life experiences of six students who transitioned from high school to college, using a qualitative-case study design to analyze the similarities and differences among students' experiences. She also used grounded theory to collect and code the data for themes and concepts. She found that these students experienced microaggressions while in college.

This qualitative study of Latinx students at City College of San Francisco (CCSF) used the frameworks of Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) and community cultural wealth to interpret the lived experiences of Latinx students who plan to transfer to UCs, CSUs, or private institutions. LatCrit gave me the tools to analyze how the different types of oppression have impacted Latinx lives in institutions of higher education and society through the one-on-one and focus group interviews. LatCrit also provided contextual lenses for examining the patterns of institutional barriers affecting students' integration into community college and their success in it (Ramirez, 2011). It demonstrated that the dominant discourse used in higher education perpetuates racism and discrimination.

Fernandez (2002) and Ramirez (2011) argued that students' perspectives and students' voices are missing from research and that this is due to the dominant school discourse. That dominant discourse assumes "what is true and in the best interest of the dominant group is true for everyone and in everyone's best interest" (Love, 2004, p. 230). This means that the Eurocentric curriculum is implemented as the right one for everybody, colorblindness allows the dominant culture to "never see color," and that the myth of meritocracy—that success is an accurate assessment of ability because every student has equal access to and opportunity for education—gets perpetuated (Love, 2004). This attitude ignores the fact that race is important in the decision-making of people of color as well as the fact that the achievement gap many scholars talk about

places people of color at a deficit instead of scholars changing the conversation and talking about the “resource gap, expectation gap, or teacher efficacy gap or relationship gap” (p. 235).

### **Similar Studies**

My searches covering the topic of Latinx students’ experiences in post-secondary education have not generated specific studies addressing barriers and supports influencing Latinx students transferring from a community college to a four-year college. Thus, this study is the first to examine lived experiences of Latinx students in their transfer journey. The topics covered include institutional barriers, financial challenges, and cultural and personal hurdles as well as microaggressions on college campuses. The four studies described below were conducted at four-year universities; however, they are similar to mine in that they focus on challenges Latinx students face in college. They are all qualitative designs with a focus on interviews. The authors have put students’ voices at the forefront through a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit approach. For example, Pérez Huber (2009) began her work titled “Challenging Racist Nativist Framing: Acknowledging the Community Cultural Wealth of Undocumented Chicana College Students to Reframe the Immigration Debate” by interviewing 10 Chicana (Mexican American) students in an elite undergraduate university. Her second study, “Discourses of Racist Nativism in California Public Education: English Dominance as Racist Nativist Microaggressions” (2011), built on the first one, but this time she interviewed 20 U.S.- born, undocumented students who attended a University of California. All participants fit the categories of being female, being of Mexican descent, and being of low socioeconomic status. Both of her studies (2009 & 2011) relied on CRT and LatCrit as a lens to document students’ experiences of “struggles, survival, and resistance” (Pérez Huber, 2011, p. 388) in institutions that do not have a system in place

to support them in their educational trajectory. Although the focus of her second study was on exploring students' experiences in K-12 education systems, in both studies she concluded that race and immigration status shaped students' experiences. They were also able to challenge the racist discourse by utilizing community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Of particular significance is the finding that social networks were essential to navigating social institutions and colleges.

The study by Yosso et al. (2009) titled "Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates" was qualitative, like Pérez Huber's, but different in that it was guided by eight focus group discussions with 37 students (19 female & 18 male) instead of using individual interviews as Pérez Huber did. The authors used CRT to shed light on students' experiences with racial microaggressions. Their findings indicated that racial microaggressions do not only affect the academic achievement of Latinx students, but also affect them physically, emotionally, and mentally. However, students' resilience in Yosso et al. and Pérez Huber's research depended on how they drew on cultural knowledge, skills, and social networks to navigate college. That knowledge and those skills were interpreted through Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework.

Like the authors above, Minikel-Lacocque's (2013) study titled "Racism, College, and the Power of Words: Racial Microaggressions Reconsidered," exposed race-related microaggressions that Latinx students encountered in their college journey. But unlike Yosso et al. and Pérez Huber, Minikel-Lacocque followed six Latinx students for 10 months who were transitioning from high school to college. During this time, she developed an intimate understanding of their experience and found that Latinx students experienced a wide range of racial microaggressions on the college campus: for example, a micro assault by a bus driver and feelings of isolation due to unwelcoming stares which she considered "'automatic' and 'unconscious' acts of racial discrimination" (2013, p.

446). This is the spectrum of microaggressions. They can range from one-time acts to constant occurrences.

Building on the works of the authors cited here, my work adds to theirs in that it is qualitative, using a strengths-based approach, and it relies on CRT/LatCrit as a lens to understand and articulate the experiences of Latinx students at CCSF. The interview methods of focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews assisted me in drawing from participant responses to generate counter-storytelling to respond to the research question. In addition to looking at racial microaggressions based on language, accent, culture, and immigration status on college campuses, this study explored other types of barriers—such as institutional, economic, and cultural—to pinpoint some family hurdles Latinx students confront as they prepare to transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges or universities. Scholars such as Yosso et al. (2009), Pérez Huber (2009, 2011), and Minikel-Lacocque (2013) demonstrate that the students they interviewed faced many challenges but used community cultural wealth to navigate higher education. It is critical to pay attention to students' actual experiences to be able to make changes and thus create support not only for undergraduate Latinx students but also for any student of color who is in the educational pipeline. My work will contribute to this body of literature where students' voices are in the foreground of the study and their lived experiences inform policy changes to facilitate postsecondary degree completion.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the experiences of Latinx community college students planning to transfer from City College of San Francisco (CCSF) to four-year institutions of higher education such as the California State University system, the University of California system, or a private institution. Fernandez (2002) and Ramirez (2011) argue that students' perspectives and students' voices are missing from research addressing barriers facing college-going Latinx students. The data collected answered the research question below:

What factors do Latinx students at City College of San Francisco perceive as supports for and barriers to navigating higher education as they prepare to transfer to four-year colleges or universities?

This chapter covers the following topics and is organized as follows: research design, study context, data collection, collection procedure, data analysis, and trustworthiness and limitations, which is embedded in the positionality section.

#### **Research Design**

This qualitative study relied on interviews that included semi-structured, open-ended questions based on phenomenological and counter-narrative structures, as well as a semi-structured process, to draw out participant responses in a manner that generated

counter-storytelling (telling a story) about their experiences as Latinx students navigating their transfer from a two- to a four-year institution. The questions, the interview process, and the interview formats guided the research to explore, investigate, and learn about these experiences (Leavy, 2017). Using a small sample of participants, this study examined a dimension of the social phenomenon of navigating the transfer from a two- to a four-year institution, including how students navigate higher education in a community college and the key supports and barriers they experience as they prepare to transfer. I engaged in a phenomenological and counter-storytelling interviewing process to document the untold stories of the participants, who were preparing to transfer from CCSF to a four-year university, thus demonstrating the value of students' life experiences and meaning-making processes (Leavy, 2017).

### **Phenomenological Study**

This study consisted of investigating how people experience a specific phenomenon (Leavy, 2017), thus serving as a mechanism for creating a detailed and in-depth description of students' experiences, feelings, and perceptions about a specific educational phenomenon (Roulston, 2010) – in this study, the phenomenon of preparing to transfer from a community college to a four-year university. In other words, it describes the internal meaning, the essence of lived experiences (deMarrais, 2004), as students navigate the transfer process. The essence in this study refers to Latinx students' experiences related to their multidimensional identities as they navigate higher education, facing multiple obstacles. Their experiences or multiple truths as described by Ladson-Billings (2003), will extend the original notions of finding universal truths and essences. Instead, this study will focus on exploring contextual and situated truths, which are their lived experiences, through the individual in-depth interviews. Examples of phenomenological techniques will be explained in the data collection section.

The German philosophers Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) developed the field of phenomenology to understand the social reality of people: “how people experience the topic under investigation” through ethnography and interviews (Leavy, 2017, p. 129). According to Groenewald (2004), the objective of the phenomenological researcher is to describe the phenomenon as meticulously as possible. One way to exercise this is by first stating the researcher’s epistemology, “the study of the source of knowledge” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). I positioned my epistemology within a female Latina experience, gained through my personal, professional, and academic journey (Pérez Huber, 2009), to better understand the relationship with the participants of this study and thus report the “truths,” as defined by Ladson-Billings (2003, p. 12). Ladson-Billings asked that researchers recognize our “truths,” because our epistemology illuminates or obstructs those “truths” (Ladson- Billings, 2003, p. 12)—in this case, the stories/knowledge that was constructed through the counter-storytelling regarding the support and barriers CCSF Latinx students grapple with as they prepare for their next college journey.

### **Counter-Storytelling**

Counter-storytelling is “a method of telling the stories of people whose experiences are not often told” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). In this case, I documented the stated experiences of Latinx students at CCSF, in part, through the stories they told of their experiences. These stories were used to challenge the dominant discourses (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) that silence and distort the rich story of the often-oppressed Latinx college students. Counterstories serve the following functions: they build community among those who are marginalized “by putting a human and familiar face to educational practices” (p. 36); they challenge what is known as power; they provide a means to change beliefs and allow the marginalized to feel supported

(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This process provided college-going Latinx students a platform on which to tell their stories and feel supported as they navigate higher education.

To gain insight into CCSF Latinx students' lived experiences, I used the simple level of a symbolic interaction framework to structure the counter-storytelling (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). In other words, I focused on the participants' stories, not the interaction of the participants with the researcher nor on the relationship to the audience of the dissertation (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). A complete symbolic interaction process consists of focusing the study and analysis on three groups of people: the "producer" of the story/participants, the "coaxer"/interviewer, and the "consumer"/those who are interested in the story (Earthy & Cronin, 2008, p. 3). As stated above, this study concentrated on the participants' stories. Though not a focus of this study, the relationship between the participants and the interviewer was still crucial and it played an important role in the research because it influenced the way the interviewees perceived, understood, and experienced the issues under study (Earthy & Cronin, 2008). As a Latinx (female) myself, who experienced barriers and found ways to overcome them, I brought my own personal experience to build trust and make my role as a researcher work well. The type of questions used to elicit the stories were mostly open-ended and are explained in detail in the collection procedure section.

### **Study Context and Participants**

The study was conducted at City College of San Francisco (CCSF), one of 114 community colleges in northern California. It is the only two-year college in San Francisco and it offers 11 different centers/campuses and more than 50 academic programs in over 100 occupational disciplines. Additionally, CCSF provides free non-

credit classes in ESL, citizenship, and adult education, as well as credit courses that can be applied to fulfill the general education requirement for transfer to four-year institutions. CCSF has an articulation agreement with the California State University (CSU) system, the University of California (UC) system, private and public universities in California, and some other universities in the United States.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, the overall enrollment was 60,137 students. Student demographics for those taking credit courses were as follows: 30.1% Asian; 24.9% Latinx; 23.5 % White; 7.7% African American; 5.8% Filipino; 5.4% two or more races; 7% Pacific Islander; 0.3% American Indian/Alaskan native; and 1.6 % unknown (CCSF, 2017). According to the 2015 CCSF Equity report, a large “number of identified underrepresented populations, such as African American, Latino/a Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Filipino, and students with disabilities” (p. 6) experience disproportionate gaps in education at City College of San Francisco (CCSF, 2015). Furthermore, more than half of CCSF students qualify for financial aid. Based on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data (2014), 49% of students surveyed said that financial resources were their greatest obstacle (CCSF, 2015).

### **Participant Selection Criteria**

The study’s participants were comprised of a purposive sample of five Latinx students attending CCSF who identified themselves as: Latinx; first-generation college students; one male, three females, one gender non-conforming; and low socioeconomic status as defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. They were in their second year in college and were a mix of two Puente (a learning community program) and three non-Puente students. They all indicated that they planned to transfer to obtain a bachelor’s degree. All participants were adults, 18 years old or older. Their background information was collected through a short initial survey, which they

completed during the selection process. For reference, the Puente Project is “a year-long academic and community leadership program designed to increase the number of community college students transferring to four-year colleges or universities. To meet this goal, the national award-winning program emphasizes writing, counseling and mentoring” (CCSF catalog 2016-2017, p. 57). Given that I work at CCSF as an academic counselor and Puente Project co-coordinator, I am familiar with the areas where recruitment occurred. I recruited participants from Latin American & Latino/a Studies (LALS) classes (15), counseling center-Latino Network Services (LSN), and Voices of Immigrants Demonstrating Achievement (VIDA) student resource center, which supports students affected by immigration and citizenship status. None of my participants were students in my current cohort of Puente advisees.

### **Recruitment Procedure**

I recruited five participants through the following actions:

1. After IRB for CSUEB and CCSF were approved, I emailed the Latin American & Latino/a Studies Department chairperson to get approval to contact the Latin American & Latino/a Studies (LALS) instructors.
2. After my request was approved, I emailed LALS instructors to discuss the nature of my study. After they agreed, I did a short (five minute) presentation in their classes. I distributed the short background survey and collected it right after students completed it.
3. I also contacted the Multicultural Retention Program chairperson to get permission to contact the coordinator of LSN. I contacted the coordinator of VIDA via email as well. I then stopped by their locations to explain in more detail the nature of my research. I requested their support in distributing,

collecting, and putting the surveys in a black locked survey box that was placed in a secured location.

- a. LSN has four counselors with whom I coordinated individually to help me distribute and collect the surveys from potential study participants when they met with them during their counseling appointments. After the surveys were completed, they dropped them in a locked survey box for storage until I picked them up. I also had a tray with the survey in the computer lab on the student sign-in table. I coordinated with the office manager to have the surveys available and to encourage students to fill them out. Once the surveys were completed they were deposited in the locked survey box. I called the coordinators to check on the status of the surveys weekly and I picked up both survey boxes on my last day of recruitment.
- b. At the same time, I contacted the VIDA coordinator to help me deliver and collect the background surveys. I explained the nature of the study at that time, and with his help, I placed the survey tray and the locked survey box near the computer used to check in. Students had an option to fill out the survey and then drop it in the survey box or to scan the barcode on the survey and complete it online. I placed a sign above the tray saying:

*I am looking for a group of 3 to 5 students who are willing to share their struggles and successes at CCSF. By participating in this study, you can help Latina/Latino/Latinx students have a better experience when they transfer to a four-year college.”* (Latina/o/x was used because many students may not be familiar with the new term “Latinx.”)

4. Simultaneously, I emailed former Puente students using the script in Appendix C. Once interested students responded, I explained more fully the nature of the research, including their rights and responsibilities as participants.
5. After creating a list of all participants who met the study criteria, which included 19 students, I contacted them via email, and then phoned them to follow up. They filled out online the pre-focus group survey in Appendix D. This helped me collect data on their general impressions about the barriers they face and supports they receive as they prepare to transfer to a four-year college/university.
6. After they all submitted the survey, I contacted all participants to explain how the five students were going to be chosen for the study, which was based on the criteria stated in the study (the goal was to have a balance of 1<sup>st</sup>-, 2<sup>nd</sup>-, and 3<sup>rd</sup>-generation college students, male and female, of low socioeconomic status, students who planned to transfer, and those who could meet on the dates presented). Ten of them agreed to participate, but only six committed to coming because some had to work, while others had family obligations. A few needed childcare, which I offered to provide, but only five showed up the day of the first meeting.
7. The five participants came 30 minutes early to fill out the consent forms in Appendix A, along with the long background survey in Appendix E.

In the following section, I describe the collection of the data, beginning by describing the instruments and how they facilitated the collection of the data.

## Data Collection

This qualitative study relied on four types of data collection: two background surveys (short and long), a pre-focus group survey, 10 one-on-one interviews, and two focus group interviews.

### Background Surveys

Three types of background surveys were used to conduct the study: a short survey (with eight “yes/no” or “circle one” questions) for prospective participants (Appendix B), another short online survey (Pre-focus group survey) with two open-ended questions and multiple “check all that apply” questions (Appendix D), and a long survey (with 17 short answer or “mark a check” √ questions), for participants who were selected for the study (Appendix E).

**Short survey.** As noted above, a short survey was used to solicit participants. It was given to them in the LALS classes and LSN counseling unit, VIDA (a student resource center), and my counseling unit at my center. The selected participant responses to this short survey were included in the data.

**Pre-focus group survey.** This survey was emailed to all participants who met the criteria of the study, and it was used to gather general information about the barriers and supports for transferring to CSUs/UCs/private institutions.

**Long survey.** After the five students were identified, and they agreed to participate, they were given a longer, one-and-a-half-page background survey. The survey facilitated the collection of information including but not limited to ethnicity, gender, age, high school education, and student college status: part-time vs. full-time, income level, marital status, and transfer major.

## Interviews

This study also relied on two types of interviews—individual and focus group—as a method of drawing on the participants’ responses to generate counter-storytelling (telling a story) in response to the research questions. This facilitated data gathering to support my research question. Each interview gave my participants time and space to talk about what they considered essential, using their own language to describe their experiences.

**Individual interviews.** I conducted two rounds of individual interviews with each of the participants. Two students were part of the Puente Project, and three were not. The first individual interviews were conducted 2½ weeks after the initial focus group meeting. The second one-on-one interviews took place one week after the initial individual meetings were completed.

Considering the nature of this qualitative research, a semi-structured interview was fitting, and participants were free to choose their own terms to answer questions posed by the interviewer (Roulston, 2010). It was also in-depth and open-ended, and participants offered detailed responses and went in any direction they wanted to respond to the interview questions (Leavy, 2017). During the first individual interview, participants were asked to talk about parts of their story, and during the second individual interview, I took the lead and prepared and asked questions based on the emerging analysis (Earthy & Cronin, 2008).

The individual interviews were used to elicit counter-storytelling. Therefore, I created a detailed interview guide with a list of open-ended questions (Appendix F). The questions were organized as a “funnel,” which means that the interview questions went from broad and more general questions to more specific (e.g., “Tell me about your life. Tell me what happened, or have you ever experienced...?”) (Earthy & Cronin, 2008,

p. 12). Most of the stories came from the one-on-one interviews because the questions guided them to tell their stories. As a researcher, I participated, interacted, and guided them less in the one-on-one interview than in the focus group, unless the participants felt stuck. The types of questions used to elicit the students' stories were used in chronological order, for example: "When did you first...? Starting at the beginning, tell me about...? Thinking back over the last week... Looking ahead...?" (Earthy & Cronin, 2008, p. 11). Additionally, I used "probes" or clarifying statements, which were used to demonstrate active listening and collect data (Leavy, 2017). Probes demonstrated active listening by asking participants to give examples or expand on what they said. For example, this involved saying to the participant, "please tell me more" (Leavy, 2017, p. 140). Additionally, I was attentive to what Leavy (2017) calls "markers" (body language), which refers to writing cues and keys of valuable information that I jotted down in my notes while each participant spoke.

**Focus group interview.** The focus group interview relied on the phenomenological strategy. It was a semi-structured and in-depth interview focusing on the phenomenon of Latinx students' college experiences regarding the barriers they face and the support they receive, and I was more involved with the participants than I was during the individual interviews. In other words, the participants were guided more. Similar to gathering counter-storytelling narratives, the questions were organized as a "funnel," and I used probes. After each interview, I listened to the interviews several times to come up with possible codes, categories, and emerging themes. Then I prepared questions for the next interviews. After the data were transcribed I downloaded them into ATLAS.ti and began the analysis. Although the individual interviews and focus groups shared many similarities, there were unique qualities to the focus groups. Consequently, the phenomenological interview process was used more in the focus group interviews to generate students' stories. Two focus groups were used for the collection of data using

questions in Appendix F. One was conducted at the beginning of the study and the other at the end of the research as a way to process the member check and verify the accuracy of the data and agree on the emergent themes of the study. Appendix F presents the questions used in the study. This unique interview method allowed the researcher to collect data from small groups of people who got together in an informal group session to discuss specific topics (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). Similar to the two one-on-one interviews, the focus group interviews were semi-structured (Leavy, 2017). This method helped me explore a social phenomenon, a “study of the lifeworld,” on a more in-depth level (deMarrais, 2004, p. 56). In this case, the lifeworld involves the support postsecondary Latinx students receive and barriers they face as they prepare to transfer to colleges or universities to obtain a bachelor’s degree.

