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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Me Echan Porras: Understanding Latina Students' Journeys of Persistence
and Challenge in Community College

By

Carla Lopez-Valdes

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty of Education

Loyola Marymount University

in satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education, Loyola Marymount University

2024

Me Echan Porras: Understanding Latina Students' Journeys of Persistence
and Challenge in Community College

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By

Carla Lopez-Valdes

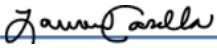
**Loyola Marymount University
School of Education
Los Angeles, CA 90045**

This dissertation written by Carla Lopez-Valdes, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

4/9/24

Date

Dissertation Committee



Lauren Casella (Apr 9, 2024 15:37 PDT)

Lauren Casella, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair

Dolores Delgado Bernal

Dolores Delgado Bernal (Apr 9, 2024 16:14 PDT)

Dolores Delgado Bernal, Ph.D., Committee Member



Antonio Felix, Ed.D., Committee Member

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DEDICATION

Quiero dedicar este trabajo a mi mami, Maria Herminia.

Este logro es para usted.

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ABSTRACT

Me Echan Porras: Understanding Latina Students' Journeys of Persistence
and Challenge in Community College

By

Carla Lopez-Valdes

Latina community college students face significant barriers in achieving their educational goals, particularly transferring to 4-year institutions. Despite comprising a large and growing demographic within community colleges, their unique needs and experiences often remain unaddressed. This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of Latina community college students in Los Angeles County aiming to transfer to 4-year universities I sought to understand their challenges, needs, and supports as community college students. Employing a counter-storytelling approach, the study utilizes *Platicas* methodology and method, informed by *Latina/o Critical Race Theory* (LatCrit) (Huber, 2010) and *Community Cultural Wealth* (CCW) frameworks (Yosso, 2005). Data collection involved in-depth *Platicas* with Latina students to capture their experiences navigating community college. Two research questions guided this research: How do Latina students reflect and describe their experiences navigating community college, particularly in relation to transferring to a 4-year institution? What do Latina students identify as their needs, challenges, and supports within their respective community colleges to facilitate successful transfer? Understanding the lived experiences of Latina students is crucial for developing student-centered policies and practices that promote their success in transferring

to 4-year institutions. This research aimed to contribute to a more equitable and inclusive educational journey for Latina students pursuing higher education.

Keywords: Latina community college students, transfer pathways, lived experiences, Community Cultural Wealth, Latina/o Critical Race Theory, *Platicas* methodology

POSITIONALITY OF THE RESEARCHER

For this research study, I draw from my experiences as a first-generation Latina who experienced poverty while growing up in Los Angeles. My parents came to the United States from El Salvador in the 1980s, fleeing a civil war. They arrived in Los Angeles with an elementary school education. Even with little education, they worked hard to provide the best quality education they could afford. To do so, we moved around to neighborhoods where the nice schools were located. Sometimes it would require moving to a new apartment across town and begin to build new friendships. There were times when moving felt overwhelming and stressful, but deep down inside, I knew it was for the best. It was at my middle school graduation that I knew the value my parents placed such an emphasis on education. The hope for a prosperous future for their children was undeniable. Throughout my entire middle school time, my mom would walk me to school—we would share stories, jokes, and even the stresses of the day before. I vividly remember her warmth during our walks, and how we connected. However, it was not always like this.

My family and I experienced the recession of 1990. My father lost his job, and my mother's hours were drastically reduced as a housekeeper. During this time, we lived in a single apartment in a neighborhood near downtown Los Angeles. The neighborhood was not the safest—nightly drive-bys often occurred, and gangs occupied almost all the corners of the neighborhood. Even at a young age, I was fully aware of the uncertainty of everyday life. We faced numerous obstacles, including financial, housing, and food insecurity. My parents found innovative ways to make ends meet. My mother began selling Avon products and helped to sell food, and my father became a handyman, a plumber, and an electrician in a matter of months.

One afternoon when I was eight years old, I wanted a corn on the cob [*un elote preparado*] from the corn man who regularly passed by our streets. I tugged at my mom to come out with me because I was hungry, and she kept telling me that she only had large bills, to which I insisted that the corn man had change. It was not until I was about 18 years old that my mom shared with me that she never had the large bill—she had no money at all. As she began telling me about it, shame came over her face and in her voice. This memory is clear in my mind and one that I will always be my why. This story is the story of immigrant parents arriving in this country with hopes of a better life for themselves and their children. These experiences have shaped my work to address inequities in education and ensure that a mom has *dinerito para un elote* [money for corn on the cob].

During the *Platicas* with the collaborators, I shared my parents' worry, as well as mine about going to college, and not exactly knowing what that meant. As the *Platica* moved along, I described the uncertainty of being far away from my mother—my biggest cheerleader and my motivation until this day. The *Platicas* served as a reflection of why this work is important to me and reaffirmed why I created this research study that was necessary for students.

For the past 15 years, I have been an education advocate where I have anchored myself in the community—collaborating with them to advance policies and systems that are responsive to their unique needs. During these years, I have been able to connect to the Latino/a, immigrant communities across Los Angeles County. While doing this work in different communities, I learned and the resilience, the strong work ethic, and the *ganas* (desire to succeed) this community holds to ensure their children achieve their dreams.

The inspiration for this research study was the community that I call home. I decided to move to the city of South Gate located in the Southeast Los Angeles region. In my earlier organization, I worked on issues that affected the region, from immigration, health disparities, and workforce development to college access and success. It was during the beginning stages of a particular project that I knew I wanted to be a community researcher who served to be a bridge builder between policy and practice. The COVID-19 pandemic cemented this when Los Angeles County went into lockdown. During this time, I had the opportunity to develop a pilot program where we were able to provide families with money for over a year. I had the honor of hearing and documenting their stories, where they would share how they invested in launching their small businesses—ranging from selling tamales to masks. The vulnerability in the stories allowed me to be more reflective of my role as an advocate, a community member, and as a daughter to a mother who found ways to make ends meet every month.

Additionally, my team and I held listening sessions via Zoom (www.zoom.com) with students enrolled at various institutions to advance a college policy framework to uplift the importance of a region focused college-going initiative. We scheduled listening sessions for two hours, but we stayed on for 4 hours. We had great conversations, but more than that, it felt like we were all healing and holding space for our emotions in navigating higher education and the unknown. The students' stories resonated with me as a first-generation Latina from a low-income background. Their stories are still close to me and have informed how I move through policy and advocacy spaces. Creating spaces where policy, advocacy, and community engagement intersect is part of my personal mission—where I can awaken awareness to reshape the Latino/a narrative

was what this work is about. The inspiration and dedication of this research is for all the Latino/a students who shared their experiences with me and trusted me with their stories.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Latino/a population has increased over the last 50 years across the United States, where in 2021, it reached “63.6 million” (Krogstad et al., 2022, para.2). In California, there are approximately “15.8 million Latino/as” (Krogstad et al., 2022, para. 11). In the county of Los Angeles, an estimated “nine million Latino/as” call it home (United States Census Bureau, 2022, p. 1). As the Latino population increases, policymakers must adapt resources and programs that address the Latino communities’ unique needs. Access to educational opportunities is foundational to a prosperous Latino community. As more Latino/as enter higher education institutions, specifically community colleges, responsive policies need to build a solid foundation for a sustainable workforce that leads to better life outcomes (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021).

As the largest population entering the college system, Latino/a students continue to have low college retention and success rates. With this in mind, it is vital to learn further about the systemic barriers this group faces in accessing and receiving information and resources to help them transfer to a 4-year institution (Hodara et al., 2017). Research demonstrated that high school graduation and college attendance rates among Latino/a students have increased in the past couple of years (Jabbar et al., 2019). In the 2006-07 school year, the high school graduation rate for Latino/a students in California was “60.3%” (Rumberger & Rotermund, 2009, p. 1). Data showed that in 2020-2021 the “high school graduation rate was 80.5%” (California Department of Education, 2024, para. 2). As this number grew, so did the college entrance and enrollment. The state of California enrolls the highest number of Latino/a undergraduate students across a

number of higher education institutions (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021). Despite this progress, gaps still exist.

The term *Latino/a* identified the uplifted and engaged population in this research study. The United States Census (2021) defined Latino, “As a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (United States Census Bureau, 2021, para. 3). Additionally, in the Spanish language, the word *Latino* describe all genders of Latin American descent. However, throughout the study, I used Latino/a to describe the population, the collaborators, and the research to recognize both Latinas and Latinos. This description used as Serrato (2021) explained, “As ‘Latino’ came into use in the 1980s, it quickly became supplanted by ‘Latino/a’ and ‘Latina/o,’ both of which offered to correct the gendered implications of ‘Latino.’” (para. 2).

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the term *Latinx* has emerged as a term to create a gender-neutral and inclusive space. However, many still believe the term imposes American values onto the Spanish language. In this study, the intent to use Latino/a is to recognize the Spanish language and how we express it at home but, more importantly, in everyday conversations. According to Noe-Bustamente et al., (2020), “an estimated 23% of adults in the United States have heard of the term Latinx, and only 3% use the term” (p. 5).

Historical Background

In 1960, the state of California adopted the *Master Plan for Higher Education* (Bady & Konczal, 2012). The 15-year plan called for all students to receive an opportunity to be educated. The Plan was a piece of legislation with benchmarks, commitments, goals, and guiding principles (Bady & Konczal, 2012). The Plan outlined an increase in enrollment numbers for

existing campuses, as well as more funding for the building of new campuses across the state. Prior to the passing of the Plan, there were 45 community college campuses. By 1960, Californians saw 64 campuses, and by 2011, there were 112 campuses across the state (Callan, 2012). The focus on expanding community colleges placed them as the cornerstone of affordable education for a diverse group of students to thrive economically (Dimino, 2019). Students who enroll in the community college system find the possibility to attend a lower-cost education that then paves a path toward an associate's degree, acquire experience through career and technical education, or be able to transfer to a 4-year university to obtain a bachelor's degree (Evans et al., 2020). Due to the call for open access, California community colleges "serve an estimated 2 million students – one in four students enroll in the system" (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d., para. 2). In the 2019-2020 school year, the community college system educated a diverse student population, including "47% Latino/a, 24% White/Caucasian, 11% Asian, and 5.3% African American" (California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, n.d., para. 5). Trends in both the economy and workforce showed that higher education has become a high priority for our society, where research has shared that most jobs will require some type of degree (Martinez & Munsch, 2019). These goals have been at the forefront of policy efforts from a spectrum of advocates. This has resulted in policy and advocacy to inform the state budget, where the Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, and his administration designated an estimated \$542.1 million for community colleges for the 2022-2023 California budget (2022-23 Governor's Budget Higher Education Summary, 2022). Through this budget allocation, the administration has built a multi-year roadmap to elevate the importance of increasing transfer

rates and improving transfer pathways to 4-year institutions (2022-23 Governor’s Budget Higher Education Summary, 2022).

Transfer Goals

A California budget that reflects the values of community college to be a vehicle for a 4-year degree is an important step that aligned with students’ goals. Johnson and Mejia (2020) highlighted that more than three of four incoming students aspire to transfer to a 4-year university. Research showed that community colleges must chart a more straightforward path and remove it as a barrier to the transfer goal (Johnson & Mejia, 2020). As transfer is the goal, this is not a reality. Latino/a students show a 4-year and 6-year completion rate, at a two-year college (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021). The data above showed that community colleges are the cornerstone among Latino/a students to be an entry point to pave a path toward economic and community prosperity.

The Latino/a Educational Pipeline

Higher education moves society toward economic and social mobility, which unfortunately remains out of reach for far too many Latino/a students. According to the “Latinos in Higher Education: Compilation of Fast Facts of 2023” published by Excelencia in Education, “in the United States 28% of adult Latino/as (25 and older) had earned an associate degree or higher in comparison to 48% of Whites” (Excelencia in Education, 2023, p. 1). As previously mentioned, the Latino/a population is growing and college enrollment has increased. Additionally, the Latino/a population is the second youngest racial or ethnic group in the country, “an estimated 51% Latino/a population in the state is under 30” (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 14). This number aligned with the number of Latino/a students

applying, enrolling, and graduating from colleges and universities, which has led to an increase over the last 13 years. However, this increase does not align with the growth of the population (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021). The literature on this topic elevates various factors, including support from peers and family, institutional structures, and financial obligations that affect school experiences to move towards degree completion (Zell, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The educational problem of practice is the lack of clear transfer pathways to ensure college persistence and success for Latino/a community college students. Many Latino/a high school students who enroll in college are likely to enroll in community colleges (Martinez & Fernandez, 2004). Ongoing data indicated that an estimated “78% of Latino/as students are enrolling in community college versus other racial groups” (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 58). Increased opportunities to access higher education have led to an increase in enrollment. However, research showed that Latino/a students are making slow strides in postsecondary persistence and attainment (Johnson & Mejia, 2020). Most Latino/a community college students hope to transfer, but only “42% accomplish the goal after 6 years” (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 58). Added research highlights that only 2.5% of students in community college will transfer in two years, and an estimated 23% will transfer in 4-years (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 34). According to Zell (2010), less than “13% of Latino/as students transfer to a 4-year institution and complete a bachelor’s degree” (p.169). Much of this is due to community college students experience more stressors that will highly impact their well-being, which then impacts their success than students who attend a 4-year institution directly from high school (McBride, 2019). These challenges affect

outcomes for first-generation and low-income students, the most who are Latino/a (Soria et al. 2020). Furthermore, within Latino male and Latina female students, gaps exist in access, persistence, and success. Over the last few decades, Latino males entering higher education institutions have decreased, where research showed male students are more likely to drop out of high school and begin to work or leave college before graduating (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). The lack of attainment for Latino males is a growing concern that has resulted in research studies focusing on the early ages and high school experiences that affect both girls and boys (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). The research explored that gendered stereotypes are embedded in the culture, affecting everyday life and outcomes. These experiences shape a young man's identity, placing a family's needs over their individual needs to be the protector and provider. Similarly, cultural experiences affect a Latina's outcomes. For many, attachment or proximity to family and their well-being takes priority, including the role of caregiver. Nonetheless, this research study did not negate the Latino male experiences as troublesome or not worth further research. For this research study, uplifting Latina females was important because gendered and cultural experiences have encouraged Latina students not to leave the house and attend college but instead stay close to deal with their families. These experiences have encouraged Latinas to aspire to higher education. As the Latina students in this study wanted to transfer, this cultural shift had led to a cultural trend of Latina female students entering post-secondary education worth noting, researching, and reflecting on to inform practices and policies.

Through a social justice lens, the community college system is a steppingstone for all racial and ethnic groups. Still, it plays a critical role for Latino/a students to fulfill the expectations of an educated workforce to improve their financial and social well-being (Chavez,

2008). In the United States, achieving a high level of education has become an increasingly crucial factor in determining one's economic and social prosperity (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). When the data demonstrated a low transfer rate and the largest population the system serves identifies as Latino/a, decision-makers, including school faculty and leadership, must develop strategies, programs, and policies to promote completion that are effective and relevant to the student population and their needs.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study explored and gained insights into the experiences of Latina community college students enrolled at local community colleges. The research studied the unique needs of Latina community college students to understand further and affirm opportunities to address those needs. Moreover, the study examined the structural, cultural, economic, and community barriers that affect the educational success of Latina students in Los Angeles County. It emphasized the importance of providing policymakers and decision-makers with critical information to remove obstacles that prevent Latina students from successfully transferring to a 4-year institution and to thrive academically and economically.

Research Questions

To further explore the topic of the experiences of Latina students in a community college setting, two research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do Latina students reflect and describe their experiences navigating community college?

RQ2: What do Latina students identify as their needs, challenges, and supports at their respective community colleges?

Significance of the Study

This research study contributed to the growing literature on Latina community college students navigating community colleges and the transfer process. Their cultural and educational experiences were essential to contribute to policies, programs, and practices that will ensure their success. Through the lens of uplifting the multiple strengths brought to their educational journeys, this study aimed to affirm further the literature that outlines Latino/a students' barriers in the community college systems as students navigate to a 4-year university (Yosso, 2005). Moreover, as an extension, this study contributed to student-centered policymaking, program, and practice decisions to meet their unique needs.

The history of community colleges highlighted that they were founded through the values of open-admissions policy, low course cost, and flexible course scheduling to ensure that various populations would enroll in higher education and obtain a bachelor's degree (Chavez, 2008). However, research illustrated there continued to be a low transfer rate from community college to a 4-year institution, that led to fewer students not obtaining bachelor's degrees across various ethnic groups (Hodara et al., 2017). The data is striking for Latino/as students (Maliszewski Lukszo & Hayes, 2020). Additionally, various analyses showed that the current COVID-19 pandemic disrupted and continues to impact various educational outcomes while widening pre-existing opportunity and achievement gaps (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). These gaps were more clear in low-income, African American, and Latino/a across K-16 schools and communities. Research indicated students from the communities mentioned above were less likely to enroll and/or persist in college (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Confirming this fact was data from community colleges across the states, noting a decrease in student enrollment throughout the fall

semesters of 2020 through 2022. The research showed that the California community college system lost approximately 300,000 students (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Although this change was noted throughout racial and ethnic groups, African American and Latino/a students experienced this drop the most (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Given the large Latino/a student population enrolling, yet few realizing their degree goals, this research sought to provide insight into the institutions and the complexities of the implementation of practices and policies to ensure a path forward towards a bachelor's degree, a gainful career, and, ultimately upward mobility.

Theoretical Frameworks

To further understand the experiences of Latina students and how this impacts their experiences in community college and their transfer progress, this study used the following two frameworks: (a) Latina & Latino Critical Legal Theory (LatCrit), an extension of Critical Race Theory (Huber, 2010) and (b) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005). The overarching framework of LatCrit Theory is necessary to highlight White-centered policies that continue to gatekeep the success of Communities of Color (Huber, 2010). CCW will guide the decentering of Whiteness in the higher education institutions, in this case, community colleges and recenter the assets and capital Latina and Students of Color brought to their experiences on college campuses (Yosso, 2005). Through these theoretical frameworks, the study examined the intersectionality of the lived experiences of the collaborators and the institutional practices that impact their educational outcomes. Through LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010), the study highlighted the various layers of policies that continue to impact how students see themselves in college, career, and life. Moreover, this highlighted the lack of infrastructure that attends to Latino/a student experiences in community college. Through CCW, the research study identified and

captured the cultural wealth the students bring to their educational journey and how other factors may have contributed to their educational outcomes (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, these frameworks complement each other to elevate the need to advance systemic change and work towards an infrastructure to yield comprehensive and effective solutions centered on students, their needs, and their assets. And lastly, to advance systemic change, various stakeholders need to place lenses on the strengths, knowledge, and future possibilities in Communities of Color to fully be accepted and valued in a Euro-centric society.

