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Testimonios of Latino/A Students in Hispanic Serving Institutions: Lessons for Community Colleges

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The University of San Francisco

TESTIMONIOS OF LATINO/A STUDENTS IN HISPANIC SERVING
INSTITUTIONS: LESSONS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A Dissertation Presented

to

The Faculty of the School of Education
International Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Luz O. Briceño-Moreno

San Francisco

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THE UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Dissertation Abstract

Testimonios of Latino/a Students in Hispanic Serving Institutions: Community Colleges

This qualitative study was conducted at a Northern California community college with eight Latino/a student's and the utilization of their *testimonios* to bring awareness to their academic experiences, successes and needs as first-generation college students. A large majority of Latino/a students who do enroll in college begin at community colleges, this stands to be the first point of entry into higher education for current and future Latino/a student's (Santiago & Stettner, 2013). Community colleges graduating mostly vocationally trained Latino/a student's continue to feed into a history of limited educational and societal mobility which is vastly different than the white students experience (Cohen, 2008). Community colleges have an obligation to address the issues of inequitable services to Latino/a student's that will change the trajectory of their educational experiences. New resources and strategies need to be implemented to increase the rate of Latino/a community college graduates and transfers to four-year universities (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

The problem of access and opportunity for Latino/a students in community colleges is great and needs to be addressed especially as they become the majority on many community college campuses. For some community colleges that are considered Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) through Title V of the United States educational code, serving this Latino/a population with equal opportunities could not be of greater importance (Higher Education Act, 1965). This study demonstrated in its student narratives the various systems of support, such as family and transfer readiness programs, that helped students accomplish their academic and

career goals. These students also shared stories racial biases, lack of financial resources, and systemic obstacles that created educational barriers. The utilization of student *testimonios* is necessary and imperative for institutions to create services they find most useful, and finally to provide the best pedagogical practices to deliver successful academic outcomes.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee, and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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12/15/16

To all of those that paved the way for this journey to be an option for me in my lifetime. I thank
you and dedicate this to you.

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I tell my student's, my son, my nieces and nephews when they struggle with school and question if college is for them, one response. I tell them there is no difference between you and I except time. I share with them that my college degrees were not accomplished because I was smart, but because I was whiling to put in the hard work and time needed of me to finish it. I told them I asked for help, from any resource, from beginning to end. I tell them I was not a smart student, but I gained some valuable traits from my parents, that were extremely useful in college, having a strong work ethic, dedication, perseverance, resiliency, insight, bravery, and commitment.

What I do remember from my childhood was that there were no vacations in the summer. We worked or went to summer school. Sometimes we did both. My brother and we five sisters worked alongside our parents working in the grape fields or pear fields of Northern California. They would remind us constantly, that if we did not want to have this type of physically exhausting employment in our future, then we needed to go to college and do well in school. We went to summer school not because we were behind academically, but because my parents valued education and felt one could not have too much of it. They saved financially, and invested in our education and showed us how to sacrifice and push our capacities to grow in spirit and intellect. They wanted us to know that we were capable of great things, and showed us that as long as we were whiling to put in the hard work, there was not anything in the world that we could not accomplish.

Our parents had sacrificed all that they had accomplished in Mexico so we could reach beyond the limits only available to us in Mexico. Our parents had a son and five daughters that

deserved greatness, and I thank them for this insight. We have all gone to college and continue to return for additional knowledge. I thank my sisters and brother for valuing a college degree as much as I do and supporting me through mine. I thank you also for making it easier for me to go to college because you all had gone before me. To my brother-in-laws, sister-in-laws, nieces and nephews, I thank you for all your prayers, love, and support, as I covered myself with that energy when I struggled academically. To my husband and son, you mean the world to me and inspire me to get up early and stay up late writing. I appreciate your patience and sacrifices that you made with me on this journey.

Thank you to my classmates Andrea, Page, Liliana, Juliet, Allison, Brianna, Michelle, Mijiza, and Jessie. Most importantly, Jessie as I leaned on you to the last day of writing for your knowledge and support. I also thank those spirits and angels that were there to give me strength when I called for it, thank you Noah, my grandparents, Cesar, Gorgonia and countless more. To Xavi and Bella B. thank you for your patience, I am ready for you.

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CHAPTER I: THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

Latino/a student's face numerous obstacles in the K-12 educational system. Less than half of Latino/a children enroll in any type of early childhood education program (Murillo, 2010). Latino/a students comprise of one in five students in K-12 public schools (U.S. Census, 2010). However, according to nationwide data the quality of the educational opportunities they receive and their overall academic success prove to be poor (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Latino/a students have the highest high school dropout rates in the United States, a rate of four times higher than that of White students (Pew Research Center, 2012). Latinos/as completion rates lie below both White and Black students (Fry, 2008). Finally, only 13 percent of Latinos/as currently hold a bachelor's degree and only four percent complete any type of postgraduate education (U.S. Census, 2010).

While the United States as a whole becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, figures show continued low enrollments of Latino/a students in higher education. (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Betances (2004) captured this shifting demographic in higher education by stating:

For the first time in the history of colleges and universities, educators have to do what no previous generation of their peers had ever done before: educate learners who are members of the dominant society along with those who are not; ... educate those for whom completing post-secondary, higher educational requirements, and earning degrees form part of their rich family history, along with those for whom it does not; educate those whose cultural heritage/racial group identities are positively affirmed in our racially stratified society, along with those whose are not; and educate those who are white, and those who are not. (p. 44)

Latino/a students comprise the largest ethnic population in higher education with enrollment trends growing at a steady rate (Murrillo, 2010). Many institutions of higher education anticipate future growth mainly among Latino/a student populations. The community college system remains the point of entry into higher education (Santiago & Stettner, 2013). “Community colleges are a particularly attractive option for Latino students to begin their college education because they are located in their communities, have open access, and are more affordable and flexible than four year colleges” (Santiago & Stettner, 2013, p. 6).

Although Latino/a students represent the fastest growing student population, very few qualitative studies document the experiences of community college students from their own perspectives (Perrakis, 2010). Qualitative studies that do use student voice integrate the stories of marginalized populations in the world of academia for the purposes of overcoming and confronting the systemic barriers to success (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This gap in the research makes it imperative to learn more of this “fastest-growing minority” (Obama, 2011, p. 2). Research serving this population is critical, especially on the campuses most utilized: the community college (Laden, 2004).

The educational experience of many Latino/a community college students is complicated by being a first-generation college student (Engle & Tinto, 2008). The first-generation Latino/a community college student will be an increasingly visible student population for the community college system (Smith & Miller, 2009; Zell, 2010). “First-generation students are often at a disadvantage when navigating the world of higher education because, unlike their traditional peers, they have not grown up in an environment that acculturates them to college (Jehangir, Williams & Jeske, 2012, p. 269). Tinto (1998) argues that the financial, academic, and cultural obstacles that first-generation students face in college need to be eased by the colleges. Institutions

can better understand and serve these needs by utilizing student voice.

One way to capture student voice and honor their rich narratives is through the use of *testimonio*. Lindsay Pérez Huber (2010b) describes *testimonio* as “a verbal journey of a witness who reflects and speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment, and advocacy for a more humane present and future” (p. 851). For the purposes of this study I will utilize *testimonios* of Latino/a community college students to bring awareness to their academic experiences, successes and needs with the community college system. The *testimonios* of Latino/a community college students will expose racial and cultural bias that creates educational barriers. This empowering process is necessary and imperative for institutions to utilize students voice. *Testimonio* allows institutions to learn about the needs, and create necessary changes to accommodate the needs of Latino/a student’s in community college.

Because Latino/a students in community colleges have historically funneled through vocational and short-term tracks versus transferring to universities, the community college system needs to offer equitable access to all its educational options (Alfonso, 2006). Many community colleges will be become Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) as the Latino/a student population becomes at least 25 percent of its overall student population. More research will shed light to the experiences of Latino/a community college students, especially those at HSI campuses. This study will pay specific attention to the needs, uncovered through *testimonios*, of Latino/a students in HSI community colleges, to the services they find most useful, and finally to the best pedagogical practices to deliver successful academic outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

While only about half of all Latino/a students will graduate from high school, other ethnic groups have gradually increased their graduation rates, Latinos/as unfortunately have not experienced such progress in the last three decades (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Fry and Paul (2013) continue to add that, “Young Hispanic college students are less likely than their white counterparts to enroll in a four-year college (56% versus 72%), they are less likely to attend a selective college, less likely to be enrolled in college full time, and less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree” (p. 1). However, a large majority of Latino/a students who do enroll in college begin at community colleges (Santiago & Stettner, 2013).