Historically, focus groups have been a staple in research (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). In the 1920s, researchers used the method to identify survey questions. In 1940, Robert Mentor and Paul Lazarsfeld, who formalized the focus group as a research method, used them to investigate the media’s effect on people’s attitudes towards the U.S. involvement in the Second World War (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Soon after, focus groups began to be used in the marketplace to assess the opinions and attitudes of customers. Now they are used to collect qualitative data in the social sciences. In the words of Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009), “focus groups are an economical, fast and efficient method for obtaining data from multiple participants” (p. 2). This method gives participants a sense of closeness, and they may feel safer than they might in a one-on-one interview, depending on how the group interviews are run. Focus groups also create an environment where participants engage in more spontaneous responses (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). As a researcher, I asked questions and used probes to engage the participants in the study and as part of obtaining their stories. The participants spoke freely using a few key questions to guide the discussions (Leavy, 2017). The focus group setting encouraged

members to support one another, ask questions, exchange anecdotes, and comment on each other's experiences (Roulston, 2010), which was more noticeable in the last group interview.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

After the participants were selected, and consent forms were signed and agreed upon by each student, I began collecting the data. The first one-hour-and-23-minute focus group interview gave participants time and space to get to know each other and discuss the barriers and/or support they have experienced as they prepare to transfer. I began the focus group by asking my participants to agree to the importance of keeping information discussed in the focus group confidential. I then asked each participant to verbally agree to keep everything discussed in the room confidential and reminded them at the end of the group not to discuss the material outside the group. In addition to the above, I read the interview script reviewing the nature of the study, their rights, and what was going to happen during the one-hour interview. Unlike other conversational interviews, the semi-structured interview included: (1) an introductory question, (2) transition questions, (3) key questions, and (4) closing questions (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The introductory question helped me begin the interview with easy questions. The transition questions slowly guided the conversation towards the key/main questions. The main questions solicited key information, and as the interviews came to an end, I asked easy questions again to give participants a chance to talk about issues and concerns they had at that point. I asked something like, "Before we conclude this interview, is there something about your experience (at CCSF) that influences how you engage in your classes that we have not yet had a chance to discuss?" (Castillo-Montoya, 2016, p. 823).

The first focus group interview followed the phenomenological techniques using open-ended questions and followed the structure shown below.

“Think of a time when you experienced \_\_\_\_\_ and describe that in as much detail as possible.”

Possible follow-up questions (provided in Appendix F) were:

“You mentioned \_\_\_ --tell me what that was like for you.”

“You mentioned \_\_\_ --describe that in more detail for me.” (Roulston, 2010, pp.16-17)

Before participants left the first focus group, they were reminded that in a week they were going to be contacted again to schedule the individual interview sessions.

The first one-on-one interview lasted one hour with each participant, for a total of five hours with all participants. The questions in the one-on-one interviews were intended to elicit story-telling: (e.g., “Tell me a story about \_\_\_\_\_? Tell me about a time when you were \_\_\_\_\_?”). The second one-on-one interview lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, depending on the participants. This served as a follow-up or a continuation of unfinished earlier interview discussions.

The final focus group interview lasted one hour and gave participants a chance to reflect on the whole interview process. They were also presented with two anonymous interviewees’ excerpts to begin the discussion. Students read the excerpts, highlighted strong lines, then talked about them in relation to the general theme: barriers they face at CCSF. Before the interview was finished, they were thanked for their participation and they received a small token of my appreciation with a card and a \$10 Amazon gift certificate.

The first interview took place in a multiuse room at CCSF and the rest in the college library in a neutral, accessible spot. The interviews were audiotaped, then

downloaded onto a personal computer, and then stored in a safe place with a secure password. To ensure a breach of confidentiality did not occur, all information and data relating to this project were kept in password-protected files in a personal computer. Respondents were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Any related materials/documentation will be destroyed after one year or at the end of the study. Students were reminded of the confidentiality of the study before and after every meeting. Table 1 displays the timeline, meeting length, and locations for all research activities in the study.

### **Data Analysis**

I used an inductive approach to collect and analyze the data. Hence, the data analysis relied on Saldaña's (2013) coding process to generate codes and Leavy's (2017) coding information. I also used ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to help code and categorize the data. After each interview, I listened to the interview to get a general idea of codes, categories, and possible themes. Then, after each interview was transcribed, I began the line-by-line coding or pre-coding by "highlighting...significant, participant quotes or passages" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 19) as they related to the literature review and the research question. This process led to saving preliminary data (words, phrases, or codes) in ATLAS.ti. I also coded manually at the beginning because I did not completely trust the computer software. In addition to coding and writing short memos throughout the interview process, I created an analytic memo (Saldaña, 2013) organizer related to the emerging categories and themes. In the right-hand column, I wrote a descriptive or *in vivo* code (participant's own words); on the left, I wrote descriptive codes to summarize the main topic of the excerpt. Next, I categorized them by arranging codes into patterns and similar ideas (Saldana, 2013), which later became themes/concepts designed to elicit answers to my research question.

<b>Research activity</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Meeting time</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Survey # 1 (short)</b>	October 25- November 15	Varies 3-5 minutes	LALS classes, LSN, VIDA, counseling office at my location
<b>Pre-focus group survey</b>	November 16-21	Varies 5-10 minutes	online
<b>Survey #2 &amp; consent form (long)</b>	November 26-December 3	Varies 5-10 minutes	Participants' own location
<b>Focus group #1</b>	December 21	83 minutes	College library's group study room
<b>Indiv. Interviews #1</b>	January 7-11	1 hour	College library's group study room
<b>Indiv. Interviews #2 (follow-up)</b>	January 22-29	45 minutes to 1 hour	College library's group study room
<b>Final focus group "member check"</b>	February 9	1 hour	College library's group study room

*Table 1: Research Activity and Timeline*

Two-and-a-half weeks after the first focus group interview occurred, I conducted individual interviews with each of the five participants using the collection tool shown in Appendix F. After the second set of data was transcribed, I continued to code and focus more on the emerging themes until I saturated the data. I knew I had exhausted coding the data when the major themes or concepts continued to repeat. The codes and categories were influenced by my review of the literature and the study's research question. They spoke to the (a) support students see as necessary, and (b) barriers preventing their progress as they prepare to transfer. The preliminary themes that emerged from the study were presented to each student approximately two months later at the last focus group interview, with their own data supporting the themes. The participants also did strong line analysis to further focus the discussion on an emerging theme. Participants were presented with two anonymous texts. They all read them alone and highlighted or underlined meaningful passages related to the overall themes. They then read the passages out loud and explained why they chose them and how those highlighted or

underlined passages connected to the topic under discussion. This final meeting lasted one hour, and the data collected went through the same coding, categorizing, and theming process as did the previous interviews. Finally, I used a Descriptive Analysis: Codes and Definitions graphic organizer to organize the themes and began writing up the findings.

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of this study was established by following protocol throughout the entire study and by using California State University East Bay IRB-approved sources/tools, such as the self-reported instruments used during the in-depth focus group interviews. I developed questions based on prior researchers' work. Also, I downloaded and saved the interviews on a personal computer, with password protection, thus protecting access to the interviewees' personal data. I protected their confidentiality by giving them pseudonyms during the coding process and during the reporting of the data. I went through multiple rounds of coding until the data reached saturation. Plus, I had a critical colleague and an experienced program faculty member check the accuracy of my analysis. Additionally, I had all participants check the emerging themes during the last focus group, member check, and interview (see Appendix G).

### **Positionality and Limitations**

The issue of access to higher education via the community college pathway is a personal one for me. As a Latinx (female), I have personally witnessed and experienced inequality within the education system. However, I was determined that these inequities would not stop me from getting an education and unraveling financial challenges. My

past experiences continue to inspire and influence my research. Thus, it is important to share my story in presenting this study.

I am a 44-year-old female Afro-Bolivian Latinx, a first-generation student and one of 13 children, five of whom died within their first two years of life. I was born and raised in Tocaña, a small town in Nor Yungas (one of 20 provinces near La Paz city), La Paz, Bolivia, among people who empowered me through music, dance, and religion, blending Catholicism with African and Indigenous Bolivian beliefs. I did not know I was poor or discriminated against until I went to middle school in Coroico, the capital of Nor Yungas. Coroico had over one thousand inhabitants at that time and was the center of political and industrial happenings. I was 12 years old, and Coroico seemed to be the only option for somebody who wanted to continue studying. The other option was to stay in a small town, get married, and raise children, like many of my town family members did. Bolivian K-12 education was divided into primary and secondary education, and at 12 years old, I was still in primary school. During my first time in Coroico's school, I noticed that the color of my skin mattered and that there was a social distinction between those who had money and those who did not. From ages 12 to 18, I lived with different families in order to continue going to school because my parents could not afford to pay my room and board or rent a place for me to live. Luckily, whenever I needed a family, my parents' friends provided me with what I needed, and I paid them back by being their housekeeper. By the time I graduated from high school and was ready to enroll in college, I had lived with five different families.

I graduated from high school but needed to do community service to receive my high school diploma. Fortunately, my high school had a connection with the Amanecer program, a program that provided a home, protection, and defended the fundamental rights of homeless children from birth to age 18 in Cochabamba City. The program was founded by the Sisters of Charity, and I lived and worked in one of the houses, Madre

de Dios (Mother of God), for six months and worked in the daycare and afterschool program. Two months after I started my community service, I connected with one of my teachers, who introduced me to the Principal of the American International School of Bolivia (AISB), which served PreK-12 US-based education. Before I knew it, I was taking English as a Second Language classes, and after another six months, I enrolled in the AISB to take high school classes in English in the morning and attend the university in the afternoon. The university tuition was paid with a scholarship I had earned in high school.

By August 1995 I had a place to live and a high school to attend, all in English. I fell in love with the English language, and after two years in the international high school, Mr. Champi, the high school counselor, known as the man who made miracles happen, helped me apply to colleges and universities in the U.S. In August 1997, I arrived at Beloit College, Wisconsin on a 50% scholarship. The other 50% was paid by a generous CSU East Bay professor, Phyllis Kaplan.

My journey of traveling and connecting with people on my own is unique but not unusual. In the United States, Phyllis Kaplan became my mentor and provider. She introduced me to Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco, founded by a visionary leader, Cecil Williams, who created a community to empower the marginalized, embrace humanity, and offer unconditional love. The core values of unconditional love and acceptance are now the values I live by.

I currently work as a full-time academic counselor at City College of San Francisco (CCSF) with students of diverse backgrounds, including Latinx students. When I began working at CCSF, I noticed that persistence and degree completion of Latinx and African American students has always been low. I learned that access to higher education for Latinx students is still difficult even with the support of programs like Puente. So, I am determined to find the barriers Latinx students face, and how colleges can facilitate

their degree completion and transfer aspirations. I seek information to empower further administrators, faculty, staff, and educators with knowledge and skills to address the pervasive opportunity gap we face as Latinx in the educational system.

As I reflected on my background and my role at the college, I was concerned that my participants might be influenced by my position; they may withhold, or they may contribute more if my positionality increased their comfort level. Thus, I took an “insider” perspective in this study. Insider perspective research has been defined as the study of one’s own social group or society, referring to aspects that the participants and the researcher have in common such as the community and its members in a more intimate way (Greene, 2014). I understood many aspects of the culture which allowed for additional insights an outsider might not perceive; however, to take the insider standpoint also presented challenges, as described by Villenas (1996). Villenas stated that one must deal with “our own marginalizing experience and identities in relations to (the) dominant society” (p. 712). Taking the insider standpoint, I had to also be sensitive to not imposing my subject experiences or understandings in my analysis of the participants’ data. In practice, there were times when I applied my insider knowledge to the data collection and analysis process and others when I did my best to bracket this knowledge. I also recognized my privileged position of being in a doctorate program and working at the community college. This privilege is associated with the dominant culture/discourse, and I align myself with it by the nature of my work in higher education. Although I am a member of the Latinx community, my participants could have seen me as the oppressor at times, and that could cause awkwardness, affecting the examination of my position as an “insider” and “outsider” with numerous privileges, as noted by Delgado Bernal and Aleman (2017).

Undoubtedly, I was shaped by my participants and the dynamic of our interaction, as noted by Villenas (1996). My positionality, shortcomings, and influences were both a

strength and a possible limitation as I navigated insider and outsider status and applied and bracketed my knowledge and experience throughout the data collection and analysis process. Another limitation of my study included the fact that the results of this research cannot and should not be generalized or assumed to hold true for an entire Latinx student population. An additional challenge, which could have possibly influenced the study findings, was coordinating a time that all participants could meet because some had work conflicts, others had family obligations, and some needed childcare services which I had not planned for before the study began.

### **Conclusion**

As the Latinx populations continue to grow, they must, at a minimum, keep up with current workforce demands, and receiving a bachelor's degree is one step towards that goal. This study examined the barriers City College of San Francisco Latinx students face and the support they receive in completing their associate's degree and transferring to obtain a bachelor's degree. The literature review revealed that students face institutional, socio-cultural, economic, and cultural barriers that prevent them from getting a degree. However, hearing students' voices about the barriers they face was important. Perception is reality. This research was an exploration of whether the ideas presented in the literature align with student perspectives. The following question was intended to help bring students' voices to the forefront to address inequity issues at the college:

What factors do Latinx students at City College of San Francisco perceive as supports for and barriers to navigating higher education as they prepare to transfer to four-year colleges or universities?

I used community cultural wealth, coupled with CRT and LatCrit, to articulate the experiences of Latinx students. In preparing for data collection, I relied on focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and the use of counter-storytelling to bring the voices of students to light. The study's goal was to generate information to help faculty, staff, and administrators understand students' perceived obstacles in the transfer process. It was also to highlight areas of student strength and identify cultural norms and institutional processes that need improvement to increase Latinx transfer rates in this type of setting.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this research study was to examine the actual lived experiences of Latinx students who plan to transfer from City College of San Francisco (CCSF) to a UC, CSU, or a private institution. The study captured the stories of students who are often silenced within the system's research, and therefore, highlighting students' voices and students' perspectives is critical in addressing the issues of the low transfer rate. Although the State of California has begun to address some of the low transfer rate issues by eliminating developmental courses and implementing Bill AB705, more is needed to support historically underserved students such as African Americans, Latinx, and Pacific Islanders who often need more assistance. AB705 eliminated developmental courses and requires community college students to complete their transfer-level math and English in one year and English as a Second Language (ESL) in three years (CCCCO, 2019). CCSF has also been making changes to support all students. However, African American, Latinx, and Pacific Islander students need more attention to successfully complete their math, English, and other courses at the community college and then transfer to four-year colleges or universities to attain their bachelor's degree. This study will hopefully shed light on the issues of low transfer rate by explaining the barriers that Latinx students face as they navigate higher education and by offering suggestions to better support them.

Historically, California's community college funding formula was based on enrollment (FTES) and the number of services students received (CCCCO, 2018). However, that changed with the new funding formula, which will be fully implemented

in all community colleges by 2020, and which is now based on students earning degrees and certificates, completing transfer-level math and English within their first year, and successfully transferring to a four-year institution (CCCCO, 2019). These new policies require students to begin taking college-level courses, but many may not be ready to do so; therefore, it is now more significant than ever to consider students' perspectives and students' voices in the research regarding the barriers facing college-going Latinx students.

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Community Cultural Wealth framework guided the study and were used to highlight the voices of Latinx students regarding their real and perceived challenges in transferring to institutions of higher education. The counterstories collected from two focus groups, ten individual interviews, and an online survey are interwoven to present the results through themes that support the research question. These counterstories were guided by the question, "What factors do Latinx students at City College of San Francisco perceive as support for and barriers to navigating higher education as they prepare to transfer to four-year colleges or universities?"

### **Participants' Contextual Introduction**

The counterstories presented in this study reveal that Latinx students begin their community college journey after having experienced countless difficulties in high school. Every participant described having a very difficult high school experience. Here are a few excerpts to demonstrate that reality. Juliana remarked, "High school, for me, was like a prison because I went from being a really good student in elementary school and middle school to high school, [where] everybody is gang banging...I was judged for being myself." Or as Lupe said, "towards junior and senior year, I got into an abusive

relationship. And that basically took up my whole high school experience...I also stopped going to school.” Ramirez added, “my mom got...a bipolar disorder. She used to go through episodes and we’d have to take care of her. Then, I would come back to high school and it was...to be honest, I don’t really talk about it [tearing up]...I was really alone dealing with the situations at home.” And Sandra said,

those words are really heavy. My high school experience was, I don’t know how to explain it. It was hard. I used to get bullied for not knowing the language. Even by teachers, which is kind of sad. They would make fun of me because I couldn’t pronounce something but expect me to always participate.

Ulysses said, “in high school, I got very depressed.” All interviewees faced many difficulties in high school, which made them feel as if they were in prison physically or mentally; therefore, transitioning to community college was a way out of their dark past and an accomplishment.

High school was difficult for all the participants and like Ulysses, they stated how they believed that those high school struggles would continue at the community college:

I invested all my time in the psychology class. I passed it with more than an A, [but] I doubted myself going in, oh I’m probably going to fail this and that because I haven’t been in school for so long. And [that is] the reason I dropped out of high school. I couldn’t keep up with the work.

And as Sandra explained,

The first time [in college] was really hard because I had no idea what I was doing. Whenever you’ll ask a question, the staff, they kind of rolled their eyes and they were like, “You should know this kind of thing.” And I’m like, “No, I don’t because I’m brand new.”

However, when the participants began their studies at the community college, the participants' views on those difficulties changed when they were connected with appropriate resources. For example, Sandra described a counselor who had been a support to her: "Mr. Clark. He's been really big at guiding me through the process and kind of holding my hand." Juliana added, "unless you're getting support from a program like CalWORKs or EOPS or Puente, you don't really get too much support in enrolling."<sup>1</sup>

The barriers uncovered in this study ranged from students juggling home and life obligations while also finding resources to do well in college, asking for help when needed, managing their mental health issues silently, to taking classes with professors who consciously or unconsciously made them feel uncomfortable and less capable. Nonetheless, the support they received from different programs and services sustained their transfer aspirations. Although the students found safety and comfort in these student services, their stories reveal that more must be done to support them as they prepare to transfer to four-year colleges and universities.

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<sup>1</sup> CalWORKs [California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs)]—a public assistance program that assists students to complete their educational goals and then find employment as well as medical assistance, housing, food, clothing, and basic services. (Department of Social Services, 2019)]

EOPS [Extended Opportunity Programs and Services—a program that helps to enroll, retain, and transfer students who have historically been underrepresented and that provides wraparound student services. (CCCCO, 2019)]

Puente [Nationally recognized leadership program that offers wraparound services to students who are educationally underserved in California, including academic counseling and English instruction for students planning to transfer. (Puente, 2019)]

These empathetic student voices and stories are presented from a non-privileged college position and do not represent the majoritarian voice, the voice of the status quo. Therefore, to provide the reader with a context of the participants' stories, this section will begin by providing biographical introductions to the five participants using some excerpts from Langston Hughes's poem "Dream Deferred," which was first introduced in Chapter 1. I will use it when they talk about having their dreams deferred. They all have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. The participants' biographies will follow the counterstories to illustrate the barriers and supports Latinx students experience at a two-year public institution as they prepare to transfer. The themes will be presented as barriers first, followed by the supports, and will conclude with students' assets as described by Yosso (2005).

Dream Deferred (1951)

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore  
And then run  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?

—Langston Hughes<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> All subsequent references to this poem are from Hughes, L. (1995), *Montage of a dream deferred*, Ann Arbor, MI: UMI.

Meet Ulysses, a 23-year-old transgender, non-binary gender fluid student whose preferred pronouns are they/their/them. They (singular gender-neutral pronoun) were born in Mexico and immigrated to the U.S. with their mother at a very young age. Ulysses describes that it was not easy to come out to their family due to cultural values and expectations. It took them a while to define their identity. They say,

Being the oldest, being born female, I was not allowed to kind of go up and down the hall. I had to ask permission to go to the bathroom because it's at the far end of the apartment...later my mom had a boy, and he was allowed to go and do whatever he wanted to...the traditional binary of men/female kind of role started really kicking in. I was relied on a lot growing up, expected to be able to cook, and clean.

In college, Ulysses took a Latin American Studies class where they learned more about their culture and Muxes or Muches (pronounced Moo-Shey, this Zapotec word derived from the Spanish word for women). It refers to a group of indigenous men in El Istmo de Tehuantepec in Oaxaca, Mexico who openly dress in female attire and perform traditionally female roles. They are accepted in the Zapotec community and they are depicted as third sex (Mirandé, 2011). Ulysses commented,

I learned about Muje or Mushes, I think it is, and it's basically kind of like a mix of being trans, a trans male in Mexico and they're accepted but they're also used a lot. I learned about that...finally I found an identity.

They are an AB540, first-generation college student and rely on the Free City program to pay for school. They are a full-time student and work more than 20-25 hours per week to support themselves and their parents. They were a straight-A student in middle school and continued these grades for a few years into high school, which allowed them to qualify

for multiple awards. However, high school was challenging socially and emotionally, and they ultimately dropped out. Ulysses had a dream of going to college, and their parents expected the same, but their dream was deferred. Listening to Ulysses made me think of the poem's line "dry like a raisin in the sun" as they described their struggles in realizing their dream. Fortunately, years later they completed their General Education Development (GED) tests, enrolled at City College of San Francisco (CCSF), and now plan to transfer in Fall 2019, double-majoring in Psychology and Sociology. They also want to continue their studies in graduate school; their goal is to be a clinical psychologist and work with at-risk youth. Although their dream was deferred, they are now on track.

Lupe is a 20-year-old who hears music, dancing, and laughter when she hears the word Latina or Latinx. The word means "strong on the outside, strong on the inside," as she says. However, these are not words she would have used growing up:

When I was younger...I knew I was Mexican, but I more rejected it, just because the people around me were not like me.... I guess it's, in a way, I felt like I didn't belong, but it was with the wrong community or the wrong people.