Latina/o Critical Race Theory

LatCrit Theory is an extension of Critical Race Theory (Huber, 2010). Solorzano (1997) considered critical theory to be a framework aimed to recognize, examine, and change structures and norms that uphold the oppression of People of Color. Education researchers believe LatCrit Theory is related to and reinforced each other to transform practices (Solorzano & Bernal, 2002). As Valdes (1996) explained,

LatCrit theory is supplementary, [*sic*] complementary to Critical Race Theory. LatCrit theory, at its best, should work as a close cousin-related to Critical Race Theory in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof. (p. 9)

In this study, LatCrit Theory helped show the inequities found across the various institutions and how a one-size-fits-all approach cannot equate to success for all students (Huber, 2010). Furthermore, Latina students shared their lived experiences as stories through a *Platica* methodology. Delgado (1989) described these stories as counter-storytelling, where individuals tell stories rarely shared and where they challenge the dominant or mainstream narrative. As Delgado Bernal (2002) shared:

They can open new windows into reality, showing us that there are possibilities for life other than the ones we live. They enrich imagination and teach that by combining elements from the story and current reality, we may construct a new world richer than either alone. (p. 2415)

To challenge the White majoritarian story or the dominant narrative, Muñoz and Maldonado (2010) highlighted that stories from Communities of Color are valid and told against the systems of oppression and help create equitable structures for marginalized communities. This study engaged with the stories of Latina students in community colleges to challenge and analyze the stories of those in power (Delgado, 1989). Lastly, quantitative data provided one piece of the story of Latino/a students navigating college, to be able to narrate a full story, a counter-story placed the human face to the number and/or theories. Through a qualitative approach I used a *Platica* methodology, counter-stories provided an in-depth experience to the students in this study. As the dissertation focused on Latina students, it is important to elevate their stories impacted by racism and racist institutional practices.

Community Cultural Wealth

The second framework explored was Yosso's (2005) work on the concept of cultural wealth and the importance of showing the multiple strengths found in Communities of Color. Bourdieu (2000, as cited in Yosso, 2005) explained Students of Color do not possess various types of capital because they do not belong to an elite group (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021). Acevedo and Solorzano (2021) shared, "In response to Bourdieu's conceptualization of cultural capital as assets that wealthy individuals possess to reproduce their positions of power in society." (p. 2). Bourdieu's theory centers White, and middle-class norms (Bourdieu, 2000, as

cited in Yosso, 2005) The research uplifted the community cultural wealth approach to identify the diverse resources, assets, and multiple strengths offered and brought to various situations by Communities of Color (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021).

To challenge the traditional sense of cultural capital, the framework highlights the following six areas: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital to capture a student's multiple strengths (Yosso, 2005):

1. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to remain hopeful for the future despite actual and imagined obstacles.
2. Social capital refers to the networks, assets, and resources found in communities
3. Familial capital refers to those cultural traditions that are passed down via families and carry a feeling of culture and common history, memory, and cultural intuition.
4. Linguistic capital refers to the ability to communicate in multiple languages.
5. Navigational capital recognizes Communities of Color's unique skills in navigating social institutions.
6. Resistant capital refers to the skills acquired by Communities of Color in achieving equal rights and collective liberation.

Method

Research Design

This study used a qualitative approach through a *Platica* methodology for the data collection and analysis to identify themes among the collaborators. The interview with students used *Platicas*, or informal conversations. This method was an in-depth approach to explore and

understand the experiences that have shaped Latina community college students across various community college campuses in the Los Angeles region. In doing so, *Platicas* welcomed the researcher to engage with the participants to build authentic rapport. As such, in this study, I identified participants as collaborators, as they were imperative to the study and to inform policies to ensure their educational goals are attained. Nonetheless, their identification as collaborators gave space to ensure they feel honored to bring their authentic selves into the *Platicas*.

Through purposive sampling, seven Latina students received an invitation to participate in one *Platica* to help ground the research question in their lived experience and what has been their experiences navigating community college. The engagement through *Platicas* guided a better connection with the collaborators. The use of *Platicas* in this study aligned with a methodology as well as methods to produce a counter-narrative to Euro-centric focused research.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following terms were used throughout this research study:

Latino/a: The term Latino/a is used throughout the study. The United States Census Bureau (2021) defined Latino “As a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (para. 2).

College Access: Efforts made by a cross-sector set of stakeholder organizations that promote the concept of college and the opportunity to obtain a degree (Hachey et al., 2021).

College Persistence: The term described a student’s action to where a student completes a course from term to term (Hagedorn et al., 2007).

College Retention: The term described the institutions' ability to retain students and is defined more as a measurement of success (Hagedorn et al., 2007).

College Success: The term is used to describe students that obtained good grades which leads them toward a path of graduation (Yazedjian et al., 2008)

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 was the introduction to the research study. This included an overview, with background information on the experiences of Latino/a students navigating community college. Chapter 2 provided a more in-depth literature review that elevated the importance of this research study while acknowledging the current gaps in the research on this student population. This is followed by Chapter 3, which outlined the study's methodology, and Chapter 4 presented the data collected and a general discussion of the themes from the data collection process. Chapter 5 shared my findings and recommendations for future research, as well as how it can be applied to the current and future practice and policy landscape.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focused on the experiences of Latina community college students enrolled at various community colleges in Los Angeles County. Chapter 1 introduced the context and the background of the study, as well as the research questions and methodology. In this chapter, presented is a review of the literature on community colleges, the Latino/a college experience, and an overview of the community and college partnerships to support student success.

Community College in California

Community colleges in California are among the oldest and largest in the United States (Boroch et al., 2007). Drury (2003) indicated that between 1907 to 1917, California policymakers voted to pass legislation to build junior colleges with their funding streams, which resulted in the establishment of an estimated 22 new colleges by the 1920s. Furthermore, before the 1930s, community colleges received recognition as academics that would pave the path to a baccalaureate degree. (Vaughan, 2006). By the 1930s, the mission of the colleges shifted to a more career-technical education curriculum. The author showed this change was in response to the growing need for workers to have training specifically to work in the increasing manufacturing industry.

The above shift paved the way for the *1960 Master Plan for Higher Education in California* (Bady & Konczal, 2012). Because of the Master Plan, the number of community colleges in the state rose (Pickens, 1995). This Plan uplifted the message that all students should receive an education at a higher institution (Pickens, 1995). Additionally, the Master Plan divided the universities into the systems of the University of California, California State

University, and California Community Colleges, as well as private colleges and universities (Pickens, 1995). The Master Plan called for a seat for every undergraduate with little to no tuition, along with the encouragement of initiating access to a community college (Pickens, 1995). By doing so, the plan set metrics to increase enrollment numbers and expand course offerings to meet the economy's needs. To align with the Master Plan, President Lyndon B. Johnson introduced *the Higher Education Act of 1965* (HEA) as part of his *Great Society Initiative* (Feuer et al., 2015). The *HEA's* (1965) goal was to ensure Americans' well-being, both economically and socially, by delineating that higher education should become a public interest (Feuer et.al, 2015). Higher education researchers showed that the most critical piece of the *HEA* (1965) was the offering of grants and loans to low-income and middle-class students (Feuer et.al, 2015). The reauthorizations of the *HEA* (1965) have furthered asserted the government's involvement in education policy to focus on opportunities versus dependency (Hwang, 2020). The author revealed that *HEA* (1965) increased graduation rates among women and minority groups (Hwang, 2020). However, the vision of *HEA* (1965) to be the equalizer has yet to come to fruition as much of higher education is dependent on several factors, including socioeconomics and quality of education in the K-12 pipeline (Hwang, 2020). Although community colleges have an open-door policy and are intended to build a broader set of opportunities for students, research has aligned success to those students from middle-class backgrounds who will reap the maximum success and will obtain a bachelor's degree in a shorter amount of time versus a student from a marginalized community (Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

Latino/a Student Enrollment

In the 2018-2019 school year, “approximately 1.4 million Latino/a students attended higher education institutions, including community college, the University of California, California State University, and private and nonprofit colleges” (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 28). Although this number has steadily increased over the last couple of decades, Latino/a students enroll in the community college system at higher numbers where success does not mirror the increase in enrollment. The California community college system “serves an estimated 1.8 million students – one in four students are enrolled in the system”. (2022-23 Governor’s Budget Higher Education Summary, 2022, p. 50). Of that number, an estimated 72% of Latino/as enrolled in community college in the 2018-2019 school year (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 34). This was witnessed in the 2021-2022 school year, where the community college system enrolled a diverse student population that included 47% Latino/a, 24% White/Caucasian, 13.5% Asian, and 5% African American (California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, n.d., para. 6).

The Transfer Process

Johnson and Mejia (2020) highlighted that more than three of four incoming students aspire to transfer to a 4-year university. A report shared that most community college students hope to transfer. Still, “only 32% of them accomplish the goal after 6 years” (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 34). The author continued by reporting that only 2% of students in community college will transfer in two years, and an estimated 16% will transfer in 4-years (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021, p. 34). As Martinez and Fernández, (2004) explained, “When asked about their educational and occupational goals, Latino students overwhelmingly

state at least a bachelor's degree as their intended goal" (p. 52) Ippolito (2021) found that institutional structures are complex and unclear in the transfer processes leading to student attrition. To address gaps in the transfer process, state leaders have committed to increasing the number of students who can transfer, thus placing policies as part of ongoing efforts to create clear pathways to a bachelor's degree. This has resulted in policy and advocacy to inform the state budget. The Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, and his administration designated an estimated \$600 million in ongoing base funding for community colleges in the 2022-2023 California budget (2022-23 Governor's Budget Higher Education Summary, 2022). Through this budget, the administration also allocated \$65 million to enhance the community college student transfer process to build a multi-year roadmap to elevate the importance of increasing transfer rates and improving transfer pathways to 4-year institutions (Weissman, 2022).

Supporting Student Success

In 2016, *the California Guided Pathways Project* (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2023) launched to assist 20 community colleges in adopting and executing the *guided pathways model* (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2023). To support this project, the 2017-2018 Governor's Budget (2017-2018 California State Budget, 2017) distributed \$150 million in one-time grants to California community colleges to enhance student success through regional guided pathways programs (Dadgar et al., 2017). According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2020):

Guided pathways is an institution-wide approach to student success based on giving students clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences that build in various academic and non-academic supports. Pathways puts equity at the center of colleges' educational approach so they can improve outcomes for all students. (p. 4)

The initiative aimed to improve achievement results for every student and reduce disparities in educational opportunities. To attain this goal, the initiative supports community colleges to outline the routes students might take to reach their objectives, assist students to choose a course of study and maintain it, and guarantee high-quality instruction where students are required to complete a plan in their first academic term (Foundation for California Community Colleges, 2023). As the initiative was recently implemented with fidelity, research on the impact on student success is extremely limited. However, it is essential to note that community colleges are improving communication and engagement to increase awareness of the guided pathways to ensure students meet their transfer goals.

Associate Degree to Transfer

Transferring from a community college to a 4-year institution is complex, with financial and informational challenges that hinder the pathway to obtaining a bachelor's degree. Former Governor Schwarzenegger responded in 2010 by signing Senate Bill 1440—*The Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act* of 2010, a bill that would make the transfer process more accessible for students and guarantee admission to the California State University (CSU) systems. This led to the *Associate Degree for Transfer* (ADT; Patton & Pilati, 2012). The author suggested the essential idea behind SB 1440 (2010) was to offer California community college students a straightforward and comprehensive plan for transferring to a California State University (CSU). By following this roadmap, students are ensured admission to the CSU system (Patton & Pilati, 2012). This bill is in response to the lack of clarity and the different transfer requirements, where students were accumulating too many units than necessary to transfer or complete an associate's degree (Patton & Pilati, 2012). As Baker et al. (2023) shared, "Transfer

can also result in excess credit accumulation for students; nationwide, students who transfer from a community college to a public 4-year college lose, on average, 22% of their accumulated credits” (p. 489). Additionally, from information gathered from samples from across the country, it appears that only 58% of students who transferred from community college to a 4-year institution could transfer most of their credits (Baker et al., 2023). This loss of credits is a significant financial burden and can affect a student’s chances of graduating successfully-particularly students of color and from low-income backgrounds (Baker et al., 2023). Early research suggested that progress has been made, where approximately 217,611 ADT’s (Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act, 2010) have been granted and 41% of them to Latino/a students from its launch (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2020). To implement *ADT* (Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act, 2010) fully, the authors found that community colleges need to be more intentional in ensuring equitable pathways to access information, as well as identifying campuses where *ADT* (Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act, 2010) is not implemented with fidelity (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2020).

Partnerships for Community College Success

The above literature highlighted the role of resources, collaborations and their opportunity to ensure student success in higher education. To ensure access to the above occurs, college community partnerships are essential. There is limited research on best practices and guidance on how community colleges can effectively maximize these partnerships to support college access and success. The literature shared below, focused on 4-year institutions and community partnerships. However, the overall themes and recommendations can be duplicated and adapted to fit the needs of a community college.

Strier (2011) shared that higher education institutions and college leaders see the mutual benefit of meaningful partnerships to lead to innovation. However, investments such as time commitment and resources are still a barrier to formalizing a relationship. Developing meaningful partnerships with communities is a shared concern of many higher education institutions (Strier, 2010). However, there is no one-size-fits-all model to recommend these partnerships. According to Strier (2010) the most successful partnerships are the ones where collaboration is at the center and grounded in shared goals—where all voices work towards solutions, synergistically. According to Amey (2010), community college partnerships “[show] that community colleges partner with other organizations for many reasons, among them facilities sharing, technology demands, state and institutional goal attainment, resource scarcity, teacher labor market constraints, and personal relationships between partners” (p. 14).

Student-Centered Approach

To fully understand the needs and experiences of students, it was crucial to consider the historical background of the communities near college campuses and the student’s educational journey (Cheang, 2016). The values of community colleges and 4-year institutions are to move students to a high-quality life through social mobility and economic prosperity. Strier (2010) showed that partnerships are necessary for colleges because at times they are socially detached and not fully aware of the inequities found in their students’ day-to-day. Colleges and universities have strayed from solutions-oriented visions and values and instead have become focused on building power dynamics to place them as the drivers of agenda-setting and set the tone for outcomes (Maurrasse, 2002). This is where the critical role of community partnerships can help colleges align themselves to their mission, vision, and goals. More importantly, a

partnership approach that emphasizes individuals' and communities' engagement and growth would be most effective for collaboration and a collective agenda (Cheang, 2016). Pleasants McDonnell and Bonilla (2022) highlighted that organizations and community colleges could potentially serve more families and students if resources were aligned. To do so, colleges and universities must focus on the community's strengths and assets. In the state of Ohio, the Associate of Chamber of Commerce Executives Foundation (ACCEF) developed a model to convene community colleges, nonprofit organizations, and local chambers of commerce to collaborate and remove obstacles to not only college but also career technical education and workforce development in an attempt to minimize duplicating efforts (Reagan, 2022). A cross-sector collaboration can lead to standard goal building, commitment, and more importantly, centering student success as ingredients to a long-lasting, impactful partnership.

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Community Colleges

The Governor's budget of 2022-2023 (2022-23 Governor's Budget Higher Education Summary, 2022), was in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to bring students back to persist at their respective colleges. Community colleges, like their K-12 partners, pivoted to online teaching and learning in weeks due to stay-at-home orders (Yates et al., 2021). Since the onset of the pandemic, the California community college system saw a drop of approximately 300,000 students between fall 2020 and fall 2021 and the local district saw the highest drop (Zinshteyn, 2022, para. 3). Baker et al. (2022) shared that most students did not enroll or persist because they had to prioritize work over school. In contrast, other students shared they had to become caregivers to family members, and another group said they were unable to adapt to virtual classes.

As the pandemic continued, disparities continued to surface, affecting college persistence and outcomes. Zottarelli et al. (2022) showed disparities in housing security, food security, and access to mental health resources existed prior to the pandemic—but they were exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic and the lack of resources. These experiences most impacted first-generation and low-income students (Soria et al. 2020). To address the unmet needs of students, community colleges developed essential need initiatives or wrap-around services to support college persistence (Zottarelli et al., 2022). The goal of these initiatives and services, as D’Amico et al. (2022) shared, was to contribute “[t]o the social and economic wellbeing of students, and strive to address issues of equity and change as individuals and economies suffered” (p. 12). To support students, community colleges found external partners for referrals and services, such as community service agencies to help students sign up for public assistance, including technology and internet, food banks, and mental health agencies to better meet the needs of their students (Zottarelli et al., 2022). There is limited literature on the impact of the services and resources. However, community college leaders and administrators are optimistic that through responsive, caring, and personalized actions, students can seek services to remove more barriers and challenges from their educational journey (Zottarelli et al., 2022).

The Latino/a Experience

As the Latino/as population has increased over the last decade in the United States, so has access to college (Bates et al., 2018). However, the number of college degrees does not align with the population number (Bates et al., 2018). According to the United States Census Bureau (2023), Latinos/as make up an estimated “40 % of California’s population” (para. 2). In Los Angeles County, Latinos/as account for an estimated 48% of the population. (United States

Census, 2023) Latino/a K-12 student population is close to 55 %, granting school districts across the state the opportunity to develop long-lasting systemic change to address college access and completion (California Department of Education, 2024). There has been an increase in high school graduates. In California, there has been a growth of about 12% from 74% in 2006 to 86 % in 2016 (Bates et al., 2018, p. 8). Progress has been in high school graduation, yet we have not experienced college success at the same rate. In the last 20 years, there has been a tremendous investment in getting Latino/a students to college, which has matched with an estimated 91% increase, but college completion still lags for this group (Bates et al., 2018, p. 4). The report noted that by 2016, “Only 18 % Latino/a adults in California held a college degree” (Bates et al., 2018, p. 3). It was critical to study Latino/a students, not just based on the growing population trends but also to recognize the assets and the diversity students hold to find long-term and permanent investments to increase college and career success rates. Additionally, it was crucial to uplift their narrative to ensure representation of their cultural, social, economic, and political contributions in the development of resources and practices.

In a-Pew Research Center survey (2016, as cited in Dwyer, 2016) it outlined the familial component of education, where Latino/a parents place a high value on education, career, and financial success. In the survey, parents believed a college education is a ticket to a middle-class, high-quality life (Pew Research Center, as cited in Dwyer, 2016). In exploring the earlier data, we can conceptualize the importance of speaking on which practices, information, and policies are necessary to provide opportunities for Latinos/as to succeed. The goal was to provide students with tools to prepare them for college and careers adequately, but resources at colleges have missed the mark. The Latino/a student population in California has the lowest bachelor’s

degree completion rate compared to other groups, even though they make up the largest student population in the state's community colleges.

Factors Influencing Educational Outcomes at Community Colleges

Community colleges are open-access and low-cost institutions that serve a spectrum of students. Thus, community colleges have created a gateway to social mobility by making access to higher education easier for low-income, and students of color. However, success rates have remained an issue for most students, not those from middle-class backgrounds. Goldrick-Rab (2010) showed that students from middle-class families will make the most significant gains from their community college experience and resources, especially in the transfer process. This research also detailed a range of factors that affected low-income community college students' enrollment, retention, and transfer. As Vega (2016) stated, "Latino students are more likely to come from low-income backgrounds and be first-generation college students" (p. 307). The challenges encountered when striving to further one's education are more difficult by the intersectional of these identities (Vega, 2016). Marrun (2020) further reaffirmed this by stating, "Latinas/os are more likely to be first-generation college students who have limited information about the college admissions process, including financial aid, which also makes them more likely to work more hours and risk not graduating" (p. 166). This makes the parent and familial support a critical role in the creation of support systems to ensure college access. However, as students are the first in their families to step onto a college campus, families have limited resources and knowledge to navigate a clear pathway to and through college (Auerbach, 2004). Latino families place a high value on education. Although many Latino families do not obtain a formal education, parents showed an unwavering dedication and commitment to bettering their

children's future (Vega, 2016). The delivery of this encouragement is through support that, in many instances, is not acknowledged by schools or institutions (Auerbach, 2004).