The educational inequalities of Latino/a student’s show significant gaps along all educational levels (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). According to Yosso’s (2006) critical work on the Chicano/Latino education pipeline, of 100 Latino/a student’s that start elementary school only 46 graduate from high school and of those 26 enroll in college. Of those 26, 17 go on to a community college and one transfers to a four-year university. In total only eight Latino/a students of the original 100 graduate with a bachelor’s degree, two earn a graduate degree and .20 received a doctorate (Yosso, 2006). These numbers stand in stark contrast to the experiences of White students, 84 out of 100 graduate from high school, 26 receive a bachelor’s degree, and 10 earn a graduate degree (United States Census). Yosso and Solórzano (2006) state the difficulties faced by Latino/a students in K-12 are often due to the fact that, “far too many Chicana/o students continue to be ‘tracked’ into remedial or vocational trajectories. Academically rigorous enrichment programs and courses...disproportionately under enroll Chicana/o student” (p. 2).

As a result of the high dropout rates of Latino/a students and not being academically prepared for four-year universities, most Latino/a students are funneled into the community

college system directly from high school (Kahlenberg, 2012). Adelman (2005) states, “Latino students are more likely than students from other racial or ethnic groups to begin their postsecondary education at a community college” (p. 12). When looking at factors that contributed to entry into community college, socioeconomic status was one of the highest predictors. However, Michael Kurlaender (2006) states that “...the effect of socioeconomic status on the type of college entered appears to be weaker for Latino students than for whites and African Americans, suggesting that even affluent Latinos are disproportionately choosing community colleges over four-year institutions” (p. 11).

Community colleges have a long history of admitting Latino/a students, however the educational services and opportunities are vastly unequal to that of other students. It is imperative that community colleges stay connected and become informed of the uniqueness of Latino/a students. The community college system has historically funneled Latino/a students into a non-transfer vocational programs and this pattern of educational inequality must change (Steinberg, 2009 and Krieger, 2009).

Certificate programs and vocational non-transfer majors enroll large proportions of Latino/a and students from low-income families; the educational attainments of Latinos/as in community college are low (Bailey, et.al., 2004). In a 2005 of over six thousand community college students, 61 percent of Latino/a student’s versus 35 percent of white students were found in vocational degrees as well as only 12 percent of Latino/a student’s compared to 38 percent of white students were on a transfer path (Alfonso). In 2012, 21.3 percent of Latinos/as had earned an associate’s degree compared to all adults of 40.1 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Community colleges graduating mostly vocationally trained Latino/a students continue to feed into a history of limited educational and societal mobility which is vastly different than the white

students experience (Cohen, 2008).

Cohen states that this is a strategic tool of oppression where Latino/a students will continue to add to society's vocational jobs and not breaking through careers and sectors of society that require at least a bachelor's degree and that are historically dominated by whites. This historic trend does not show to be significantly different for future generations of Latino/a community college students, thus causing great concern of inequitable distribution of and access to services at the community college level (Handel, 2013). A shift in this educational trajectory is needed to streamline future Latino/a students through an education pipeline that produces more successful outcomes. Community colleges have an obligation to address the issues of inequitable services to Latino/a student's that will change the trajectory of their educational experiences. New resources and strategies need to be implemented to increase the rate of Latino/a college graduates (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

The challenge then for community colleges to successfully serve its Latino/a student population should not stop at recruitment and enrollment but also needs to address issues of retention, graduation and ultimately transferring to a four-year university. The problem of access and opportunity for Latino/a students in community colleges is great and needs to be addressed especially as they become the majority on many community college campuses. For some community colleges that are considered Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) through Title V of the United States educational code, serving this Latino/a population with equal opportunities could not be of greater importance (Higher Education Act, 1965). HSI campuses are awarded a five year grant to provide equitable services to these students on their campuses and while some implement strategic reform, others do not. Most importantly when a campus does qualify as an HIS, few campuses take into account the experiences of its Latino/a students or include their

voice their needs (Pérez Huber, 2010 b). This study, specifically through the use of student *testimonios*, intends to add to the literature and ultimately have an impact on the practices within HSIs to better serve its Latino/a student's. Analyzing whether Latino/a students in community college complete their degrees as often as other students is critical, because this information allows us to assess the extent to which these institutions provide equitable educational opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study will be to capture the real life experiences and stories of Latino/a first-generation community college students as they navigate community colleges that have been recognized as HSIs. The overall goal of this study, and through the use of *testimonio*, is that the voices of the Latino/a student no longer be hidden but instead used as a tool by school administrators in effectively providing services to their growing Latino/a population. The purpose of this study is also to provide for HSI campuses the resourcefulness of *testimonio* when implementing Title V services to Latino/a students. This study will examine how specific elements impact the Latino/a students' educational success while at the community college. Examples of some of these factors are language barriers, identity formation, family roles and responsibilities, financial needs, immigration status, race, and culture.

Student *testimonio* will be utilized to gather these experiences as a resource to identify and implement community college best practices, policies, and procedures on campus that best fit the needs of Latino/a first-generation students. "*Testimonio* is and continues to be an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one's life experiences as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising. In bridging individuals with collective histories of oppression, a story of marginalization is re-

centered to elicit social change” (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Flores Carmona, 2012). The purpose of this study will be to utilize the *testimonio* gathered to best understand the needs of a growing population on community college campuses.

Background and Need for the Study

Latino/a community college students enter the community college with feelings of inferiority as a result of their K-12 experience and also that which they encounter from faculty and staff upon entering the community college (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Latino/a student’s reflect on the many challenges they face as a result of the poor quality of schools they attended (Moore & Shuloch, 2009). They have demonstrated lower proficiency levels in math and English even before entering high school, take fewer advanced math and science courses while in high school, less likely to graduate from high school, and unqualified to apply for four-year universities because they have not been taking college preparatory courses (Moore & Shuloch). Latino/a students are then entering the community college system with insecurities and feelings of inferiority to their white peers (Chau, 2012). Gándara and Contreras (2009) write:

Today the most urgent challenge for the American educational system has a Latino face.

Latinos are the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic minority in the country, but academically, they are lagging dangerously far behind. (p.1)

While Latinos/as are graduating from high school and enrolling in higher education in record numbers, too few are completing (Escobar, 2013). Latino/a students are underrepresented in all systems of higher education in California except the community college sector where they continue to enroll at high numbers. In 2012, 70% of first-time freshmen enrolled in the California community college system (Escobar, 2013). As the Latino/a population in California

becomes the new majority their college success is directly tied to the economic future and security of the state as well as a moral obligation to provide needed services for degree attainment at parity with white students. Carnoy (2010) states, “In California, a major reason for under-production of bachelor’s degrees is the large Latino enrollment in the community colleges (where transfer to four-year institutions is problematic) rather than in four-year institutions” (p. 1). Only half (52%) of all California community college transfer students actually enter into a California public university (Moore & Shulock, 2010). Due to budget cuts on California’s public universities resulting in tuition increases and the complex requirements to transfer to these institutions many Latino/a students have been enrolling in the for-profit sector in high numbers as their transfer university (Chancellors Office, 2013). For example, University of Phoenix increased its Latino/a student population by 33percent between 2003 and 2008.

The success of the growing Latino/a population is of particular concern especially as the working age Latino/a population in California is expected to grow from currently 34 percent to 40 percent in 2020 and at least 50 percent in 2040 (California Department of Finance, 2007). The California Department of Finance report (2007) revealed that only 16 percent of working age (25-64) Latino/a adults currently have a college degree (associates or higher) in comparison to 50 percent for white adults. Latino/a student’s are likely to continue choosing community college when beginning a postsecondary education, putting a great amount of demand on these institutions to produce an increase in degree attainment among Latino/a student’s (Kurlaender, 2006). California could produce an additional 790,000 bachelor’s degrees if the achievement gaps were closed between Latino/a students and White and Asian students (Escobar, 2013). It is clear that Latino/a student’s are creating a new pipeline in community college that increases their transfer rates and breaks the cycle of funneling Latino/a student’s into mostly CTE associate and

certificate degrees. In order to continue to do so student services will need to evaluate their effectiveness in with this growing student population.