Her preferred pronouns are she/her/hers. She is a first-generation college student but second-generation in the U. S. since she was born in San Francisco, but her parents were born in Mexico. She is a full-time student taking 14 units and working full time at 30-40 hours per week to support herself, pay for school, and occasionally contribute to her parents' household. She was a very studious child and made her parents proud until she got to high school, where she struggled to fit in socially. At the end of her junior year and the beginning of her senior year, she got into an abusive relationship which, she says, "took up [her] whole high school experience." She barely graduated and took a year off to work and stay away from her abusive boyfriend. Her dream of going to college was deferred and similar to Ulysses, "it [dried up] like a raisin" came to mind as she described

her struggles to continue her educational endeavors. A year later she enrolled at CCSF. She is quiet and prefers to take classes that engage her ethnicity. And she says,

I always try to make sure that the word Latin [is] in front of it [a course]. It's helpful to know that there's classes for Latin[x] people. I feel more...less intimidated by the classes, by the people who are going to be in my classes. Even though it's pretty diverse here, I tend to feel more comfortable with Latino people, or people that look like me.

Lupe plans to transfer by 2020 and major in Women's Studies. Her goal after college is to open a nonprofit organization to help women (especially women of color) to address issues of domestic violence and rape.

Meet Juliana, a 27-year-old student, and mother of three beautiful girls, two of her own and one of her partner's. Her preferred pronouns are she/her/hers. She, like the other female participants, struggled to define or accept her gender role, about which she says,

Growing up I was told "You're a girl, this is what you're supposed to do." I would talk back to my mom. And I told her, "I don't want to be a girl." I would hate wearing dresses. The way they made it...the culture makes you kind of hate being a girl. I hated it. I hated it. I would dress differently when I was in high school. I wouldn't wear tight clothes, but it was because I felt safer. I felt like no one was looking. My body was changing. I was going through puberty.

However, the fact that she hated being a girl changed and she says: "I graduated [from high school]. I went to the doctors...a week later. And, they were like, 'Yeah, you're... pregnant.' That was the first moment I actually embraced liking being a girl, because I hated it before."

She is a first-generation college student but second-generation in the U.S. She grew up in San Francisco, but her ancestry takes her back to El Salvador. Juliana was independent at a very young age. She had a strong will as a child, which helped her most of the time, but at other times it did not. She was expelled from her high school and placed at Independence High School. During this time, she was referred to a program that helped at-risk teens. She got a job, but it required her to stay in school to keep it. By the time she graduated from high school she was pregnant and working two jobs. She enrolled at CCSF but could only take one class per semester because she had to work to support herself, and soon, her child. She applied to the CalWORKs program but initially did not qualify because she made too much money even though she could not afford a babysitter or daycare.

As I go back and read Hughes's poem, a different line comes to mind as she tells me her struggles. Juliana's dream of going to college "stank like rotten meat" because although she was at CCSF she did not qualify for services. She then quit one of her jobs and applied to CalWORKs again and FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), which allowed her to become a full-time student and work less. She transferred to San Francisco State University in Spring 2019 and plans to graduate with her Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration in two years. Her goal is to help young girls with financial planning and getting their small business ideas started through the nonprofit organization she plans to open.

Ramirez is a 20-year-old first-generation male student but third-generation in the U.S., since both of his parents were born in California. His preferred pronouns are he/his/him. Although he did not talk about the traditional Latinx male roles, he explained what he did, and he says,

So, I used to do all of the cooking actually, now that I think about it. I think I used to do the majority of the cleaning too. I do the majority of the cleaning right now because no one else is cleaning in my house. I'm washing the dishes. The only thing I haven't really done is scrub, 'cause I don't really do that as I usually take ahold of the majority of the household chores.

His rich ancestry is a combination of his grandparents' heritages, who were from Mexico, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico. He is a full-time student and works 20-30 hours per week. He receives financial aid but contributes financially to his parents' household. Although Ramirez, like many of the other participants, had a dysfunctional family growing up, he still managed to graduate from high school with straight As. He then applied to San Francisco State University, where he attended one semester. Discouraged by the number of remedial courses he had to take and the lack of sense of belonging and a community, he dropped out. His dreams of attending college and obtaining a bachelor's degree were deferred and as I listen to Ramirez's struggles, once again I am reminded of Hughes's poem line "It stank like rotten meat," and it was "crust[ing] and sugar[ing] over like a syrupy sweet" because he was at the university of his dreams but could not continue. He tasted the joy of being in college but only for a short time. He then realized he could continue his studies at CCSF, where he then enrolled. His father and other relatives, all except his mother, were against that decision because they all believed CCSF was a second-tier school with very little to offer. Thanks to the encouragement of the only person who believed in him, his mother, he enrolled at CCSF and is planning to transfer in the Spring of 2020 and to major in Sociology. His goal is to work as a rehabilitation officer to help formerly incarcerated individuals get back on their feet.

Sandra is a 31-year-old student and the mother of a four-year-old girl. She is a first-generation college student and first-generation in the U.S. Her preferred pronouns

are she/her/hers. Growing up, she also had a difficult time with binary gender roles, referring to things her mother said, like,

“You got to cook and clean for your brothers. You got to help me.” She forced me to do it, now I know how to cook. And, my brothers don’t know how to clean their butts. That’s when I didn’t like being a Latina. That was one of the biggest challenges.

She was born in Guatemala and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of 12. She is a full-time student but cut back her work hours a year ago to fully commit to her studies and rely more on her husband financially. In the Fall 2018 semester she took 19.5 units and finished while obtaining all As and one B grade. For the Spring 2019 semester, she enrolled again for a full-time load (14-16) units. She is persistent and does not take “no” for an answer, which she learned from the first time she enrolled at CCSF when she had a “horrible time.” She said that the first time the process was very complicated, and she took classes that she later dropped and subsequently quit college altogether. Similar to the other four participants, Sandra had her dreams deferred. This once again reminded me of the same poem line “sagged like a heavy load,” as I carefully listen to her struggles in determining her future goals. Her desire to earn an associate’s degree faded away, at least for a little while. When she came back a few years later, she was bold and demanded assistance. This time she was connected to resources that supported her desire to get an education. She is on-track to transfer to Mills College in the fall of 2019 and plans to major in Biopsychology. Her goal is to offer counseling within the military community, especially to those who have PTSD or other mental illnesses. She also has a strong desire to highlight mental illness to Latinx families and help remove the stigma of mental illness in the Latinx community.

Given that all participants had their dreams deferred, it is essential to acknowledge that they did not give up, but persisted, and continue to persevere despite the obstacles they have encountered. Many of the barriers they face are ones that have already been covered, described, and reported by other researchers. The next section describes the additional, salient obstacles found in this study.

### **Barriers**

The findings below represent the perceived barriers Latinx students encountered at CCSF as they prepared to transfer to a four-year college or university. The barriers listed below are not in any order of importance: (1) juggling home life and its unstable conditions reduced the possibility of finding resources to do well in college; (2) cultural influences inhibited Latinx students' ability to ask for help; (3) mental health issues decreased their self-esteem and academic performance potential; and (4) micro-aggressions and negative stereotypes affected their perceptions of self and belief in their academic abilities. The study also found that students are financially challenged and encounter difficulties with the transfer process to UCs/CSUs or private universities, but these last two barriers will not be covered in this study as they have already been covered, described, and reported by other researchers such as Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017), Stevenson (2009), and Rodríguez et al. (2015), among others.

**Personal barriers: Juggling home life and its unstable conditions reduced the possibility of finding resources to do well in college.** The participants in this study understood the importance of going to college; however, they all juggled numerous family responsibilities. They wanted to commit to school and family, but they had to make difficult choices when it came to meeting with their instructors before or after class, going to tutoring, or going to work vs. going straight home to take care of their family

responsibilities. Students like Lupe and Ulysses worked full time and the rest worked part time. The comments below illustrate their added roles and responsibilities aside from going to school.

Sandra had a child and she said she would be put in a very difficult position if her daughter was to get sick because she could neither afford a babysitter nor miss classes. She worked part time and went to school full time. In addition to being a mother, she said:

I'm the secretary, I am the accountant, I am the chef, the maid. The driver, yes. All the roles that you can think of, I'm it. I am a full-time parent and a full-time student or a student-parent, that's...because...college is not designed to help parents.

Juliana was also a mother of three and besides her responsibilities as a mother, she went to school full time and worked part time, which was a big change for her since she had always worked full time. Reducing her work hours to 25 or less per week was possible because of the help she received from her partner. However, she needed to maintain those hours to continue to qualify for the CalWORKs program, one of the resource programs she relied on for support. She completed all her requirements and transferred to San Francisco State University. Her roles were similar to Sandra's, but she added that she also liked to share her knowledge, what she learned in school, with her kids because she wanted her kids to be strong. Adding to the complexity of the participants' roles, Juliana remarked, "It's difficult to be there for your family and prioritize your education at the same time. There has to be a balance and it has to be around your work schedule."

Ramirez had out-of-school additional responsibilities including managing family crises, as described below:

I'm the supporting position in my family [and] whenever we're in crisis I'll typically take hold of it. I'll typically be like, "Oh, we just gotta find him. We just gotta do this and we gotta do that...." I usually take hold of the majority of the household chores.

Lupe, on the other hand, worked full time and went to school full time. She had a difficult time connecting to on-campus resources due to her busy schedule and the demands of work, school, and family. She was constantly working on her time management, but she said that it was difficult to manage all those responsibilities. Below is a snippet of her struggles:

I always try to see what works best for my schedule. Like, if going to work, and then going to school at night. Or, if taking one day off from work, and then going all day to school...but then I don't have an actual day off. So, this semester, I took Monday and Wednesday off, just to go to school, but then the other five days, I have to work.

For Ulysses, things were complicated because they (singular gender-neutral pronoun) were on call at all times. They were a part-time student but worked full time. They described their struggles as follows:

Many of the difficulties I've had to face while attending CCSF mostly have stemmed from my home life. My home life can be very unstable and the people that I live with can be volatile. On any given day, an emotional confrontation may ensue and whatever assignments I have due the next day become afterthoughts. I then have added stress and cannot solely focus on my academics. Plus, I am heavily needed at home at random times, so it's difficult to stick around [after class] since I live on the other side of the city. Transferring is something I really

want to do; I just worry a lot about my home life, which impacts my academics and my ability to communicate any obstacles with difficult professors.

The excerpts above illustrate the multiple responsibilities all five participants had. They were different from students whose parents supported them while they attended college and whose only job was to go to school. Juliana, Sandra, and Ramirez reduced their full-time jobs to part-time to focus more on school and hopefully transfer soon. Their personal responsibilities varied from being an “accountant, chef, the maid, the driver,” as stated by Sandra, or the homemaker, as noted by Juliana. Their responsibilities also included being the family’s crisis manager, like Ramirez, and trying to manage several responsibilities, as mentioned by Lupe. In addition to the numerous responsibilities they had, the data also shows that the interviewees sought strength and empowerment from their families. This theme of family being important even if they sometimes dissuade more than they encourage will be fully explained in the section on support.

**Cultural barriers: Cultural influences primarily inhibited Latinx students’ ability to ask for help.** Latinx students in this study were reticent to ask for help from college agents. Although it became a little easier once some became more familiar with the college campus and were connected to student support services, it remained nonetheless difficult to ask for help. Per the students’ assertions, the reasons for being reluctant to ask for help were due to cultural perceptions of children’s roles. They described how they were expected to listen to and obey their parents, teachers, or anybody who represented authority without asking questions. The demands of the culture required them to be obedient, ask less, and do as told. As they grew older, they spoke about how they had internalized that asking for help was not something they were supposed to do. When they entered American high schools in the U.S. they were

encouraged to ask questions to exercise their critical thinking skills, which was different when they were at home.

So, why didn't these Latinx students ask for help from agents of the community colleges such as professors, counselors, different institutional department representatives, and others? The interviewees reported to have exercised extra caution and did not easily ask questions because of their (a) unique childhood experiences, including trauma for some; (b) cultural values on raising children; (c) preconceived thoughts on what people may think of them; (d) experience of being shut down when having asked questions in the past; (e) not knowing what to ask; and (f) having limited English proficiency.

*Unique childhood experiences, including trauma.* Ulysses and Ramirez reflected on their childhoods and attributed their childhood experiences, including trauma they experienced, to the fact that they had a hard time asking for help. Ramirez stated:

You know, growing up, my mom didn't have any patience for me. It would just be like this barrage of fire and lightning and stone. And that was even with my grandmother....So I didn't really ask for a lot of things. I mean, I asked for stuff sometimes but for stuff like I don't know how to do, I'd get scared to ask. So...I don't remember asking for help. I try to do it now but I don't really.

Ulysses explained:

I feel like a lot of the students have grown up with the survival mode kind of thing. They grew up not really living, but just surviving and making sure they got through life. Whatever trauma, whatever they went through growing up, it just taught them as long as you're doing the bare minimum, you're okay. And so, doing anything more than that, oh, that's extra, that's too much.

Ramirez attributed his difficulty of asking for help to his family dynamic, where it was not easy to ask questions, and Ulysses to the fact that many parents left their country escaping war or natural disasters and therefore they did their best to survive. Their children suffered trauma in the process and learned from their parents to be cautious and not ask questions because they did not trust people. Another reason for not asking questions was related to cultural values, as described below.

***Cultural values on raising children.*** A second reason the participants gave for not seeking help was due to cultural beliefs about raising children. They shared that children were expected to be *educado*, which meant to be polite and well behaved, to not interrupt parents when they're having adult conversations, and to not ask questions. As Juliana, Sandra and Lupe explained, culturally, you're not supposed to ask your parents questions. "You do what you're told and don't argue. Don't talk back" – [Juliana]

Sandra added that the issue of not asking for help had a direct correlation to her parents' upbringing experiences. She explained that she did not develop the skills to ask for help because she "was sheltered too much:"

[Some] parents survive by not asking questions. So, you kind of teach the same thing: "If I survive, you can survive too." And we're just going to keep that cycle going because that's how we made it. Another thing I experienced is that my mom, she would just tell me, "Well, if you want to do this, just find out how to do it. You do it yourself." But she sheltered me so much. I don't have the tools to figure it out on my own because I couldn't ask her for anything because she would immediately tell me no. So, you're between two worlds.

Additionally, Lupe shared what she did to lift herself and how she saw the idea of asking for help as something positive:

At least for me, you're kinda ingrained from a young age that you don't need to ask for help because you can figure it out yourself if you really want it... In my case, I'm trying to tell myself that it's okay to ask for help. It doesn't mean I'm stupid. It doesn't mean I'm weak. It doesn't mean I'm uneducated. I'm just in a field I don't know anything [about], and my parents don't know anything either.

The participants shared that being a well-behaved, polite child was very important to their families but it also posed conflict because some, like Sandra, described how they lacked the tools to ask for help later in life. Likewise, having preconceived thoughts of what people may think of them before they asked for help contributed to the matter, as described below.

**Preconceived thoughts on what people may think of them.** A third reason was that some of the participants had thoughts about what people may think of them before they even asked their questions. Whether those thoughts were accurate or not, they affected their ability to ask for help. Below find two examples that illustrate the participants' internal conflict.

Ulysses said, "in higher education...not wanting to look for those resources because...whether they [school personnel] say yes or no, you make it seem in your head that you'll get yelled at. We blew it up so hard because of our trauma." Juliana added:

...[W]hen we ask for help, most people assume we're Latinos: "Oh, they probably don't know nothing. They probably just here trying to waste my time," kinda thing. Or just why bother. You're gonna drop out anyway. So, the expectations again are very low. Another thing is asking for help doesn't mean I'm lazy. 'Cause most people will just be like, "She's just asking for help because she wants them to do it for her." Instead of having the mentality like, "Hey, how about if I show

them how, then they will know how.” But it’s more like I’m already dreading it because they probably just want me to do it for them.

Those unhelpful thoughts reduced their ability to ask questions or ask for help due to negative stereotypes, as mentioned by Juliana or being afraid, yelled at, or disrespected, as implied by Ulysses. Those thoughts, coupled with being shut down in the past when asking questions, also contributed to the issue of not being able to ask for help.

**Remembering experiences of being shut down when asking questions in the past.** A fourth reason asserted by the students was the fact that they had been “shut down” when they asked questions in the past. Ulysses summarized what they (gender neutral pronoun) heard after everybody shared in the last focus group and said: “I feel that it’s fairly apparent that everyone here has gone through some kind of experience through your childhood where [you] got shut down for having questions.”

Also, three other students including Ulysses described the effects of having been ignored. Here is a quote from Ulysses highlighting this problem:

I feel like the biggest issue here is getting stubborn students to open their eyes and seek out help. I feel like that’s definitely the biggest one because that still ails me.

I still am stubborn, and I’m like I’m not gonna go there [to] ask for help.

The effect of negative experiences, being ignored, impaired those like Ulysses and made them stubborn, as they stated. However, other participants did not ask questions because they did not know what to ask. They did not know what student services were available on campus, as reported below.

**Not knowing what to ask.** A fifth reason agreed to by all but best explained by Juliana is because some students do not know what to ask. She said, “For me, I think all of these it’s like, what do I ask? Not asking where to go; all of that.”

Being unaware of the services, coupled with a low English proficiency, also contributed to not being able to ask for help, as mentioned below.

**Having limited English proficiency.** Finally, Sandra concluded that with limited English it was difficult and tiring for her to ask questions:

I only spoke Spanish and I knew a little bit of English. So, trying to ask questions on a little bit of English is hard. It’s really hard because you kind of come with this thing from going to school that you say something wrong and people are gonna laugh. Or people were not gonna take you seriously because you mispronounced a word.

The quotes above capture the voices of all participants and provide justification as to why they often didn’t ask for help. The participants reported that not being able to ask questions was due to negative childhood experiences, including trauma, which caused the participants to distrust others. Additionally, having cultural values their families exercised on raising children influenced how they approached the idea of asking questions. Similarly, they had conscious or unconscious conversations in their heads about how people may react when they posed their questions. Those thoughts or inner conversations were influenced by prior negative experiences of being invalidated. Next, one participant noted that not knowing what to ask made it difficult to ask for help. Finally, Sandra concluded that it was difficult and tiring for her to ask questions because of her limited English.

At the end of the last focus group, all participants agreed that not being able to ask questions is an issue that needs to be addressed to better facilitate maneuvering the roads

of higher education. The first step agreed upon was to “get through the thick skulls and let them [Latinx students] know it’s okay to ask for help,” as Ulysses stated. Although their parents survived by not asking for help, they must ask for help. It is more than a survival mechanism. Asking for help has many benefits for students because it promotes independent learning strategies, higher student self-esteem, and future success, as noted by Karabenick and Knapp (1991). They concluded that it is up to their generation to break the cycle and find ways to encourage people to ask questions. But they also recognized that questions cannot be asked if students do not know what services are available on the college campus or where to go if they don’t know what they need.

**Cultural barriers: Mental health issues decreased their self-esteem and academic performance potential.** According to my participants, mental health issues were interpreted differently in their community and students processed and coped with them in silence. They struggled to talk about them and did not have useful and positive coping mechanisms. They voiced that it was difficult to have conversations about it at home when they experienced unusual emotions, thoughts, and feelings, which decreased their self-esteem so that they could not perform to the best of their abilities. They felt as if they walked in two different worlds: that of their parents and the world of their school/college in the American culture. Here Ulysses describes these two worlds:

They [parents] expect you to get ahead in life, but the social skills they taught you and how to cope with things and the survival skills are [a] completely opposite world.... So, you’re trying to live your life in this outer world that is nothing like the inner world. You think it is and so you treat everything the same way, like, fearing everything all the time.

The ways in which the students articulated their stories reflecting on mental health distress suggested that: (a) they could not talk about it; (b) mental illness was not

acknowledged in their families; (c) students who had anxiety found it difficult to communicate with their instructors; and (d) they did not get enough support from the college in identifying and learning coping strategies.

**Not being able to talk about mental health.** Sandra’s statement below reveals that it was difficult not to be able to talk about mental illness. If she did, it was perceived as a sign of weakness and not being a “real woman.”

When I was diagnosed with post-partum depression, my family classified it as “Western mentality” and us Latinas, we don’t go through that, we don’t go through mental illness. We just suck it up and move forward.

Similarly, Juliana spoke of not being able to talk about it, which caused them to feel “weird,” as described below:

...[They] made me feel like I was wrong for feeling like I was weird, like sometimes I would just want to cry. And, I’m just like, “Oh my God, I can’t cry because my parents are going to hit me.” Just, things that I didn’t understand.

Not being able to talk about mental health made the participants such as the ones quoted above out of place; this was something that occurred to other people and therefore was not acknowledged by their family.

**Mental illness was not acknowledged in their families.** Lupe and Ramirez shared that their family members viewed mental illness as something foreign to them, something that does not happen to their families. Lupe’s father did not even accept that headaches exist, much less mental illness, as she explained below:

My dad doesn’t even believe in headaches or mental illness. When I was little, like, I have a headache [he said] that doesn’t exist here [their home]. You can’t say

how you feel...do you know? [he said] “...*esos son cosas Americanos. Aqui no.*”  
 (translation: “those are American things, not here.”)

In addition to Lupe’s experience, Ramirez’s family also denied that mental illness exists; however, he felt alone and scared when he experienced anxiety:

... [M]y family in general, was like, “depression is for white people.” (laughing)  
 When I first came to City, there was like two or three semesters where I was really out of it in terms of mental health. I was just scared all the time....it was a real feeling. I didn’t do anything about it. I just waited for it to dissipate. Even when I went to get help for it, they just like “ah, it sucks.” (laughing) Like “ah, really.” Like “okay.”