Azmitia et al. (1996) looked at Mexican American and European-American families and the parents' influence on long-term educational goals. The authors found that the Mexican American parents in the study provided more words of motivation and moral support, versus their European American White counterparts, where they provided more consistent support in how educational pathways connected to careers. The Mexican American parents' support was shown by the parents and extended family, such as *abuelos* [grandparents] and *tio/as* [aunts and uncles]. The support came through in the form of *consejos* [narrative advice] and *apoyos* [moral support] (Marrun, 2020). At times, *consejos* and *apoyo* are grounded in storytelling to offer an opportunity for the children or students to obtain insight into the challenges and obstacles their family members face. This cultural identifier motivated and connected college persistence to a better quality of life (Marrun, 2020). Storytelling in families played a more significant role in the Latina educational experience, as many Latina students are still defined by their gendered roles (Marrun, 2020). According to Marrun (2020):

Contrary to cultural-deficit perceptions of the role of mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and older sisters in Latino families, women played a critical role in shaping Latinas' academic aspirations and resilience. They motivated young Latinas by sharing *historias familiares* of hardships, resourcefulness, and resilience to the subordination they faced because of their gender, race, class, low education levels and, for others, their undocumented status. (p. 173)

The messages conveyed through *consejos*, *apoyos*, and *historias familiares* are at the core of Latino families and their experiences. Sharing such moments speaks to the web of connectedness that students take on their college journeys. Yet, this web of connectedness is often unrecognized or acknowledged as an asset across the K-16 education pipeline.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks presented in this study are LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010) with guidance from CCW (Yosso, 2005). Huber (2010) explained that LatCrit Theory, “examines experiences unique to the Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (p. 77). These experiences uplifted the intersectionality of an individual’s identity with respect to their gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic standing (Villalpando, 2004).

CCW outlined Yosso’s (2005) work, which focused on cultural wealth and being able to identify the multiple strengths of Communities of Color. The foundation of the framework is a strength-based understanding that Latino/as (or Communities of Color) bring capital to their school and educational experience (Yosso, 2005). The framework highlighted the following areas of capital: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital (Yosso, 2005). From the literature, there is an interconnectedness and uplifting for all the forms of capital where we can be able to theorize the importance of *consejos*, *apoyos*, and *historia familiares* is vital to elevate the various forms of capital in the Latino community (Yosso, 2005).

Latina/o Critical Race Theory

LatCrit Theory is an extension of CRT (Huber, 2010). As Valdes (1996) explained here, “LatCrit theory is supplementary, complementary, to Critical Race Theory. LatCrit Theory, at its best, should operate as a close cousin-related to Critical Race Theory in real and lasting ways, but not necessarily living under the same roof” (p. 103). Solorzano (1997) considered critical theory to be a framework to recognize, examine, and change structures and norms that uphold

the oppression of People of Color. Education researchers have confirmed that LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010) is related to CRT and reinforces each other to transform practices (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

The LatCrit Theory framework helped guide the data analysis and understanding of historical practices, policies, and systemic barriers Latino/a communities have experienced and continue to face (Huber, 2010). Furthermore, the fundamental principle of CRT (Huber, 2010) and LatCrit Theory (Yosso, 2005) is the recognition that race and racism are integral aspects of American society, and consequently, deeply ingrained in the structures, discourse, and policies that shaped the day-to-day operations of college campuses (Villalpando, 2004). The framework allowed to examine the ways in which college students are subjected to discrimination, including racial exclusion (Villalpando, 2004). Moreover, it will be critical to understand if feelings of inferiority are further hindered by the lack of access to funding, campus services, resources, and programs to ensure their well-being and success.

In their study on the experiences of Latino and Latina undocumented students, Huber and Malagon (2007) examined the various forms of oppression students face at their respective colleges and offered recommendations for higher education institutions to implement better practices to meet the unique needs of this student population. They found that racism and immigration status impacted the students' lives — where they expressed feeling like the “other” on their college campuses. Researchers approach this theme as racist nativism. As Huber (2010) shares, “Beliefs in white superiority and historical amnesia have erased the histories of the indigenous [*sic*] communities that occupied the U.S. prior to the first white European settlers” (p. 81). Through this definition, the idea of being a foreigner and not a native leads a person to

experience hostility (Villalpando, 2004). This hostility present at institutions can come from marginalization and exclusion. Furthermore, the presence of these obstacles alters how students, particularly Latino/a students, navigate new college experiences (Villalpando, 2004).

Delgado Bernal (2002) conducted a study grounded in counter stories that examined the skills and tools Chicana/Chicano or Latino/as college students leaned into as they navigated the educational system, found that speaking multiple languages, living two cultures, and engaging in community activities are not formally accepted or validated by educational institutions. Furthermore, the author found that most college students surveyed reported a sense of pride in their cultural knowledge and in bringing this knowledge to their college experience (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Unfortunately, this did not equate to a sense of belonging on their college campuses.

Finally, Strangfeld (2022) conducted a qualitative study that examined the intersectionality of citizenship status, as well as race, gender, and whether they are the first in their family to attend college affect their motivation. The study found many participants could show how personal and familial struggles could be attributed to broader social systems of oppression (Strangfeld, 2022). Moreover, they discussed how their experiences with growing up low-income and continuing to struggle financially influenced their understanding of the low-wage labor market. They pushed hard through educational obstacles to help their families (Strangfeld, 2022). Lastly, as Hernandez (2013) shared how counter stories built empathic communities among those at society's margins by putting a human face to educational theory and practice. This would challenge conventional wisdom from society's center, revealing

opportunities by using stories and reality to create a better world, and provided a space for challenging established belief systems.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital referred to the ability to remain hopeful for the future despite actual and imagined obstacles (Yosso, 2005). Matos (2015) interviewed 21 Latinas and three Latinos across three colleges and universities, including one community college. The author found that regardless of challenges at home, in their communities, and at school, students all shared they wanted to obtain a degree to improve their socioeconomic condition and their parents. Furthermore, students connected their parents' stories to their college aspirations and the emphasis placed on education being essential for social mobility:

“Parental narratives about the importance of education and the placement of education as a family value were commonplace. Students reported often hearing that one needed an education to “be somebody” and parents used themselves as cautionary tales of not having received a formal education” (Matos, 2015, p. 443).

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital encompassed the cognitive and interpersonal abilities acquired through communication experiences in multiple languages. Bourdieu (2000, as cited in Yosso, 2005) pointed out that “all linguistic practices are measured against the legitimate practices, i.e., the practices of those who are dominant” (p. 53). As such, being bilingual is not an acceptable linguistic capital for students. Straubhaar (2013) found that linguistic capital aligned with social capital, as both built upon themselves to increase comfort in the participants. Through this lens, Spanish-speaking students created supportive communities with staff and other students who

shared similar backgrounds but, most importantly, spoke Spanish (Straubhaar, 2013). As a result, students engaged more in the lesson, resulting in higher grades and achievement (Straubhaar, 2013).

Familial Capital

Familial capital referred to cultural traditions passed down via families and carries a feeling of culture and shared history, memory, and cultural intuition (Yosso, 2005). This form of cultural wealth uplifted the importance of connection not only through the immediate and extended family but also non-biological family members, including teachers, clergy, and other social community settings (Matos, 2015). Matos (2015) shared Latina students attending a 4-year university fostered this type of cultural wealth on campus via student groups, such as *Hermanas Unidas* [Sisters United] where students shared everyday experiences with the group and feel validated. However, for community college students this was seen differently. Latina students were able to build trusting relationships with an academic services coordinator who served more than a coordinator, they took the role of confidant and mentor for many students (Matos, 2015).

Social Capital

Social capital referred to the networks, assets, and resources found in communities (Yosso, 2005). This social support can be individuals or centers of information where People of Color live and work (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021). This form of cultural wealth placed a high value on relationships to support navigating new experiences and/or facilitating access to new information (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Montanez et. al (2010) revealed that “Social capital also has been defined with an emphasis on the relationships among members of the networks and marked by reciprocity, information channels, and flow of information, and norms enforced by

sanctions” (p. 27). Gonzalez (2013) found that high school Latina students were highly aware of the limited ways their families could directly support them with higher education. They sought college preparatory programs such as *Upward Bound* (United States Department of Education, 2023) and other local programs, including community-based organizations, to help them navigate college information.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital recognized the skills and abilities of individuals as they navigate social institutions or unsupportive environments (Yosso, 2005). This type of capital referred to institutions not created with marginalized communities in mind. In their research, Sáenz et al. (2018) interviewed Latinos enrolled in a community college in Texas. The authors found that students believed they were at a disadvantage because their parents had not completed high school and could not adequately support them through the college process (Sáenz et al. 2018). Despite formal support, students could navigate on-campus resources and services, and although it took more time, they learned what worked for them and what was necessary along their journey (Sáenz et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The literature reported that the Latino/a population is growing, high school graduation rates are rising, but college success still lags, especially for low-income and first-generation students—where many are Latino/a. The state has taken steps to close gaps through guided pathways and associate degrees to transfer, and even though the programs are new, they show promising practices and a commitment to supporting students.

This chapter began by discussing higher education, community college history, and programs launched to ensure student success. The discussion continued with an overview of Latino/a student community college enrollment. Additionally, this section included a discussion on the Latino/a student experience and programs to move to ensure transfer progress. And lastly, the literature uplifted the CCW (Yosso, 2005) and LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010) frameworks, the importance of capital, the critical role that educational institutions play in Latino/a social mobility, and how college and community partnerships can influence student success.

Community colleges continue to be the cornerstone for higher education for Latino/as, as such they have the responsibility to be responsive and reimagine the delivery of a high-quality education along with practices and resources that can only benefit their students. The goal of the literature was to focus on and further investigate the need for more research on the Latino/a community college experience.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature in the previous chapter presented a view of the ongoing research on Latino/a community college students. By taking a lens on Los Angeles County and community colleges, this research study contributed to existing research on the Latino/a experience in community college while providing a narrative on the assets students bring to their educational journeys.

This study brought additional attention to the need for easily accessible programs, services, and resources to meet the unique needs of Latino/a students to ensure their persistence and success in a community college with the goal of transferring to a 4-year institution. When the data showed a low transfer rate and the largest population the system serves identifies as Latino/a, decision-makers, including school officials, must develop strategies to promote completion more effectively and relevant to the student population. In the last few years, specific policies have been crafted to ensure the meeting of goals. However, data cannot complete a narrative of navigating college barriers. Implementation of policies and programs that align with the goals of supporting students is important.

Additionally, this research study learned about the lived experiences of Latina students enrolled at a community college in Los Angeles County. The lived experiences of Latina students are crucial to guide and inform student-centered processes and policies. Students have tremendous insight into their needs and interests to reach their highest potential. To center their voices, in this study, Latina students were interviewed through *Platicas* to yield a comprehensive

understanding of the needs of students, and the resources currently offered by community colleges.

This chapter focused on how I conducted the research to guide the research questions. It also included a discussion of the background of *Platicas* as a methodology selection. Additionally, this chapter discussed the research design, collaborator selection, data collection, and analysis.

Research Questions

Through *Platicas*, this research study further explored the topic of the experiences of Latina students in the community college setting. Two research questions guided this research study:

RQ1: How do Latina students reflect and describe their experiences navigating community college?

RQ2: What do Latina students identify as their needs, challenges, and supports at their respective community colleges?

Method

The research study elevated students' experiences through a qualitative approach. This was completed through *Platicas*. This method took an in-depth approach to explore and understand the experiences that have shaped Latina community college students at local community colleges in the Los Angeles region. As Yin (2015) shared, the most important aspect of qualitative research is understanding how people experience their lives in the real world. Through this lens, it was sought to uplift and explain social behavior and use existing or emerging theories (Yin, 2015). To meet the goal, a *Platicas* methodology was employed to

explain behaviors to inform current and future practices and policies (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). While there is extensive research on the experiences of Latino/a students, this study offered to uplift and complement the current research around cultural wealth or assets found in the students' lives and their communities while identifying how institutional practices and resources have impacted their educational journey at a community college.

This research study investigated experiences beyond education to learn about external factors, like family, work, and home, and how they affect a student's journey. To uphold the collaborators' experiences and have them become co-constructors of the study, *Platicas* guided this study to provide a more in-depth perspective of the collaborator's journey through community college and life experience.

Platicas as a Methodology

Chicana Feminist Theory guided *Platicas* and adapted into the research process (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) defined *Platicas* as, “informal conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces” (p.117). Flores and Morales (2021) further shared, “*Platicas* rooted in Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies provide several opportunities for healing, connection, kinship, theorizing, laughter, joy, pain, and a myriad of other emotions because they center a reciprocal relationship between researcher(s) and collaborator(s)” (p. 3). Moreover, researchers have opted for *Platicas* to disrupt the Eurocentric ways of traditional research—where the researcher detaches themselves from the study (Hannegan-Martinez, 2023). Instead, *Platicas* invited and welcomed researcher participation to engage with the participants or collaborators to co-create and share knowledge to build relationships and community (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016).

Central to this study is the opportunity to authentically engage Latina students as they navigate community college towards the transfer process, and their lived experiences and build rapport beyond this study. The use of *Platicas* offered a vehicle for a more in-depth approach to connecting with the study's collaborators. Through this process, Fierros and Delgado Bernal (2016) described, "*Platicas* are not used to extract information from youth, but to allow them to assess or theorize about their lived experiences" (p. 109). To reflect on the engagement and the data *Platicas* surfaced, Hampton and Mendoza Aviña (2023) explained five principles that guide *Platicas* as a methodology,

The research is (1) rooted in decolonial feminista thought; is (2) relational in its recognition of participants as co-constructors of knowledge; (3) centers the everyday; (4) incorporates healing; and (5) relies on reciprocity and vulnerability in the research process. (p. 2)

To honor the students' stories, knowledge, and contribution to this research study, moving forward in the description of this study, participants will be identified as collaborators.

Rationale for Theoretical Frameworks

This study used two theoretical frameworks, LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010) and CCW (Yosso, 2005) to guide the research questions and the subsequent analysis of the *Platicas* and data. Applying the LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010) and CCW (Yosso, 2005) framework to this study is critical to answer the research questions that guided this study.

First, the overarching LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010) was utilized in this study. Ross (2022) explained the theory, "As theoretical frameworks in the field of law, CRT and LatCrit explore the ways that so-called race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination" (p. 4). LatCrit theory is a proper lens through which to examine and reveal

the ways Latinas experience gender, class, race, age, and sexual orientation while guiding how it intersects with immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Huber, 2010). Through the lens of LatCrit, the theory examined the institutional policies, practices, and programs that hinder a clear path to success through the transfer process while understanding potential social inequities and injustices rooted in racism and oppression at the institution (Huber, 2010).

Secondly, CCW is a framework that elevates the concept of cultural wealth and the importance of showing the multiple strengths of Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). In addition, the foundation of the framework is in a strength-based understanding that Latino/as (or Communities of Color) bring capital to their school and educational experience. The CCW framework provided the opportunity to analyze and uplift the strengths, skills, and capital that have shaped the lives of the collaborators participating in this study (Yosso, 2005). Moreover, this framework was used to understand the students' lived experiences and the role it has played in their community, home, and educational journey.

Research Design

Participants as Collaborators

The foundation of this research study was the experiences of Latina students and the use of *Platicas* (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). To honor their narratives and lived experiences, the Latina students are identified as collaborators instead of participants. According to Pope (2020), describing participants in this particular qualitative research method validates and prioritizes the participants' experiences, recognizing them as experts and thus involving them as co-researchers and collaborators in the data collection and interpretation process. Furthermore, using *Platicas* as both a methodology and a method, the goal was to build rapport to support the

building of student-centered recommendations (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). As Pope (2020) shared, for participatory designs to be successful, it was crucial to establish reciprocity and build strong relationships between researchers and co-researchers. To honor the process integrated into the *Platica*, I requested the collaborators bring an item that held significance to their educational journey. I did the same. During this process, both myself and the collaborator exchanged stories about their items. To further build reciprocity, the collaborators were provided with their interview transcripts. Lastly, as a token of appreciation, they were given Target \$20 gift cards. By engaging collaborators and employing the *Platicas* methodology, the goal to build rapport with each of the collaborators to share their stories and feel invited to continue sharing their stories was accomplished. It was the hope the collaborators reflected on their *Platicas*, they owned their narratives moving forward.

Selection and Sampling Criteria

To conduct the study, I used purposive sampling to identify participants. This method allowed me to elevate what topics I wanted to be discussed and seek out participants who can and were willing to provide information to inform recommendations. This method yielded more richness to the topic and the focus of the study (Yin, 2015). Leavy (2017) noted, “Sampling is a central feature of research design when purposeful strategies are used because the better the participants are positioned in relation to the topic, the richer the data will be” (p. 79). As Patton (2002) discussed, “The logic of criterion sampling is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 238). By using this approach, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of the students’ narratives of their experiences attending a community college in Los Angeles County.

Research Setting

To invite collaborators to participate in the study, the researcher connected with their network of advocates, community organizations, and direct service providers to contact current students. To ensure fidelity to the study, participants were screened using the following criteria: (a) identify as Latina; (b) identify as female; (c) currently enrolled at community college for more than two years; (d) attend a community college in Los Angeles County, and (e) looking to transfer to a 4-year institution (California State University, University of California, or a private university). To be included in the study, those interested needed to meet the criteria. See Appendix A for the recruitment letter sent to the network of advocates.

Methods for Data Collection

For this study, I chose seven Latina students living in the Los Angeles County region using a purposive and criterion sampling approach (Yin, 2015). Once potential collaborators were identified, they were asked to complete a Google form (www.google.com) that ensured they fulfilled the criteria. Once I received the form, I contacted them via email to introduce myself and shared more information about the research project and the goal of the study. I also provided background on why I chose this field of study. Additionally, it was important to create space for the potential collaborator to build rapport with me, therefore I offered a Zoom (www.zoom.com) call to clarify concerns or questions before scheduling the *Platica*. Once I identified the collaborators, I emailed a consent form in which I outlined the purpose of the study. After I received the consent form, I coordinated the best times to meet via Zoom. Throughout the research study, I made sure to protect the identities and the colleges the collaborators attended. I used pseudonyms for their names and their actual colleges.

Procedures

The study used a qualitative research design that used one-on-one *Platicas* as a method for data collection to investigate the lived experiences of Latina students attending a community college in Los Angeles County. Those student collaborators chosen to participate received an invitation to take part in an one-hour individual *Platicas* via Zoom.