This section will discuss the various layers that contribute to the Latino/a first-generation community college student's academic experience. I will pay specific attention to the environment, their k-12 experience, and issues of motivation, resiliency, spirituality, role modeling, and gender role challenges.

Sixty-one percent of Latino/a student's in community college system will be the first in their family to attend college (Hicks, 2012). Community colleges serve as the first point of entry for the majority of Latino/a student's because they offer a low cost higher educational experience close to home while also preparing them for the four-year university system (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). Geographically most will reside in urban communities which is important and unique to know where possibly some campuses will reach an HSI status sooner than others (Hagedorn, et.al., 2007).

A large majority of this influx of first-generation Latino/a students living in urban communities is due primarily to employment opportunities (Myers & Pitkin, 2001). Being that many Latino/a students come from low-income household's financial aid resources and outreach needs to be initiated by the community college (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). An example of this can be seen as Los Angeles Community College Districts (LACCD) the largest community college district in the country with nine campuses assists the largest Latino/a student population (Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004). The Latino/a population is growing in other urban communities in California such as the San Francisco Bay Area and not trailing to far behind is the state's capital city of Sacramento (UC Census Bureau, 2006). Largely Latino/a urban districts such as LACCD and Florida's Miami-Dade and New York's City University systems (CUNY) hold a

longstanding history with Latino/a first-generation students. However, community colleges across the nation are beginning to working with this new emerging population in larger numbers than historically experienced (Keller, 2009). These new districts serve the community college students that are, “economically, educationally, and ethnically disadvantaged and nationally diverse student populations” (p. 127). Knowing where many Latino/a students will reside and that they need financial aid resources is important information for campuses but there are many more qualities that make this student population unique.

Orozco (2003) dedicates a chapter to her experience as a first-generation Latina as she enters the uncharted waters of attending higher education and writes, “When I first came to the university, I was uncertain of myself and whether I could succeed. I wondered if I could manage the cultural and social challenges of the academy. I wondered if I could succeed in a way that would make my family and me proud. I often wondered if I was alone in my questions and uncertainty.” (p. 127). Countless other first-generation student’s question their academic capabilities and abilities to succeed upon entering college as a result of a broken K-12 system. Tara Yosso (2006) writes, “Chicanas/os usually attend underfinanced, racially segregated, overcrowded elementary schools that lack basic human and material resources. The least experienced teachers tend to be placed in the most low-income, overcrowded schools” (p. 21). Yosso further elaborates that few Latino/a students had teachers who drew on their cultural or community experiences into the classroom. On the contrary teachers often perceive Latino/a students’ culture and language as “defects to overcome instead of strengths to cultivate” (p. 22).

Pizarro (2005) studied a population of Mexican-American university students in Los Angeles. While in college these students reflected on the experiences of race and racism from childhood that had made a psychological imprint that they carried while in college. These

students spoke of experiences in their k-12 education that was fueled with racial tensions. A female student shares how she had a 3.9 grade point average graduating high school but when she spoke to her counselor about applying to college she responded by saying, “I don’t know if you’ll get in. But if you do it’s because you’re Mexican.” (p. 53). This student shares that this lack of confidence that was portrayed to her by someone in authority made her doubt that she would then be successful in college when she did start attending college as a first-generation Latina student.

These incidents of racism were not isolated to their school experiences but also resonated in their home communities. Another student shared how two police officers approached him and his friend in his car and after being both physically and verbally assaulted by them the officers said, “...what were we doing over there, that we belong in [the barrio], that over here that it’s pure white people...and that us wetbacks should go back over there” (p. 54). Both the counselor and the two police officers in these situations were White and held positions that these Latino/a student’s felt damaged a pride in their ethnic identity development. The results of these incidents caused life-long damage to their aspirations of attending college and created doubt that they were equal to others. For these student’s now in college, building a pride in their ethnic identity was critical and they shared that it was also a source of motivation to stay in school. While these college students were made to feel “different” (p. 62) in junior high and high school by teachers and administrators they made a deliberate attempt to try to rebuild trust with college professors that were helping in rebuilding trust in the education system (Pizarro, 2005).

The United States will continue to succeed and prosper when Latinos/as- its largest minority group- continues to grow in degree attainment (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). However, the degree attainment needs to be increased at both the undergraduate and graduate

levels. This study hopes to demonstrate a need for community colleges to prepare Latino/a students for all educational options available while in community college. This study is also needed for community colleges administrators, faculty, and staff to evaluate their effectiveness with Latino/a student's and the services they receive while also investigating the rate of degree completion for this population.

The Latino/a student population has a complexity of unique needs at the community college level (Kirwan, 2010) and this study aims to understand those needs from the first hand experiences of the students themselves. When the enrollment reaches 25 percent of the total full-time enrolled Latino/a student leads to Title V funds for those community colleges that are identified as HSI. Therefore, it is critical that these campuses provide effective programs and services to its Latino/a student population. In order to do so this study will utilize the *testimonios* of Latino/a community college student to research and capture their voice in providing their needs for best practices, policies and procedures at the community college.

Theoretical Framework

Latino/a critical race theory (LatCrit) provides the framework for understanding the responsibilities and needs of community colleges to Latino/a students. This study will utilize LatCrit as a theoretical framework to explore the realities of race and racism in the context of Latino/a student's educational experience. LatCrit is derived from critical race theory (CRT) that has deep historical frameworks in legal scholarship (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010). CRT began in the mid-1970s with the early work of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, in response to the dissatisfaction of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and its inability to fully address the issues of race and racism in United States law (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Bell wrote in his book *Faces at the*

Bottom of the Well (1992) that racism is a permanent fixture of American society and those seeking social justice need to expose its multiple hidings in schools, communities, and government. CRT seeks to challenge the centrality of race, racism and power in all of its various settings such as our educational system (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

One key tenet of CRT is the inclusion of experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge is the knowledge gained from one's experiences in life. Williams (1991) address the importance of experiential knowledge as an empowering tool in breaking the shackles of oppression. Barnes (1990) continues to support this central tenet of CRT by stating,

The ahistorical and acontextual nature of much law and other 'science renders the voices of the dispossessed and marginalized group members mute. In response, much of the scholarship of CRT focuses on the role of 'voice' in bringing additional power to the legal discourses of racial justice. Critical race theorists attempt to inject the cultural viewpoints of people of color, derived from a common history of oppression, into their efforts to reconstruct a society crumbling under the burden of racial hegemony (p. 1865)

CRT validates the importance of one's story as a symbol of self-sacrifice in sharing their experiences in homage to those that never could. Some of the educational topics and experiences that CRT surfaces for discourse are the educational attrition, retention, and racial disparities of minority students (Quiñones, et.al., 2010).

CRT in education is used to address the inequalities in schooling experienced by students of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Daniel Solórzano (1998) states that CRT, "challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups"

(p. 122). CRT allows examination of social and educational inequalities through the lens of race and equity. Solórzano continues to explain the five tenants of CRT in education as (a) race is central in disparities and injustices (b) there should be a challenge to dominant ideology (c) commitment to social justice (d) ones' knowledge and experiences should be central and (e) various interdisciplinary perspectives need to be acknowledged. CRT while having been utilized to examine higher education, it has not been used extensively to examine community college practice and scholarship (Jain, 2010). Jain, further explores the use of CRT at community colleges to allow for critical insight on issues of dysfunction such as low transfer rates by students of color. LatCrit branches off from CRT to further explore the racial disparities of Latino/a student's in the education system.

LatCrit in education draws theoretically from Chicano/a studies and the civil rights literature (González & Portillos, 2007) to address some of the educational inequalities experienced by ethnically diverse students. To better understand the impact that various forms of racism effect Latino/a student's a critical lens such as LatCrit needs to occur (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). What makes LatCrit a major contributor to the field of research published by Latino/a scholars are that it focuses on the experiences of Latino/a student's specifically and their experiences of racism in institutional practices such as higher education (Zarate & Conchas, 2010). LatCrit especially impacts Latino/a first-generation community college students, as it allows them to contextualize the educational system and practices in place and challenge the prior tradition, all the while intentionally moving towards a social justice change on the campus (Arriola, 2010).