Not having the support of their family nor the support of CCSF made it difficult to do their best in college. Some, like Ulysses, could not communicate with their instructors, as stated below.

**Students who had anxiety found it difficult to communicate with their instructors.** Mental illness such as depression and anxiety affected my participants not only at home but also in college. Ulysses stated that they could not communicate with their instructors. They said:

I suffer from anxiety, so it makes it much more difficult to communicate my circumstances with professors and discuss potential extensions or arrangements....I just personally have a hard time going to them for support because of anxiety.

**Students did not get enough support from the college in identifying and learning coping strategies.** The other participants like Ramirez needed more support

from the college to manage illness; however, he did not elaborate on the type of support he would have liked to see:

We don't get a lot of support. I feel like we don't really do enough at City to really address it...In terms of anxiety, or just not going to school, or loss of motivation or anything like that.

Ulysses goes deeper and explains that many students are not aware that they are suffering from mental illness and go through life thinking that it is normal to encounter the turmoil of emotions; they said:

They [Latinx students] just think I'm just a little afraid, but it's full blown anxiety and they don't know how to process it because mental health also has a negative stigma. I feel it's not talked about enough and... feeling insecure that you don't have money is gonna bring some kind of darkness to you, and you're not gonna wanna continue. Yeah, mental health I feel like encompasses a lot of other things, like feel[ing] lonely, not having a support system also plays into that.

The above excerpts do not only state that the students in this study faced anxiety and depression, among other mental illnesses, but also that they could not talk about them with their families, nor did they have tools to manage them. A participant took the conversation to the next level and requested that more support at the college be available to identify mental health issues and learn how to cope with them. Finally, they all asked the institution to help them remove the stigma around mental illness, which is complex because it involves undoing certain cultural and personal beliefs.

**Institutional barriers: Microaggressions and negative stereotypes affected their perceptions of self and belief in their academic abilities.**

The participants shared that they faced discrimination not only in high school but also at CCSF, and that they experienced microaggressions and stereotype threats, which affected their perceptions of self and their belief in their academic abilities. The data shows that due to microaggressions and negative stereotypes the interviewees felt uncomfortable, as if they did not belong in college, ignored, subordinated, humiliated, and unintelligent. These things prevented them from reaching out to their instructors or school agents to ask for help for fear of rejection. Therefore, they said, they did not do as well as academically as they could have.

Some microaggressions came from instructors; others came from classmates and school personnel, or they occurred outside of the college campus. Overall, well-intentioned White people acted unconsciously in a racist manner, as noted by Sue (2018), making students feel uncomfortable and ignored. As Ulysses explained:

There were these two very disruptive older white men that sat behind me in class, one of whom was a veteran and had a noticeable impulse problem because he always spoke out of turn or commented on something my professor would say to the other guy, sometimes in an inappropriately loud manner. In a group with them...they were completely ignoring me and excluding me from the activity even though I was writing all of our group's info. Whenever I would suggest anything they...would reply condescendingly and as if whatever I had to offer was lesser than. Sometimes we would discuss race in class and they always had a snide comment to add under their breath.

This passage also demonstrates that the student experienced macro aggressions from their classmates. They were verbally insulted. The hostile message and behavior directed to the student seemed to also be directed to their ethnic group.

Some of the participants' professors contributed to this issue of microaggressions as well. For example, during class they required Ulysses and other students to participate in activities that could expose students' immigration status and thus make them (non-binary singular pronoun) feel awkward, stressed, and humiliated:

In my political science class...the professor had us all go around and say if we voted and why or why...we didn't. It was humiliating and terrifying to feel like I had to reveal my immigration status. [Ulysses]

All the participants expressed having experienced microaggressions in the classroom and feeling unintelligent and discouraged. However, students such as Ramirez and Ulysses also experienced macroaggressions on and off campus. Ramirez explained:

I went to LA for this student union, ... Some dude called me a cholo. I didn't know him, at all. I didn't even talk to him up until five minutes ago. And he just had the audacity to do that. I just think he called me in his own way a thug...it was like a Spanish way of dehumanizing.

Ulysses also attested to having experienced macroaggressions, as voiced below:

I remember they were getting people to sign up to vote, this was I think the biggest kind of racial attack I got. There [were] all these people....with the clipboards and I kind of always had to steer away because it's like, "No, I can't vote." So, I just started ignoring them after that. There was one person who tried to also like hit on me at the same time. When I didn't, he was screaming as I was walking away...telling me, "Oh. Don't you love your country? Dah, dah, dah."

Something about being Latinx and Mexican, I don't know, I kind of blocked it out because...I just wasn't expecting it.

The testimonies above demonstrate that both students were macro insulted because the insults were not only consciously done but were also intended to insult not only to them but their entire ethnicity. Ulysses was assaulted by the guy with the clipboard who screamed as Ulysses walked away. Ramirez was assaulted by a guy in Los Angeles—was called *cholo*, which means a Mexican-American youth who belongs to a street gang (“cholo,” Merriam-Webster, 2019). This was an assault directed at Ramirez and young men like him in his ethnic group.

In addition to dealing with microaggressions and sometimes macroaggressions, all five participants admitted to having constantly battled stereotype threats, which caused them always to be vigilant. They feared to conform to the negative stereotype of their ethnicity, which lowered their motivation to stay in college, causing them to doubt themselves and not always perform to their highest potential in class. Sandra faced the stereotype of not being smart, Lupe feared conforming to the stereotype that Latinas are not to be trusted and may steal, Ramirez felt characterized as a criminal, and Juliana felt undervalued or “less than.”

Below, Sandra described the negative stereotype of not being smart enough in mathematics and not being a real woman because she did not hide her suppression and pretended that all was well:

.... So definitely ... Latinas are not smart or good at math. I mean, I heard that all my life. [Also] the stereotypes of how to be a woman...they (family members) were constantly comparing me to my grandmother. That was one of the biggest challenges where I didn't like being a Latina.

Lupe, on the other hand, explained her experience in a bookstore and her perception of what people thought of her when they saw her tattoos. She said:

I'm Latina. I'm in a bookstore. I had a bag and a backpack. I'm like, I hope they don't think I'm putting books in my bag. It was an open one. It just kind of feels like...I don't know. It doesn't feel good. I'm just...I'm assuming most people of color knows what that feels like. It's daily stuff.

Ramirez battled the negative stereotype of young males wearing hoodies, as described below:

I feel a little bit of a stereotype because I'm wearing a hood[ie] all the time. Sometimes I play into them [stereotypes]; honestly. I remember at this party, this dude was like, "When I looked at you I was kind of scared of you." [Also] I typically stay away from cleaning jobs. I usually try to avoid doing stereotypical stuff, especially with the last name Ramirez.

Contrary to Ramirez, Juliana battled the negative stereotype that young female Latinx get pregnant early; she said:

Sometimes, people, they stereotype like, "Oh, they're gonna be pregnant at a young age." "They're gonna get married." Somebody said something as crazy as I had a baby so that I could get support from welfare and for school because otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to afford it. Like I was using my kids to go to school. I was just like, "No. No, what happened was I was having unprotected sex."

Based on the students' counterstories above, the stereotype threats caused the participants to doubt themselves, feel subordinated and awkward. They caused the

participants to also have low self-esteem and self-doubt, as described by Steele (2010). Family members such as Sandra's, who compared her with her grandmother, the one who had many children and never complained, demonstrate that negative stereotyping also occurred in their own family. Similarly, being in a bookstore with tattoos exposed and a backpack or wearing a hoodie validated the fear students had about conforming to the stereotype of stealing (Steele, 2010). And, while there is not a clear indication of who told Juliana that she had a baby solely to get welfare support, she is still a victim of negative stereotypes. Yet, all five participants found ways to cope with stereotypes and microaggressions by either ignoring the aggressions, "playing into them" (Ramirez), or, as Sandra did, by making the time to teach a classmate about the Latinx struggles using her own story as a refugee, which is quoted below:

[In] my English class last semester there was this one guy who questioned a lot of the struggles of Latinos. He was a white person, young... [in a group discussion] he felt attacked by us, by Latinos and it came from when we expressed ourselves, it was more like out of frustration than attacking him personally.... We sat next to each other and I tried to communicate some of my personal struggles so he can see where I was coming from. Instead of judging him and making it about him, I was making it...a general picture of how I was treated in my country with the struggles that I had to go through to come here. So, it's not that I'm coming to invade your country. It's more like, I just need a fighting chance to get out of there and to live, basically.

All participants acknowledged having experienced microaggressions and negative stereotypes, which affected them mentally and emotionally as they prepared to transfer to a four-year college or university. Microaggressions caused them to feel uncomfortable, like they did not belong in college, "stupid," ignored, subordinated, humiliated, and/

or unintelligent, while stereotype threats kept them alert because they feared giving in and doing what the negative stereotypes assumed, limiting their individual potential to do well in college. Additionally, juggling home and school life, coupled with cultural demands, such as the ability to ask questions, and coping with mental health issues in silence are barriers the five Latinx students perceived as making it difficult to navigate CCSF as they prepared to transfer to UCs/CSUs or private universities.

### **Support**

Latinx students in this study who connected with student support services and other college resources reported that they appreciated having access to them. CCSF offers more resources than a four-year institution does, according to Juliana, who recently transferred. Latinx students interviewed also requested that those programs and services be more visible, highlighted more, and improved to better assist new and continuing students. This study found that Latinx students: (a) valued family, even if they sometimes dissuade more than encourage them; (b) found comfort and support in some student service programs and services because they felt safe and welcomed; (c) enjoyed taking classes with culturally responsive instructors, and; (d) utilized their cultural assets to navigate community college as they prepared to transfer.

### **Family Was Important Even if They Sometimes Dissuaded Rather than Encouraged**

Family was important to the participants even though their families' comments were sometimes discouraging. They gained strength by turning the negative comments into sources of encouragement as they balanced school, work, and family. They suggested that having those commitments made it difficult to balance everything, but they made it

work, and being connected to college resources made their college experiences fruitful because they did not have to figure things out on their own.

Ramirez described that he had a unique family unit because some of his family members did not make good choices in life, but they still took care of each other, as stated below:

My mom is the majority of the breadwinner, but I help pay for things.... I'll go buy groceries, and things like that. [Also] I probably have to say I'm the supporting position in my family... unfortunately my uncle was shot, so she [grandma] takes care of him. ...every weekend we try to go to visit her, which is really far away. We make sure that she's okay....

Like Ramirez, Sandra's family was distinctive. The family had strong religious beliefs, which Sandra did not share. She was judged when she had depression, but her parents made sure she had a place to live and stayed connected. She said that as time passed her parents and relatives became less judgmental and she felt less judged, as noted below:

I have my family trying to push Christianity on me and I'm resisting. And they're like, "But why are you fighting it? This is the Devil!" ... [When she had depression] my family thinks of me as, "You're not a real woman... you're chicken about everything. So that [it] was very difficult for me to overcome and I don't think we overcome any of this with my family. But they're getting better at maybe not judging as much... my mom was able to transfer that [section A housing] to me. So, I was able to get her apartment and have a place to live, 'cause otherwise we wouldn't have it.

Ulysses' family is as unique as the other participants' but they (singular neutral pronoun) preferred to spend less time with them because they believed it set them back

academically. The family, however, had high expectations for Ulysses because they were first in the family to go to college:

I feel like there's also that developmental setback...of hanging out with your family too much and with people you shouldn't be hanging out with.... They expect you to get ahead in life... growing up it was mostly like, "You're here to ...go to college and get your family ahead because that's what your parents came here for, that's why they brought you here. But when they realized I was not going to finish high school they were like, "Oh my god. What's wrong with you?" And just a lot of negativity...."You're not smart enough for school. You're not strong enough for school, for college. You can't even finish high school, what's wrong with you?" And that's why I felt like I was going to fail that first semester at City. But I didn't and I'm here now, so....

Juliana also reported having a dysfunctional family because their comments were more discouraging than encouraging, but nevertheless, she learned to be more patient and affectionate towards her mother. She hugged her more often, but also relied on her supportive partner. Juliana described her family this way:

My parents were kind of crazy, themselves, because they came escaping the civil war of El Salvador. So, they had major trust issues; and they wouldn't hug me or tell me they loved me. I took a Latin American history class and I learned all the horrible things that they had to go through as kids in their country and why they escaped here. So, then, I was able to understand and kind of break that cycle. I hug my mom now. I tell her I love her. I kiss her. And, you know, at first she felt awkward.

My parents never encouraged me to go [college]. They kind of were just, “Okay, you’re done with high school. Get a good job and support yourself.”... My dad would say things like, “Oh, you’re never gonna go to school now” [after getting pregnant] ... My mom [and] a lot of my family members would say things like, “Oh well, when you already have kids with other people, a man doesn’t value you, and a man doesn’t wanna be with someone who already has kids...”

The participants described their families as sometimes discouraging and less supportive, but nonetheless they also stated that their families saw them as strong and capable individuals, and therefore levied more responsibility onto them. Their family demonstrated that they cared in a nontraditional way. For example, Ramirez reported that he and his family took care of their grandma and great-grandmother. Juliana taught her parents to be more affectionate. Ulysses had moral support because their family members had high expectations for them. The participants articulated that they wanted to show their families and friends that they could be successful in college despite the dysfunctionality and the demands of being first-generation college students. In closing, students’ comments recognize CRT and LatCrit experiential knowledge (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011) because they illustrate the students’ experiences as strengths (Hernandez et al., 2013).

Family was important to the participants although many of their comments such as “You’re not a real woman,” “You’re not smart enough for school,” “This is the devil,” or “Get a good job and support yourself” were discouraging. Similarly, enduring the pressure of finishing school to improve the family quality of life at times felt too much; however, those same hurdles encouraged the participants because they wanted to prove their family members wrong. They gained strength by turning the negative comments into sources of encouragement as they balanced school, work, and family.

### **Latinx Students Went for Support to Designated Latinx Spaces where They Felt Comfortable, Safe, and Validated**

The five participants stated that they found programs and student resource services where they felt comfortable not only because the faculty acknowledged their presence and helped them, but also because the staff at those locations were welcoming and kind. They said that counselors like Mr. Clark were instrumental in guiding students through the transfer process. African American Scholastic program (AASP/Umoja), California CalWORKs (Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids), Puente Project (a nationally recognized program dedicated to supporting students planning to transfer to four-year universities with its wraparound services), EOPS (Extended Opportunities Programs and Services), and LSN (Latino Network Services) counselors were very helpful. Student-run organizations such as VIDA (Voices of Immigrants Demonstrating Achievement, a student support center for undocumented students and allies), Smac (a student club), and Scube (a student-run program that offers peer mentoring and does many community service projects) were welcoming and became more of a higher education community/family for some of them. All those student support programs offered services such as tutoring, book loan programs, access to computers, scholarships, immigration advocacy, transfer field trips, and more.

Sandra describes her experience connecting with an academic counselor and said: “Mr. Clark [counselor in one of the retention programs]. He’s been really big at guiding me through the [transfer] process and kind of holding my hand so I’m going to miss that when I transfer.”

Juliana, who also connected with college resources such as CalWORKs and EOPS, commented:

I applied for CalWORKs and my CalWORKs counselor helped me to learn how to do it...before that, unless you're getting support from a program like CalWORKs or EOPS or Puente Project, you don't really get too much support in enrolling. In Puente, I made friends....it did make me feel welcome because we got to know each other in the class. And the whole participating in class...I wasn't really open before for sharing, but I'm glad that I did, and I got to know a lot of really cool people in class because the teachers set that environment...Cindy Mata at EOPS was helpful as well. She was very understanding, and she would try to advocate for CalWORKs students and try to see if there was a way around not having to work 25 hours because it cut into our study time. [Juliana]

Ramirez stated that he frequented LSN, a counseling unit, and VIDA, a resource center, as noted below:

I typically go to more Latin-centric areas for a reason. I'm at VIDA; it's majority Latino, Latinx, people work there. I'm either at VIDA, or LSN, or Smac [student club]. I try not to really go to a lot of other different places...I go to VIDA a lot, and I also go to LSN a lot, especially, for my counseling and things like that. And then, sometimes whenever there's events thrown at SCube (Student Supporting Student), I'll go and I feel comfortable there.

All the programs and student services mentioned above were designated to help students of color and those who were historically underserved. They offered students a space to study and community where they felt safe and were able to network with one another. Also, that sense of safety and belonging experienced in the centers was felt in some of the classes the participants took. The professors in those classes made the interviewees feel acknowledged, safe, empowered, and validated.

### **They Enjoyed Taking Classes with Culturally Responsive Instructors**

Students reported that some of their instructors were available and genuinely cared for the success of their students. All five students felt as if they belonged in college, which was different from what they felt in high school due to the life adversities they faced. These classes were free of microaggressions, even though they struggled with stereotype threats or being around friends or people who did not understand the work and commitment involved in going to college. Since the instructors created a positive environment in the classroom, the students were ready to tackle any task presented to them.

Ramirez explained his experience taking a class from an innovative instructor and he said:

I actually really liked Research Methods, because I was able to pick the subject I wanted to do all the time. And both my projects I had this quantitative study, where I talked to three people, and talk about their experiences....It was pretty cool; I liked that one. I like classes where they let you pick the stuff.

Juliana talked about her experience with a Puente instructor who not only made her feel welcomed but also helped her to connect with others:

I like the culture of the program [Puente]...And the whole participating in class, it's a very engaged class, and the teacher wants to know more about you and wants you to share that. And I wasn't really open before for sharing, but I'm glad that I did, and I got to know a lot of really cool people in class because the teachers set that environment.

Ulysses, similarly, took a class with an ethnic professor and said:

Over the summer [I took] statistics...it's a five-unit class and it was statistics for behavioral sciences...I remember my professor in the college teaching us, "Well, you're learning a completely new language. All these new words and things that people had to come up with so that they can understand these concepts." ...and then when I learned that my professor was black I was like, "Oh thank goodness, we have an ethnic professor, this is great. They're going to be more understanding." And she is an amazing person. She's amazing at what she does, and she throughout was like, "You're not stupid." she was like, "I got a Ph.D. in statistics or masters in statistics because everybody told me I couldn't."

The instructors mentioned above, and many others, engaged with their students and therefore motivated them to continue to thrive in their classes. Also, having a professor acknowledge and compare the class material with learning a foreign language, as well as establishing and stating explicitly that the students are not "stupid," humanized the learning experience and encouraged students to do their best, as pointed out by Ulysses, who got an A in that class. The participants emphasized that taking classes with innovative, culturally responsive professors made them feel acknowledged, safe, empowered, and validated because they felt they were part of a community that cared.

### **Latinx Students Utilized Cultural and Personal Non-Financial Assets to Navigate Community College**

All participants unveiled cultural and personal assets that ranged from being proud of being Latinx, being able to connect to resources, asking for what they needed using their bilingual ability, to having hopes and aspirations for the future despite the barriers they faced. Those assets helped them navigate community college more easily, as they prepared to transfer to the university of their choice. They began by agreeing that there was a time in their lives when they did not like being Latinx. However, as they got

older and learned more about their ethnic background, they learned to appreciate who they were and embraced their identity. The assets described below are: (1) ability to have hopes and aspirations for the future; (2) ability to maintain a healthy relationship, form a bond with others, and connect to resources (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015); (3) ability to network with people as well as to access community resources and to be able to navigate the institution (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015); (4) ability to get the information they need to facilitate their success in college (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015); and (5) ability to persist in college despite the microaggressions, negative stereotypes, and assumptions about who they were.

**Being proud to be Latinx.** All participants overwhelmingly stressed that they were proud to be Latinx at this point in their lives, which was not the same as in the past. Below are two examples to illustrate this theme. Ulysses noted:

For a long time, I didn't know the difference between Hispanic, Latinx, Latino, Latina or Mexican. I took Latin American Studies 1 (LALS) last semester that helped me out to understand the difference...I strictly identify as just Latinx now; you know, not Hispanic, and just "I'm Mexican and Latinx" and that's it. that X really, ... I'm being included...wherever I go I kind of carry that history and that background with me. The word is a little more inclusive; it also just kind of feels like it encompasses who I am as a person.

Lupe added:

Oh, my God, when I think about that word, I'm just so happy. I feel like I hear music, I hear dancing, I hear laughter. To me, it means that people that probably have gone through the worst situations, but you would never notice. You're strong on the outside, strong on the inside. I feel so happy being a Latina, and I feel happier knowing that Latina isn't just one way of looking.

Ulysses and Ramirez became in touch with their ethnicity after having taken an Ethnic Studies class. Juliana and Lupe pointed out the diversity in the Latinx community. They were proud to be able to navigate two cultures, two worlds. Sandra stated in addition to being proud, she felt the “extra pressure” to represent her ethnic group and dismantle the negative stereotypes that exist. She claimed that the expectation for female Latinx was low; therefore, she had to go above and beyond to disprove the negative stereotype of being female and Latinx.

**Five Non-Financial Assets Exercised by all Participants.** All participants had (1) hopes and aspirations for the future; (2) bonds with others; (3) people with whom they could network; and (4) the ability to obtain the information they needed to succeed. Also, (5) They persisted despite the challenges they faced.