The one-hour *Platicas* kicked off by asking the collaborator to bring an artifact, which had been with them throughout their college journey and had some type of significance. The goal of this part of the *Platica* was to begin building rapport, by having the collaborator and the researcher talk about their artifacts. The *Platica* questions focused on the collaborator's experiences navigating community college, including how their family and background, community networks, and support played a role in their journey. The *Platica* culminated with a reflection question on advice and guidance to their younger self. The design of the questions invited the collaborators to speak on stories and anecdotes to provide insight into their day-to-day experiences and events leading up to their present day. Additionally, the theoretical frameworks provided the foundation for the questions. See Appendix B for the interview protocol.

Analysis Plan

I recorded the *Platicas* with the collaborators on Zoom and then transcribed using Otter.ai, an online platform to produce the *Platica* transcription and audio. Once I completed the transcription, I reviewed the transcript to capture initial thoughts and themes that surfaced from the *Platica*. I used post-it notes directly on the hard copy version of the transcripts to flag the first themes. I then developed a Google document where themes were listed to see patterns in the

data. I reviewed the transcripts three times to allow the coding of the emergent themes and extraction of quotes categorization. This process ensured alignment to the research questions and the theoretical frameworks. Lastly, it culminated with a solid understanding of the *Platicas* to build a foundation for the analysis process.

To closely analyze the data captured through the *Platicas*, I used a deductive approach (Creswell & Plano Clark 2007). The deductive process uses a priori codes and definitions led by the theories in the research study. This study used two frameworks: a) LatCrit (Huber, 2010) and b) CCW (Yosso, 2005) theories. I identified coding and themes, which validated and were consistent with LatCrit (Huber, 2010) and CCW (Yosso, 2005) and how they appeared and intersected in both frameworks.

Conclusion

This study sought to understand the experiences of Latina students as they navigated community college with the hope of transferring to a 4-year institution. This chapter provided an overview of the design and methodology of this study. Given the research purpose, questions, and goals, I chose a *Platica* methodology to learn about the collaborators, and also to hear stories about their lived experiences as they navigated community college.

The two frameworks selected provided an understanding and an intentional way to explore the distinct types of capital students hold on their day-to-day campus experiences and discover the types of barriers placed by institutions, by policies, and programs. In the next chapter, there will be a discussion of the data gathered from the seven collaborators based on the methodology described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Just because I have a kid does not mean that I'm gonna not go to school anymore. I was raised, I was raised to keep going and work hard for it and everything. Like even with the strollers and everything. I'm still going for it. —Amanda, Study Collaborator

Before her son was born, Amanda had difficulty finding herself in school and felt she was all over the place. Her son gave her the inspiration to persist and overcome obstacles. After her son was born, she believed “everything fell together in order,” as she revealed in her interview for this study. Amanda began her college journey at the University of California, Merced (UC Merced), but after one year of attending, she decided to return home.

I came back because it was too far from home. I was homesick—bad. I had to really come back home. And that's when I entered Desert Community College. And that's when it went downhill because I didn't know what to do. So, it was a long road of failing classes and learning about myself.

She took her time at UC Merced as a learned lesson. She needed to be close to her family as she navigated new spaces. As the oldest of eight siblings, she took the opportunity to gain experience and share new information with her mother and siblings:

I'm basically, the guinea pig. Because as I was learning, I was telling my mom, oh, they need to do this, they should do that when they get to high school they need to be taking college courses. But don't take just any just take the ones that are colleges will actually count.

Amanda understood the importance of her role in her family and understood she would be the source of information that her siblings could rely on once they were ready to apply and go to college. Even though they complained about her recommendations and suggestions, she believed it strengthened their relationship. Because they are a close-knit family, she shared that it

made it difficult to live independently at UC Merced and made the decision to come back home an easy one.

Amanda was one of seven Latina community college students who shared their experiences in this research study. This chapter introduced and explored seven Latina students navigating community college, with the hope to transfer while navigating life challenges and feeling hopeful about their dreams to receive a degree and start fulfilling careers.

Organization of the Chapter

The primary purpose of this qualitative research study was to focus on learning, exploring, and gaining insights into the experiences of Latina community college students enrolled at local community colleges in Los Angeles County (Yin, 2015). The goal of the *Platicas* methodology was to understand better the unique needs and experiences of Latina community college students to understand further and affirm opportunities and policies that will ensure their success in the transfer process (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016). The collaborators in this study described their hopes and goals to transfer while concurrently managing other aspects of their lives.

The data collected through the *Platicas* told stories full of complexities and differences but share commonalities of perseverance, hard work, and dedication to a better life. For some of the collaborators, their child inspired them. For others, their dream job motivated them to keep going.

The chapter includes into two sections. The first section presents the collaborators' profiles, which provide descriptions of each collaborator, including their family backgrounds, role in their family, educational background of their immediate family, and lastly, their major

and what 4-year university they wish to transfer to. Humanizing the collaborators and their experiences throughout the research study was important (Yin, 2015). Additionally, I included a discussion of the artifact each collaborator brought to the meeting. This discussion aimed to build rapport for an authentic *Platica* between the collaborator and myself. The second section of the chapter highlighted the four major themes that appeared from the *Platicas*. The four themes included familial, aspirational, navigational/social capital, and the barriers encountered along their journeys. The section closed with the words of advice from the seven collaborators. It was essential to close the *Platica* with a reflection that illustrated their commitment to their education and the significance of it not only to their family but, more importantly, to themselves as Latina students.

Theoretical Frameworks

The two frameworks that guided the collection of data from the collaborators were (a) LatCrit, an extension of Critical Race Theory (Huber, 2010); (b) CCW (Yosso, 2005). Through these theoretical frameworks, I examined the intersectionality of the lived experiences of the collaborators, how they are navigating community college and institutional and systemic practices that impact their educational outcomes as they set their goals to transfer to a 4-year institution.

To ground the data and the stories shared by the collaborators, it was crucial for the study to elevate the cultural identity as an asset and set it as valuable (Yosso, 2005). This provided an opportunity to understand better how Latina students used the various forms of capital on their respective campuses. Through LatCrit, I recognized the multiple challenges that continued to affect how students see themselves in college, career, and life. The stories and experiences

shared through the *Platicas* revealed the barriers Latino/a students encounter at their respective colleges, thus limiting their success at the community college. The LatCrit framework reinforces the CCW framework, as Strangfeld (2024) explained, “CCW framework identifies cultural assets that assist students in navigating racialized institutions and resisting systemic inequities”. (p. 3). The framework also takes into consideration the unique forms of oppression Latino/as experience that disrupt access, persistence, and success within the community college system (Huber, 2010). Both these frameworks were selected because using CCW, will allow me to be able to identify and capture the cultural wealth that the collaborators bring to their educational journey and how other factors may have contributed to their academic outcomes (Yosso, 2005). Each collaborator in this study described their experiences. The description of past and present moments augmented the intersectionality of class and other issues, such as on-campus resources and organizations to support their motivation.

Research Questions, Methodology, and Collaborator’s Profiles

The following two research questions guided the study and the data collection process:

RQ1: How do Latina students reflect and describe their experiences navigating community college?

RQ2: What do Latina students identify as their needs, challenges, and supports at their respective community colleges?

Counter Stories

The study used counter stories through *Platicas* to highlight the lived experiences of Latinas navigating community college. The stories and voices are critical to understanding the collaborators’ lives not only as they relate to their lives as students and their educational paths

but also how Latino/a students overcame challenges and have intrinsic motivation to succeed. These counter stories can inform better support practice and policy paradigms to look at the whole student.

Platica as a Connector

The choice to conduct the qualitative study through *Platicas* was to welcome me to engage with the collaborators to build rapport. Using a *Platica* methodology invited and welcomed researcher participation to engage with the participants or collaborators to share knowledge to build relationships and community (Fierros & Bernal, 2016). Furthermore, Flores and Morales (2021) shared, “*Platicas* rooted in Chicana/Latina feminist epistemologies provide several opportunities for healing, connection, kinship, theorizing, laughter, joy, pain, and a myriad of other emotions because they center a reciprocal relationship between researcher(s) and collaborator(s)” (p. 3).

The collaborators of this study took part in individual *Platicas*, where they shared their background and experiences as a Latina enrolled in a community college with the goal of transferring. Throughout the seven *Platicas*, the collaborator and I engaged in discussions that validated the collaborator’s experiences, agency, and knowledge. In turn, it gave me continuous reflection and accountability to tell their story as a student, daughter, and college graduate.

As I developed and conceptualized this research study, the goal was to consistently and authentically engage with the collaborators throughout the *Platicas* versus coming in to simply extract information as a researcher (Hannegan-Martinez, 2023). To nurture this process, I developed the interview protocol through a relationship-based lens, which allowed both the collaborator and myself to be open about experiences along our educational journeys. This

interaction prompted me to ask the collaborators to select one artifact that had been with them along their community college journey. The sharing of an item elicited candid conversations, spontaneous responses, and at times family anecdotes.

This process added richness to the dynamic of the *Platicas*. In doing so, this study offered critical insights into the distinct types of capital Latina students arrive at college with while meeting institutional and systemic barriers along their journeys. As the *Platica* commenced, I asked the collaborators what is one piece of advice that you would tell your high school or younger self? I used this question as a reflection point—where the hope was for the collaborator to think through what they have overcome, and accomplished thus far, and where they are heading.

Throughout the *Platicas*, ongoing reciprocity occurred between the collaborator and me. During this time we shared memories, experiences, and the multiple realities of college success. In doing so, my positionality in this study was critical to uplift. It was impossible not to speak about my experiences of being first-generation, having a difficult childhood, depending on government assistance, and not knowing where to turn for help when questions arose. This interaction added a piece of comfort to the *Platica*, where the collaborators and I shared moments of sadness, happiness, and sometimes anger.

Collaborators' Profiles

Applying for colleges in high school was hard, because she (mom) wasn't too enthusiastic about the idea of me leaving, because that's not what you do as a first-generation Latina...you don't leave unless you get married. —Christina, Study Collaborator

I interviewed seven Latinas from various community colleges across Los Angeles County. The criteria used to choose students to participate were: (a) identify as Latina; (b) identify as female; (c) currently enrolled at a community college for more than two years; (d) attend a community college in Los Angeles County, and (e) looking to transfer to a 4-year institution. The collaborators self-identified their ethnicity, community college, and city of residence. I gave pseudonyms to the collaborators to maintain confidentiality. A summary of collaborator demographics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Collaborators' Profiles

Name	College	Ethnicity	City of Residence
Amanda	Desert College	Mexican	South Gate
Helena	Coast College	Mexican/Guatemalan	Lynwood
Rosa	Shore College	Mexican	Lynwood
Christina	Inland College	Mexican	Compton
Jasmine	Central College	Mexican	East Los Angeles
Yanira	Ocean College	Mexican	Highland Park
Rebecca	River College	Mexican/Guatemalan	El Monte

Introduction to Collaborators

For this study, I conducted seven interviews with Latinas from across Los Angeles County. At the time of this study, all seven collaborators were in different stages of their educational journeys—some were close to transferring, others were starting over at a different college. The narratives below provided a background to further understand and humanize the student experience.

Amanda

She was born and raised in Huntington Park but now lives in South Gate, located about seven miles from downtown Los Angeles. Amanda was the oldest of eight children-her parents are divorced. She was the first one in her family to go to college. Amanda lived with her mother, son, and two younger siblings. She worked part-time at a design studio and previously worked at a pharmacy. Amanda first attended UC Merced but returned home a year later. She attended Desert Community College with a major in architecture, with the hope to transfer to either the University of Southern California (USC) or the California State University, Pomona (Cal Poly Pomona). It was her dream to become an architect.

To begin the *Platica*, Amanda spoke about her son being there throughout her college journey and her motivation to do better in school. “In every class I was taking I was failing. Once I got pregnant, that’s when everything changed. And my son is not an item he’s a person, but it feels like he’s a perfect fit for this question.”

Before her pregnancy, Amanda recalled feeling lost as she navigated community college. When she enrolled, she was a microbiology major, then moved to an art major, and dropped it soon after. She was undecided, but she believed jumping from major to major would help her choose one. It did not. Instead, it led her to fail her classes, affecting her financial aid. Amanda registered for an architecture class simply to check it out, and the more she attended, the more she got interested in the class, but she was not doing well academically. As her pregnancy moved along, her professors noticed a change in her. She was thriving, and she had found her passion — architecture. “Her professors told her, we would talk about you, we would say, she has the passion, the potential but she’s not putting in the work. We need her to put in the work.” Amanda

did not realize she had affected her professors for them to care. At times, she thought they did not know who she was or cared about her academics.

Helena

She was born and raised in the city of South Gate but lives in the city of Lynwood. Her parents are also divorced. She was the middle child—her older brother and younger brother attend college, and her mom recently graduated from college. Helena worked at a nearby coffee shop where there are times, she worked part-time hours and other times she worked full-time hours. She attended Coast Community College. Helena hopes to transfer to the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and major in English. It is her goal to become a book writer.

To begin the *Platica*, Helena spoke about her journal. Her journal became her item during her first year of college:

When I became stressed with the transition between high school and college and not being able to see friends. We were all busy with school and work. So it was super helpful—I was able to overcome a lot of things, just writing them down.

Helena spoke to how she felt that she could not compare her struggles to her mothers' and where her journal became a communication tool for her and her thoughts:

When we were younger, my mom was working, going to school, and raising three kids. At some point, I felt my struggles are not as big as hers, so I did not feel I could go to her about them. So I would just write it down to help me process.

Rosa

She was born and raised in Lynwood, and resided in the city of Bell. Rosa was the second oldest child out of four siblings. Her sister graduated from the University of California (UC) a few years ago. Rosa and her three siblings lived with their parents, where she and her sister were the household providers. As such, she worked and went to school. Rosa attended Shore

Community College. Rosa hoped to transfer to California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), major in Sociology. It was her goal to become a counselor.

Rosa shared her phone as her item. She described it as one that got her through the first years at various community colleges and now at Shore College. She knows that her school engagement and grades suffered due to her lack of a laptop to complete her coursework:

At first I was gonna say, my laptop, but I didn't have a laptop until my third year in community college because I couldn't afford one. So I thought, what have I had the whole time, and that's my phone. I used Canva on my phone, when I didn't have a laptop, I would type my essays on my phone, I would do everything on my phone. If I was working on something late, and I couldn't go to like the library, or borrow someone's laptop—then I would use my phone.

Christina

She was born in Long Beach and resided in Compton. She was the oldest of three siblings. Her mom graduated college in Mexico and was a social worker. Her mom's side of the family were all college-educated and were educators in their hometown. Christina lived with her siblings and parents, where Christina takes the role of parent, financial and caregiver to her younger siblings. She worked and went to school. Christina first attended CSUDH but withdrew due to the lack of financial aid. She attended Inland Community College and hoped to transfer to Cal Poly Pomona and major in animal sciences. It was her goal to become a veterinarian.

Christina shared a necklace and a pendant her grandmother gave her when she was 5-years old. Now that her grandmother has passed, she valued the necklace so much more—it has become a connection to her grandmother. Christina leaned into how much her grandmother believed in her and her dreams. She recollected a conversation she had with her grandmother.

She said (grandmother) you know remember the (ballerina) bailarina I gave you? I gave it to you because the ballerina always reminded me of you. You were always just happy

you would think about your next move and you would just do it. So think of yourself as this ballerina in your own life. Do what makes you happy. So I did.

Jasmine

She was raised in East Los Angeles, where she lived with her parents and older sibling. Her brother attended community college but recently decided not to continue. Jasmine does not work because she is a full-time student and hoped to transfer soon. However, she was doing an internship that aligns with her career interests. Jasmine planned to attend the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC). She has yet to decide on her major, but she was leaning towards child development.

Jasmine shared her iPad. For her, the piece of technology had a more profound significance than just being something you could draft essays on—it was a sign of moving into adulthood. She hoped the iPad would be with her as she began the transfer process and at her new university. She shared that as they were looking for a laptop, she remained optimistic her parents could afford one. However, the more they looked at computers, the more she became aware her parents could not afford to buy her MacBook as she initially wanted.

I also paid for some of it through like scholarships that I had in high school. I was really excited when I first got it. For me, it just marked like the new beginning of my academic journey, and also being more independent.

Yanira

Yanira grew up in Highland Park, where she lived with her parents, and her three younger siblings. Both her parents attended college but did not graduate. As the oldest, Yanira took on the role of guiding her younger sibling in navigating school. Yanira does not work because she takes the train to school—where her commute is an estimated two and a half hours one way. She attended Ocean Community College. Yanira hoped to transfer to UC Santa

Barbara, where she wanted to major in sociology and criminology. It is her goal to become a lawyer.

The item Yanira chose to share was her hoop earrings. She wore them as they have become a marker of her identity, background, and culture. She shared memories of attending a predominantly White high school where school staff and students would never call her by her name. They would constantly mispronounce it, and those experiences shaped her identity to wear her hoops proudly everywhere she went:

I have always used my earrings and I've always used them throughout my high school and now college journey, just because it's something so special to me, are my hoop earrings. I have my hoop earrings on all the time, you'll never catch me without them. Yeah, my hoop earrings just because they remind me of my identity.

Rebecca

Rebecca lived in El Monte with her husband and son. She was the youngest of three siblings. Her parents divorced when she was 16 and was kicked out of her home as a result of the separation. She moved in with her grandma. She had no communication with her immediate family. Her mother went to a trade school and became a nurse. Her father did not attend college. Throughout her time in community college, Rebecca has worked about 50-60 hours a week but recently transitioned to 24 hours. She attended River Community College and hoped to transfer to USC and major in computer science. It is her goal to become a coding programmer engineer.

To begin the *Platica*, Rebecca shared a photo of her son. As she spoke about her son, she beamed with joy. When she got pregnant, her family members told her she would just become a statistic and drop out of school. Unfortunately, those comments negatively affected her, and she stopped going to school and began working full-time. When she thought back and reflected on

what her family said, those statements gave her the motivation to think about college and her future:

I am grateful that we are coming out of the pandemic. There are more online course options. I was able to balance having a kid, going to college, and working. So that's definitely why this picture kept me motivated. Because at times, I would feel discouraged.

Findings

I got pregnant at 18 and gave birth to my son at 19. The item I will share with you is a photo of my son. He has been a motivation for me to do better. He inspired me to get my GED and enroll in college. —Rebecca, Study Collaborator

In this research study, collaborators narrated and shared their school experiences. To capture their journey thus far, examining their experiences as a daughter and a student was important. I developed the interview questions to elicit responses on how those experiences, positive or negative, impacted their college transition and current status. In the *Platicas*, the collaborators shared the realities of their lives as students and how challenges, identities, and personal connections affected their motivation and achievement along their educational journeys. Although the collaborators were able to pursue and persist through community college to move through the transfer process, they also acknowledged it was a difficult path to navigate as a Latina with a myriad of responsibilities, questions, and doubts.

Presentation of the Data

The themes explored in the following section, highlighted rich descriptions, including family, academic enrichment programs, campus resources, and current relationships at their respective community colleges. Alongside these descriptions, explored are their *Platicas* as they

relate their college experiences to the realities of their lives, and how their personal histories have mediated their experiences as current students.