LatCrit has emerged to complement CRT [Critical Race Theory] by including other forms of oppression unique to Latinos' experiences in its analysis of racism

in schools and education. For example, immigration and language policies are practices that have deeply influenced the educational experiences of Latinos. (Montoya, 2000, p. 96).

LatCrit hones in on the intersectionality of oppression in a way that CRT does not. LatCrit states that while racism is endemic in all parts of society it intersects with other forms of oppression for Latinos/as such as status, sexuality, culture, language, gender, phenotype, accent, surname, and immigration (Rios, 2008). LatCrit illuminates power and knowledge structures built within our society as oppressive tools for dominating Latinos/as in schools and society (Quinones, 2011). LatCrit theory uses interdisciplinary knowledge from ethnic studies, women's studies, sociology, history and the law to better understand various forms of oppression (Rios, 2008). LatCrit looks to examine these topics of ethnicity and subordination that occurs in the education system (Huber, 2010).

Research in various field have utilized *testimonio* as an effective research strategy that blends both LatCrit and Chicana feminist epistemology (Arriola, 2010). In Latin America, *testimonio* was a research strategy that was utilized to document the experiences of oppressed people during times of war (Hernandez-Truyol, 2006).

The critical elements of *testimonio* identified by scholars in various fields are similar to some of the elements of LatCrit framework. *Testimonio* and LatCrit both validate and center the experiential knowledge of People of Color, recognize the power of collective memory and knowledge, and are guided by the larger goals of transformation and empowerment for Communities of Color. Highlighting the ways a LatCrit frame is similar to the key elements of *testimonio*, critical race *testimonio* can be described as, a

verbal journey of a witness who speaks to reveal the racial, classed, gendered, and nativist injustices they have suffered as a means of healing, empowerment and advocacy for a more humane present and future. (Huber, 2010, p. 83).

LatCrit identifies *testimonios* as a form of giving voice to one's reality as an important tool for achieving racial emancipation (Fernandez, 2002). *Testimonios* serves a valuable purpose in LatCrit because it allows Latino/a students to trust themselves. It encourages students to know, understand and interpret their world, and to recognize their knowledge as valid and valuable, especially in research. Huber (2010) describes the power of *testimonio* and LatCrit as a process through which "cultural intuition" is infused in the research process (p. 848). Students' *testimonio* leads them on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment through discussions and theorizing. *Testimonios* will be used in this study to gather Latino/a first-generation students' voices in the community college system to give a space for acknowledging ones lived experiences of racism, classism, and sexism in these institutional settings while also seeking to offer their voice as a resource for needed services.

Research Questions

1. What are the obstacles and support systems that first-generation Latino/a community college students encounter while attending community college?
2. According to students, what can community colleges that are HSIs do to better serve their needs?

Limitations of the Study

A limitation to this study is the small sample size of eight students. This can negatively affect the generalizability of the study for other campuses as some of the experiences (good or

bad) collected through student's *testimonios* potentially are not reflective of others on their campuses. Another limitation is that this community college campus in this study has only a 20 percent Latino/a population which could not mirror that for other campuses. Also, the student services programs that were found on this campus to be and not to be effective with first-generation Latino/a students could not reflect other campuses effectiveness with their student services programs.

Significance of the Study

This study will contribute to a greater understanding of the first-generation Latino/a community college student and the impact that their *testimonio* contributes to serving this population at community colleges. The first-generation Latino/a community college student is a population that has a scarce amount of research done on it but will continue to grow on campuses across the nation (Huber, 2010; Kirwan, 2010). It is my intention to highlight this student population and its needs for a standard of how best to serve Latino/a first-generation students in community colleges and in particular HSIs. Because I will be using student *testimonio* to uncover the elements of this population that make them unique it is my goal that more researchers will look to also incorporate the voice of their research population as valuable. Also, with the utilization of *testimonio* I plan to demonstrate that this research tool is a valid and valuable form of research to uncover the missing voices in literature, institutions of higher learning, and HSI services.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will base itself in a claim of concept (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). A claim of concept is a proposition, an idea or a phenomenon, that is described, defined, and justified by expert testimony. For the purpose of this literature review, the phenomenon in question is the identity development of Latino/a students on community college campuses. The expert testimony used in this literature review, to describe this phenomenon, comes from studies informed by a LatCrit framework, as well as *testimonio* collected by scholars in the field. This literature will demonstrate how *testimonio* then can be utilized to inform the design and implementation of programs and services of community colleges, especially emerging HSIs.

This literature will use joint reasoning to justify the claim that we need to know more about the experiences of Latino/a students at community colleges, especially HSIs. “The reasons stipulated cannot stand on their own, but, when taken together, provide the necessary reasoning to warrant the conclusion (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). This literature review will present three reasons that justify the use of *testimonio* to document the experience of Latino/a students on community college campuses: (R1) Latino/a students have a set of shared cultural influences that shape their academic and professional identity development; (R2) Latino/a students are subject to a set of institutional influences that shape their academic and professional identity development; (R3) the increasing number of HSIs have the potential to use *testimonio* to create change in the educational and professional outcomes of Latino/a students. A visual representation of this reasoning is (R1 + R2 + R3) C, with R being a reason and C being the conclusion that it is important to use *testimonio* on community college campuses, particularly at HSIs, to learn about and respond to student experiences.

Cultural Influences That Shape Identity Development

This section will discuss the various cultural influences that contribute to the Latino/a community college student's identity development. Latino/a student's must navigate these influences in higher education. The following topics will be discussed in this section (a) gender roles and responsibilities, (b) a mother's influence, (c) a commitment to giving back, and (d) balancing between home and college culture.

Gender roles and responsibilities

Young Latino/a students' in college stress that even though they are college students their identity as a daughter/son remains critical (Pizarro, 2005). It is a role that continues to influence them throughout their college experiences. In particular female students feel more pressure than the male students to maintain their family roles and responsibilities (Nielsen, 2013). Young Latina student's feel the pressure to come home and help with various tasks such as translating at appointments or at the bank. These women often miss class or stop studying for midterms in order to fulfill these responsibilities (Espinoza, 2010). Latinas are also not encouraged to attend colleges far from home and expected to live at home if the college is close. Because many Latina's live at home while attend college they are expected by their parents to share in household duties and caretaking responsibilities, while their male siblings are not expected to balance these roles. These students feel caught between the two worlds of college and family, and sacrifice their own needs for that of their families (Garcia, 2004).

Latino males also feel pressure from their parents to follow stereotypical careers in college, even if these are not the careers that the students wish to pursue. Males feel pressure to attend community college for an associate's degree or certificate program. This shortest track

helps in finding employment and contributing to the family income. Long-term educational goals like a bachelor's, master's or doctoral degree is not always supported. Breaking tradition or stereotypical roles or balancing cultural expectations while maneuvering through college as first-generation college students causes much stress and anxiety for Latino/a students. Colleges with a high Latino/a population such as HSIs need to be aware of these struggles that impact the college success of Latino/a students.

A mother's influence

Many young Latina/o students first experience gender roles through their mother's stories of becoming residents in a new land (Garcia, 2004). Garcia shares two cultural shifts for Latina mothers who immigrate to the United States: (a) challenging of the patriarchal system (b) entering into the workforce. Both of these experiences redefine gender roles and responsibilities. In most traditional Latino/a households, the decision-making is male-dominated and the division of household labor is unequal. When women begin to work outside the home it creates a new dynamic. The role of who cares for the children, and who is responsible for the household labor, must be renegotiated. When the mother's income is at or above the father's income, or when she becomes the sole provider, it causes a shift. This shift meets with resistance but is necessary.

Garcia (2004) states, Mexican immigrant mothers told their daughters about their struggles with their husbands who wanted them to "stay Mexican". These mothers were aware that crossing the border in the United States signified the beginning of a new life, but they told their daughters that they soon discovered that their lives as women would change dramatically. Immigrant women confronted another border—a border that once crossed would change their lives

as they faced new situation and responded to them, eventually redefining themselves as women.
(p. 65)

An overarching theme that these mothers shared with their children was that while their identity did change, their ethnic allegiance, their “Mexicanidad” would never change (p. 69). What these immigrant mothers teach their children is that ethnic identity is not fixed, especially when it comes to gender constraints. They can remain loyal to a country despite traveling through various national and cultural borders. One student shares, “My mom said she would always be Mexican, but she wouldn’t always be the same.” (p. 69). This is the same experience of Latino/a student’s who add formal education to their identity.