*Having hopes and aspirations for the future.* In addition to being proud of who they were, all participants had hopes and aspirations for the future. They all had well-defined academic and career goals, at least for the time being. They saw the need in their communities; therefore, they wanted to contribute by either working as a counselor, financial specialist, clinical psychologist, or a prison rehabilitation officer. Below find their explanations of their future goals.

Sandra wanted to work in the military with those who suffered from PTSD. She said:

Counseling...in the military and I've seen lots of his [husband] friends or people in the army suffer from PTSD or mental illness...Also [,] I really want to highlight mental illness to Latino families. I want the stigma to be removed because it's hurting so many people.

Juliana, on the other hand, wanted to work with young girls and teach them how to manage their money and support their business ideas:

I just want to help young girls become independent. With a business degree, I can help them start their [small] business ideas. I want to [start a] nonprofit...to help them learn about how money works at a young age.

Ulysses hoped to work as a clinical psychologist, also with young people; they expressed, “Clinical psychology...with pre-teens or teenagers so I can help them. Like at-risk youth and help them before they make a big mistake.”

Ramirez, similar to Sandra, wanted to work with adults but especially with formerly incarcerated individuals, as voiced below:

I wanna work in prisons as a rehabilitation officer or something like that because I just feel like especially in my community...I didn't really grow up with a male figure, my dad was on drugs, he went to jail, and then my uncle the same story... building careers for those types of people.

Lupe focused her conversation around helping victims of domestic violence, saying:

I would like to work in some organization...that deals with domestic violence and relationships because I found that me going through it, there wasn't a lot of women that wanted to talk about it even if they were older. I would like to start an organization to just talk about it.

Their desire to improve their community ranged from helping “young girls become more independent” and teaching them how to manage money early in life to empowering other young adults to break the cycle of domestic violence. It also extends from helping veterans manage their PTSD to working with formerly incarcerated individuals to find jobs. Their goals illustrated that all five participants were interested in careers related to human services. They desired to influence people through their work and make a change as a result. Additionally, students like Juliana, “wanna show

them [people] that you can do it [get a college degree] with three kids, with four kids, with five.”

*Form a bond with others.* A second asset Latinx students possessed was the ability to maintain a healthy relationship, form a bond with others, and connect to resources (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). All participants had had some sort of falling out with their immediate relatives throughout different times in their lives, and sometimes it was better to distance themselves from their families. However, they all found a way to maintain positive relationships inside and outside their homes to balance their lives. They formed bonds, beginning with their own children and extending to co-workers and student-run organizations like VIDA. Juliana emphasized her bond with her immediate family:

My support network...it's my child, my eldest daughter. She always says things that motivate me. Besides her, I have a handful of friends and family that are always there, no matter what. My partner is supportive...at Puente, I made friends. Even after Puente we've kept in touch and we've taken classes together, other classes, and it just makes it encouraging because you can support each other through studying.

Sandra highlighted not only her immediate family but also her academic counselor and the counselor and instructor of the Puente program; she explained:

I live with my grandma and she helps me sometimes with taking care of Amelia and of course, cleaning here and there. My in-law watches my daughter for a weekend a month. Overall, Puente for sure and Mr. Clark.

Others, like Lupe, affirmed that besides her parents, she bonded with her co-worker. In conclusion, all five participants formed bonds with people who supported them as they

prepared to transfer. The support network began with a child, and extended to a spouse, co-worker, grandparents, members of student clubs, and retention programs such as LSN and Puente. Their support network was, perhaps, atypical, but effective.

*Network with people.* A third asset students talked about was their ability to network with people as well as to access community resources and to be able to navigate the institution (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). All participants had found a way to network with different programs at the college and, as Juliana mentioned, it was imperative that all Latinx students were at least aware of programs such as Puente, EOPS, and CalWORKs early in their college journey. Below are two passages depicting this asset.

Juliana connected with three different student support services and explained:

I applied for CalWORKs and my CalWORKs counselor helped me.... before that, unless you're getting support from a program like CalWORKs or EOPS or Puente, you don't really get too much support in enrolling.

Others, like Ramirez, joined VIDA and became a tutor. He said:

I ended up going and working at VIDA, as a tutor. And I'm also working for this student program called (Smac) that I found in my second year there, just like all the students making a change. I've been working at both, and it's just been really positive experiences.

Juliana, Sandra, and Ramirez acknowledged that they made connections at the college and were able to network with people and resources. Lupe met with two different academic counselors but was still looking for a program or a way to network with other resources at the community college. She understood the importance of those connections

but due to her full-time job and school, her time was limited, which made it challenging to find the resources she needed.

***Obtained the necessary information they needed to succeed.*** A fourth asset students mentioned was the ability to get the information they needed to facilitate their success in college (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). They identified programs such as CalWORKs, Puente, EOPS, LSN, and VIDA as sources of information and those services helped them navigate community college more easily because the participants knew where to go for support and information needed to make the best of their college experiences.

***Persisted despite their challenges.*** Finally, all five interviewees persisted in college despite the microaggressions, negative stereotypes, and assumptions about who they were in college. They persisted despite the low expectations associated with being Latinx, and despite being told nobody will get an “A” in a particular class or being asked to disclose their immigration status through a class activity. They persisted regardless of being asked to put their phone away until the end of class because that important call or text can wait, according to the instructor. They persisted even when a recruiter yelled and screamed at a student, or when other classmates commented under their breath, making a Latinx student feel excluded, or even when someone questioned the struggles of Latinx people in general. They succeeded although they heard discouraging comments from their professors or somebody who commented that a student had a baby with the purpose of being supported by welfare. Below is a listing of their actual voices as they describe their experiences overcoming many obstacles and barriers.

The students succeeded despite:

- “Being told ‘you’re only good enough for a C’”
- [A] “guy who questioned a lot of the struggles of Latinos”

- “Me on my phone because I need to make sure my brother gets picked up or something...If they tell me it can wait until after class it can’t wait until after class”
- “In a group with [two white guys] ...they were completely ignoring me”
- “Sometimes we would discuss race in class and they always had a snide comment to add under their breath.”
- “It was humiliating and terrifying to feel like I had to reveal my immigration status.”
- “They say different things to me, and it makes me feel kind of like, stupid, sometimes.”
- “Somebody said something as crazy as I had a baby so that I could get support from welfare.”
- “On top of being a minority and being a woman, it’s twice as hard because they expect you to [assume those roles].”
- “Don’t pay a babysitter to raise your kids.”
- “A lot of these old teachers can be a little insensitive with their wording.”

Based on the data collected, students’ resilience made them strong and the assets they brought to the classroom helped them navigate community college as they prepared to transfer to institutions of higher education to pursue their college degree. They all indicated having found support when they were connected to student support programs such as LSN, VIDA, EOPS, Puente, and other counseling units where they felt comfortable, safe, and validated. Similarly, Latinx students in this study unveiled many cultural and personal assets that helped them navigate community college even though they faced the following barriers to navigating college:

1. Juggling home life and its unstable conditions which reduced the possibilities of finding resources to do well in college;
2. Cultural influences inhibited Latinx students' ability to ask for help;
3. Mental health issues decreased their self-esteem and academic performance potential; and
4. Microaggressions and negative stereotypes affected their perception of self and belief in their academic abilities.

Therefore, it is imperative that community colleges promote trust and proactively care for Latinx students from the moment they arrive at their campuses to enable their transfer to four-year colleges and universities. This can be done by helping students identify resources early in their college journey, de-stigmatizing mental illnesses, and promoting an inclusive community by fixing the White male (status quo) mentality.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Latinx population is growing quickly in the United States (Rodríguez et al., 2016), but the population growth is not mirrored in higher education degree completion rates at four-year institutions. Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) and Vega (2017) established that Latinx students face financial struggles and have to work while going to college; however, more research is needed to examine the reasons beyond economic barriers that inhibit and prevent Latinx students from transferring from community colleges to institutions of higher education (Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017; Solórzano et al., 2005). The unequal playing field also impedes access to careers and the opportunity to improve their socio-economic status. Scholars such as Kim, Rennick, and Franco (2014) state that nationally only 13.9% of the overall population of Latinx adults received a bachelor's degree, in comparison to 30.3% of Whites, 19.8% of Blacks, and 52.4% of Asian and Pacific Islanders. *The Majority Report* (Education Trust-West, 2017) and Pérez Huber et al. (2015) noted that there has been an improvement in educational attainment for all ethnic groups; however, Latinx students still experience the lowest college completion rate among other racial groups (Kim et al., 2014). According to the US education pipeline, by race/ethnicity and gender (2012) presented by the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, 61.5 % of Latinx graduate from high school, 12% received an undergraduate degree, 3.5 % graduated with a master's or professional degree, and .3% graduate with a doctorate degree (Pérez Huber et al., 2015). As noted above, degree attainment is low, which thus establishes the significance of this study.

## **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This qualitative study was done in order to gain insights into the barriers and institutional constraints that contribute to the low transfer rates of Latinx students from community colleges to CSUs, UCs or private universities. The study generated information to help stakeholders understand students' perceived obstacles in the transfer process, and it illustrates other factors contributing to the low transfer rate. This chapter will not only summarize and discuss the findings in relation to the research question, but will also provide an implications section of the findings. At the same time, this chapter makes recommendations on processes that can strengthen the educational pathway for Latinx and other students towards degree completion (Salas, 2014). In the end, suggestions for future research and conclusions are included.

Latinx students' college journey begins when they complete the matriculation process and register for their first classes. As they start making connections with counselors in different programs and learn from their innovative teachers, they begin to learn about the "culture of power" which encompasses specific strategies (codes/rules) to communicate with others in writing, talking and behaving (Delpit, 1988, p. 282). Students learn that those codes give them the power to be able to negotiate higher education systems and gain knowledge and social capital, while also maintaining their individuality through their personal assets of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, 2006).

## **Summary of Findings**

The current study found that Latinx students faced multiple barriers as they prepared to transfer to a UC, CSU or private university. However, financial obstacles and dealing with the complexity of the transfer process (navigating the website, finding

transfer requirements, filling out the transfer application and supporting documents) were issues that surfaced but were not discussed here because authors such Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017), Rodríguez et al. (2015), Salas (2014), and Zarate and Burciaga (2010) have addressed those topics. This study includes these additional barriers, not readily found in the current research literature: (1) juggling home life and its unstable conditions reduced the possibilities of finding resources to do well in college; (2) cultural influences and history of trauma inhibited Latinx students' ability to ask for help; (3) mental health issues decreased their self-esteem and academic performance potential; and (4) microaggressions and negative stereotypes affected their perception of self and belief in their academic abilities. On the other hand, the data also shows that Latinx students at CCSF (1) valued family even if they sometimes dissuaded rather than encouraged them; (2) found comfort and support in some student services and programs because they felt safe and validated; (3) enjoyed taking classes with culturally responsive instructors; and (4) utilized their cultural assets to navigate community college as they prepared to transfer. The following sections will describe the findings compared with the current research literature.

### **Personal, Cultural, and Institutional Barriers**

**Personal Barriers: Juggling home life and its unstable conditions reduced the possibilities of finding resources to do well in college.** Latinx students have more commitments than traditional students do, and they need more support to succeed in college. This finding agrees with the research literature. Traditional students are those who mostly come from the middle and upper classes and who experience validations at home and school. Traditional students were taken to places such as museums, art galleries, and theaters, and at least one parent or sibling has a college degree. They do not have to work to contribute to the family income (Rendon, 2002). Also, they are

more likely to understand the “Tools of Power” (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 30; see also Delpit, 1988) of higher education. My participants were nontraditional students. They were all first-generation college students who, at some point in their college lives, doubted their ability to be successful in college. They had a history of having dropped out of high school or college and experienced trauma in life. They were less familiar with the values, traditions, and practices of college (Rendon, 2002). The research found that Latinx students in this study managed various obligations while attending college. Those responsibilities ranged from running their household (serving as the secretary, the accountant, the driver, the cook, etc.) to handling the home crises as well as those who are “heavily needed at home” (Ulysses) while working and going to school. They had an enormous responsibility to continually manage their time wisely to be able to perform all these tasks and do well academically. They had to make difficult choices when the options before them came to either meeting with their professors before or after class, going to tutoring, going to work, or going straight home to take care of their responsibilities.

Given that most of the participants in the study were female, and two of them had children, it is important to understand that “cultural demands have imposed upon the Latina woman a self-denying and sacrificing role in which she cherishes her children and husband but asks very little for herself” (del Portillo, 1987, p. 235). Therefore, family comes first, and it serves as a unit of strength; in other words, they value familism (Ayon et al., 2010), which gives them intrinsic motivation, which then empowers them to perform and manage all those tasks. Similarly, when groups of similar Latinx students get together they gain additional strength from each other because they share similar experiences. The life complexity of the female Latinx coincides with the literature review wherein it states that they shuffle many commitments, which causes conflict between academic and family responsibility while they are balancing work, family, and school

(Dayton et al., 2004). Therefore, familism can be interpreted in their own family unity or when women with similar backgrounds get together to empower themselves, as discovered in this study.

Because they are busy students, it is important to keep them engaged in the campus community. One way to do so is by having instructors, counselors, and administrative staff actively promote validation experiences in and out of the classroom, and when possible, in a coordinated way. This means instructors will keep students engaged in their classrooms, administrative staff will follow up with students (especially when they miss class), and counselors will sit down with students to develop a realistic education plan as they prepare to transfer. This team effort would create a supportive environment for Latinx students to foster their hopes and dreams, because many Latinx students come to college without a sense of direction and want guidance in a caring, not condescending, way. Besides, college is not a natural process for nontraditional students (Rendon, 2002). Rendon describes validation as an act of fostering, enabling, confirming, and supporting students in and out of the classroom to help them develop their academic identity and interpersonal skills. To validate students, there must be a team effort similar to the one offered in the Puente Project in which a counselor, an English instructor, and a mentor work together. At the very least, it means having instructors, counselors and administrative staff collaborate to provide students with the information they need, an educational plan, and support to help them succeed in all their classes, and thus reach out to them to let them know they are capable of enduring the academic rigor of higher education. Nontraditional students yearn for validation because some of them may not have experienced validation from friends or family. When validations are present, students are more likely to get involved in their academics and college in general. In addition to juggling home demands, school and work, this study found that home trauma and cultural influences inhibited students' ability to ask for help.

**Cultural Barriers: Cultural influences and history of home trauma inhibited Latinx students' ability to ask for help.** This finding that emerged from the study appears to extend the current literature; no direct discussion was found in previous studies in relation to this study. It is new and unique to this study. Asking for help is not easy for many students in general. It is even more challenging for Latinx students who are first and second generation in the U.S., as discovered in this study. According to the participants—nontraditional students—many Latinx students do not ask for help because culturally, they were not encouraged to do so. They mentioned that children are to be “*educados*” – well-behaved, polite kids who do not talk back to their parents. Therefore, asking questions or asking for help may or may not have been welcomed early in life depending on the family and the level of education of those in the family. In addition, for female Latinx students, the Latinx culture obliges women to be submissive throughout their lives (del Portillo, 1987); therefore, women are even less likely to question authority and tend to sacrifice themselves more than male Latinx students. It could also be that “low income (nontraditional) students are reluctant to ask questions because they are unfamiliar with how the higher education system works” (Rendon, 2002, p. 644). Therefore, one must foster multicultural values to develop multicultural coping mechanisms. Rendon recommends creating an environment that fosters validation.

The second reason for not asking for help was because they were ignored, rejected, or made to feel unintelligent in the past. In other words, they had memories of being invalidated (Rendon, 2002). They feared rejection and created a scenario in their heads of how the person would react before they even asked their question. A third reason was that some Latinx grew up in survival mode, having had a history of childhood or adolescent trauma (Rendon, 2002) and therefore doing more than surviving was too much to ask. This notion could be in part due to parents' past experiences. Some of them, as disclosed by a participant, fled their country due to war. Others escaped natural disasters

such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or unbearable conditions that pushed the families out of their country and they sought refuge in the U.S. (Cohn, Passel, & Bialik, 2019). The trauma they and their family endured shaped them and made them strong individuals who were skeptical of the information they received as well as the provider of the information.

Karabenick and Knapp (1991) assert that asking for help has many benefits for students because it promotes independent learning, increases student self-esteem, and promotes future success. However, it falls on educators to create a climate that encourages students to ask questions in a supportive environment. Moreover, it is not an easy task for many students in general and even worse for nontraditional, first-generation college students. In the introduction of the article titled, “Nudging Minds to Life: Self-Authorship as a Foundation for Learning,” Baxter Magolda (2014) explains that it is not easy to be a college student because professors’ expectations of skills needed to be successful are different, their instructions are often ambiguous, the class reading has unfamiliar styles and genres, and they are most times not applicable to other classes. To make matters worse, the culture is different, and just when students think they know how to dress, talk, and interact with their instructors, things change, and they are supposed to figure out and make sense of those changes (Baxter Magolda, 2014). Including culture and ethnicity in the already complex college process adds another layer of confusion, and makes navigating college much more difficult for nontraditional, first-generation college students. One main reason why Latinx students have a difficult time asking questions is due to having memories of being invalidated in the past and fear of appearing stupid or lazy (Rendon, 2002).

To better understand this phenomenon of asking for help, let us look at Torres and Baxter Magolda’s (2004) study that used Baxter Magolda’s Self-Authorship Theory (2001), initially introduced by Robert Kegan’s work in 1994. Baxter Magolda’s Self-Authorship Theory emerged from her 27-year study with young adults ages 10 to 45;

Phase Two involved college-age students (Baxter Magolda, 2014). This theory helps us understand how college students make sense of their learning experience, and presents two features: (1) the meaning-making process encompasses multiple dimensions such as “knowledge (how one knows), identity (who one is), and relationships (how one relates with others)”; and (2) there is a “subject-object relationship” which changes as learning occurs (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012, p. 11).

Torres and Baxter Magolda (2004) presented a study on how Latinx students view their lived experience concerning their identity. From a total of 48 interviews, they only used data from 28 students, who represented nine Latinx countries of origin. However, only two students’ stories, one from a community college and one from a four-year institution, were used as exemplars because they represented the overarching themes to demonstrate how they made meaning of their identity (Torres & Baxter Magolda, 2004). To give a little background of the study, one of the participants had been in the U.S. for five years but was not confident with her English. Due to external factors, when she started college she felt insecure, doubted her ability to succeed in college, and believed that those who spoke English as their second language and had an accent were not smart. However, as she learned more English, interacted more with native speakers, and took more classes, her perception of having an accent changed; she successfully applied for a scholarship and found a job where she was able to practice more English. At the end of her two-year college journey her attitude toward having an accent changed and she was more assertive and confident, which changed her perception that having an accent was equated with not being smart.

Applying Baxter Magolda’s theory, this participant went through developmental stages during which learning happened with the influence of “external formulas, crossroads and becoming an author of one’s life” (Torres & Hernandez, 2007, p. 569). Learning occurred on the “cognitive, intrapersonal and interpersonal level” (Torres &

Hernandez, 2007, p. 569). Externally she was influenced by her peers, relatives, and teachers but as she realized that having an accent had nothing to do with intelligence, she arrived at a crossroads, expanding her knowledge through experience. Finally, she became her own author after she took classes and learned more about her culture and realized her potential and even applied for a scholarship. The confidence she built helped her accept herself and her accent. For all this to occur, there must be trust between the students and the agents who facilitate the changes from the external formula, through the crossroads moving along to the authoring of one's life to beyond, because trust is the core for positive relationships, which is shown by caring (Hammond & Jackson, 2015).

The data in the previous sections extends the notion of asking for help because the analogy can be useful to describe how a participant gained the confidence to ask for help and eventually transferred to continue her studies at a four-year university. Because of her involvement in the Puente Project and connections to other student support services, she experienced validation in and out of the classroom and became an empowered student. Juliana may always question whether she should ask for help, but at least now she has tools to make that process easier. Juliana, like all the other participants, faced social, emotional and physical difficulties in high school. Looking at Baxter Magolda's theory (2001), the environmental influence or the "external formulas" (p. 569) were the influence of her peers, family, friends and social perceptions of their identity. In Juliana's case, her perception/identity of who she was caused her turmoil because, as she said, in high school she was judged for being herself. Cognitively, she knew she was Latina but was facing the internalized stereotype from others that being a Latina was not positive. In college, she took a Latin American studies class that taught her about her background and her parents' upbringing and why they left their native country. The knowledge acquired from the class helped her appreciate her parents and undoubtedly her background. This stage would be considered a "crossroads" (Torres & Hernandez, 2007, p. 569) because

Juliana had a better understanding of her culture and started to change her view of the negative stereotypes associated with being Latina and over time, she became more confident (intrapersonal). She accepted who she was and acknowledged her ethnicity by acknowledging her culture and her bilingual abilities. The changes in her can be attributed to the fact that she was getting older, taking classes and interacting with people (including Latinx) who are positive (interpersonal). The confidence she built also helped her connect to resources such as CalWORKs, EOPS, and Puente.

According to Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory, Juliana is on the road to becoming the author of herself (self-authorship). Now that she transferred to a four-year university, she has begun to form her own voice and knows the basics of navigating college. She built the social capital she needed that is acknowledged by higher education and became adept at using the "culture of power" as described by Delpit (1988, p. 282). She learned the codes and rules to navigate CCSF and is more likely to use them at her new university.