The choice of themes surfaced from the *Platicas*—but it is imperative to point out that at times the collaborator’s experiences could not be placed neatly in positive or negative categories. In one of the *Platicas*, family events or circumstances where both positive and negative aspects appeared. An example of this is one collaborator citing the struggle with having little to no relationship with her family, while also expressed having the distance gave her more motivation to think about transferring and do well in her career. I emphasized the contrasts between struggle and support in distinct sections in highlighting the selected findings. By doing so, the hope was to provide depth and insight into the collaborators’ lives. The four major themes that emerged from the *Platicas* were familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational social capital, and barriers encountered along their educational journey.

Familial

Throughout the *Platicas*, collaborators spoke about their role in their families and the relationships they held with either a sibling, their mothers, or grandmothers. Familial capital was cultural knowledge centered around connections to one’s communities (Yosso, 2005). This connection can be to the immediate family and can also include extended family as a form of motivation (Yosso, 2005). The participants referred to the connection to their families as a source of inspiration and support academically and emotionally. This section highlighted the *Platicas* with Amanda, Helena, Yanira, and Rebecca

Amanda and her siblings were close. As the first one to go to college, she felt that she had the responsibility to learn how to navigate courses and resources to be better prepared for college. She recalled:

Because as I was learning, I was telling like my mom, they need to do this, they should do that when they get to high school. That's why I said I'm like the guinea pig because I always made sure that they were taking the classes that were going to benefit them in college.

Her mom worked at the high school Amanda and her siblings attended. She believed this larger network community made it easy to return from UC Merced and enroll in community college because she could lean on her high school for support. Her mom was able to connect with her relationships, such as the school's academic counselors, which in turn, Amanda was able to connect closely with when questions and worries. She recalled:

When I got back home, my mom and me did our research. She asked around my high school to see community college options because she could ask the counselors there at Ocean high school. They have a lot of information on community colleges and they recommended for me to go to Desert College.

Amanda's mom also used her social capital to offer her daughter guidance. This was instrumental in helping her make stronger connections with the high school counselors that are now part of her network and academic growth. The collaborators leaned on family members along their educational journeys.

Similarly, Helena recalled her relationship with her brothers. Helena described her relationship with her brothers as being "really close". She further explained, "And I grew up with my younger brother, my older brother, and my mom. I feel like when I was growing up, I relied a lot on my older brother." Her older brother enrolled at a university in the state of Texas, and her other brother attends a career technical school nearby. Helena's mother has been her biggest

motivator and supporter. Being raised in a single-parent household, she knew her mother juggled a lot but was still present in their lives. Helena recounted when she began thinking about the transfer process, she told her mother she was interested in attending UCSB, her mother scheduled a visit, and both were on the campus a few days later.

I would say my mom 100% for everything she is down for it. When I told her like, I want to transfer to UC Santa Barbara. She said, “Okay, let’s go visit the campus.” We went to visit the campus and we were signing up for things. She’s just my cheerleader. She just amazes me.

Helena expressed that her mom was her resource and has hesitated about a visit to the counseling center at her college. She has only met with her counselor twice so far during her time at Coast College. One of her fears was that a counselor would tell her that her goal was unrealistic, and she knows she would shut down and begin second-guessing herself. She wanted to avoid that, especially when she already planned to transfer to UCSB.

Yanira uplifted a similar sentiment about her family. Her parents are extremely supportive of her journey and always ensure she had the space and tools to do well. Yanira shared that she relies a lot on extended family members to give her *consejos* (advice). She shared:

I’m a really grateful to have been able to rely [*sic*] and kind of get help from my cousins, because one of them already got like their masters, the other went to college. And so there’s someone already seeking like higher education, and already have their professional jobs. So I think I was able to kind of latch on to that when trying to kind of navigate like, what would be the best option for me?

Throughout our *Platica*, Yanira consistently circled back to how her family, especially her cousins, and how they have supported her time in high school and now in college. Yanira spoke about one cousin who transferred to UCLA from a local community college. Her cousin

helped her navigate college courses, on-campus resources, and now helped her understand the transfer process.

Family was important to many of the collaborators and served as a point of inspiration and motivation because of the close relationships. Although the understanding of family can have several meanings, it was important to show the dichotomies of struggle and success that can be found in a narrative about family. One of the collaborators, Rebecca, had a challenging childhood. She shared her parents and siblings had always lived with her grandparents for most of their lives. In her teen years, her parents separated, and everyone moved away. At a young age, she felt lost. Rebecca, shared:

My parents were separating around that time when I was turning 16-17. So unfortunately, my mom kicked me out. And she told me I need to go live with my grandma. My grandparents only speak Spanish. It wasn't like, let me guide you. So I didn't have any education, no support on what to do next, which that was where I like, "fell in love" with working. I liked the money, a lot.

For her, the relationship with her parents became nonexistent because she felt she was on her own, and did not believe anyone cared about her well-being, or much less about her education. She recalled no one in her family, immediate or extended, talked about college. In her family, the idea was more like reaching the age of 18—the individual finds a job, moves out, and figures out their life. She believed that because of this thinking, only a few family members have attended college, and fewer have obtained degrees. Due to the consequences of the separation, she held a lot of anger and resentment towards her parents, and it has been until recently she was able to reconnect with her father. For Rebecca, she felt like the distance between all her family served her to stop doubting herself about her ability to succeed academically and professionally.

Navigational Social Capital

All the collaborators held some form of navigational capital and social capital. Yosso (2005) defined navigational capital as the skills and abilities individuals possess as they navigate social institutions or unsupportive environments. The second part of this capital is social capital, described as the networks, assets, and resources found in communities (Yosso, 2005). This social support can be individuals or centers of information where People of Color live and work (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021). This form of cultural wealth places a high value on relationships to support navigating new experiences and/or facilitating access to new information (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). In this section, navigational social capital was brought together to refer to the navigational social networks the collaborators in this study identified and relied on when they needed academic and social supports as well as a sense of belonging at their respective community colleges. It was important to highlight both constructs as capitals play a critical role for the collaborators in their education and have become a source of empowerment in the development of self-efficacy. Similarly, allowing space for both constructs to build upon each other provides a better lens to the collaborator's membership to the networks that are united primarily for the use of their educational journey.

Jasmine was grateful to have the Puente Learning Center program in her high school, as it provided her with a space to learn about post high-school options, without the pressures of knowing precisely what she wanted to do. The program engaged students through in-classroom workshops and case management to grow awareness on college options and career exploration. She believed the program allowed her to explore her college and career options her family never

spoke about at home. She was happy to learn the program continued at her community college, where she continues to connect with staff:

The program has a teacher that is another gem. He's allowed me to find my voice as well. Now I see myself asking for help when I need it, and especially with him. He is that teacher who has really brought that out of me, even though it still needs a little bit more work, but he's slowly bringing that out—it's okay to ask for help. And I have appreciated that from him.

Jasmine was reflective in thinking about how her teacher has not only empowered her to ask for help, but she has also learned how best to reach out to professors, attend office hours, and be proactive during her interactions with on-campus staff. She knew that she is still learning to navigate relationships with professors and it will take time to get better at it. Furthermore, Jasmine appreciated his approach to connecting college students to career professionals so they can build their networks while learning about career options. For her, it was space to understand that community college is not a bad place to start, and sometimes the path to transferring will be a little longer because of life's setbacks. She shared:

He's always bringing people together – he brings people from previous cohorts to come and talk to us. And that also gives us more of a reality check, it is possible. These people were in your position not too long ago, or maybe long ago, but they made it and they have graduated. Some of them have their masters. Some of them want to do their doctorates. They are the products that came out of the community college. I think that also community college is stigmatized to being the last resort—that's not a good feeling.

Yanira also held a high navigational social capital. In high school, she became part of Kid City Hope Place, a nonprofit organization in Los Angeles that provides services for college access, persistence, and career preparation. Yanira found her relationship with Kid City Hope Place (www.kidcityhopeplace.org) pivotal as she began thinking about college. Involvement in this group enabled Yanira to become part of a community that shared commonalities, including

ethnic background, and language—where most students in the program were first-generation.

Yanira shared:

Kid City Hope Place was so helpful. Seeing more people that look me, it felt like a family. It felt like establishing my own little family. They never judged me. They were kind of goofy when I would talk to them. It feels like such a good and genuine relationship, as if we knew each other already. They wouldn't talk to me so professional. So I wouldn't feel that like, oh, I need to say the right things.

Yanira also described Kid City Hope Place was more helpful than her high school counselors in answering college and financial aid questions. She remembered when she asked questions about a 4-year university and the financial aid package she received. Yanira did not fully understand what out-of-pocket costs would be. Unfortunately, her counselor was unsure and provided different totals each visit. As a result, Yanira went to Kid City Hope Place, where they helped her figure it out. She shared:

I asked a staff member, do you know what I'm gonna be paying, like the estimate. they had a proper calculator, they put it in, I got my results. And I was like, Okayyy, well, I think I can get a better option.

It was helpful to see the costs as she figured out which university would offer her the best financial aid. It came to a point where Yanira sought support for the counselors, including coordinating resource-sharing workshops for her high school. She was happy to help and support the students at her high school because all the services and resources Kid City Hope Place provided were free, and they were able to simplify the process. She furthered shared, "It was so important to have them, especially because it was meant for first gen, so they really knew how to navigate that whole process for us and help us. I'm so grateful for that".

Yanira attended Ocean College (pseudonym used) and chose the college because of the resources and opportunities provided for a law pathway, which other colleges in her community

did not. She enjoyed her time at Ocean College. She built relationships with counselors and other students with similar backgrounds and experiences. This has been due to Ocean College's academic support program. The campus has created and successfully implemented a culturally responsive program called *Adelante* [Forward]. Yanira shared more:

They have resources and counseling only for Latino students. And they actually require you to set up meetings and appointments with the counselors, because they want you to succeed. They make like a little pathway program for you to meet your goal of transferring.

Yanira felt comfortable entering the *Adelante* [Forward] office, asking many questions, and sometimes not knowing exactly what she was looking for, but she received help and support. She described that before she signed up for the *Adelante* [Forward] program, she went to a general education counselor. She had difficulty navigating some of the conversations because she felt as though the counselor tried to convince her to change her major. Yanira admitted she was turned off and motivated when meeting with the *Adelante* [Forward] counselor once again. She shared:

With the other counseling [*Adelante*], they heard me and talked to me in Spanglish, too, They asked me, how are your classes? And they treat me like family. Like it's really it's almost like a tiny Kid City Hope Place in a way.

Yanira acknowledged her long commute is worth it because the *Adelante* [Forward] program understood her and supported her with more than just school dilemmas. They have a resource for about everything. Her navigational social capital was instrumental in finding her place, her voice, and her commitment to transferring and majoring in law.

Like Yanira and Jasmine, Rebecca found her navigational social capital through close relationships with the staff at River College. Although her trajectory to community college was not typical, she never felt discouraged by the counselors. On the contrary, they believed in her

more than she did. Rebecca had a challenging senior year in high school, where she stopped going to classes and, at some point, stopped going to school altogether. Unfortunately, nobody called her parents or checked in on how she was doing or what was going on. The lack of engagement furthered her interest in completing her last semester of high school. When she decided to return and finish her General Educational Development (GED) Test, she completed it at her nearby adult school. She connected with a staff member along the way, that made her feel seen. Rebecca described her interaction with him:

He was speaking from his heart and he made me cry. He said, all your grades have been good until your last year of high school. I want you to know that your life can start over again. Like whatever happened, mistakes happen, and you can learn from them so I felt like he was really speaking to my soul. And he said I want to connect you with Angela. He closed our time together by saying, I think you're far better than just getting your GED.

She had a meeting with Angela, and her relationship has flourished into one in which Rebecca has complete trust and confidence that Angela was her person for academic support. Rebecca shared the help she has received:

And then I was speaking to Angela, and I was like, Okay, I want to transfer but I don't know how to do this. So thankfully, she guided me to look up websites, and they have all these meetings you can go to, and she broke it down for me. So I want to transfer to USC, so I looked up their requirements and everything. So, I was like, Okay, your GPA needs to be high. So thankfully, right now I'm maintaining a 3.92.

Rebecca acknowledged community college would be extremely difficult to navigate without Angela and sometimes impossible. She believed her identity as a worker and a mother makes it harder for any counselor to understand how best to support students like her. She recalled visiting a transfer counselor while Angela was away, and the meeting was highly un motivating. She shared:

So I made an appointment with the transfer counselor. And right off the bat, they said, our transfer rate out of River College is only like, less than 5%. I think you should consider other applications or other pathways. And I remember being so let down, like, Oh, my goodness, like, this is how we started off the meeting. And at that point, I didn't want to be rude so I finished the meeting with her.

Rebecca is reflective that the only people who have been supportive throughout her college journey have been Angela and her husband. Although she tries not to internalize the conversation with the transfer counselor, she carries it with her in the space of motivation and perseverance.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to remain hopeful for the future despite actual and imagined obstacles (Yosso, 2005). In the *Platicas* it was clear that familial and navigational social capital were woven together. In familial capital, I highlighted the connection between family members. In the same thread, it should be stressed that familial connections are also a source of expectations and consistent messaging for the students to earn a degree, as well as moments of encouragement to do well. The navigational social capital highlighted the infrastructure necessary for students to succeed and advance their careers (Yosso, 2005).

Aspirational capital was present throughout all the collaborator's *Platicas*, either for themselves or for their families. Several felt the pressure to do better, even though they knew what that meant—they were unsure how to do it. They saw their parents struggle with finances, immigration status, and living conditions. They were aware their parents worked hard and often long hours, but that did not equate to being financially stable or having a safety net. Like many children of immigrant parents, they used these experiences as a source of determination and perseverance. Nevertheless, it was critical to elevate how precarious it was to navigate

aspirational capital—students are encouraged to go to college, encouraging them to persist in college and the need to succeed, all the while managing stressful life and academic circumstances.

Throughout the *Platicas*, there were numerous times when the collaborators shared the pressure of trying to do well in school while dealing with home stressors. Aspirational capital was clear in Rosa’s experience for the last few years. She recently enrolled at Shore College. However, Rosa began her college journey at a community college in another city. The college had one of the best in transfer rates because of the level of support and resources provided to all students, and she believed this to be true. She began succeeding academically, but soon after “it began going downhill.” Rosa shared:

My dad around like 2009 or like 2010, he, well, he has a lot of problems, where he started to use drugs, and then it just started like going way downhill. And around 2017 or 2018, it got really bad. He couldn’t hold a job. He was going in and out of jail and stuff. So in 2019 that’s where like, it got the worst and like we ended up getting evicted.

During this time, Rosa leaned on her older sister to help her, but her sister was also away at college at a nearby university and trying to deal with her own stress. Rosa felt alone and, at times, helpless. She shared that when she started at her first community college, she liked her classes, the campus, and the professors. However, as the semester went on, the stress got overwhelming. Rosa spoke to this:

So that year (2019) started off really good, but also that year was the year we got evicted. So the second semester, I think I just stopped going like the last two months and I ended up getting I don’t remember if I ended up dropping them or I ended up just getting Fs because I couldn’t go anymore.

Rosa was afraid to return to the college because her grade point average was low, and she did not believe she could get past the disappointment. A few months later, she enrolled at a

different community college. Once arriving at the new college campus, she realized she did not feel comfortable or welcomed. So, in the fall of 2020, Rosa unenrolled and began at Shore College. She shared she continued to struggle but persevered so she could transfer and become a counselor to help others.

Christina shared a similar experience. Christina began her college journey at CSUDH and decided to major in nursing to fulfill her parents' dreams, not her own. Unfortunately, she only attended for a year because she and her parents could not afford it anymore. Christina returned to enroll at the nearby community college, where she was doing well. A few months later, mental health issues surfaced, and she could not manage the situation. She attended Inland College, however, she had to pause school, as she described here:

And then I went back, and then it was going good. And then something happened with my, with my dad. With immigration, he was finally caught, unfortunately. And I had to drop my classes because I had to focus on getting him out.

Christina wondered how things would be different if her parents could afford college, feel comfortable sharing their information through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process, or have the option of not working full-time.

When I had any questions, I would definitely go to my high school counselor. For FAFSA, it was hard, you need your parents financial information, my mom once again. And I like to remind her (her mother) that she did these things to me. She denied me a lot of my dad's financial information, whether it be that she was scared that they were both immigrants without any papers. And so I had to pay for a lot of my forms. And it was also hard because they wouldn't, she wouldn't give me the money.

Christina carried a part of the burden. She was afraid that if she gave schools more information, her parents would get in trouble or, much worse, get deported. Once in school, she received minimal financial aid that barely covered course costs. She recognized this is not an ideal space to succeed, but she knew she will transfer soon and be able to focus only on school.

For Rebecca, the memory of high school was difficult to recall. As previously mentioned, her parents kicked her out of her home and told her to go live with her grandparents. She recalled being uncomfortable when counselors began talking and asking about financial aid because she could not go to her parents, much less her grandparents. She remembered no one setting up expectations for college or what success looked like, as she shared:

I just started working at 16. I remember my last semester in high school and I was like, I can't even afford or to apply for, for college applications, even if I wanted to, because I can't tell them I can't afford it, they're gonna be like, this is what your parents' income will be needed to complete paperwork. How did I tell them I do not live with them or have little communication with them?

Rebecca shared no one in her family spoke about college, and once she arrived at her new high school, this was still the case. Her school encouraged her to become part of a sport or become a cheerleader. She recalled:

I really wished in high school they had more support. But I do understand too that a lot of it has to do with public funding. Because our school was in a very low-income neighborhood. I believe it was hard for them to be able to really encourage and push for college education. I feel like for low income a high school—they're really trying to make the funding to get people to just graduate for the statistics.

Rebecca persisted in college, even though she struggled as a contributor to her family's income. When she began college, she worked 50-60 hours a week—she worked from 12:00am-8:30am, then went to school from 9:00am-2:00pm, picked up her son from school, and then slept once her husband got home. She knew everything was a sacrifice but there are times she cannot keep up. Recently, she cut her hours to 24 a week, to attend in-person classes.

Jasmine sometimes felt alone in this process and struggled like Rebecca. She knew she could rely on her Puente program for support, but occasionally her struggles become

overwhelming. Her brother went to community college for a couple of years, but eventually decided not to continue. She described here:

My brother, he didn't didn't finish college. So I'm first generations. He dropped out of community, so it's not really like I could go to him for advice. Sometimes it feels like I'm doing this alone, by myself, but I think I'll figure it out.

Jasmine figured out she needed to enroll at Central College because of how close it was to her home. She considered other colleges like Santa Monica College and Pasadena Community College, but she knew without a car, the commute would be unmanageable. As she explored the transfer process, she regularly connected with her friends who attended different community colleges, including the ones mentioned above, in which they speak about just going the occupational routes because their doubts about success ran deep. Jasmine recounted a conversation with a close friend:

But I had this conversation with a friend of mine, who also is going through the same transfer process. And we're like, what if we can't make it in two years? What if we're here for longer? Does that say that the bad on us? Like, are we doing something wrong? If we, if we stay longer? And I said, let's think positively about this. I guess our goal is to go and transfer in two years, but if that's not the case, that's fine. We're gonna be all right. And we just have to really push through it. And I think if we really want it, we will get it. But it's, it's also like to see the similarity that my friend has this worry. It's a common worry amongst us. So we have to transfer, if we, if we want to push past that, I don't know, it's like maybe like a group of us, like has to come together and maybe voice this so that like to give us encouragement as well, like it is possible.