Many students specifically state that their mothers are the main source of inspiration and major support system, even if their mothers never attended college themselves (Garcia). Their mothers hope that college will assure “...a better life than the ones they had experienced” (Garcia, 2004, p. 147). The use of *testimonio* by Garcia demonstrates this. Angela shares her *testimonio* of her mother’s influence from a young age and how her mother’s voice still echoes in Angela’s thoughts at college:

But she would start telling me, even in grade school, that she hoped I could go to college. She said she came here [from Mexico] to help her and when she had kids. And now, well, last July before I got here [to the university] she would tell me not to worry about the family but to concentrate on getting good grades. She would tell me she didn’t want me to work at a cleaners. She wanted better things for me. (p. 146)

Many college students revealed various inequalities in higher education, such as racial and institutional oppressions, and feel that their mother’s support is critical in overcoming these

obstacles.

Pizarro (2005) states that a mother's strength and support is a source of motivation for first-generation students. These mothers pass on to their children, "... the necessary spirit to meet the challenges of higher education." (Garcia, 2004, p. 152). Gonzalez (2001) states that Latino/a student's report spirituality, passed to them by their mother, as a source of strength in their own educational trajectory. This sense of spirituality is utilized to negotiate and navigate the world of higher education. It is important to note that these students see a connection between their spirituality, their educational journey, and their desire to help others. Spirituality is connected to their commitment to their family and communities.

A commitment to give back

Vasti Torres and Ebelia Hernandez (2007) state that Latino/s students feel a sense of spiritual guidance connected to social justice. This is a trait that is similar to the nurturing spirituality of a mother. Latino/a student's often find ways to help other students in need on campus. According to Flores, Horn, & Crisp (2006) Latino/a students are already informally involved in the campus community. Often these young students became powerful role models to their younger siblings and other Latino/a youth in their community. They also feel a responsibility to return to their home communities and become leaders and advocates (Delgado Bernal, 2006). For example, Delgado Bernal records how one first-generation college student plans to give back to her home community:

I am basically *mujer Mexicana* (Mexican women), a feminist, a struggler...*Que algun dia se va a graduar de aquí y va a regresar a* (That one day I would graduate from here and return to) South Central. And I'm going to teach at my

high school...I would love to become a teacher and that is what I'm going to become. I'm going to study to teach others, be the best that I could be in my community. Be a community leader, basically support my community, where I come from (p. 124).

The pride to one day being a valuable resource to their community becomes a source of inspiration and motivation to overcome educational obstacles. Community colleges are in a position to be able to capitalize on this cultural strength that Latino/a students bring with them. One way to identify the strengths of the Latino/a community is through the use of *testimonio*.

Recognizing the strength of Latino/a culture for giving back benefits both the campus and the student by showing a commitment to using cultural capital in the educational setting. It also works against the deficit model that often influences the educational experiences of Latino/a students. Latino/a students have been blamed for their educational failures due to their utilization of their cultural values and lack of assimilation into the customs and traditions of the dominant group (Valencia, 1997). This concept is also better known as the culture deficit model, which was widely popular in the 1960s however remains a standard practice today for many educators working with Latino/a students' (Yosso, 2006).

Cultural deficit models assert that Chicana/o families also exhibit problematic internal social structures. They claim these social structures-large, disorganized, female-headed families; Spanish or nonstandard English spoken in the home; and patriarchal or matriarchal family hierarchies-cause and perpetuate a culture of poverty. (p. 23)

Using *testimonio* will allow community colleges to demystify belief systems of Latino/a culture

and allow for culturally responsive pedagogy that acknowledges the struggles and strengths of the Latino/a community.

Balance between home and college culture

Pizarro (2005) describes it as a blending of the old and new as Latino/a students' integrate their traditional values with their college experiences. Perreira and Smith (2007) write that the identity formation of Latino/a youth is complicated by the process of acculturation. This process can take many forms, from one not wishing to maintaining their cultural identity, an example of the assimilation strategy, to accepting and integrating of both their culture of origin to the dominant culture, known as biculturation. In a study of first generation Mexican college women Alma M. Garcia (2004) shares the *testimonios* of Sonia. Sonia remembers one of her first encounters as a young girl as she balances her parents' traditional values and American customs. Sonia's grandmother says Sonia should not be allowed to go on an overnight camping trip with the Girl Scout troop because "Mexican girls don't go off like this." (p. 77). Sonia, much like other Latino/a students, realizes that her identity formation exists within an American context and is constantly being infused by her family's cultural norms and traditions. The acculturation process continues on college campuses.

Garcia (2004) believes that Latino/a college students do not live in between two cultural worlds, one of their Latino/a culture rich in cultural values and traditions and the other of American norms infused all over society, but rather carry both Latino/a and Anglo customs and practices with them at all times. For these Latino/a student's who are first-generation they quickly learn they must be accountable to both of these worlds.

For example, Guerrero (1988) describes her frustration at having to take time away from

her studies at the university to fulfill her obligations as a daughter. At times the task of immigrant parents acting as guides for their child in a foreign land is reversed as stated by Hoffman (1989) as children of immigrants soon adapt to the host country much quicker and are then the navigators and interpreters for their parents. Identity confusion for these immigrant children then occurs when they are growing up with in dual contexts characterized by a parent's cultural beliefs and the child's social environment. This experience can be something that continues to occur later in life for these children as they enter into higher education where the new culture (college) and the parent's cultural traditions and beliefs are not equally valued or acceptable (Berry, 1997).

Dolores Delgado Bernal (2006), shares how these Chicana college students continue to fulfill their family responsibilities even while in college. Some of the participants stated that while in college their mothers would call and share the troubles with the other children at home, asking for help to help settle disputes. This forced students to fill family obligations while simultaneously acclimating to the culture and rigor of college. Similarly, college students who live at home, to help offset the cost of college, are often obligated to help with household responsibilities. While struggling through the complexities of being a Latino/a student cultural family responsibilities are never too far away from this student population (Espinoza, 2010).

Responsibilities such as caring for other siblings, a parent, or elder are more common (33%) among first-generation Latino students than others (22%). This time dedication is usually 30 hours a week or more in caring for a family member. Murillo (2010) identified a number of factors that put first generation Latino/a student's statistically at risk for not completing their college degree. These include attending college part time, living in an urban low income community, working 30 or more hours per week, and being academically underprepared.

Navigating the college system is an overwhelming task for anyone and Latino/a first-generation students need educational systems who understand and appreciate Latino/a culture (Harrell & Forney, 2003). These students must navigate the cultural factors that influence their identity. This section has explored these influences. In the next section, the institutional influences that shape Latino/a student identity are discussed. It is important for colleges to be attentive to these two sets of competing influences. One way for institutions of higher education, such as HSIs, to identify and meet these needs is to provide Latino/a student's with opportunities to share their *testimonio*.

Institutional Influence of the Community College on Latino/a Students Identity

This section will discuss the influences of the community college on Latino/a student's identity. Specific attention will be focused on the history, development, and structure of community colleges in general. This is followed by a discussion of California community colleges. The high number of academically underprepared Latino/a students is discussed, as well as the influence of ethnic studies. The section continues with a discussion of the connection between degree attainment, student services. The impact of being a full-time, versus part-time, student is also considered.

Community college development and structure

In the early 19th century a demand for more skilled jobs required training; those that sought schooling advanced more rapidly in these jobs (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). The development and establishment of community colleges, from the early 19th and 20th century, were established to meet this need. Educators wanted universities to abandon their freshman and sophomore classes and reroute them into junior colleges. The function of the junior colleges would be to relieve the universities of providing general education for young people then

allowing universities to become true research institutes (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). In 1921 the first meeting for the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) began to define the role of junior colleges as, “The junior college may, and is likely to, develop a different type of curriculum suited to the larger and ever-changing civic, social, religious, and vocational needs of the entire community in which the college is located (Bogue, 1950, p. xvii). By the 20th century access to college grew as the percentage of those graduating high school increased and the local community conditions, market and interests expanded to develop a need for community colleges.

The American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) in the mid-20th century aimed at offering an open door policy for any student to attend its institutions for vocational, pre-university track, career growth, personal interests and community need. Soon after federal funding began to support the nation’s community colleges and nationally these institutions became an option for higher learning. Cohen and Brawer (2008) explain the impact and need for community colleges,

No other countries but the United States (and to some extent Canada) have formed comprehensive community colleges. The primary reason is that compulsory schooling continues for a greater number of years for America’s young people than it does in any other nation, a phenomenon seeding the desire for more schooling. The second reason is that Americans seem more determined to allow individual options to remain open for as long as each person’s motivations and the community’s budget allow (p. 27).