Sandra is at the same stage as Juliana. The other participants such as Ramirez and Ulysses who are connected to resources or student-run organizations are between the crossroads and becoming authors of themselves based on Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory. They are also learning those codes to build their social capital and thus navigate the four-year institution more easily. However, Sandra, who is proud of her ethnicity, and is in the process of learning the codes, though her process is much slower than Juliana's due to her work commitment and financial difficulties, would benefit from getting more support from the institution.

In Lupe's case the institution must address certain practices that perpetuate inequality (Boykin & Noguera, 2011) to be able to support Lupe as she continues to prepare to transfer fully. Educators who want to promote access for nontraditional students including Latinx students must build wraparound services to validate students'

presence, like Lupe's, and her desire to complete her courses and transfer to a four-year institution.

**Cultural Barrier: Mental health issues decreased their self-esteem and academic performance potential.** This finding also emerged from the study and it appears to extend the current literature. Mental health issues are present in all ethnic groups, but each group processes and copes with them differently. In the Latinx community, as described by the participants in this study, they are dealt with in silence (Ulysses); nonetheless, creating a culturally responsive space for students to come together to talk about those issues and know that they are not alone is a way to offer opportunities to begin destigmatizing mental illness. This study found that all participants described suffering from some sort of mental health issue, with anxiety and depression being most commonly described. Students shared that they could not talk about it, as mental illness was not acknowledged in their families. Students who had anxiety found it challenging to communicate with their instructors to either get extensions on deadlines or reschedule quizzes or tests. They also did not get enough support from the college in identifying the mental illness or for learning coping strategies. Although the participants only mentioned two of the many mental health issues, del Pilar (2009) found more extensive mental health needs in a similar population. Del Pilar analyzed 119 Latinx students' mental health records at a four-year university counseling center. The findings revealed that depression rated higher for Latinx students than non-Latinx. Some had a history of depression, whereas others had depression but were never diagnosed or took any medication compared to 17% who were diagnosed and took medication. Another interesting finding is that 4% of the 119 students were hospitalized for psychiatric reasons compared to 2% of non-Latinx, which were only 60 (other) students. One can speculate that the sample size for non-Latinx students is not comparable, but it is worth pointing

out that depression was the most significant mental illness among Latinx students at this university.

Mental health issues affected the participants on an emotional level because they could neither talk about them with their family members nor be open about them at school. Even if they were connected to the school mental health services, that does not guarantee Latinx students would go seek help. Gloria and Castellanos (2012) say that Latinx students have a difficult time connecting with school resources because students are not familiar with what is available on campus, thus limiting their ability to make connections. If they connect with mental health services, for example, the authors state that Latinx students don't share their experience easily until a "culturally intentioned space" is created for the students to open up (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012, p. 90). So, one request was to have more support at the college to help students detect and manage their mental illness because many are not aware that they have mental illness and go through life thinking that it is normal to be mentally unstable, as noted by one of the participants.

Students' financial needs also affect their mental health (del Portillo, 1987), and while CCSF has a student health center, students may be referred to outside services depending on the severity of their illness or if they reach the maximum number of free visits per semester (CCSF, 2019). Although the services outside the college are low cost, the payment requirement may affect students because the cost of living in the Bay Area is high (Riggs, 2016). In her 2015 study with 34 Latinx (female) students done in a large university in the northwestern part of the United States, Mount found that students with low socioeconomic status usually did not have health insurance. They could not afford health care and they showed discomfort using college student health services. Therefore, socioeconomic status is often associated with the basic condition of well-being in addition to good health and a positive self-concept, which enables Latinx to be effective participants in society (del Portillo, 1987).

While Gloria and Castellanos's (2012) study was conducted at a four-year university with first-generation college students, the outcomes can apply to other first-generation college students. Therefore, creating a culturally sensitive safe space for Latinx students will allow them to come together, feel confident and have a sense of belonging. This space will let them talk about their issues, and it will also provide them with the means to network with others (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). This can also serve as the initial step in addressing the stigma around mental illnesses that prevents people from talking about them. Mental health issues emerged from the study and although they were not included in the literature review, they are significant; therefore, more research is needed to better understand the effects of mental health issues on community college Latinx students. Continuing with the theme of barriers that students face at CCSF, the next theme is centered around microaggressions and negative stereotypes.

**Institutional Barrier: Racial microaggressions and negative stereotypes affected their perception of self and belief in their academic abilities.** Microaggression is defined as a subtle form of everyday verbal or nonverbal unconscious degradations and putdowns (Yosso et al., 2009) based on race/ethnicity, "often in combination with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent or surname" (Pérez Huber et al., 2015, p. 17). The finding regarding microaggressions agrees with the literature review in that these first-generation Latinx college students experienced microaggressions on and off college campuses. All interviewees in this study experienced microaggressions. They made an impact in the lives of the students, but the interviewees relied on their non-financial cultural and personal assets to battle these microaggressions. Those subtle forms of verbal or nonverbal racial bias and discriminations (Sue et al., 2007) behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, de-rogoratory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color. Perpetrators of microaggressions are often unaware that they engage

in such communications when they interact with racial/ethnic minorities. A taxonomy of racial microaggressions in everyday life was created through a review of the social psychological literature on aversive racism, from formulations regarding the manifestation and impact of everyday racism, and from reading numerous personal narratives of counselors (both White and those of color affected their perception of self and belief in their academic abilities. In other words, those unconscious or conscious microaggression acts, such as being ignored and subordinated, made the study participants feel uncomfortable or awkward, which in turn made them feel as if they did not belong in college, were stupid, ignored, subordinated, humiliated, and unintelligent.

Some racial microaggressions occurred in class but they also occurred outside of class. Some microaggressions and macro aggressions came from classmates, e.g., the act of the two disruptive White men saying inappropriate things to each other or ten others ignoring the Latinx student in group work or making snide comments under their breath, which made the students feel disrespected. Another example was hearing that nobody would get an A in the class, which made one participant feel unintelligent. An example of a microaggression experienced in the classroom was when a student felt interrogated. Insisting students should vote while disregarding the student's response of "No, I cannot vote" and then yelling at the student for not giving in is another form of microaggression, which made the study participants feel awkward and subordinated. Finally, hearing the example of the U.S. border and Mexico, building a wall, when the student's country of origin is Mexico made the student feel isolated and unwelcomed because it implied that Mexican immigrants are bad people. All these microaggressions may have been unconscious or the level of hurt and violence that they caused the recipient may not have been fully appreciated by the perpetrator; however, they nevertheless placed stress on people of color and specifically Latinx students more than White students (Yosso, 2006). These microaggressions had an impact on students and affected their perception of

self and belief in their academic abilities. The results of this study on microaggressions coincide with the literature review in that racial discrimination/microaggressions are factors that make maneuvering higher education distressing (Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017; Solórzano et al., 2005). So to better understand this phenomenon, CRT and LatCrit offer a unique critical lens to analyze and make sense of it.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) center around the premise that race and racism are a central aspect of how the United States functions (Yosso, 2005, 2006), and LatCrit focuses on the intersectionality with other dimensions of subordination unique to the Latinx community (Villalpando, 2004). Looking through the lens of LatCrit, an extension of CRT, the findings of this research exposed yet again the subtle forms of discrimination that these students experienced from classmates, instructors, and administrative staff. In class, having to expose one's immigration status and hearing instructors announce that nobody will receive an A in class are examples of practices that symbolize the majoritarian assumption that everybody can vote or that classes are hard and therefore only a few will succeed. Ramirez went to a student support service center, and the staff made him feel as though whatever the student asked was common knowledge, and the "tone of their voices [came] out paternalistic...patronizing" (Ramirez). That is also a form of discrimination. The assumptions were that all students have access to any or all resources and should know what to ask before they get to the location. Those possibly well-intended acts caused distress, perhaps inadvertently, to these Latinx students.

The intersection of the forms of oppression discovered in this study was based on ethnicity and gender. With regard to the transgender, non-binary gender fluid student, they mentioned that microaggressions happen so often that they did not even seem to consciously see them anymore. Those microaggressions were often partnered with their gender identity and ethnicity, which made it difficult to separate one from the other. The

other intersection of microaggression I found was reflected in the story of the student whose professor used an example of the U.S. border and Mexico. The first example demonstrates that microaggression is based not only on ethnicity but also on gender identity, which makes it difficult to separate them. The second example assumes that, first, nobody would be offended by the example, and second, that nobody of Mexican descent was in the class. At the same time, it implies that all examples are fair game and there is no reason to get upset if your heritage happens to be singled out, because it is helping all students understand the material. Sadly, the nontraditional students in this study have experienced microaggressions their whole lives, and therefore, they have developed defense mechanisms to protect themselves. Each interviewee shared that they found CRT and LatCrit acknowledged cultural wealth assets to resist microaggressions. When there is oppression, there is resistance (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2004). The ways students resisted forms of oppression will be discussed in the section on students' cultural assets through Yosso's (2005, 2006) community cultural wealth theory.

In addition to dealing with microaggressions, all five participants admitted having to constantly battle stereotype threats, which aligned with previous research by Steele (2010), and which caused them to always be vigilant. They feared conforming to the stereotypes of being less intelligent, no good at math, having tattoos and being a thief, wearing a hoodie, being associated with gang membership, or purposely getting pregnant too young to get government support. The negative images of their ethnicity projected in the media damaged their psyches as they internalized those beliefs that some time ago were accepted as true or normal (Steele, 2010). Lupe feared to conform to the stereotype that Latinas are not to be trusted and may steal, while Ramirez felt like a criminal because he wore a hoodie, and Juliana felt undervalued or less than because she had children when she was very young. Although stereotype threats can affect anyone, as noted by Steele (2010), it affects some people more than others, and people are not always aware

that it is happening. Steele (2010) makes it clear that stereotype threats weaken the intellectual performance of people by interfering with the thinking process. This was certainly true in the findings of this study.

Lupe was always vigilant to things related to the threat, such as how people were looking at her with her tattoos when they were exposed. She said she got some looks and people would ask, "What's that? What does that mean?" Lupe internalized that people are thinking she may be on the street, may be "messy," "devalued as a person, as a female, and as a student," or she hoped that people "did not think she was putting books" in her bag. She also noticed that if the teacher or a classmate put her down, she also put herself down, and that made her question her potential by saying "Oh, why should I try, if I don't understand it?" In all these instances her mind was racing, doubting herself, arguing the stereotype, feeling sorry for herself, and trying to lift herself up at the same time to disprove the stereotype. Her mind was trying to defeat the stereotype that was taking too much mental space (Steele, 2010). She could not concentrate on the book she was trying to find at the bookstore or fully engage in class after having heard comments that caused her to put herself down. The stereotype impaired the working memory she would need to "retain and manipulate information for immediate use"; i.e., the type of memory necessary to be active in class discussions (Steele, 2010, p. 123). These threats she experienced have real effects, according to Steele. They cause physical and behavioral changes which can be damaging in the long run. Steele (2010) goes further and concludes that stereotype threats affect Black, Latino, Native Americans, and other minority students in college, with the most obvious effect seen in their low grades.

Lupe tried her best to hide her tattoos because she felt that people treated her differently when they saw them. She also recognized that those stereotypes did not determine who she was. This is an important step for Lupe to acknowledge because as she continues her studies, over time, the stereotype threats are likely to decrease.

However, a few things need to happen to support that improvement. She will need to get more connected to the school resources, take more classes with innovative professors who provide “good teaching” (Steele, 2010, p. 177), and create experiences to validate her efforts in college (Rendon, 2002). The wraparound services, along with care from instructors and those in the resource centers, ethnic clubs, and culturally sensitive spaces will help her gain a sense of belonging and trust in the system before and after she transfers. She can then continue her education to obtain her bachelor’s degree and master’s degree, which will allow her to open the nonprofit organization to help women (especially women of color) address issues of domestic violence and rape. Her grades are likely to improve. I used Lupe as an example as she was the only one who was not yet connected to resources due to her work and school schedule. However, tattoo removal programs like Central American Resource Center (CARECEN) can help remove past stigma.

Consistent with the literature review, this research found that all participants acknowledged experiencing microaggressions and negative stereotypes which affected them mentally and emotionally as they prepared to transfer to a four-year college or university. However, students who were connected to school resources, four of the participants, felt validated on campus and managed these stereotypes threats better. They felt a sense of belonging and seemed happier than the one who did not have a solid connection to school resources. This next section will address the second part of the research question, which is the support that these Latinx students perceived as important as they prepared to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. The study found that they gained support from family, the college programs, student support services, their instructors, and their cultural assets.

## Support

**Family was important even if they sometimes dissuaded more than encouraged them.** The results of this study align with previous studies in that having contact with immediate or extended family members was important to the participants. Most participants described their immediate family as “dysfunctional” because each presented a unique set of challenges which sometimes caused more stress than harmony. Each family support was unique. Ramirez’s mother was the “breadwinner,” and his grandmother and great-grandmother offered moral support and somebody with whom he practiced his Spanish. Sandra was able to get a place to live thanks to her mom’s connections, and now that she has a child, her in-laws help her watch her child one weekend a month. They all kept in touch, and they offered her moral support and encouragement. They were also available if she asked for any help. Juliana’s family came to the U.S. escaping the civil war in El Salvador. She had a hard time connecting to her parents, but that changed after she learned more about the struggles her parents endured. That discovery got her close to her parents, who now are wonderful grandparents for her children. Currently, they are her moral and emotional support. They communicate with each other and are very present in her life and that of her three children.

Ulysses also had a strong connection with their (gender neutral) family, as they made them feel deeply needed based on all the roles they play at home. Ulysses is almost done with the coursework required to transfer, but they mentioned that they are not ready to transfer due to family worries because they heavily depend on them (Ulysses). In general, all participants were connected with their immediate and extended family on some level, and *familismo*—described as family trust, loyalty, closeness, kinship and networking (Ayon et al., 2010)—was a core value to them. Family served as a source of strength and empowerment. In 2012, Comeau did a study where he looked at data

from the General Social Survey and had a sample of 2,765 people in the U.S., including “Hispanic, Black non-Hispanic, and White non-Hispanic” (p. 255) persons, ages 18 and older. The results indicated that in the U.S., Latinx scored higher than Whites and close to Blacks in his measures (frequency of family contacts) of familismo. This confirms that familialism is an important value for CCSF Latinx students.

Latinx families often do not understand their children’s university experience because college information is marketed to students, rather than to parents, especially if parents are Spanish-speaking (Rios-Ellis et al., 2015). The participants’ parents’ level of education ranged from 3rd grade to 9th grade and some high school education. One of the participants’ parents was also taking classes at CCSF at the time of the study because she felt encouraged by her daughter. However, they supported their children’s education in other ways. Parents learned to survive and provide for their families at all costs, and helping their children with college applications was not something they have done before and they could not afford to pay people to help their children with homework or filling out college applications; therefore, those tasks were left for educational institutions to handle.

Also, the nontraditional students turned negative comments from their family (as well as those they received in their schooling) into a source of empowerment. The negative comments gave students the motivation to be a better person and do better in life and prove the speakers wrong in some instances. Negative comments such as “Okay, you’re done with high school. Get a good job and support yourself” or “you’re not a real woman, you’re not smart enough for school” were turned around and used as fuel to keep them progressing on their educational journey. They used these comments and others in some instances to do the opposite. Juliana, who was told to get a job right after high school, is now at a four-year university, and she said she did it because she wanted to prove to her family that she could go to college and be successful with three kids.

Sandra, who was told she was not a real woman, is now in counseling for her depression and plans to transfer in fall 2019. Lupe is also proving to “be smart” by staying focused in school even though it is difficult to work and go to school full time in addition to other family commitments. She is finding her way into higher education and learning the rules and codes to learn the culture of higher education. Latinx students’ experiences must be seen as strengths (Hernandez et al., 2013) rather than weaknesses. They not only found support in their families but also found support from programs such as EOPS, Puente, LSN, AASP, and VIDA, as described in the next section. In conclusion, students valued familismo and turned negative comments into encouragement by doing the opposite. Their parents are not to blame for not helping them navigate college, but they handed those responsibilities to the educational institutions to handle, as their role was to assist and support their children in the pursuit of their college and career dreams.

**Latinx students went for support to designated Latinx spaces where they felt comfortable, safe, and validated.** Crisp and Nuñez (2014), Salas (2014), M. Sanchez (2012), and other scholars agree that community colleges serve as a transferring gateway for historically underserved students who plan to transfer to four-year colleges and universities. Many community colleges offer support services to their transferring students. Although CCSF has many student support services, the participants mentioned that the Puente Project, and student support services including CalWORKs, EOPS, LSN, AASP, VIDA were vital to their success at CCSF. Four of the participants stated that they were grateful for the program and student support services mentioned above. All four wished they had known of them earlier, when they began their college journeys. Below is a description of each program and the services it provides to students.

***The Puente Project.*** The Puente Project is “a year-long academic and community leadership program designed to increase the number of community college students transferring to 4-year colleges or universities. To meet this goal, the national award-

winning Program emphasizes writing, counseling and mentoring” (CCSF catalog 2016-2017, p. 57). In other words, it offers wraparound services to support students planning to transfer to a university. Throughout the year-long program, students go on educational and cultural field trips. They attend motivational conferences at a university with other Puente Project students from across the state, and work with mentors who are professionals from the community. The program is open to all students, especially to those who are interested in being part of a learning environment and becoming leaders in their community. They receive priority registration for all their classes, allowing all Puente students to register early. The project began at Chabot Community College, located in Hayward, California, as a Latinx-specific program. The Puente Project has since expanded to 65 community colleges, 38 high schools and 4 middle schools throughout California, and the model has also been adopted in Texas and Washington. The project is co-sponsored by the University of California and the California Community College Chancellor’s Office (The Puente Project, 2019).

***Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS).*** EOPS is a state-funded program available in all 114 community colleges. Its goal is to support those who are disadvantaged based on language, social, economic, and educational circumstances. EOPS at CCSF offers students counseling, book vouchers, priority registration, college orientation, workshops, and CSU and UC transfer application fee waivers. It also coordinates its resources with other CCSF departments and programs to enhance student success. In addition to the services mentioned above, eligible students may be part of Cooperative Agencies Resources for Education (CARE) and receive food card services, educational grants, and other funding. CARE is also state funded and helps students who

are on welfare and are single heads of household with children. Its goal is to facilitate the students' move from being on welfare to becoming self-sufficient (CCSF & CCC, 2019).

***California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs).***

CalWORKs is a public assistance program that assists students in completing their educational goals, then helps them find employment as well as medical assistance, housing, food, clothing, and basic services. At CCSF it helps current and former students on welfare to achieve their educational goals, including work experience. It also offers them:

- Employment opportunities
- School Supplies Assistance
- Financial Aid and Tuition Fee Waiver
- Transportation Assistance
- Paid Book Support
- Laptops Available to Loan
- Academic & Career Counseling
- County Employment Specialist conveniently located on campus (CCSF & Department of Social Services, 2019).

***Latino Services Network (LSN) and UMOJA/African-American Scholastic Programs (AASP).*** LSN and UMOJA/AASP are two of five multicultural retention programs. Although they were created to support a specific ethnic group, they serve anybody who walks into their offices. They assist students with:

- Academic, vocational, and personal counseling
- New student orientations in English and Spanish (LSN only)
- Promotion of educational and cultural events
- Computer workstations and study center lab

- Tutoring - instructor support
- Referrals to campus and community services
- Book loan program; Scholarships (CCSF, 2019)

*Voices of Immigrants Demonstrating Achievement (VIDA)*. VIDA is a resource center that helps students, their friends, and allies who are affected by concerns related to immigration and citizenship. VIDA was founded in 2012, and its mission is to empower undocumented students on their higher education journey. It offers them a place where students find a sense of belonging and a place to network with others and the community (CCSF, 2019).

The five nontraditional first-generation college student participants in this study found comfort and support in these programs and requested more visibility for the programs on campus. The help they received was not only from the programs generally but also from specific counselors who held their hands through the transfer process, like Mr. Clark, who was instrumental in guiding students through the process. They were welcoming and became their home away from home. They also provided students with a place where they could network with other students. Resources, such as those listed above, made these students feel validated and were vital for the success of these Latinx first-generation college students, which was similar to results that Shumaker and Wood (2016) found. Both authors conducted a study with 17,000 students across 68 community colleges to find out if the students accessed academic, career, personal, and educational planning services, their effectiveness, and how often they used those services. Their findings revealed that first-generation college students accessed those services, although their literature further indicated that first-generation college students did not utilize those services as much as other students. Both their study's findings and mine reflect that students utilize the services when they feel validated, as Rendon (2002) confirms. Booth

et al. (2013) found that having support on campus is crucial to the success of Latinx students. The goal of their three-year study (2011-2014) was to find out what students in California community colleges said they needed. They interviewed 785 students from 13 community colleges in California and paid close attention to what African-American and Latinx students said. The results concurred with the findings of the above studies in that student support services are essential to help students transferring from community colleges to CSUs, UCs, or private institutions. Booth et al. reported that students wanted support in (1) developing a clear educational plan; (2) engaging in course content in a more meaningful way; (3) getting opportunities to connect with others; and (4) having a sense of belonging on the college campus. They also asked that services for students be better advertised, in addition to having their instructors inform them of what assistance and resources were available on their campuses.