From the *Platicas* and the stories shared by the collaborators, aspirational capital played a critical role in college persistence that may have stemmed from various relationships, including family and college programs or a combination of both. All the collaborators showed levels of stress, although at times there was doubt, they kept their goals of obtaining a bachelor's degree as their guiding star. The next section of the chapter describes salient obstacles found in the *Platicas* with the collaborator.

Barriers Faced by the Collaborators

The data presented below represents the barriers the collaborators highlighted throughout the *Platicas*. It was important to note that the barriers discussed impacted academic progress and access to financial aid. However, these two barriers will not be under discussion in detail, as the collaborators shared they were doing better academically and have become more aware of how to access financial aid at their respective community colleges. Although the CCW framework elevated the capitals each collaborator holds as they step onto their college campuses, systemic or personal barriers still exist and more prominent as they manage academic and home life (Yosso, 2005). The barriers discussed by the collaborators included: (a) access to information (b) balancing work and school; (c) lack of technology to do well in school; and (d) lack of transportation.

Disconnect Between Students and Information

The collaborators noted the navigational social capital along their college journeys; however, a lot of experiences were not always positive. This engagement or lack of engagement with on-campus staff was a form of tension amongst the collaborators. Some described being afraid or worried of meeting with a counselor because they feared disappointment. Collaborators like Amanda, Christina, and Rebecca shared their experiences in connecting with counselors or advising staff to talk through their majors, transfer process, or general guidance on class registration.

Amanda talked about when she entered her architecture program at Desert College, unfortunately she did not know about some of the updates to the course sequence. This was

because regular counselors were not aware of the updates to the course sequence, and students like Amanda, received mixed messages about the transfer process. Amanda detailed the below:

So the architecture program is one thing, but then the academic counselors would tell you just to take certain classes to help you transfer, but the counselors, like they didn't really communicate with the architecture professors that were the ones that were telling us like to take these classes in this order. So right now, my current professors, they're like rebuilding the architecture program. Now they have like actual architecture counselors that know what classes to take how to take them, because now they have that communication between all of them.

These updates and changes have helped Amanda and her cohort, but unfortunately, she shared because of the lack of clear communication in the department, she would transfer until 2025—when she entered the program in 2020. She is grateful for the opportunity to gain experience about architecture and be able to apply for internships, but also there is frustration as it has impacted her transfer plan.

Christina had attended a 4-year university, then transitioned to a nearby community college, and most recently she enrolled at a different college where she believed she is received better resources. Her friends influenced her to attend her earlier college, but she was not always comfortable there for different reasons. She described the below:

It started off good and then until it was very hard to get classes and then trying to get an appointment with my counselor that was not easy. So it's like okay, well, where do I go from here? Well, do I just take this class and then when finally having an appointment with them, but just signing up for these classes? And it was like oh, well, no, you don't need this class or that class. You actually needed this class and I was like, well, it was hard to see you already. And now I can't get that class and I have to drop this class.

Christina shared she sent numerous emails requesting appointments, and when she did, she believed she was not always receiving the correct information to help her transfer. To help move along the transfer process, she signed up to be a note taker for students with disabilities. This job allowed her to get priority registration. Even with this priority, she was not able to get

access to her core classes. Christina felt disappointment and frustration, as a result, she began working more hours, and it led to a break from school.

Rebecca had similar experiences with a counselor on her campus. The regular counselor she connected with went on vacation. Rebecca thought this would be a good opportunity for her to get to know other transfer counselors. The upside was she received a quick response and appointment time. She described the negative experience:

And right when I came in, the counselor said, our transfer rate out of her River College is only like, less than 5%. I think you should consider other applications or pathways. And I remember being so like, let down, like, Oh, my goodness, like, this is how we started off the meeting. And at that point, I didn't want to be rude. So I finished the meeting with her. But I just felt like, you can't ask someone with that mentality, like, hey, I need help finding the classes.

Interactions like these were difficult to navigate for several of the collaborators. For Rebecca, they made her even more grateful for the strong relationship she had built with the counselor who supported her from the very beginning. The counselor guided Rebecca to keep a 3.92 grade point average and helped her to set her goal to transfer to USC.

Commitment to Work and School

The collaborators held familial capital, navigational social capital, and aspirational capital. However, they all grappled with family responsibilities that affected their academic progress. Collaborators like Rosa, Christina, and Helena worked full-time, and contributed financially to their household. The stories below illustrated the added roles and responsibilities as the collaborators tried to study and complete assignments.

In Helena's home, education was always been a priority. However, she was balancing school, while also working an almost full-time job. She did not want to add additional financial burdens to her family, as her mother was a single mother. Helena explained:

I work at a nearby coffee shop. It's nothing crazy. But it does kind of get to me sometimes because I work the night shifts. So Friday, Saturday, Sunday, I'll get home like at two in the morning, Monday through Thursday, I'll get home like at one in the morning. And then I have to wake up like a seven or eight in the morning for school. Sometimes it gets a little too much.

Helena is thankful her job offered flexibility if she needs time off for finals or important assignments. She shared she sometimes gets home late, intends to do homework or study for a quiz, but is so tired that she quickly falls asleep. At times, she wonders if she can get through it.

Rosa, on the other hand, was one of the breadwinners in the household. She shared that she and her sister supported her family with most of the bills, including the rent. She shared:

So right now, it's only me and my older sister working. So we're paying all the bills. And then before, my dad was working it was better. My mom never had an actual job, she would just more like sell food and stuff to make money. And she always had to do that because we grew up poor.

Rosa and her family were evicted from their home, and at some point, they were relied on her sister's financial aid to pay the bills. Due to multiple reasons, financial aid was processed incorrectly, so they scrambled to make ends meet. In the *Platica*, Rosa shared this affected her mental health with the ongoing stress. It was hard to focus on improving it, while also balancing the responsibility of being a breadwinner. She acknowledged home life has affected her academics, but she hoped she will be able to transfer and make school priority, again.

Christina had similar experiences to Rosa. She was doing well in school while also working when her father was detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). At that point, Christina became the breadwinner. As she shared:

During the time my dad was picked up, I had to become the provider for my family. And there was no room for school in all of that. Now it's better, but it is definitely hard to balance all of it.

As she reflected on her progress, she said even now, it was difficult to process the traumatic events that have occurred in her life. Christina was aware when her father got picked up by ICE, and she became the breadwinner, her stress was heightened. She knew it was her role as the eldest child. It was not an easy role to fill, but she believed she had a lot of responsibility growing up that prepared her for that moment—between cooking, watching her siblings, and helping them with her homework, she knew she could step in while her father was away. All of this affected her mental health, and she had doubts about her ability to continue through college. Christina is aware she carries a lot but also understands that she cannot leave her family on their own. Over the last few years, she has been able to get help for her mental health and has begun to feel better. The time away from school has provided perspective for goals. As she said, “I got this no matter what happens. . . . I got this.”

Personal Technology

Collaborators shared the lack of technology affected their academic success in their classes. Although they knew a laptop or access to some type of technology would help them, they could not afford one financially. Per the collaborators’ assertions, they were grateful to be able to use the campus computer laboratory but knew owning a laptop of their own would provide the flexibility to begin and complete assignments as needed and at their convenience.

As Amanda began at Desert College, she only had a Google Chrome laptop that she received as a gift. As she stepped further in her major, she realized she needed a specialized program her current laptop did not support. She shared a snippet of her conversation with her professor:

Well, I don’t have a laptop. I told you this. And he says, yeah, well, you need to get one. In my mind I told him, how are you gonna tell me that I need to get one, we don’t have

the money for it. So I grabbed my stuff, and as I was walking out the door, he's says, you can't just leave because I told you that you need a laptop. I turned around and said no, I'm gonna go get one right now. I return the next day with an Apple laptop to realize that these programs are not compatible. There is no way he just told me that. So then I had to get a new laptop. So it has been quite the road trip with the program.

Throughout the *Platica*, Amanda shared that finances were not the best at times, and between going to school, paying for a laptop, getting a car, and being a student parent—she felt she needed to depend more and more on financial aid, but was unable to access it because her grade point average was low. Due to the grade point average, she was on academic probation. Unfortunately, she was not able to receive a full financial aid package, and was only able to receive a portion, making planning for necessities more difficult. Even though she worked, she knew she could not work full-time to focus on school. Amanda acknowledged the hurdles and the pressures of her educational journey; nevertheless, she maintained these are learning moments for her to share with her siblings. In Rosa's *Platica*, she discussed an experience similar to Amanda's:

I didn't have a laptop until like my third year in community college because I couldn't afford it. I would use my phone to type out essays... I would do everything on my phone. I was working on something late, and I couldn't go to the library, or you know, or borrow someone's laptop like I would use my phone.

Rosa further shared that because she did not have access to stable technology, her grades were low, and it affected her motivation and mental health. Rosa wanted to succeed and transfer, but she barely passed some classes and withdrew from several more. All these actions impacted her grade point average. This resulted in academic probation, thus affecting her financial aid. She shared that everything felt unfair because she did not have the financial means to have access to the necessary materials causing her to be punished by not being able to receive additional funding to help her succeed. She felt the transition to a new community college would be a fresh

start. During this time, she bought a laptop, which has made such a difference in her academic progress. She discussed her setbacks have at times led her to question if she should continue in her journey, but she thinks about how her family *le echan porras* [keep cheering her on] that she can do it. She focused on those moments to keep her going.

Personal Transportation

Several collaborators in this study shared a lack of personal transportation throughout their college journey. To get to school, they used public transportation, which was easily accessible and easy to navigate. However, they were aware this made their educational journey more challenging and dangerous on several occasions. For the collaborators with access to a reliable vehicle they owned a sense of independence, especially during stressful school schedules. During our *Platicas*, the students reflected that when they got their car, they felt okay staying at school as late as they could studying or finishing homework without bothering parents or siblings.

Yanira lived in Highland Park and attended a community college that is not near her home. She decided to attend Ocean College because of its many resources and programs, especially for Latino students. Yanira shared that her friends who attend other colleges in Los Angeles, do not have access to the same or similar resources she does. These conversations reaffirmed her choice to continue attending Ocean College. In reflecting on the *Platica*, Yanira shared that getting to and from school can be exhausting and discouraging. Yanira shared:

I take two trains that equal about two and a half hours—just one way. Yeah. And it's chaotic, it gets chaotic. There's been times where I'm like, I cannot do this anymore, and that's where it has pushed me to learn to drive. My dad was like, yeah, maybe you do need a car. Because the train travels some places that are a little more dangerous, and I do not feel safe.

Although the trip is long and at times distracting, she took advantage by reading or doing homework whenever possible. She knew that if she had a car, she would not be able to finish some of her schoolwork, but she also realized she could arrive as early as possible or stay on campus as late as possible. In the *Platica*, she recalled feeling like she could not make the commute any longer. Yanira described a recent experience:

I've witnessed the person next to me, like doing coke, like lighting up in the spoon and all that there was a fight last time that broke out, and it was like, pretty bad. I freaked out and I got off in the middle of nowhere. I was crying and could not stop crying. I called my parents and kept saying I can't do this, please call me an Uber. When I finally calmed down, and was about to reserve an Uber, my total was going to be about \$200. I could not afford that, so I got back on the train and went to school.

Yanira acknowledged that everything she does is a sacrifice to get closer to becoming a lawyer. Throughout the challenging times, she focuses on "it will be worth it and pay off".

Jasmine had a similar reflection. However, for Jasmine, having her own mode of transportation would give her a better sense of independence. She currently traveled by bus to get to school. She acknowledged owning a car would be ideal, but sometimes it felt out of reach. As she shared:

I think when I get my keys, or my permit or license, that is when it is gonna feel real, like I'm in control of my life now. It feels different when you have to take the bus or depend on your parents.

Throughout the *Platica*, Jasmine highlighted she felt like she is dependent on her parents, or as she put it, "attached with the parents to the hip". During finals or stressful assignments, she witnessed this type of dependency.

When I have to stay later on campus for a class or studying. I do feel that sort of like, I'm not being considerate of my parent's time. I know, they're tired. And I feel bad but like, sometimes it's really late, and they're my only option for a ride home.

There are times when Jasmine has no other choice but to take the bus home. In the *Platica*, Jasmine echoed the same sentiment as Yanira and Rosa, that when took the bus at night—it was scary:

If I can try to avoid asking them to come pick me up and everything because I just feel like I get in the way sometimes. I know they want to rest and all that, so if I have to take the bus, I am willing to do and I do it anyways... but especially at night, it does get scary.

Rosa was in a similar situation. Rosa attended the same community college Yanira currently attends for the same reasons—access to high-quality resources and programs. When Rosa began at Ocean College, she lived in the city of Bell, where she took the train to school. Rosa shared:

My commute was about 45 minutes, at times about an hour. I had to take the bus and train to get to school. Sometimes, I took two buses to avoid the train. That was a really big struggle. That was when I relied on my phone to catch up on reading or some homework.

Rosa expressed she had a tough time during her first year at Ocean College. Her friend decided to enroll at Ocean College, and Rosa would carpool with her because they had similar starting times but not end times.

My first year, I made the mistake of taking a night class. Getting to school was okay, I would just get a ride with my friend, but coming back home was hard. I would get home like at 12am—it was really scary.

She realized she made a mistake of taking a night class, but also knew she needed that particular class to transfer. She was able to save money for a car, a dependable one, too. In the *Platica*, she shared that she did not take her car for granted, as it offered an opportunity to work different job to be able to support her family and save more money.

Late last year, I started working at a company that has homes for adults with mental disabilities. I worked the night shift from 10:00pm-6:00am. It was hard to adjust to

people that would depend on you for everything, especially at night. The job had some scary situations. Between that job and school, I felt like I was always on edge.

She recently started a new job, that is a better fit to her career goal. Her new job increases access and persistence for students in college, which is something she is leaning towards as she navigates and learns about the opportunities she may have at her 4-year university.

Platica: The Final Reflections

As the *Platicas* concluded, I asked the collaborators, “What is one piece of advice you would tell your high school or younger self”? I posed the question as a point of reflection of their efforts, opportunities, and success thus far. It was an intentional space to share wisdom and conceptualize their progress. The participants shared their experiences of past and present setbacks and layers of barriers that may have hindered their progress in school. In this final reflection, there was a sense that all the collaborators were aware moving ahead was their only chance and choice to move closer to their goal of transferring to a 4-year university, obtain a degree, and begin their careers. Most collaborators used their careers as a piece of aspiration to live a fulfilling life. This final reflection was a space for me to reaffirm their progress and also lend words of encouragement. In the following section, I introduced descriptions through their own quotes.

Amanda

I want to start with my high school self because I always planned, I always like to plan our time and it's okay when plans change. Even now, I'm still trying to come to understanding that plans change I get upset when things don't go my way. And I think to myself like, it's okay, if things don't go your way, maybe it is for a reason. I'm still learning.

Helena

Honestly, just get it done. I used to stress so much about things being like all perfect ,but at the end of the day, it just stressed it stressed me out way more than I needed to, and I had to do it, just get it done. And at the end of the day, I was fine.

Rosa

I think ask for help. I had never did, I never talked to my friends about my situation, maybe until like two years. I never felt comfortable talking about it. I think it just felt like, if I say it out loud, it's real. It's okay, like, you never know, how things can change when you maybe just talk to someone about how you're feeling.

Christina

If I could go back in time, I would tell myself to put myself first and don't be afraid to put yourself first because now that we are older, that is a problem that we have. And don't be afraid of that next step. What is, will be meant to be. You can't plan everything out life will. Life will throw life at you. Never, you will never be prepared for the storm that's to come. You need to learn just how to navigate it.

Jasmine

Something I would tell my younger self would be, you are capable, you are enough. And surround yourself with people who care for you. One more thing I want to say is that like, yeah, even though it feels like, I don't know, what I'm doing, sometimes I still feel like, lost. I always ask myself, what's next? I think, there are like research studies like this, where people share or have that willingness to hear other people and their stories—it'll bring more connectedness. I feel that's what, right now, people need is just feeling like, people understand them, and they're not alone in this.

Yanira

I would tell myself to just be authentic. Do what you can, don't overdo it. Because when I think about it in high school, I definitely overdid it just to like, I did too much that I did things I could barely keep up with. I believed everyone in school, if I did all the things, I would be able to get into any school I wanted. That's not the case, looking back, there were students who took their time who didn't do everything I did. And by taking their time, they put in more effort, they put in more strength. And they were able to achieve things.

Rebecca

I would say seek a mentorship and I would definitely say I wish I was offered mentorships. I think about the importance for guidance that it would make on a make or

break situation for a person. It just feel like a person can say, I see this potential and you'll let me help you push you and I'm not gonna judge you and I don't think you can do it. Because sometimes when you're young, your head is all over the place.

Overall, the overarching finding from the question, "What is one piece of advice you would tell your high school or younger self? Revolved around expertise and persistence.

Through this final reflection, it was critical to acknowledge the aspirations and values embedded in each collaborator's voices and experiences. These experiences aligned with the CCW framework, where the collaborators have an abundance of capital, which has allowed them to be resourceful in navigating structural and institutional challenges at their respective colleges (Yosso, 2005). Their assets have helped them understand that community college is not an easy one to navigate, but they persevered in the process. Lastly, the reflections highlighted the high value placed on education and educational aspirations from a personal perspective.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the data from the *Platicas* of seven Latina community college students as they navigated their educational journeys at community colleges. The collaborators of this study shed light on the range of challenges affecting their journeys. The four themes discussed and further unpacked included, familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational/social capital, and the barriers encountered along their journeys that spoke to the ongoing inequalities that continue in the Latino community and its students. Their *Platicas* provided insight into how the collaborators, even with ongoing challenges, saw themselves in a space of success, perseverance, and independence. Through this lens, the lived experiences of the collaborators were validated and honored. I created a safe space of vulnerability and reflection for both the collaborators and me by inviting an artifact to begin the conversation, and employing a *Platica*

methodology to establish a familiar and friendly tone, and ending the *Platica* with optimism as they move ahead in college. All the collaborators showed their use of the various capitals, while also carrying doubt due to ongoing barriers.

To answer the research questions guiding this study, two frameworks, LatCrit (Huber, 2010, and CCW (Yosso, 2005) were elevated to ground the *Platicas* and their stories. The first framework explored the concept of cultural wealth and the importance of identifying the multiple strengths of Communities of Color. The stories highlighted familial capital, navigational social capital, and aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). In the *Platicas*, discussed were the strengths and assets to gain insight into ways the collaborators may continue building, therefore higher education institutions can embrace Latino/a students as they continue to enroll and persist through community college. The 'LatCrit Theory framework helped guide the understanding of historical practices, policies, and systemic barriers that the Latino/a communities have experienced and continue to face (Huber, 2010). The findings also illustrated the driving force behind continuing to be enrolled, attending, and persisting in community college even through difficult moments.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In the 2018-2019 school year, approximately 1.3 million Latino/a students attended higher education institutions, including community college, the University of California, California State University, and private and nonprofit colleges (The Campaign for College Opportunity, 2021). Although this number has increased over the last couple of decades, Latino/a students enrolled in the community college system at higher numbers is not proportionate to the increase in degree attainment. Research showed more than three of four incoming students aspire to transfer to a 4-year university (Johnson & Mejia, 2020). Even though Latino/a students entering colleges in California are above average, there are still gaps and implications for college campuses to address and resolve the lack of persistence (Velasco et.al. 2024). As noted above, enrollment in community colleges has increased, but transfer progress still remain stagnant. This research study sought to explore the experiences of Latina students enrolled in a community college with stated aspirations of matriculating to a 4-year university.