California community colleges

No other state expanded its development of community colleges more than California. California became the leader in community college development because there was little competition by the private sectors and also because it had the support of the University of

California, Stanford University, and k-12 public school system. In 1960 California created its own Master Plan (University of California, 2002) for higher education. The Master Plan created three systems of higher education with the extent that every qualified and interested student must be granted access to higher education. The role of the state's community colleges was to offer lower-division transferable courses as well as occupational instruction and personal development instruction. While the University of California and the California State systems have a stricter admissions criterion (upper 1/8 and 1/3 of the high school graduating class respectively), the role of the community college was to remain as an open door institution (University of California, 2002). This Master Plan was to be revisited every ten years but its reviews were conducted in 1973, 1989, and again in 2002.

In 2010 the California community college system celebrated its centennial. It currently hosts 113 campuses. It is the first large-scale community college system in the nation and continues to be the nation's largest in total numbers (Lay, 2010). The 113 community colleges in California are "...vital to the future social and economic health of California, as well as to the success of the national agenda to restore America's competitive position in the global economy" (Moore & Shulock, 2010, p. 2). The Public Policy Institute of California (2009) states that community colleges can contribute to many middle skill jobs. These jobs represent the largest share of jobs in California and the nation, and include the technology and health-care fields.

In 2012-13 more than 2.9 million California residents enrolled in a California community college, 38 percent of this population were Latino/a students and white students followed with 30 percent. Of the bachelor's degrees obtained in a California public university more than half of those students began their studies at a California community college (Chancellor's Office, 2013). However, in 2012-13 only 16 percent of Latino/a student's graduated with a bachelor's degree.

For California closing the racial educational attainment gap amongst its Latino/a student's is a leading concern.

Beginning community college academically underprepared: k-12 experiences

Many first-generation Latino/a student's start community college striving to transfer and complete a four-year degree. DiMaria (2006) states that first-generation Latino/a students are more likely to come to class prepared and do not skip classes as frequently as others. However, in overwhelmingly high numbers, Latino/a student's report feeling academically underprepared for college (Flores, Horn, & Crisp, 2006). Though they are more engaged than their peers in accomplishing an educational goal once that is decided, Latino students face many barriers to degree attainment (Liard, 2009; Chau, 2012).

Latino/a college students disclose some of the barriers felt upon first entering college. One of the first steps to the matriculation process into any institute of higher education is taking an assessment to determine a student's placement into English and Math based classes. Most first-generation Latino/a students are placed in remedial courses once entering the community college system. Often, the public K-12 system does not academically prepare students for the academic rigor of college level English and math (DiMaria, 2006; Perry, et.al., 2010). Remedial math and English are likely courses to be taken during the first years of college for Latino/a student's. Although many Latino/a students are underprepared for college, they are more engaged in their education, are more likely to talk about career plans with an instructor or advisor, work harder to meet an instructor's expectations, and write more papers or reports (Flores, Horn, & Crisp, 2006).

DiMaria (2006) states that this population exerts more effort, experiences greater academic challenges, experiences more support from their college, use college services more

extensively, and report greater academic gains than their more prepared peers. It appears that underprepared students compensated for their gaps in their pre-collegiate experiences through a process of connecting with their classmates in other ways. Latino/a students who were underprepared reported more academic gain in several areas during the duration of their education and were more likely than their prepared peers to credit the college with helping them attain that gain (DiMaria, 2006). This population also reported that college helped them develop skills and abilities they needed to succeed, such as writing and speaking more clearly and effectively, think critically and analytically, and solving numerical problems. *Testimonio*, when utilized as DiMaria has, collects important information on Latino/a student's needs and the cultural attributes they use to problem solve these needs. *Testimonio* can be utilized to respond to these culturally specific qualities and academic challenges.

Ethnic studies and merging identities

One way Latino/s students connect with and support each other is through the shared interest in ethnic studies. Latino/a students enter community college with a history of racism in their school and lived communities, stigmatized as unequal to their white peers. However, they are able to turn these negative experiences into a driving force to complete their degrees and make a difference in their communities (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hillard (2004) write that the cultural makeup of a community for Latino/a youth is linked to the preservation of cultural identity. Garcia's (2004) study, that captured the *testimonios* of Latino/a student's in college, found that being in college redefined the cultural identity formation of Latino/a students. It was in the university setting where institutional and personal power relationships collided. Latinos/as in ethnic studies explored the societal and educational boundaries of oppression and experienced an awakening to the systemic barriers aimed at

keeping Latino/a students marginalized.

This newfound knowledge attained from college courses, added to their cultural identity and helped them to situate themselves within a larger political history. For these reasons, first-generation Latino/a college students choose courses, such as ethnic studies, outside general education and major requirements. They are drawn to those courses that for the first time expose them to a critical understanding of their culture. With this knowledge they become driven to succeed in college and passionate to help others do the same. Julia (Garcia) shares her *testimonio*:

I saw part of a film about farm workers, and my dad worked picking strawberries for a long time. It really meant something to me as a student when I saw the farm workers in the film carrying signs that said “Si Se Puede” [“Yes, it can”]. And I try to say to myself that my parents probably said something like this and now I will say the same. Yes, I can too. (p. 98)

Latino/a student’s such as Julia express feeling “ethnically charged” (p. 155) as they went through their undergraduate classes which included ethnic studies (Garcia, 2004).

They revealed two themes in their experiences. First, the various exposures to marginalization and alienation on campus caused an evolution in understanding that ethnicity matters. Second, these students grew a raised consciousness for political awareness in regards to race, ethnicity, gender, and social class. Banuelos (2006) illustrates this when she shares the identity formation of a student called Luz. Luz felt her classes in Mexican-American history impacted her identity formation in a very profound way.

Then I started taking classes in the Mexican-American studies department. It was

amazing what that did for me because I was learning about our history...it became very empowering. By my sophomore and junior year, I knew what I wanted to do...[be] a Chicana in the academy. (p. 103).

The knowledge gained from Luz's academic courses became invaluable in her identity formation. According to Bernal (2006),

The fact that these Chicanas are in college, have maintained an emotional and financial commitment to their families and communities, have resisted damaging stereotypes, and have embraced *Mexicano* culture and the Spanish language points to the significance of understanding a mestiza consciousness. They seem to draw from their sense of self, which is based on family, community, culture, and language, as a source of strength that enables them to continue on their educational journey and succeed in college. (p. 125).

In this way, the community college experience can have a positive impact on Latino/a student by encouraging Latino/s students establish a positive ethnic identity. This is important because first-generation Latino/a students continue to face complex issues of race and racism in their educational and community settings.

Latino/a identity formation continues to develop in "...surroundings, sites of contested terrain. They (re)invented themselves by creating an 'imagined community' of Mexican ethnicity." (p. 162). What Garcia (2006) document's is that these young college students in dealing with racial barriers and other struggles create visible symbols or signs sharing these struggles. For example, they decorated their dorm rooms with what they felt were Mexican symbols such as: Aztec calendars, bright colored serapes, and posters by Mexican muralist Diego Rivera and Mexican revolutionaries Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa as a symbol of the

cultural power struggles they were facing by and in college. These student's identities emerge as one of "...a radicalized one, fueled by their growing experiences with incidents of prejudice and their growing political consciousness and cultural nationalism" (p.166).

Garcia (2004) also adds that while Latino/a parents always stressed an importance in cultural pride they had a difficult time accepting their child's cultural dress, speech and choice of music symbolic of their resistance to being treated as the *other* on their campus. Marta is a student from Garcia's (2004) study and she shares her visible identity formation and her father's reaction to it,

I like to come into my room and feel proud of my Mexican background. It's a place where I feel I belong. But, it's funny, at home I didn't have any of this stuff. And, once, my dad visited after I had done this redecorating and asked, "What's all this?" He seemed really shocked. I told him that other of my friends, you know, Mexican, well, whose parents are Mexican, did the same. He said it wasn't a good idea, especially the pictures of Villa and Zapata. He said that they were Mexican heroes, not Americans, so why did I have to have them on my walls? (p.112)

This reinvention of identity is a result of students creating their own ethnic world, separate from both the dominant culture and the culture of their immigrant parents. The topic of race and culture is very much present in Latino/a first-generation students' lives and experiences and, when understood and utilized, is a great asset to a college. *Testimonio* is a powerful way to do this.