Additionally, students in this study by Booth et al. (2013) requested that professors share their stories about how they succeeded. Another specific finding for African-American and Latinx students was that they needed assistance not only with their academics but also with figuring out financial needs as well as social and personal needs. They requested assistance outside of class, mentoring programs, as well as having their family history and culture validated in college. The requests were endless; however, the above are relevant to the student populations in my study.

My study, like the one mentioned above, found that the programs and student services to which they were introduced offered students a space to study, a community where they felt safe, motivated, empowered, validated and where they were able to network with one another as well as to gain a sense of belonging. That sense of belonging was also extended to some of their classrooms. The participants stated that some instructors also supported their transfer efforts by offering help before or after class through their teaching philosophy.

**They enjoyed taking classes with culturally responsive instructors.** In addition to being connected to student programs and resources, the findings of this study coincide with those of Hinton (2015). Black and Latinx students, who mostly come from low socioeconomic status families and often get less support in school than other racial groups, do bring cultural capital to school. However, the cultural capital that non-dominant group(s) of students bring to the classroom is usually ignored (Hinton, 2015). The participants mentioned that they had some support and were thankful to have it, but more needed to be done. As they acquired the cultural capital acknowledged in higher education or the “culture of Power” (Delpit, 1988), their navigational skills got easier to use. They learned the rules to write, behave, and address issues of higher education (Delpit, 1988).

It helped to take classes with innovative professors who used culturally responsive pedagogy (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). For instance, a participant said that in his English class he was able to pick his own topic based on the class guidelines. In a research methods class, another participant got to do a qualitative study and interviewed people for the project. In a statistics class, the instructor made them feel they were capable of learning the material, but they had to approach it as if they were learning a foreign language, which made sense to them. Those classes kept them engaged, contrary to what Winkle-Wagner (2010) noted – that students leave when they do not possess the cultural capital rewarded by the mainstream.

As a Puente Project instructor and academic counselor and in partnership with the English instructors, we sat in on each other’s classes and modeled the behavior of good students. When I taught, the English instructor sat in and acted as a responsible and engaging student. When she taught, I did the same. After hearing the participants describe the classes they took and what kept them engaged, I immediately made the connection with classes taught through the Puente Project. Puente Project courses embody the

concept of Hammond and Jackson (2015) and culturally responsive pedagogy, which the co-executive director at the Puente State Office, Vergara, called “pedagogy of el cariño (pedagogy of care)” (Vergara, personal communication, October 15, 2016).

According to Hammond and Jackson (2015), culturally responsive teaching pedagogy is good teaching because culture plays an important role in neuroscience and the brain. She says that the brain is like hardware with three parts that work as a “synchronized dance” (p. 37): the reptilian region of the brain that only reacts; the limbic regions, or emotional brain, and the neocortex region where the information is processed; and the nervous system, which is an extension of the other brain structures, which picks up information from our environment and sends it back to the brain to be interpreted, which then processes the action related to the information. So, culturally responsive teaching focuses on four key areas that instructors use to guide students and help them transition from being a dependent learner to an independent learner. Those four stages are “awareness, learning partnership, information processing and community of learners and learning environment” (Hammond & Jackson, 2015, p.17). Table 2 clarifies the connection between the brain and the learning processes.

<b>Structure of the brain</b>	<b>Culturally responsive teaching framework</b>	<b>Instructor’s role &amp; practices in the classroom. The instructor....</b>
Reptilian region	Awareness	is aware of own sociopolitical position, tunes cultural lens and is aware of own triggers around race and culture.
Limbic region	Learning partnership	builds connections with students and establishes a trust to hold students’ standards high and offer them new intellectual challenges.
Neocortex region	Information processing	strengthens and expands the intellectual capacity of students but keeps in mind how culture impacts how the brain processes information. Uses methods from oral traditions.

<b>Structure of the brain</b>	<b>Culturally responsive teaching framework</b>	<b>Instructor's role &amp; practices in the classroom. The instructor....</b>
Nervous system	Community of learners/ learning environment	uses classroom rituals to create an environment where students feel intellectually and socially safe for learning and practices the principle of restorative justice.

(Adapted from Hammond & Jackson, 2015)

*Table 2: Learning Processes*

Study participants who experienced engaging instructors were motivated to continue to do well in their classes even when the class content was hard. If more instructors used culturally responsive teaching pedagogy, the outcome of Latinx students completing their courses would be higher because they would feel validated, as noted by Rendon (2002), and it could be a strategy for closing the achievement gap. However, there is a need to provide instructors with the skills to teach well regardless of race, class, and culture (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). Although there are many innovative instructors with creative and culturally responsive curricula, higher education, in general, still uses the color-blind approach which was created as best practice to educate everybody without considering differences related to race, culture, and class. The goal has been to treat all students the same regardless of their background, but it is impossible to implement a color-blind position in a society where “racism, ethnocentrism, class, and snobbery are rooted in historical and contemporary social relations” (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 31).

Looking through the lens of CRT and LatCrit, the tenet that challenges the dominant ideology of objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race-neutrality and equal opportunity (Villalpando, 2004; Yosso, 2005, 2006; Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, & Solórzano, 2001; Yosso et al., 2009) helps us understand that elements of the dominant ideology act as a cover-up to benefit the dominant group's traditional claims in education. We all have biases, but some instructors may fail to recognize that and treat all students

the same way in order to be objective or fair, which ends up isolating and ignoring some, and ultimately being less objective and less fair to their minoritized and marginalized students. If instructors create an optimal learning environment where students feel engaged, motivated, and validated, they will thrive because instructors show they care, and they want their students to succeed. An example of color-blindness at CCSF can be seen in the scheduling of course offerings. Juliana shared that in her fourth and fifth semesters at college, she had a very difficult time registering for major and transfer requirement courses because only one instructor taught those classes and few classes were online. The times when some classes were offered seemed to benefit traditional students rather than nontraditional students. She understood that online courses were designed to accommodate all students but they were not available to help her to the extent she needed.

Similarly, a participant acknowledged that the English curriculum needed to be adjusted in regard to AB 705, a new law requiring students entering college to complete their transfer math and English in one year or ESL in three years. The participant believed that unprepared students need more support than others. What seems to be good for all students may result in excluding students of color and those who are not prepared for college-level academic rigor when they enter. Community colleges are the bridge to higher education, and their goal is to prepare students who are less prepared and get them ready for transfer. Thus, the content, structure, and availability of the courses students need should be accessible for both traditional and non-traditional students, like the Latinx students in this study.

Another participant shared that changes need to be made in the tutoring center hiring process because many current tutors have difficulties connecting with and helping students of color. The participant also saw the need to add bilingual Spanish-English tutors and then conduct a survey to investigate what other bilingual tutors should

be added. The example above depicts an aspect of the “objectivity-colorblindness-neutrality” tenet of CRT and LatCrit, because the tutoring center is available to all students; however, students like those in my study believed that more can be done to help them with their unique or additional support and learning needs.

Some of the participants also made it known that some agents at the college discouraged students from using their services by their behavior. Students were ignored, yelled at, or made to feel unintelligent. Whether the agents were having a bad day or not, all students deserve to feel welcomed. The services are there, but the question is, are they serving all students or just a few? Looking at this issue through the lens of CRT and LatCrit, contesting the dominant ideology, this research found validation that the colorblindness, racial objectivity and inherent equal opportunity narrative apparently resulted in many services not reaching many of the students, such as the participants in this study. This research suggests service offices should conduct a review of customer service practices, followed by culturally sensitive customer service training workshops for all agents, to better support Latinx students who visit those centers.

Similarly, the tutoring center would benefit from providing multicultural training for its staff, and hiring bilingual tutors, as well as changing some of the criteria for hiring tutors, because the current tutoring, as perceived by the study participants, is not serving all students. Requesting changes in current practices is easy, but acting on those changes requires a team effort from the various college staff and administrative constituencies. In the meantime, students are left to use their cultural wealth assets to be able to achieve their educational goals.

### **Valuing Latinx Students’ Community Cultural Wealth Assets**

CRT and LatCrit can be used to recognize experiential knowledge (Pérez Huber, 2009, 2011) and to illustrate the lived experiences of people of color as strengths

(Hernandez et al., 2013, Villalpando, 2004). From that premise, the assets discovered in this study are represented through Yosso's (2005, 2006) community cultural wealth framework in addition to taking pride in their Latinx ethnic identity. The counterstories of participants in this study allowed them to think about the past: their parents' uprising—such as escaping from a civil war—or having large family gatherings where they told stories, practiced traditions, and were reminded of their heritage and their future. The two focus groups, especially the last one, allowed the participants to reminisce about the past, but they also enabled them to open up and connect, as described in the excerpt below.

Ulysses sent this note after the last meeting:

I know you know how important the work you're doing is, but I don't think you realize the impact you've left on all of us. The stark contrast between the first meeting and the last was extremely pronounced. Yesterday felt like a laid-back discussion, like we've all known each other for ages, because thanks to you, the chemistry and the emotions that came out of our little unique group has become something utterly unforgettable. Thank you for providing the medium for which we were able to feel safe, heard, and a little less alone in this lifetime.

CRT and LatCrit experiential knowledge identify Latinx students as assets, and the only thing that must be seen as a deficit is the fact that they did not have access to schools with better resources (Villalpando, 2004), or adequate health insurance, or a fair-paying job. The interviewees learned to survive even though some of the survival skills they learned were not positive. For example, one of them said, "My parents came escaping the civil war from El Salvador. So, they had major trust issues; I went through things that I feel like my trust issues helped me survive on the streets." However, she and the others have other assets that are worth explaining. They utilized their cultural assets to navigate community college and be successful. These assets are (not in any particular

order): (a) aspirational capital; (b) familial capital; (c) social capital; (d) navigational capital; (e) resistant capital; and (f) linguistic capital.

**Being proud of their identity.** All participants overwhelmingly stressed that they were proud to be Latinx at the time of the interviews, which was not the same as in the past. This empowered them to go above and beyond to do their best because the educational system was not designed with them in mind; therefore, they had to do more (and *be* more, which included self-acceptance and self-validation) to be able to compete with other students.

**Aspiration capital.** This refers to the ability of Latinx students to have hopes and aspirations for the future despite the systemic racism they face (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Yosso, 2005, 2006). In addition to being proud of who they are, all participants overwhelmingly described how they wanted to contribute to their community after college and work as a financial specialist, clinical psychologist or a prison rehabilitation officer, and a type of counselor to help young women end the cycle of violence. Their interest in careers relating to human services and the desire to influence people through their work is a testament that they have plans for the future even though some of them do not even know how they will pay for college or have all the resources necessary to travel the college journey.

**Familial capital.** This is the ability to maintain a healthy relationship, form bonds with others, and connect to resources (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Yosso, 2005). Although the interviewees did not have an optimal relationship with their immediate families, they appreciated them because they offered moral support. They could not help them with college-related inquiries, but they could help in other ways. All five participants formed bonds with people who supported them as they prepared to transfer. The support network began with a child, or a spouse, co-worker, grandparents,

members of a student club, and a retention program such as LSN. Their support networks appeared to be atypical but were effective.

**Social capital.** This is the ability to network with people as well as access community resources and to be able to navigate society's institutions (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Yosso, 2005, 2006). Based on the social capital definition, the study found that four of the Latinx students in this study networked with different programs and services such as the Puente Project, EOPS, LSN, and CalWORKs; however, most of those connections started later in their college journey and they wished they had known about them when they began their studies at CCSF.

**Navigational capital.** This is the ability to maneuver through social institutions to get the information they need to facilitate their success in college (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Yosso, 2005). The evidence for this cultural capital is that most of the participants were able to maneuver their way through CCSF by meeting with academic counselors, using resources and thus obtaining all the information they needed to be successful at CCSF. If they could not find the necessary resources in those locations, they at least could ask for referrals to resources outside the college: for example, affordable childcare. Students who were more involved in the college community connected to resources through their involvement with student-run organizations in addition to EOPS, LSN, CalWORKs, and VIDA.

**Resistant capital.** This is the ability of Latinx students to persist in college or university, utilizing skills adopted through oppositional behavior, despite the systemic racism they face (Peralta et al., 2013; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Yosso, 2005, 2006). Acknowledging the difficulties the participants endured in high school and growing up, once they arrived at college, they already had coping mechanisms (positive or not) to resist subtle forms of racism and subordination perpetrated by the system of oppression. They were able to persist in college despite the microaggressions, negative stereotypes,

low expectations, inability to access some student support services, and insufficient support in applying and completing all the transfer paperwork.

**Linguistic capital.** This “includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style” (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Although this was not discussed in isolation, the study found that all five participants mentioned it as they talked about being proud of their ethnicity. They used their bilingual ability to connect, communicate, engage, and find resources. Ramirez, for example, said he did not use it as much as he wished, but when he did, he felt empowered and confident because it was a skill that gave him power in certain settings. Those who had children were doing their best to teach their children their mother tongue because it is an important asset to have in life; it gives them access to their history and that of their grandparents as well as better access to the oral histories, stories, proverbs and more.

CRT and LatCrit recognize the experiential knowledge of Latinx students. This study shows that they possessed many assets that were crucial as they navigated the system designed for those whose social capital is continuously reinforced in higher education—traditional students. In addition to social capital, those assets include aspirational capital, familial capital, navigational capital, resistant capital, and linguistic capital. All these assets allowed them to call up skills they developed in the past to apply them in the present and prepare these nontraditional students for the future. These assets are also powerful weapons for fighting microaggressions and negative stereotypes.

### **Recommendations**

CRT and LatCrit provided me with a lens to theorize, examine, and make recommendations as a way to challenge the subtle forms of racism that intersected with other forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005; Perez Huber, 2009, 2011) on a college campus.

This research found several forms of subtle racism. To address those issues, below are a few recommendations to change and improve practices to better support students of color, including Latinx students. The college has already been working to eliminate the achievement gap, and this study makes specific recommendations to support that effort. As the recommendations are implemented and student service professionals acknowledge that their work is to help the elimination of all forms of subordination, then the institution will be committing to social justice as delineated by CRT and LatCrit (Yosso, 2005; Villalpando, 2004). The findings represent students' voices; therefore, greater weight must be put towards their implementations.

1. Create a culturally sensitive safe space (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012) and bilingual, bicultural mental health professionals to validate their experiences. The space will allow Latinx students to come together and talk about their issues relating to school and mental health—a place for them to network with other students and thus encourage each other to move forward. In coordination with the student health center and work done by other resources, include ethnically relevant mental health ambassadors; include students who are in the health-related field or who can be trained to lead and handle basic mental health issues, but rely on the expertise of the mental health professionals when problems become more complex or chronic.
2. Institutionalize unconscious bias workshops to reduce microaggressions and effects of negative stereotypes. Coordinate with the Office of Student Equity, Student Development and the Academic and Instructional Affairs Office to begin the conversations and leverage their expertise regarding how to secure funding to either begin a search to find somebody internally or hire an outside expert to facilitate unconscious bias workshops. Once funding is secured and a presenter identified, coordinate with the different units and organize the

delivery of the series of workshops. Begin by offering the workshops to the instruction faculty during the all faculty meeting (Flex Day) prior to the start of the semester. Then coordinate smaller workshops with department chairs to offer the workshops during their faculty meetings. Continue coordinating and offering the workshops throughout the semester. Offer them to all the units in the Student Development Division, beginning with the counseling unit, all office management assistants, and student workers. Similarly, expand the current initiative on diversity and teaching best practices training for administrators, faculty, and administrative staff. Start these efforts by looking for internal experts such as Puente faculty, faculty from other learning communities or any other faculty who have had success helping students of color thrive in the college. Begin to offer the training during Professional Development day and offer higher credit value to these workshops as an incentive.

3. Work with department chairs, counseling units, and administrative staff to create a team to inform students in different languages of the services available on campus at the beginning of each semester and thus connect them with student support services that foster pedagogy of *el cariño* (Vergara, 2016). This will increase the likelihood that students will stay in college, transfer, and ultimately graduate. Currently the college has counselors who serve as liaisons with different academic departments. Initiate discussions with the counseling faculty to coordinate with their assigned departments to present, share with their instructors the student support services available to students at the college, and request instructors to include in their syllabi a teaching unit connecting students with student services. Begin this process by having conversations with a few counselors and their respective department

chairs. If counselors do not feel comfortable to approach their chairs, request meetings with the different department chairs to explain the purpose and the benefit of doing this work. Also submit a proposal to offer this type of workshops to faculty during professional development day.

4. Introduce new students to the resources early and increase the visibility of existing ethnically conscious counseling units, as well as other student support services to nurture the college-going endeavors of students of color.

Invite members from the existing counseling units during major orientation days and give them time and space to share their services and also have students who currently attend those programs be part of a student panel. At the end of the panel ask all students to fill out a contact information form. With the help of the administrative staff, call and invite students of color, including Latinx students, to visit the Multicultural Retention programs or create an open house with the sole purpose of highlighting these programs. If money is needed, involve stakeholders such as vice chancellors, deans, and department chairs to come up with funding to sponsor open houses, print marketing materials, and buy food.

5. Expand community college transfer programs to offer more hands-on support not only at the locations designated by the transfer center but also coordinate to expand those services at the retention programs and any ethnically conscious areas. Coordinate with the transfer center and the retention programs to offer hands-on help on filling out the transfer application at the retention programs. Start with two retention programs, then expand to the others, and finally extend the services to the centers outside of the main campus.
6. Provide empowerment training for students and their families. Offer nonthreatening conversations about college in general, the benefits of college

degrees, financial planning, and resources available for the entire family. Make it informal and organic, where parents and siblings do not only listen to whoever is leading the discussion, but also encourage a few of them to share their schooling experiences with the entire group or in smaller group discussions. Also encourage parents and siblings to talk about what the ideal support for their children would look like as their children prepare for a degree at the college or transfer to four-year universities. Pilot this empowerment training with a few lead counselors from the retention programs, LSN, and those who serve as liaisons with high schools in the district. Contact students who are willing to bring their parents and/or siblings to the college and make it a day/afternoon or evening to empower the students and their parent/siblings.

7. Partner with community organizations such as CARECEN to address legal, mental health, and tattoo removal needs. Coordinate with the community organizations on a day to come to the college. Then, with the help of all the counselors, advertise it and get students to sign up. Also coordinate with instructors who are familiar with LSN and the other retention programs to have representatives from community organizations do a short presentation in their classes to inform students of the resources available in the community and thus encourage students to contact organizations such as CARECEN on their own or with the help of the academic counselors. Keep the presentation open to all students to avoid singling out Latinx students and protect students' privacy. If funding is needed, reach out to the Office of Student Equity or ask for referrals if they are not able to support these efforts.

It is not easy to make recommendations because there are already systems in place and acknowledging that more support is needed requires institutions and stakeholders to redirect time and money to implement changes. However, it is critical to support not only Latinx students but any student of color and thus close the opportunity gap for historically underserved students. Once the changes are implemented, the institution will fully commit to social justice as delineated by CRT and LatCrit (Yosso, 2005; Villalpando, 2004).

### **Future Research Ideas**

This study's research question was: What factors do Latinx students at City College of San Francisco perceive as supports for and barriers to navigating higher education as they prepare to transfer to four-year colleges or universities? And the barriers that were found varied from institutional, to cultural, to personal. More specifically, the research found that students juggled home life and its unstable conditions, which reduced the possibilities of finding resources to do well in college. Cultural influences and history of trauma at home inhibited Latinx students' ability to ask for help; mental health issues decreased their self-esteem and academic performance potential. Additionally, microaggressions and negative stereotypes affected their perception of self and belief in their academic abilities.

There is a great need to expand the research, specifically in the area of mental health issues. Each ethnic group deals with them differently, but more information is needed to understand how Latinx community college students deal with these issues and what supports are necessary to assist them on their college journey. A second suggestion is to expand on the notion of asking for help. Many Latinx students are not aware of what is available on campus, but is there more to that? Are there better ways to validate their

college endeavors? Based on my experience as a Puente instructor and co-coordinator, I experienced that some students do not utilize the services even if they are aware of their existence. Is it lack of trust in the system and its processes? Is validation enough? What other support will be useful for them? Additional research in these areas can enable community college educators to improve their practice, thereby increasing student success, including transfer rates to four-year institutions.

### **Conclusion**

The Latinx population is the fastest growing nonwhite group in the United States (Rodríguez et al., 2016), but the population growth is not mirrored in higher education degree completion rates at four-year institutions; therefore, investigating the reason for the low degree completion is imperative for the U.S. While it is known that Latinx students face financial struggles, and many of them have to work while going to college, as stated by Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) and Vega (2017), more research is needed to learn the reasons beyond the economic barriers that inhibit and prevent Latinx students from transferring from community colleges to institutions of higher education (Mejia-Smith & Gushue, 2017; Solórzano et al., 2005). The effect of low degree attainment impedes the access of Latinx to careers and opportunities to improve their socio-economic status. Scholars such as Kim, Rennick, and Franco (2014) state that nationally, only 13.9% of the overall population of Latinx adults received a bachelor's degree, in comparison to 30.3% of Whites, 19.8% of Blacks, and 52.4% of Asian and Pacific Islanders. In California, the Latinx community has experienced discrimination in education since the 1800s (Education Trust-West, 2017) and today, discrimination continues. A recent example of this was seen when the U.S. president rescinded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, "putting over 240,000 DACA youth in

California at risk” (Education Trust-West, 2017, p. 7). Although not all DACA recipients are Latinx, this decision has disproportionately affected many Latinx living in the United States. While there has been an improvement in educational attainment for all ethnic groups, Latinx students still experience the lowest college completion rate among other racial groups (Kim et al., 2014). Therefore, public policies on immigration directly affect higher learning for Latinx.