In the previous chapter, the findings from seven Latina community college students were presented through counterstories. The collaborators' counter stories offered unique insights into the part process of navigating community college while managing home and life responsibilities and stressors. Through a data analysis, four major themes emerged from the *Platicas*. The four themes included familial, aspirational, navigational/social capital, and the barriers encountered along their journeys.

From this research study, I learned about the lived experiences of Latina students enrolled at a community college in Los Angeles County that identified their goal to transfer to a 4-year

institution. The lived experiences of Latina students are crucial to guiding and informing processes and policies to be intentionally student-centered. I investigated Latina community college student's unique needs and assets to further understand and affirm opportunities to address those needs and support their strengths. Furthermore, *Platicas* gave a voice to the seven collaborators who have an unimaginable drive and perseverance to help reimagine how students like them can be supported along their college journey and remove ongoing barriers to accomplish their goal to transfer.

The collaborators in this study have tremendous insight into the needs and interests to reach their highest potential, as detailed in Chapter 4. The comprehensive and rich data provided through *Platicas* gives way to this chapter. The following analysis and discussion focused on the significant findings related to the literature on the community college system and Latino/a students moving through it. Furthermore, through the collaborator's voices and lived experiences, this chapter paves the way to contextualize implications, and recommendations to guide and inform policies on how best to support students and transfer pathways specifically for Latino/a students.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Latina students reflect and describe their experiences navigating community college?

RQ2: What do Latinas students identify as their needs, challenges, and supports at their respective community colleges?

To answer the research questions, a qualitative study was conducted with seven community college students across several campuses in Los Angeles County. The collaborators engaged in a 60-minute *Platicas*, during which they shared about their family, journeys in community college, academics, and home responsibilities. I used Zoom to conduct the interviews and transcribed the collaborators' stories using Otter.ai, a speech-to-text application. After the completion of the *Platicas*, I transcribed, coded, and grouped using a deductive process, using the frameworks as guides to identify the themes, validate the frameworks and the data.

Four themes appeared from the data. They included familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational/social capital, and the barriers encountered along their journeys. The analysis of the themes through the lenses of two theoretical frameworks, LatCrit Theory (Huber, 2010) and CCW (Yosso, 2005). First, LatCrit Theory is a framework that aims to, as Delgado Bernal (2002) shared, "As theoretical frameworks in the field of law, CRT and LatCrit Theory explore the ways that so-called race-neutral laws and policies perpetuate racial and/or ethnic and gender subordination" (p. 4). LatCrit Theory is an appropriate lens through which to examine and reveal how Latinas experience gender, class, race, age, and sexual orientation while guiding how it intersects with immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (Delgado Bernal, 2002). In this same thread, CCW is a framework that elevates the concept of cultural wealth and the importance of identifying the multiple strengths of Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005). The framework is grounded in a strength-based understanding that Latino/as (or Communities of Color) bring capital to their school and educational experience. The framework highlights the following areas of capital: aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance capital (Yosso, 2005). A discussion of the four themes

follows in the next section with an examination of each theme individually. Elevating the counter stories through the frameworks offers insights into the collaborator's lives and the importance of looking at the whole student to ensure a clear path to persistence and success.

Analysis of Findings

I found the collaborators in this study to be multi-dimensional and come into the community college system with a wealth of cultural capital used in distinct ways throughout campus spaces and various settings. Moreover, even with levels of capital, the collaborators continued to experience barriers that add complexity not only to their educational journeys but also to their career and personal goals. The following sections discussed the findings and the four major themes from the *Platicas*. The four themes included: familial capital, aspirational capital, navigational/social capital, and the barriers encountered along their journeys. The themes discussed have a dynamic dimension that elevated the depth of the collaborators beyond being just students. Lastly, in this section, a discussion of the findings are presented in relation to existing literature to offer interpretive insights to form a more comprehensive understanding of the capital and barriers community college students experience. Throughout the *Platicas*, collaborators spoke about their networks, families, and perseverance to keep working toward their goals. With these points in mind, the collaborators shared capital they possessed and were likely unacknowledged by various institutions.

Familial Capital

In the *Platicas*, the collaborators shared familial capital, not only as a form of inspiration but also as guidance or advice. Familial capital refers to cultural traditions passed down via families and carries a feeling of culture and common history, memory, and cultural intuition

(Yosso, 2005). This capital can be knowledge derived and nurtured from family and community experience (Yosso, 2005). For most collaborators, being in college was important. While overwhelming, it was also motivating. The collaborators shared stories of their mothers connecting to a counselor or taking it up to themselves to learn about a college option. At times, a cousin shared insight about their experience and provided advice. Similarly, siblings held a significant role in supporting the collaborators throughout their journey. For some, the sibling relationship served as a form of emotional support, which provided motivation and reassurance that all this was worth it. In some cases, the collaborators supported their siblings by helping them with homework, selecting high school classes, and tutoring. This role helped them pass down their knowledge.

The findings in this study also elevated the roles the collaborators held in their homes. This showed the collaborator's experiences as multi-faceted to include the collaborators as a source of knowledge and resourcefulness to their younger siblings and family members. For others, it was an opportunity to be a role model and inspire their younger siblings. Most of the collaborators uplifted having close ties to family that motivated them, both immediate and extended, was a predictor for academic success.

The collaborators drew upon their familial capital to strengthen their aspiration to continue college, transfer, obtain a bachelor's degree, and begin a career. There were numerous examples of their roles throughout the *Platicas*, most notably by Amanda, Helena, and Yanira. All three collaborators shared a close relationship with a family member who supported them through various stages of their college journey. They understood that their encouragement and actions placed expectations on them to do well-regardless of setbacks.

The collaborators described that without their family's ongoing encouragement, college would be even more difficult at times. Amanda and Helena spoke of their mothers' ongoing support when responsibilities seemed daunting. Amanda shared, she could always rely on her mother during challenging times because her mother would always find words of encouragement. These words always gave Amanda a sense of comfort and empowerment. This was particularly important when Amanda told her mother she needed a laptop for class, a car, and extra money for textbooks. Her mother always found a way to support her. Helena's mother was similar. Helena's mother took the role of counselor by taking her on campus tours, helping her connect to on-campus resources, and encouraging her to look at different 4-year universities. She recalled:

When I told her like, I want to transfer to UC Santa Barbara. She's said, "Okay, let's go visit the campus." We went to visit the campus and we were signing up for things. She's just my cheerleader. She just amazes me.

For Yanira, the support she received by her family members, such as her cousins, gave her a sense of security. She felt privileged to have a close relationship with her cousins, who provided constant guidance because they had also attended a community college, transferred to a 4-year university, and were now in their professional careers. Additionally, Yanira was thankful to her parents as they created a quiet space to study and complete her school assignments. The collaborators were thankful for their parents' awareness of how to support them emotionally and physically despite they had little knowledge of the college process.

Navigational Social Capital

Throughout the *Platicas*, examples of navigational social capital were present for many of the collaborators. Navigational capital recognizes the skills and abilities of individuals as they

navigate social institutions or unsupportive environments (Yosso, 2005). This type of capital refers to institutions not created with marginalized communities in mind. The second part of this capital is social capital, described as the networks, assets, and resources found in communities (Yosso, 2005). This social support can be individuals or centers of information where People of Color live and work (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021). The previous chapter discussed navigational social capital would be brought together to refer to the navigational social networks the collaborators were part of in their journey. In this study, the collaborators showed important networks they relied on when they needed academic and social supports as well as a sense of belonging at their respective community colleges. Together, both constructs as capitals play a critical role for the collaborators in their academic success and emotional belonging. This can become a source of empowerment and self-efficacy as they transfer to a 4-year university.

The collaborators in this study expressed challenges navigating community college, from making appointments with a general counselor to counselors suggesting changing majors to sharing words of discouragement—all these experiences made them grateful for what relationships they had built with their networks. They recognized their networks played an essential role in knowledge-building during their time in community college, and because of this leaned into them as much as possible. From the *Platicas*, it was clearly understood that the networks were a trusted source of information, at times more than their previous high school counselors.

Jasmine, Yanira, and Rebecca spoke on their navigational capital where these networks worked at building authentic, trusting, and convenient relationships. And because of these

relationships, the collaborators continued to go to school and achieve higher grades. In the previous chapter, Jasmine recalled the following:

The program has a teacher that is another gem. He's allowed me to find my voice as well. Now I see myself asking for help when I need it, and especially with him. He is that teacher who has really brought that out of me, even though it still needs a little bit more work, but he's slowly bringing that out—it's okay to ask for help. And I have appreciated that from him.

Throughout the *Platicas*, the collaborators sought out advising and guidance where correct information was highly valued. Additionally, relationship based advising on cultural proximity was deeply appreciated. The collaborators highlighted having someone on campus who looked like them, spoke their language, and shared similar lived experiences shaped their college experience to be a positive one and quieted their doubts. Many of the collaborators felt validated in their decisions and reaffirmed their aspirations. As part of the success of this relationship, the advisors on campus clearly communicated elevated expectations, and the collaborators found this as a form of support and belief in their ability. The engagement that resulted in a relationship with on-campus staff positively influenced the collaborator's college journey.

Aspirational Capital

While challenges were present in the collaborator's lives, the sense of aspiration did not leave their side. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to remain hopeful for the future despite actual and imagined obstacles (Yosso, 2005). Several of the collaborators articulated aspirations not only for themselves but also for their parents, their siblings, and their communities. Some of the collaborators dealt with immigration, eviction, and financial insecurities, which created more barriers to their learning and their accomplishments. In many cases, the collaborators went

through episodes of uncertainty, but they knew education would be a tool to help them avoid situations where they had to step up and step in to solve. They were aware of how college would pave a path towards financial success and security. They used the aspiration as a guiding light for motivation to obtain a degree to begin a career. Although this study did not ask the question about being first-generation college students, the majority were first-generation and harnessed it as a point for perseverance.

The data in the previous chapter detailed that some of the collaborators attended more than one college, which included 4-year universities. Due to financial reasons, the collaborators stopped attending and instead enrolled at a community college. The reality of the change affected them, and they began to question their ability to persist. These experiences magnified when institutional barriers like access to clear information and resources were not readily available. Christina and Rosa spoke about their challenges that went beyond academics—they spoke about how their respective families had unfortunate situations where they, as daughters, had to step into the breadwinner role. To overcome the challenges, they had to rely on jobs and sometimes drop from full-time to part-time, pause school, or stop attending completely. Christina spoke of her experience:

And then I went back to school, and then it was going good. And then something happened with my, with my dad. With immigration, he was finally caught, unfortunately. And I had to drop my classes because I had to focus on getting him out.

Rebecca's situation was different, yet similar, because she is a student-parent with immediate family obligations. In her *Platica*, she detailed working 50-60 hours a week, while going to school full time. Even with ongoing barriers and challenges, they remained steadfast toward their goal.

Barriers Faced by the Collaborators

In the previous chapter, the collaborators elevated the numerous barriers they faced and continued to face as they navigate community college. The collaborators spoke about: (a) disconnect between students and information; (b) commitment to work and school; (c) personal technology to do well in school; and (d) personal transportation. Even with familial capital, navigational social capital, and aspirational capital, the collaborators experienced a unique set of barriers as they enrolled in community college. Many of the collaborators had issues accessing counselors who understood their unique needs and where at times received incorrect information. The theme encapsulated the negative tensions experienced between students and counseling staff at different times throughout the transfer process. As Rebecca recalled:

And right when I came in, our transfer rate out of her River College is only like, less than 5%. I think you should consider other applications or pathways. And I remember being so like, let down, like, oh, my goodness, like, this is how we started off the meeting. And at that point, I didn't want to be rude. So, I finished the meeting with her. But I just felt like, you can't ask someone with that mentality, like, hey, I need help finding the classes.

After negative interactions, collaborators seemed hesitant to return to the counseling center to request more information or clarification. Nevertheless, they remained focused on the transfer process and leaned further into relationships they had cultivated with school staff that were supportive. The deepened relationships played a critical role in their sense of belonging and validation.

The second barrier summarized how collaborators navigated work and school. It was clear the collaborators held multiple roles and responsibilities in addition to being students. They were aware they had a responsibility to their families that maybe some of their peers did not have to do. When describing the various responsibilities, the collaborators expressed feelings of

frustration, being overwhelmed, and resentment. Some of the collaborators worked full-time jobs, while also attending school full-time. Rosa shared the following:

So right now, it's only me and my older sister working. So we're paying all the bills. And then before, my dad was working it was better. My mom never had an actual job, she would just more like sell food and stuff to make money. And she always had to do that because we grew up poor.

They acknowledged balancing both full-time could not be sustainable because they were concerned one was not getting the full attention it needed—and in many cases it was school. The balancing of work and school heightened the collaborators' mental health. They struggled with dealing with ongoing stress and coped with it in various ways, including handling it in silence.

The third barrier found was a lack of technology. The collaborators voiced they could not fully immerse themselves in school and, at times, in specific courses. The collaborators discussed that buying a laptop could cause financial stress in the household, but they acknowledged it was necessary to do well academically. For Amanda, owning a laptop was essential for her major, as she detailed a conversation with her professor:

Well, I don't have a laptop. I told you this. And he says, yeah, well, you need to get one. In my mind I told him, how are you gonna tell me that I need to get one, we don't have the money for it. So I grabbed my stuff, and as I was walking out the door, he's says, you can't just leave because I told you that you need a laptop. I turned around and said no, I'm gonna go get one right now. I return the next day with an Apple laptop to realize that these programs are not compatible. There is no way he just told me that. So then I had to get a new laptop. So it has been quite the road trip with the program.

The collaborators described accessing the college's computer lab regularly to complete their assignments, including staying late on campus. This was another stressor among the collaborators because a few did not live close to their campuses, or if they did, they had to take public transportation to and from school. Due to the dependency on the college's computer lab,

they feared hours would get shortened due to budget cuts or other reasons—affecting their ability to access it.

Lastly, lack of transportation was a barrier encountered by the collaborators as they began their college journeys. In the *Platicas*, they reflected, owning their own transportation was more about experiencing a sense of independence. As mentioned previously, the collaborators used public transportation. This was more of a challenge when the collaborator lived further away from their campus and had to take multiple trains and buses to get to class. Yanira had the longest commute among the collaborators from Highland Park to her college:

I take two trains that equal about two and a half hours—just one way. Yeah. And it's chaotic, it gets chaotic. There's been times where I'm like, I cannot do this anymore, and that's where it has pushed me to learn to drive. My dad was like, yeah, maybe you do need a car. Because the train travels some places that are a little more dangerous, and I do not feel safe.

Some collaborators shared they did not want to inconvenience their parents or family members to pick them up from school, especially when they stayed late to study or finish an assignment. More importantly, the collaborators described moments when they were scared by the time they took the bus or the number of incidents they witnessed during their rides. They were aware that these occurrences affected their mental health and their sense of security, while at the same they knew they had to get to school somehow.

Implications

Community colleges, as a system, have an open-door policy with the intent to build a broader set of opportunities for students across various backgrounds (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). However, ongoing research has aligned success to those students from middle-class backgrounds who will reap the maximum success and will obtain a bachelor's degree in a shorter amount of

time versus a student from an underserved community (Goldrick-Rab, 2010). To be responsive to student's needs, community colleges have developed multiple programs. One program is Guided Pathways. According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2020):

Guided pathways is an institution-wide approach to student success that is based on giving students clear, coherent, and structured educational experiences that build in a variety of academic and non-academic supports. Pathways puts equity at the center of colleges' educational approach so they can improve outcomes for all students. (p. 4)

Another program is the Associate Degree to Transfer, where it would guarantee admissions to a CSU using an easier transfer process (Patton & Pilati, 2012). This section includes a discussion of the implications of this for various stakeholders across the community college systems.

Although the programs mentioned above have been implemented through different planning stages, it is critical to acknowledge and learn that a program can affect a student in different ways—it can be effective or detrimental to a student's success based on their lived experiences.

Implications for Students

The implications of this study centrally place the voices and the needs of the collaborators as they navigate community college with the hope of transferring. The findings in this study also illustrated the family roles and responsibilities the collaborators take at home. Some of the collaborators spoke on issues with finances and financial aid either at a 4-year university or currently at their community college. The lack of financial aid was not due to a lack of awareness. It was because the collaborators had layers of stressors where they had to focus on home responsibilities. This affected their academic success, such as their lowered grade point average. A lower grade point average affected their financial aid package, and they had to work more, which created a situation where school was not a priority. Additionally, going from full-

time to part-time affected their access to financial aid packages or grants. These types of actions resulted in a cycle where the collaborators felt constrained and hopeless by the circumstances.

To fully support students, it would be critical for campus resources, including advisors, to take a deeper understanding of the financial pressures experienced by their students, especially those who are first-generation and from marginalized communities. When a student's financial resources are limited, there are implications for a student's life beyond the classroom. As mentioned above and in the previous chapter, financial limitations caused by the college campus or by home responsibilities will cause a student to work more to pay for school, which then takes time away from their studies. The bartering may cause a student to enroll from full-time to part-time hindering their academic progress and to successfully complete their bachelor's degree. To avoid pauses, withdrawals, or changes in schools, it would be critical for community college campuses to look at students through a holistic lens to fully engage them academically.

Implications for Practice

Familial capital, navigational social capital, and aspirational capital were clear throughout the collaborator's *Platicas*. The types of capital brought onto campus have implications for the stakeholders to acknowledge, welcome, and invest in collaborators and their families. The collaborators experienced support from their families, school networks, and personal relationships, and this was key to keeping motivated, especially through challenging times. The networks they built with community groups and on-campus programs helped them navigate concerns and questions to build their efficacy, which led to the assets of navigational social capital. And lastly, the aspirational capital that stemmed from the family and community networks acted like cheerleaders for the collaborators.

As shown in the findings, the collaborators wanted to do well to be able to transfer and obtain a degree. Driving their aspirations were their family, including their motivation to begin their career and their understanding of how an education can change their lives. This highlighted capital is continuous, and not conditional on immigration status, enrollment type, or accessibility. The collaborator's stories displayed that they will persist regardless of challenges and barriers. Many collaborators would not have enrolled if it were not for these networks. As a result, community college campuses should be intentional about validating the social capitals as an asset mindset instead of maintaining a deficit mindset, and most importantly, welcoming students to talk about them and further unpack them to feel supported and provide a sense of belonging.

Unfortunately, a student's responsibilities will not stop once they arrive at their 4-year institution. The responsibilities will remain, but now a student will carry them onto a new campus. To ensure success, students will need similar or more targeted supports to help them obtain their degree. It will be a stage where colleges must collaborate with students and their community colleges to fully understand their needs and remove roadblocks.