In the *testimonios* collected by Garcia (2004) students stated that race, power and racial hierarchies were topics they understood as synonymous to being Mexican in their new schools.

Erica, a student from Garcia's (2004) study shares in her *testimonio* an experience of feeling the racial tensions on her college campus:

One student in my dorm said that he knew someone who was valedictorian in high school and didn't get into Berkeley, but some Mexican classmates with less grade point averages got in. I could sort of feel the whole conversation get tense. It makes me wonder how many people around here [the university] are thinking the same thing about me. It's really hard for me to cope with this. I have found myself going back into a kind of Mexican thing. I play Mexican music loud in my dorm and I just know it gets the Anglo girls mad. I figure they think I am not supposed to be here. They see me like I'm a token ethnic. Then OK, I will be ethnic. Oh, yeah, it's funny, I don't even really like that ranchers music. I like jazz. Well, I guess I like it a little bit, my dad and uncles always play it at home. (p. 161)

According to Padilla (1997), Latina/o university students often experience various forms of negative stereotypes, such as being academically unprepared and receiving an undeserved "free ride" (p. 162). Lesityna (1999) explaining that in order for Latino/a students who deal with racism in schools often create spaces within the school context to maintain a sense of solidarity with their ethnic community through the use of language, clothing and behavior. These new behaviors, like Erica's loud ranchero music, signify a rejection to the racial environment and cultural capital of the dominant culture.

As shown in this section cultural identity, campus climate and their educational journey just some of the current elements that Latino/a student's experience within the community college walls additional elements occur outside these settings that are important to know when

serving this population. Latino/a student's experience on community college campuses a deep cultural awakening from their classes that increases their identity development. Students are also finding it difficult to connect with the campus as a result of the racial tensions experienced by faculty, staff, and other students. Additional resources from student services are instrumental for students to utilize all the resources on campus that will allow them to reach degree attainment in a timely manner.

Degree attainment

A problem for California and elsewhere is the low college completion rates from the growing Latino/a population that has historically been underrepresented in higher education (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). In 2010 the Community College League of California convened a commission of 33 college leaders to identify and implement measures for increasing completion rates of students. The commission acknowledged that Latino/a students are less likely than White students to complete transfer, associate degree, or certificate programs. The Commission calls to the community colleges to close the achievement gap among Latino/a students and states. Addressing the achievement and participation gaps is equally an economic necessity, a moral imperative and an expression of the economic and democratic promise of the state. If achievement among the fastest growing communities lags significantly behind the achievement of other communities, the state cannot escape a future of increased inequality, political and social instability, and sluggish economic growth. (p. 10)

Degree attainment is a gauge by which community colleges often measure their own success. In 2000, the nation's community colleges awarded 230,000 associates degrees. Nearly three-fourths (71.8%) of these degrees were awarded to white students, while only 10.1% went

to Latino/a students. While Latino/a student's account for a disproportionately large population in our community colleges the low rates in completion of an associate degree impede their upward mobility and participation in four-year institutions (Laden, 2004). In a 2010 study (Moore & Shulock, 2010) Latino/a students were only half as likely as white students to transfer (14% vs. 29%). Also Latino/a students are not hitting critical academic milestones that are correlated to student success. These include completing college level math and English within two years (46% for Latino versus 69% White) or completing 20 units within the first year in college (21% Latino versus 27% White) (Moore & Shulock).

Testimonio plays a critical role in degree attainment. It provides information on students' academic needs that colleges must respond to, as well as culturally unique qualities that colleges may capitalize on when providing services. Using the information provided by student *testimonio*, colleges are able to create innovative and culturally responsive forms of student services and programs. Faculty and staff members are also able to utilize *testimonio* to have a better understanding of this population and aid students in accomplishing their degree attainment goals.

Student services

For first-generation Latino/a students there is an unspoken language to learn when running through the maze of higher education. The language of higher education opens doors to programs, services, professors, leadership opportunities, and financial aid relief. This language is shared and passed on informally from one generation to the next, often through family members or close friends. For first-generation Latino/a students this language takes a journey to un-code and discover (Ceja, 2001). Latino/a students discover it by talking to classmates or

counselors and in doing so unlock the *hidden curriculum* of collegiate language and navigate the unfamiliar territory of college life (Oakes, 2005). Solórzano and Ornelas (2002) state that the unequal access of academic services and information for Latino/a students and their parents begins in the K-12 system but continues throughout higher education. The authors go on to state that these are "...discriminatory school-based structures and practices" (p. 215) aimed at offering less services to the population that needs the most.

Counselors at the community college level offer critical academic support and are a resource for Latino/a students. They can provide access to information on financial aid, on educationally planning for reaching their academic goals, and for providing access to other student services programs and resources such as mental health referrals and student clubs (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). According to DiMaria (2006), awareness of student services improves the overall experience of Latino/a student's. Services such as academic counseling and planning, tutoring, writing/math labs, and financial aid advising can only be utilized when they are known. Latino/a students are often labeled by the community college as a "challenge" (DiMaria, 2006, p. 3) however research shows that overall this specific population is one of very few that accesses student support services once aware that these services exist and can be instrumental to their success.

Another pressing issue that first-generation Latino/a students' experience is the stresses of paying for their college education. Financial aid services greatly impact the success or failure of this population (Flores, Horn & Crisp, 2006). Financial aid for first-generation students is complex and confusing and as a result many do not utilize or apply for these resources (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). Many times Latino/a students are unaware of the various forms of financial aid available to them and miss out on financial relief for their education (Martinez & Fernández,

2004). Latino/a students are less likely (3.9%) than other students (5.7%) to take out academic loans (Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004). However, “Hispanic students, regardless of national origin or income, tend to maintain particularly close ties with their families, and that their parents often expect them to live at home and contribute to the family income even while in college.” (Ashburn, 2007, p. 82). As a result, many students feel it their responsibility to contribute to the household expenses and also find a means to pay for their education with no financial burdens to the family.

Parents of first-generation Latino/a students have the least amount of knowledge about funding their child’s college education and this in many ways can impact the critical decision to attend college or not (Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004). Finances are often a pressing issue for first-generation Latino/a students and the family roles and dynamics continues to be a factor in their lives. When an institution not only accepts and celebrates students’ cultural demands and expectations they are more likely to thrive and succeed within that institution (Laden, 1999). Community colleges need to be more cognizant of how to take into account this cultural dilemma of balancing financial need and responsibilities with educational attainment. One example of this is the difference between part-time and full-time students.

Part-Time vs. full-time status for Latino/a students

A student is considered full-time when they are enrolled in at least 12 semester units or more and part-time when taking six semester units or less (Chancellors Office, 2013). There are many academic concerns when students enroll in college as part-time instead of full-time status. Nearly two-thirds of the Latino/a student population enroll in college as a part-time student, both because they are fulfilling family financial obligations and because they are paying their own

way through college (DiMaria, 2006). Due to limited financial resources, many Latino/a students are also dependent on public transportation, which can be a hindrance on their ability to attend college full-time (DiMaria, 2006). Part-time students are less likely to work with each other to collaborate on projects outside of class. They also have less access to their professors because they are not frequently on campus; 39 percent of part timers have discussed grades or assignments with their professors often or very often in comparison with 50% of full time students.

Another concern is that part time Latino/a student's miss out on the vastness of the community college experiences such as campus event, speakers, and clubs as most occur during the day (DiMaria, 2006). Part-time students are more likely (46%) to take classes in the evening or weekend than full-time students (12%). However, part-time students tend to value their classes more and manage their time more efficiently than full-time students. They are more likely to attend class with 54 percent stating that they had never skipped a class versus 41 percent of full-time students. Even though there are some positive qualities that part-time students have they do not out-weigh the negatives. It is most beneficial for students to be full-time than part-time in hopes to completing ones' academic goals. Being a part-time student results in prolonging their graduation or transfer goals. Many students feel discouraged at the lengthy timeline to continue their academic goals and withdraw all together before reaching their transfer or education goals. The sooner students can transfer the more likelihood that they will acquire a bachelor's degree (Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004).