This study explored, from the student perspective, the transfer barriers and institutional constraints that challenged their educational success and proposes processes that can strengthen the educational pathway of Latinx and other students towards degree completion (Salas, 2014). To respond to the issue of the low transfer rate of Latinx students from community colleges to California State Universities (CSUs), Universities of California (UCs), or private universities, I conducted a qualitative study using the research question: What factors do Latinx students at City College of San Francisco perceive as supports for and barriers to navigating higher education as they prepare to transfer to four-year colleges or universities? This question guided the study to highlight the voices of Latinx students regarding their perceived challenges in transferring to a four-year institution of higher education. CRT, LatCrit and Community Cultural Wealth were used as lenses of counter-storytelling to bring five students’ voices to the foreground as a means of identifying the barriers they face and the support they receive while they attend community college.

The questions, the interview process, and the interview formats guided the research to explore, investigate, and learn about students’ experiences (Leavy, 2017). It allowed me to examine a dimension of their social phenomenon, which was navigating the transfer process from a community college to a four-year institution. I engaged in a phenomenological and counter-storytelling interviewing process to document the untold stories, thus demonstrating the value of students’ life experiences as meaning-making

processes (Leavy, 2017). The pool of participants was a mix of two former Puente students and three non-Puente students who engaged in four types of data collection: 2 background surveys, a pre-focus group survey, 10 one-on-one interviews, and 2 focus group interviews. I used Saldaña's (2013) coding process to generate codes, and Leavy's (2017) categories and themes using ATLAS.ti, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, to analyze the data until the data was saturated or no additional themes arose.

The findings of the study reveal that Latinx students face multiple barriers. However, financial barriers and transfer process (navigating the website, finding transfer requirements, filling out the transfer application and supporting documents) were not discussed in this study because there is ample research on these two obstacles. This study focused on the following barriers: (1) juggling home life and its unstable conditions which reduced the possibilities of finding resources to do well in college; (2) cultural influences and trauma of home life which inhibited Latinx students' ability to ask for help; (3) mental health issues which decreased their self-esteem and academic performance potential; and (4) microaggressions and negative stereotypes which affected their perception of self and belief in their academic abilities. On the other hand, the data also shows that Latinx students at CCSF found support from: (1) family, even when they sometimes dissuaded instead of encouraged them, (2) student programs and services where they felt safe, welcomed, and validated, (3) classes with culturally responsive instructors, and (4) their cultural assets to navigate community college as they got ready to transfer.

This study also made some recommendations to the college stakeholders to better assist Latinx students. Those recommendations include creating a culturally sensitive safe space (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012) that includes bilingual and bicultural mental health professionals to validate students' existence and reassure them that they are important,

and that their success is the success of the college as well. A second recommendation is to institutionalize unconscious bias workshops to reduce the microaggressions and effects of negative stereotypes. Similarly, community colleges should expand the diversity and teaching best practices trainings for administrators, faculty, and staff. Additionally, community colleges should work with department chairs, counseling units, and administrative staff to ensure that all make it a priority at the beginning of each semester to inform students of the services available on campus. Offer empowerment training for students and their families. Partner with community organizations to address legal, mental health, and tattoo removal needs. Lastly, increase visibility of the existing ethnically conscious counseling units and other student support services that will nurture the college-going endeavors of students of color and expand community college transfer program efforts to better assist Latinx students.

The issue of access to higher education via the community college pathway is personal, as I personally witnessed and experienced inequality within the educational system. However, I was determined to succeed. The unconditional love and support I received from those who believed in me made me a strong individual. My past experiences continue to inspire me, and they influenced my research. Now all that is left is for me to advocate for what students in general, but mainly students of color, deserve: access to education and wraparound services to support their college endeavors, because they all have the drive to thrive.

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## **APPENDIX A: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE**

### **California State University East Bay**

#### **Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study**

Breaking the Barriers: Exploring Experiences and Challenges of Latinx Students Seeking to Transfer from City College of San Francisco to 4-Year Colleges and Universities

#### **A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of Latinx students who plan to transfer from City College of San Francisco (CCSF) to a UC, CSU, or to a private institution.

The researcher, Gregoria Cahill, is a graduate student at California State University East Bay conducting research for a doctoral dissertation.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you identified yourself as a Latinx student attending CCSF and planning on transferring to a 4-year college/university.

#### **B. PROCEDURES**

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will be interviewed for approximately 1 hour for each interview (2 group interviews and 2 one-on-one interviews about your CCSF experience).
- You will be part of the interviews over a period of 2 to 3 months (approximately December 2018 – March 2019).

- The interviews will be videotaped and audiotaped to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements.
- The interviews will take place in the Mission Center or Ocean Campus library in one of the study rooms or a faculty meeting room.
- The total time commitment for the entire project will be 3-4 hours.

**C. RISKS**

Risks associated with this project are minimal. You may feel a sense of discomfort when answering some questions regarding your life experiences. However, you may decline to answer a question if you feel uncomfortable and you can stop your participation in the research at any time.

There is a small risk of loss of privacy. However, no names or identities will be used in any published reports of the research. Only the researchers will have access to the research data.

**D. CONFIDENTIALITY**

The research materials and data will be kept either in a secure location or in a password-protected computer, and only the researchers will have access to the data. After the study, all data will be kept in a locked cabinet or office or in a password protected computer. Audiotapes and videotapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

**E. DIRECT BENEFITS**

Each participant will receive a \$10.00 gift card for his/her participation in the study.

Other benefits may include contributions to research, including providing insight to improve transfer pathways to the university for other students and a type of meta-cognitive awareness.

**F. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you for participating in this research.

**G. COMPENSATION**

There will be no compensation for participating in this research besides the \$10 gift card.

**H. ALTERNATIVES**

**I. QUESTIONS**

If you have any further questions about the study, you may contact the researcher by email at [gcahill@ccsf.edu](mailto:gcahill@ccsf.edu) or phone at (415) 613-1379. Questions, comments, or complaints about the study may also be addressed to the researcher's advisor, Dr. Eric Haas at [eric.haas@csueastbay.edu](mailto:eric.haas@csueastbay.edu) or by phone at (510) 885-2292 or you may contact the California State University East Bay Institutional Review Board [irb@csueastbay.edu](mailto:irb@csueastbay.edu) or Anne Wing at 510-885-4212.

**J. CONSENT**

You have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

**PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to participate in this research study, or to withdraw your participation at any point, without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate in this research study will have no influence on your present or future status at California State University East Bay.**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Research Participant

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher

*(Signature of researcher is optional.)*

**APPENDIX B: NAVIGATING COLLEGE TRANSFER  
DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY FLYER**

Are you planning to transfer to a University?

Would you like to share how you have found your way around CCSF?

My name is Gigi Cahill, a counselor here at CCSF and a doctoral student at Cal State East Bay and I would like to hear your story about how you make things work (navigate) at CCSF. My goal is to find out what we are doing well and what we can improve to help you as you get ready to transfer.

**If YES...** Please fill out the short survey below.

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study. This is a two-month study about Latina/o/x students who are planning to transfer to a 4-year college or university. It aims to document your stories on how you navigate CCSF (higher education). By participating in this study, you can help Latinx students have a better experience when they transfer to a 4-year college. Your identity and your stories will be kept strictly confidential.

- **Study length:** 2 (two) months between December and February.
- **# of meetings:** 3-4 face-to-face meetings: 2 (two) in December 2018, 1 (one) in January, and 1 (one) in February 2019. All meetings will be on campus.
- **# of students:** 3-5 Latina/o/x students

- **Each meeting:** 1 hour each (max total commitment 4 hours during study period Dec - Feb)
- **Compensation:** Small \$ gift certificate

Please complete this short survey to see if you meet the study criteria. You can turn it in to LSN/VIDA, or take a picture and email it to me at [gcahill@ccsf.edu](mailto:gcahill@ccsf.edu), or go online and complete this survey online. I will provide more information and answer your questions before you make a final decision.

1. Do you plan to transfer to a four-year university?

Yes                      No

2. What is your preferred gender?

Female              Male              Trans              Other \_\_\_\_\_ Prefer not to say

3. What is your age? (Please circle the one that applies to you)

18-20	40-49
21-29	50-59
30-39	60 or older

This study is about Latina/o/x students. Does Latina/o/x best describe you?

Yes    No

4. Write down the city you live in.

5. Do you consider yourself a low-socioeconomic student?

Yes    No

6. Do you receive Financial Aid?

Yes    No

Year in college (circle one)

Freshman      Junior    Sophomore      Senior

Contact information:

First Name and Last Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number. ( ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_

For more information please contact: Gregoria Cahill @ 415. 920. 6065 or email  
gcahill@ccsf.edu

### **APPENDIX C: EMAIL TO PUENTE STUDENTS**

Hello, my name is Gregoria Cahill. I am a graduate student at CSUEB in the Educational Leadership Department and an academic counselor at City College of San Francisco. I am conducting research on Latino/a/x college students. My study seeks to investigate how you navigate higher education, the barriers you face and the support you perceive as necessary to help you on the transfer process to a four-year college or university. This research aims to document your stories and learn from you what is working and what we need to improve to better assist you in your desire to transfer.

Participation in this research includes participating in an interview which will take approximately 1 hour. There will be two group interviews and two individual interviews. The time frame is December 2018 – February or beginning of March 2019.

If you have any questions or would like to participate in the research, I can be reached at [gcahill@ccsf.edu](mailto:gcahill@ccsf.edu). Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Gregoria Cahill

## APPENDIX D: ONLINE SURVEY

**4-year university transfer obstacles**

Thank you for your interest in this study. Please fill out the survey and in a week or so I will contact you again to talk about the next step. This study aims to document your stories about how you navigate CCSF (higher education). By participating in this study, you can help Latinx students have a better experience when they transfer to a 4-year college/university. Your identity and your stories will be kept strictly confidential. There is no anticipated risk from participating in this study. You may choose to withdraw your consent and participation at any time. There is also no direct benefit to you from this study, but your contribution may help others have a better experience as they prepare to transfer.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the California State University East Bay Institutional Review Board [irb@csueastbay.edu](mailto:irb@csueastbay.edu) or Anne Wing at 510-885-4212. I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SURVEY (If you disagree, please exit this survey). \*

1. In 200 words or less describe the difficulties you have encountered at CCSF as you prepare to transfer to the university.

(Next page)

2. Please look at this list of possible difficulties/challenges and check (✓) as many as are applicable to you.

I have encountered the following at CCSF:

- Financial difficulties
- Disqualification from scholarships due to eligibility requirements
- Having to work while going to school
- Family obligations
- Lack of support from my family and friends
- Difficulty registering for classes
- Difficulty understanding the class schedule
- Difficulty meeting with an academic counselor
- Discrimination in class or in other places at CCSF
- Difficulty asking for help with my classes
- Difficulty meeting with instructors
- Feeling unwelcome stares as I walk through the campus
- Difficulty navigating the website
- Difficulty figuring out transfer requirements

3. In 200 words or less describe the support you have received at CCSF as you prepare to transfer to a university.

4. Look at the list below and check (√) all that apply to you and feel free to add more.

I received help in the following areas:

- Choosing my classes and registering for them
- Meeting with academic counselors
- Tutoring
- Meeting with my instructors
- Paying for school
- Interacting with school personnel
- Getting information about student services to help me do well

Thank you very much for completing this survey. I will contact you again in a week to confirm your participation in this study.

## APPENDIX E: NAVIGATING COLLEGE TRANSFER

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview aspect of my study. As I have mentioned to you before, my study seeks to investigate how you navigate higher education, the difficulties you face and the support you perceive as necessary to help you on the transfer process to a 4-year college or university. This research aims to document your stories and learn from you what is working and what we need to improve to better assist you in your desire to transfer. It is completely confidential. Neither your name nor any identifying information will be revealed. You may choose to withdraw your consent and participation at any time. There is also no direct benefit to you from this study, other than a \$10 gift certificate. Your contribution may help others have a better experience as they prepare to transfer.

Please fill out this survey before our first interview or come 30 minutes before to fill it out.

Thank you again for making time to complete it.

*What is your First Name and Last Name?* \_\_\_\_\_

1. Are you a \_\_\_\_\_ college student? (Choose one)
  - 1st Generation = If you were born in Latin America or a country other than the United States
  - 2nd Generation = If you were born in the United States, but either parent was born in Latin America or a country other than the United States.

- 3rd Generation = If you were born in the United States, both parents were born in the United States, and all grandparents were born in a country other than the United States.
- 4th Generation = If you were born in the United States, both parents were born in the United States, and at least one grandparent was born in a country other than the United States and one grandparent was born in the United States.
- 5th Generation = If you were born in United States, both parents were born in United State, and all grandparents were also born in the United States.

2. Are you a full-time or part-time student?

3. On average, how many hours a week do you work? (for pay)

- None
- 1 - 10 hours/week
- 11 - 20 hours/week
- 21 - 30 hours/week
- More than 30 hours/week

4. Do you attend or have you attended college(s) other than CCSF?

Yes                      No

5. What is your major?

6. Do you plan to transfer from CCCSF to a 4-year university?

Yes                      No

7. If yes, when do you plan to transfer?

8. What steps have you taken already to make your transfer successful?
9. What do you want to do when you graduate?
10. Which of the following services have you utilized at CCCSF? (check all that apply)
- Academic Counseling
  - Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSPS)
  - Extended Opportunity Programs and Services (EOPS)
  - Financial Aid
  - Student Health Center
  - Honors program
  - Library
  - Guardian Scholars Program
  - Puente program
  - METRO Academy
  - Veterans Resource Center
  - Write down any other program you are part of \_\_\_\_\_
11. Please write down any on-campus student club or governance you are or were involved in.
12. What has worked well in college so far?

13. What is your primary language at home?

14. I feel most motivated in class when (Check the top three)

- My instructor calls me by my name
- I am provided with specific feedback on my work
- I am engaged in class
- I work independently in class
- I take classes with people I know
- The subject I am learning connects with who I am ethnically
- The subject I am learning connects with my future career
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

15. What has been frustrating at CCSF in general?

16. What worries you in terms of school and transferring to the university?

17. What are three things you would recommend to a new student entering CCSF?

*questions adapted from Voltaire Villanueva, 2015)*

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### **Goal:**

What factors do Latinx students at City College of San Francisco perceive as support for and barriers to navigating higher education as they prepare to transfer to 4-year colleges or universities?

### **Sub questions:**

- What factors are critical in preparing to transfer to a 4-year institution?
- What barriers hinder students' ability to prepare for transferring to a 4-year institution?

### **Greeting:**

Good morning (or afternoon). My name is Gregoria Cahill. Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. There are some questions in which I will ask you about your experiences as a student at City College. The goal is to understand your experience as you begin your transition to a 4-year university. What are the challenges? What are the highs and lows? What are the barriers? What makes sense vs what is confusing? There are no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel.

### **Recording instruction:**

If it is okay with you, I will be both video and audio recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I focus my attention on our conversation and not on note-taking.

I assure you that all your comments will remain 100% confidential. I will compile all my conversations into a research report without any reference to individuals. All comments will be anonymous and not connected to any individual name.

**Confidentiality statement:** This research study is completely confidential. Your name and any identifying information about you will never be revealed. Only I, Gregoria Cahill, will know your identity and which study information came from you. The research data will be kept in a secure location (in my personal computer with a password protected program) and only I will have access to the data. After the study, all identifying information will be removed and the data will be kept in a locked cabinet. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

### **Focus group and individual Interview Questions**

The following semi-structured interview questions will be used during one or more of the interviews.

#### **Introductory questions**

1. Where did you grow up?
2. How would your friends with whom you grew up describe you?
3. Tell me about your high school experience. How did it prepare you or not prepare you for college?
4. What were your options after graduating/completing high school? College, work? Why?
5. Why did you decide to go to CCSF?

### Transition questions .

1. Can you tell me about how you went about making the decision to pursue a college education?
2. Tell me about your current educational goals. How did you identify these goals? <sup>[1-1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
3. What is your major and what do you see yourself doing with it?
4. Tell me about a high school teacher, counselor or somebody else (perhaps a family member or friend) who supported you in your decision to come to college.
5. How did your family respond to your decision to go to college?
6. Once you decided to attend college, how did you go about selecting which college to attend?
7. Tell me about a time when your family was very supportive.
  - a. How does getting a college education impact yourself and your family?
  - b. How does your family support the importance of getting an education? <sup>[1-1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
  - c. What do you think success means for your parents or whoever supports you the most?
  - d. How did they express support towards your success in elementary/middle and high school and college? <sup>[1-1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
  - e. Tell me a story about how your parents/guardians were involved in your education.
  - f. What is the highest level of education your parents or somebody living in your household has completed?
  - g. Describe your role in your family? <sup>[1-1]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

### Key questions

1. Tell me about your experience enrolling at CCSF.
2. Describe your first year at CCSF.

3. What college expectations did you have when you began CCSF?
4. What has been most beneficial to you as a student here at CCSF in helping you succeed and prepare to transfer?
5. Describe an experience when you felt stuck. What did you do to overcome that obstacle?<sup>[[ ]]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
6. What does it mean to you to be Latinx?<sup>[[ ]]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
7. Tell me about a time when you felt you did not belong to your ethnic-racial group because you are different in some way. How did you feel different?
8. Tell me about a time when you felt excluded in college based on your ethnic, cultural, gender background or language?
9. What do you think are the typical problems that Latinx students face while attending CCSF?
10. Negative stereotypes, such as “Latinx female students are not smart,” influenced me when I was in college. Describe a stereotype that affected you academically, if any? How did you overcome it?
11. Think of a time when you felt [ \_\_\_\_\_ ] and describe that in as much detail as possible.
  - a. discriminated against
  - b. unwelcomed stares
  - c. did not do well in a test, group work, homework due to racial stereotypes
  - d. were told you are not a college material
12. Do you ever feel like you are trying to disprove these stereotypes in any particular class? Why? How do you do that?
13. Tell me about what makes you feel like you belong at CCSF.
14. Think about a time when you received help from somebody at CCSF. Can you tell me what happened?<sup>[[ ]]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>

15. Think of a time when you experienced support for in the areas below and describe each one in as much detail possible.
- Academics (i. e. counseling, tutoring, computer lab, book loan programs, financial aid, scholarship office, student health, family resource center)
  - Paying for school
  - Working and going to school
16. Tell me about a time when you were doing very well in school. <sup>[[ ]]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- Has it changed?
  - What classes stand out to you the most?
  - How do you prepare for a difficult assignment or an important test? What has been challenging?
  - What do you do when you have an important project/presentation or a difficult test?
  - If you aren't doing well, do you attribute that to your background, culture or your friends?
17. Describe your support network.
18. Tell me about a time when you found support in your religion or spiritual practice. <sup>[[ ]]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
19. Do you participate in any extracurricular activities?
20. How does the CCSF faculty and staff treat you?

### **Closing questions**

- How can CCSF support or continue to support Latinx students in their journey through higher education?
- What would you advise or tell a new student coming to CCSF? <sup>[[ ]]</sup><sub>[SEP]</sub>
- What are the 3 most important things that have helped you succeed academically at CCSF?

- What are the 3 most important things in your home environment that have helped you succeed academically?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself?

**1. Clarifying questions:**

- You mentioned that you had \_\_\_\_\_; could you tell me more about that?
- You mentioned when you were doing \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ happened. Could you give me a specific example of that? \_\_\_\_\_, tell me what that was like for you.
- You mentioned \_\_\_\_\_; describe that in more detail for me.
- One problem you mentioned was \_\_\_\_\_; tell me about that?
- Think of a time when you experienced \_\_\_\_\_ and describe that in as much detail as possible.

*Follow up questions:*

You mentioned \_\_; tell me what that was like for you.

You mentioned \_\_; describe that in more detail for me.

*Questions are modified from (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Lara, 2009; Ramirez, 2011; Roulston, 2010; Salas, 2011; Villanueva, 2015)*

## APPENDIX G: MEMBER CHECK QUESTIONS

Thank you for your participation in my project and for being here today. Your participation today is voluntary and if you don't feel comfortable, you may leave at any time without penalty.

I reviewed all the data and created the following findings or patterns that describe what I heard in the interviews. Please let me know your reactions to these [#] findings.

Have I accurately captured your stories?

1. [Insert findings statement 1]. What do you think about this statement?
2. How well do you think it reflects your experiences and what you heard from the other participants during the focus group interviews and what you said in your individual interview? Please explain.

Repeat the same questions for all findings.

After having checked the accuracy of the findings, I would like for you to read a section of your individual interview that I transcribed and printed for you.

1. Please underline (words, phrases, or sentences) that stand out, "Strong lines."
2. Why do they stand out?
3. How do they relate to the overall theses?
4. Do you have any concluding thoughts on the interview process?
5. What are the 3 most important things that have helped you succeed academically at CCSF?

6. What are the 3 most important things in your home environment that have helped you succeed academically?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about yourself?