Implications for Policy

The findings in this study can inform policy at the local, regional, and state levels by shaping practices for policies and procedures that are student-centered and led. To do this, community college leadership, faculty, and other on-campus staff should be involved in developing an in-depth policy analysis of programs, resources, and supports available on campuses. Furthermore, a review of data sets should accompany the analysis. This can be an opportunity to build a narrative using data to inform decision-making that connects directly to a student's academic success, especially in the transfer progress and program. This will allow each

community college to see how student data can be used beyond enrollment to foster a college-going culture across various student groups.

Additionally, the data analysis could further capture where in a student's journey does the college stakeholders see attrition or retention. This will encourage discourse on gaps in support and resources. Furthermore, it can lead to defining the quality of the academic experience and through this lens, learn more about student engagement and how it can be defined and identified. In this study, the collaborators shared both positive and negative experiences of on-campus resources, and how each campus held different standards of support. Their stories in accessing information can support how best community colleges connect with students so they may be able to share what works best for them, and what does not work.

Implications for Research

Engaging students in program improvement is only one-half of how best it is to support academic success. The collaborators shined a light on how no two campuses delivered the same support services, and because of this reality, they had to take public transportation across town to the college, where the support was high-quality and ongoing. The experiences in this study may be unique, however stakeholders should give special attention to their stories. The findings in this study only focused on Latina female students and their experiences in community colleges in Los Angeles County. To build a more comprehensive narrative on the needs and the capital carried by students, it would be critical to expand the study across non-Latino/a students of Color and beyond Los Angeles County. This would help stakeholders build an understanding of how to view their students. Necessary research can take place from the lens of the community college through leaders, educators, and other student-facing staff. By exploring their narratives, it can

help to understand how college staff view a student in their educational journey, and how they recognize the social capitals, and the barriers at their respective college campuses. Bridging both narratives will allow for ongoing discourse in learning how best to support students through their time in community college.

The collaborators in this study described their family and home responsibilities and how it affected them both personally and academically. Even when the odds were against them, the collaborators continued to attend classes and work towards their college transfer. To be transformative, campus staff must reflect on their student populations, the assets they hold, and the unique needs each population brings to their college journey. With an overwhelming amount of research on the student and their experiences, although important, it is only one side to the coin. To be transformative, community college staff must engage in both a qualitative methodology and a mixed methods approach to understand their college campuses and their student's journey.

Recommendations

This research study closely examined seven Latina community college students in Los Angeles County and how they have experienced community college with the goal to transfer. Throughout their stories, each collaborator echoed that more needs to be done to support their educational journeys to go beyond academics. This is important to note because community colleges are open-access institutions, where students with low-income and of color enroll in larger numbers. These students have the goal to transfer to a 4-year institution. It is the responsibility of the institutions to ensure students have the skills, credentials, and resources to make their goals a reality.

Recommendations for Community Colleges—Board of Governors

The following recommendations come from the study’s findings and, most importantly, from the collaborator’s voices and lived experiences. The recommendations in this section are to improve student outcomes, including Latino/a students. In this section, both general and specific recommendations will be provided to a spectrum of stakeholders engaged in the community college setting. Involving multiple stakeholders will elevate how multi-faceted students are with their needs and support-so as an ecosystem, we can ensure they persist and succeed. Also, recommendations for other areas of research to ensure a student’s academic success will be discussed below.

Holistic Approach to Student Persistence

Community colleges must adopt a clear definition and build holistic care for students. In doing so, a community college will recognize a student is beyond a seat—they are humans with stressful external factors that affect their personal and academic life. The goal of this approach is to tie support services through a personalized lens for every student and their experiences. The care should include mental, social, economic, and academic support to meet the varying needs of students. The role of community college is now beyond providing an education, it can now play a role in messaging well-being for students through awareness campaigns or initiatives. Additionally, program development should be done alongside students to gauge effectiveness and implementation. Undoubtedly, this process will encourage student voices in the design of the program and its success. In doing so, community colleges will give space to examine how Latina or Students of Color experience higher education and in the same thread elevate assets found across these student groups.

Revamping Financial Aid

In this study, financial aid was not the focus of conversations, however there was a focus on full-time and part-time jobs and lack of access to financial aid. It is critical for Latino/a students to be able to receive a financial aid package based on need versus on grade point average. The collaborators in this study elevated when their grade point average went down, so did their financial aid, where they had to increase their work hours, still affecting their grades. This created anxiety around college planning and outlook. The state of California must review financial aid policies and review student populations to close gaps in financial aid.

To remove some of the anxiety from the students, colleges must engage with the students and their families on building college knowledge with a focus on financial aid. This engagement must be done before a student leaves high school and in a culturally responsive and relevant way once a student arrives on a college campus and be ongoing. A student's financial situation will differ from year to year, one that includes more than tuition and board—this includes an income from work wages as well. Uplifting familial capital in this environment will be beneficial to the family, including parents in the discourse will help demystify barriers of college costs and gain an in-depth understanding of grants, loans, and scholarships.

Recommendations for Community Colleges

In the stories above, collaborators shared experiences that can lend to the development of better community college practices to engage with students—both part-time and full-time students. Some of the recommendations below are already being implemented and are showing promising outcomes—it is important to seek, scale, and implement them across all campuses to ensure success.

Commitment to Students

To ensure the college continues to be student-centered, it is important for the college to comprehensively review its mission, vision, and values to assess if they are still relevant and if they reflect the core work of the institution. Being able to regularly review these statements alongside various stakeholders—high schools, community members, current and former students, faculty, and deans—to come together and discuss a sense of purpose to uplift a shared commitment to providing high-quality, accessible education to meet the needs of students. This process will also call for reflection for the college and its leadership to acknowledge the structural and institutional barriers that contribute to a student’s struggle and levels of support. This engagement will give way to building an authentic college culture that is student-centered through collaboration. The development of stakeholder engagement can direct the college to develop a clear set of priorities for student groups affected by external factors.

Community College Culture

Community colleges must find ways to create and implement community-building strategies informed and led by students. Many community colleges identified as commuter schools, where students do not live on campus and commute to school every day. This creates a challenge to building a strong school culture. However, through a holistic lens, colleges can transform into places of connection. It was important for the collaborators to engage with students and staff with similar experiences, backgrounds, and goals. These connections can be accomplished through one-day fairs or multiple-day summits where college alumni enrolled in the institutions where students want to attend, come to speak about their experiences. By establishing a strong college culture, a sense of belonging and a welcoming environment will be

developed for Latino/a students where they can utilize all their capitals to ensure they transfer but also complete their bachelor's degree.

Scaling Successful Programs

This study discussed programs such as Puente and Adelante in high regard. Unfortunately, both these programs were not accessible or available to all the collaborators, or students in general. The work towards scaling can be part of the discussion of the partnership. However, to create sustainable and long-lasting change, leadership at institutions must forge ahead to leverage their relationships at different community colleges and advocate for successful programs to be brought to their colleges. In this study, the collaborators spoke about how the programs engaged them in a culturally responsive way and were able to focus on the student's agency and capitals as they navigated more than just the transfer process. These partnerships will provide insights into how effective and relevant support programs and resources are to closing academic gaps and building success for various student groups.

Cultivating School Staff to Cultivate Capital

Program staff such as advisors and counselors are the front-line staff that help students. Many of the collaborators in this study shared that some of their counselors created doubt in them, where they never returned to them and had second thoughts about returning to the counseling center to seek further help. To ensure students are heard and motivated, it will be crucial to integrate CCW (Yosso, 2005) into professional development. This will help to review the types of capital students bring with them and how they manifest validate a student's experience. Additionally, the staff engagement can be a strategy session to think through culturally relevant and responsive practices and pedagogy. To do this, administrators can pull

student data—including psychological services, enrollment status, economic factors, and environmental that influence a student’s on-campus experiences. From this data, student profiles can be built where counselors find their value, uniqueness, and strengths and how they manifest in white-centric institutions. For example, one session can be developed for one of the capitals to recognize students to create an in-depth understanding of strengths and assets. Providing professional development and learning through student-focused programming, it will help formulate an asset mindset when designing resources, programs, and services. In turn, program staff can remind students of the tools and skills they already carry with them to be successful in the post-transfer process.

Partnerships Between High Schools, Community Colleges, and Community-Based Organizations

The building of relationships within and between different sectors will directly affect student success and community outcomes. They are the cornerstone to a successful community, and more importantly to the success of a student. The partnerships accurately outline what navigational social capital looks like in everyday interactions. For example, a partnership between a high school and a community-based organization supports a student, and within both entities, the students strengthen their navigational social capital. If at any point the student needs support, the organization can be a bridge builder to programs at the community college—programs that are not easily known or accessible to the student. As a result, the student increases their knowledge of how best to navigate college and moves towards a solution for an issue. The college then supports the student—increasing the student’s navigational social capital.

A collaborative and collective approach should help organizations better understand how colleges support students and show gaps in program delivery. The goal of the partnership will be

to build engagement and accountability practices, where each sector identifies its roles and responsibilities to ensure a great partnership. Furthermore, partnerships will help bridge knowledge building to explore the assets and the needs found in the community. These actions will result in understanding student's lived experiences, and exploring the opportunities to advocate for more resources to remove barriers.

Recommendations for Future Research

An important dimension of this study was the qualitative approach and the narratives of each of the collaborators. However, much of the data surfaced from community colleges is numbers based, and unfortunately not stories. To be transformative, student-centered and success-focused, we must reconcile both to ensure leaders across campuses take into consideration how dynamic and engaged students can be.

Beyond Quantitative Data

This recommendation elevates the goal of this research study—to engage and listen to college student's lived experiences and stories. However, with the qualitative data collected, community colleges must listen carefully and act upon recommendations derived from the stories. The recommendations cannot live on a shelf or a computer or through empty promises. The collaborators in this study knew what they needed, what needed to change, and how it would affect their lives. The data they provide can inform programming, practice, and policy. Additionally, future research must clearly illustrate the multiple layers of community college students, including financial security, family and home life, housing security, and mental health. The design of this research should be through the CCW lens—where all capitals aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistance

capital should be studied to better understand potential connections to resource creation, as well as professional development. Studies that uplift how these nuances impact college persistence would be essential for college leadership to take into consideration as they review staff, budgets, and services.

Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) Program

Transfer pathways have strengthened in the last few years; however, there little evidence of their effectiveness. This includes the study of the TAG (Transfer Admission Guarantee) program (Pasillas, 2023). The TAG program guarantees a seat for community college students who complete a set of courses with a minimum grade point average (Pasillas, 2023). Unlike the ADT (Student Transfer Achievement Reform Act, 2010) TAG allows students to transfer to a UC or a private institution (Pasillas, 2023). To ensure transfer and retention success, a partnership that outlines a clear roadmap between a community college and a 4-year university must be at the center of student success. The goal of the research would be to review the admission standards process alongside coordination between the institutions. Additionally, be able to recognize the resources, counseling, and a course road map to determine transfer, enrollment, and retention. Even with guaranteed admission, it is important to identify the collaborators in this study have family and job responsibilities that impact grade point averages.

Leadership Perspective

Student stories are crucial to informing how best to remedy systemic inequities, however further research on community college staff, including presidents, deans, and program staff, will be pivotal in shining a light on college-driven practices. The goal of this type of research would be to examine students' feelings of college leadership and how they know their student

populations and their needs and circumstances. It would be valuable to have the research co-exist further to show the gaps in knowledge or understanding from leadership. Together, it will highlight how college staff see students and place ownership on community colleges to remove barriers and inequities from their practices to increase student success meaningfully.

Conclusion

The design of this qualitative study was to better understand Latina community college students who have the hope to transfer to a 4-year institution. Specifically, the study searched to uplift the stories and voices of community college students as they related to their capital, institutional barriers, and roles as students. The seven Latina collaborators described their experiences as they progressed through college while managing personal and home responsibilities that affected their academics.

Being in the presence of the collaborators as they told their stories of hardships, goals, persistence, and hope, it was clear the gaps persist in service and program delivery models. Despite the ongoing challenges, the collaborators aspire to transfer, obtain a career, and move into their careers. Therefore, numerous stakeholders and partners should be engaged in research, practice, and policy to create conditions for students to be successful. Ongoing dialogue from critical perspectives will be essential to forming and implementing a proactive approach to community college success. And be able to move community colleges to be a place of safety and support that are comprehensive to build communities of trust.

The *Platicas* in this study served as a reminder that while much of the research and discourse has been focused on a student's experience navigating community college, we must take the time to explore what is the college's role in engaging students. The collaborators

uplifted academic support cannot be the only solution for success. Support should be identified and incorporated and take into account the multiple roles students carry. It is the hope that the findings of this study help colleges, and other stakeholders to think through programs and services development to nurture a college-going culture to expand transfer programs to better assist Latino/a students.

The collaborators' experiences in this study showed that despite challenges, they used familial, navigational social, and aspirational capital to persist through their educational journeys. As Christina shared during her *Platica*:

I was just taking a look at my transcripts when I started to see when I stopped. And it's funny because I can recall when I was going through all those moments, and you can see my Ws, my S, my As, my Cs and then random Ws. And I remember when I withdrew, and I sent an email to all my teachers. My biology teacher really stuck with me and she said, don't let what's going on in your life stop you from pursuing what you want. And it still stuck with me because it was just like I was going through this terrible thing in my life, about to lose my family.

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letters

Dear [NAME OF CONTACT],

My name is Carla Lopez-Valdes, and I am currently a third-year doctoral candidate at Loyola Marymount University in the School of Education's Doctorate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice Program. For my dissertation, I am conducting a study that seeks to explore the experiences of community colleges students as they navigate the transfer process. I intend to interview six (6) Latina community college students individually.

I am requesting your help in recruiting participants for this study. Please forward this recruitment email to any individuals you know who fulfill all six (6) of the following requirements, or may know individuals who do fulfill the requirements below:

1. Identifies as female.
2. Identifies as Latina
3. Student is eligible under the financial requirements of the California Promise Grant
4. Currently enrolled in a community college in Los Angeles County for more than two (2) years
5. Attends one of the following community colleges in Los Angeles County, including Antelope Valley, Cerritos, Citrus, Compton, El Camino, Glendale, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Mt. San Antonio, Pasadena, Rio Hondo, Santa Clarita, or Santa Monica
6. Looking to transfer to a 4-year institution (California State University, University of California, or a private university).

Enclosed with this email is a pdf version of the recruitment letter for potential participants. If you know students that fit the criteria above, I ask that you forward them the letter. In the letter, I provide an overview of the study along with information on the interviews. Additionally, my contact information can be found in the letter if they have questions.

Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions concerning this request via phone at 310-869-9749 or via email at clopezva@lion.lmu.edu. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Carla Lopez-Valdes

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Carla Lopez-Valdes, and I am currently a third-year doctoral candidate at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, California, in the School of Education's Doctorate in Educational Leadership for Social Justice Program.

For my dissertation, I am conducting a study that seeks to explore the experiences of Latina community college students as they navigate the transfer process. Students must be eligible under the financial requirements of the California Promise Grant. I intend to interview six (6) Latina community college students individually and then conduct a focus group to share out my initial analysis of data from the interviews. I am searching for Latina students who are enrolled at one of the community colleges in Los Angeles County, including Antelope Valley, Cerritos, Citrus, Compton, El Camino, Glendale, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Mt. San Antonio, Pasadena, Rio Hondo, Santa Clarita, or Santa Monica.

If you are interested in participating, please send me an email. Once I receive your email, I will send you an informed consent form. In the email, I will also ask you to confirm that you are eligible to participate in the study via this [link](#) by December 10, 2023. Potential participants will be informed no later than December 20, 2023, if selected to participate in this study. You will also receive a small token of appreciation from me.

Please feel free to contact me directly with any questions concerning this request via phone at 310-869-9749 or via email at clopezva@lion.lmu.edu. Thank you for your time and attention.

Thank you for your consideration to be a part of this study.

Best regards,

Carla

APPENDIX B

Individual Interview Protocol

Interview Information	
Date:	Subject Name:
Time:	Pseudonym:
Location:	

1. Introduction	Notes:
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Hello, my name is Carla Lopez-Valdes. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my study. **These interviews are intended to investigate the experiences of Latinas enrolled in community colleges in LA County that are eligible under the financial requirements of the Cal Grant, and I would like to remind you that your real name and any identifying information will not be published in the study.**

During the interview, I'll ask you to tell me about your experiences as a community college student and how you are navigating the transfer process. I am going to ask you specifically about your experiences as a Latina and what has shaped your experiences in community college.

These questions are not intended to be intrusive or make you feel uncomfortable, but **if I ask a question that you do not feel comfortable answering, please just tell me that you do not want to answer and we will move on to the next question.**

I anticipate the interview will take approximately 60 minutes. With your permission, I will record audio via Zoom so that I can transcribe the conversation and use the transcript for analysis.
Do you have any questions before we begin?

2. Interview Questions	Notes:
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Before we begin, I would like to connect on an item you selected that has been with you along your college journey. I would love to hear from you why you chose this item.

1. When did you realize this was your item?
2. Is there a memory you would like to share about this object?
3. What made you want to share this object in particular?

The first few questions I will ask about your family.

1. Tell me about your background -
 1. Can you tell me about your family background?
 1. *Can you share about your role in your family?*
 2. *Where did you grow up?*
 2. Can you share the educational attainment of your immediate family members?

The next set of questions will focus on your high school experience.

1. How does your family/ organizations/ school staff support you? Or supported you in high school?

1. *Did you do any extracurricular activities in high school?*
2. *Did you build a strong relationship with a school staff member?*
2. What factors played a role in your choice to attend your college?
 1. *Was there another college that you wanted to attend?*

This last set of questions focuses on your experience at your respective college.

1. How has your experience been so far at your college (both academically and socially)
 1. *What have some things that worked? What have been the challenges so far?*
 2. *Who has supported (family, friends, former counselors) you?*
2. When did you decide to declare your goal to transfer?
 1. *What helped you make the decision to transfer?*
 2. *What programs supported you in this decision?*
3. What resources have been provided for the transfer process?
 1. *What programs have been helpful?*
4. Once you arrive at your 4-year university, what will be your major?
 1. *What is your dream career? What is your hope for the future?*

Closing Question

1. What is one piece of advice that you would tell your high school or younger self?

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III. Closing Notes

We need to start wrapping up our interview now, but before we do, **is there anything you would like to add that I didn't ask about?**
[STOP RECORDING.]

Thank you for your time and your thoughtful responses. My next step is to transcribe this conversation so I can use it in my data set for analysis. **Is it ok if I reach out to you if I have questions or need clarifications about this conversation?**

As previously mentioned, I will follow up with you and all the participants to confirm the date of the focus group. During that time in the focus group, the participants will be able to make any additions or revisions to ensure that I am accurately and thoroughly representing you responses. The focus group will be held via Zoom, for approximately 60 minutes. I will email you the confirmed time and date, along with a Zoom link, and a confidentiality pledge.

Lastly, I would like to connect with the participants, this will allow you and the other participants to review my initial analysis of the data. Engaging in this step is not mandatory for this study, but you can expect to hear from me in the next 2-3 months with that option should you choose to participate.

Thank you again. If you think of any questions, please feel free to contact via phone at 310-869-9749 or via email at clopezva@lion.lmu.edu

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