In order to help Latino/a student's reach degree attainment, colleges must provide various forms of students services and financial aid resources for students to utilize. Sarita E. Brown (2006), president of *Excelencia* in Education, a national nonprofit group that focuses on

improving the outcomes for Latino/a student's shares,

Increasingly, first-generation college students are becoming the norm on campuses, the more colleges assume the responsibility of helping these students understand what they need to do to attend college and helping their families understand what that means, the more successful those students will be. (p. 26)

It takes great initiative from a community college to provide equitable student services that takes into account ones' cultural norms and responsibilities and also utilizes their already established cultural capital. Latino/a community college students enter with a rich identity influenced by their culture and continue to develop and form their identity through their experiences at the community college. *Testimonio* is one powerful way to understand and respond to this identity development, which contributes to degree attainment and larger academic outcomes.

Latino/a Students and HSIs

In the two preceding sections, this literature review presents two reasons that justify the use of *testimonio* to document the experience of Latino/a students on community college campuses. The first section demonstrates that Latino/a students have a set of shared cultural influences that shape their academic and professional identity development. The second section demonstrates that Latino/a students are also subject to a set of institutional influences that contribute to their academic and professional identity development. This section will demonstrate that the increasing number of HSIs have the potential to use *testimonio* to create change in the educational and professional outcomes of Latino/a students. This section will begin by looking at the historical contexts of HSIs and then consider the potential impact of HSIs as advocates for community and policy change.

Historical context of HSIs

In 1998 the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act introduced the Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions program with the intent of providing funds to develop the capacity of institutes serving large numbers of Latino/a student's (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012). In order to be categorized as a HSI school at least 25 percent of the full-time equivalent undergraduate student enrollment must be of Hispanic or Latino/a descent (Laden, 2004). Some of the resources that HSIs are granted are financial grants to be used in facility development, student services, and research grants to further support serving Latino/a students.

However, HSIs would not have flourished without the efforts of organizations such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU). HACU's aim is to bring attention to national issues in higher education among institutions serving large numbers of Latino/a students. HACU also seeks to change national policies that will improve educational access and raise the quality of college opportunities for Latinos/as . The advocacy work that HACU does is largely funded and supported by Latino/a community leaders, business owners, and also educators (Laden, 2001). HACU led the campaign in 1998 for HSIs to be included in Title V, the results of this amendment qualified HSIs for larger allocation of federal funds by Congress (Basinger, 2000).

In 2001 the Department of Education developed a working group titled the White House Initiative for Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans. The White House Initiative focuses on increasing the awareness of the role HSIs play in serving the educational success of Latinos/as (The White House Initiative, 2000). This collaboration is vital in areas of research development and policy change to providing continued support to agencies such as HSIs that

raise the educational attainment rate of Latino/a students. As a result of HSIs receiving continued federal support there has been an increase in HSIs throughout the United States. California leads the way with over 57 HSIs, then Texas with 32, and New Mexico following with 17 (Laden, 2001). Additionally, most HSIs are community colleges (52.7%), and the majority of the HSIs that are community colleges are in urban communities (The White House Initiative, 2001).

A context for creating change

Critics question the link between HSI efforts and Latinos/a academic achievement. “Put another way, is it the already high numbers of Hispanics enrolled in the institutions that obviously produce a higher number of completers in comparison to their lower numbers in non-HSIs?” (Laden, 2001, p. 79). Deborah A. Santiago (2012), offers several suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of HSIs. She says,

The development of monitoring milestones of increased opportunity, enhanced academic offerings, improved quality, and stability for HSIs aligned to educational attainment are critical areas for further exploration in public policy discussions of institutional accountability for the use of funds at HSIs. A more central discussion on the intentionality of HSIs in serving Hispanic students beyond enrollment must also be considered in accountability (p. 165).

HSIs have all of the elements necessary for improving educational outcomes for Latino/a student’s (Villarreal, R.C. & Santiago, D.A., 2012) but they require more and better systems for identifying and serving the needs of Latino/a students. *Testimonio* can be utilized to gather

authentic information on students' needs and increase the effectiveness of HSI programs and services.

HSIs are also called to change policies within the K-12 system to increase Latino/a student success. HSIs have worked with pre-K-12 public school systems to improve the educational outcomes for this historically underserved students by increasing early college awareness and promoting dual enrollment programs, while also aligning academic requirements with local K-12 standards (Dounay, 2008; Vega de Jesus, 2009). According to Ruiz and Valverde (2012) HSIs might also influence K-12 teachers and administrators in public education partnering “with PK-12 practitioners and parents, youth and community members to build the public’s capacity to analyze and advocate for effective policy options” (p. 190). What HSIs lack is an effective tool for cultivating Latino/a student voice inside these types of collaborations.

Community colleges will continue to show an influx of Latino/a students on its HSI campuses (Fry, R. & Lopez, M.H., 2012) Their experiences on these campuses can be gathered through the utilization of *testimonio* and used to influence administrative policy and procedures. Although HSIs serve large populations of Latino/a students, community colleges as a whole also serve this demographic. *Testimonio* can also give insight on the needs and unique identity of Latino/a community college students in general.

Conclusion

This literature review uses a claim of concept to describe the identity development of Latino/a community college students (Machi & McEvoy, 2012). Expert testimony is provided by scholars from the field of LatCrit, and thru the *testimonio* gathered in previous studies. This literature review demonstrates how *testimonio* can be utilized to inform the awareness of community college faculty, and to create programs and services that respond to the strengths and

needs of the Latino/a student community. This is especially important in emerging HSIs who serve a student population comprised of at least 25 percent Latino/a students.

This literature uses joint reasoning to justify the claim that we need to know more about the experiences of Latino/a students at community colleges, especially HSIs. First, this literature review claims that Latino/a students have a set of shared cultural influences that shape their academic and professional identity development. These include the maternal influence that fosters academic resilience; a shared cultural norm of giving back to one's community; and creating a balance between home and college culture. Second, it claims that Latino/a students are subject to a set of institutional influences that shape their academic and professional identity development.

Institutional influences include the historical significance and structure of the community college system and the influence of inequitable academic experiences in the K-12 system. Students respond to these influences through the forum of ethnic studies. Ethnic studies foster the exploration of Latino/a students' cultural roots and an investigation of systems of oppression. Other institutional influences include the disparity in degree attainment, which is influenced by systemic barriers such as the need for remedial course work, a lack of awareness of student services, and the high percentage of Latino/a students who attend community college part-time.

Finally, this literature review demonstrates that the increasing number of HSIs have the potential to use *testimonio* to create change in the educational and professional outcomes of Latino/a students. HSIs have financial resources earmarked to respond to the needs of its Latino/a population. It is the conclusion of this chapter that it is important to use *testimonio* on community college campuses, particularly at HSIs, to learn about and respond to these needs.

Community colleges can use *testimonio* to tailor its services to employ the strengths, such as resiliency, a tradition of community service, of the Latino/a community. Community colleges can also use *testimonio* to inform the students services designed to meet the academic, professional, personal, and financial needs of the Latino/a community. Community colleges that fail to create space for authentic student voices inside the institutional discourse devalue the Latino/a community and perpetuate the cycle of oppression that creates academic inequity.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study will employ a qualitative and narrative research design to demonstrate the

power of *testimonio* as a tool for identifying the most effective programs and services to support the growing population of Latino/a students in community colleges. *Testimonio*, as a methodological approach, allows those affected by racism, sexism, classism to respond to oppression through their voiced experiences (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). Delgado Bernal, Burciaga & Flores Carmona (2012) state that historically "...*testimonio* has deep roots in oral cultures and in Latin American human rights struggles" (p. 363). Using *testimonio* to collect and analyze the narratives of Latino/a community college students, this study will attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the obstacles and support systems that first-generation Latino/a community college students encounter while attending community college?
2. According to students, what can community colleges that are HSIs do to better serve their needs?

The purpose of this qualitative study is to document and honor the experiences of first-generation Latino/a community college students. *Testimonio* creates for students an empowering and liberating repositioning of power inside the traditional academic setting (Cruz, 2006). By gathering the testimonies in a community college setting the research participants will give voice to their unique experiences of education and oppression. They will also represent the experiences of a larger collective (Huber, 2009). According to Pérez Huber and Cueva (2012), "*Testimonio* in educational research can reveal both the oppression that exists within educational institutions and the powerful efforts in which students of color engage to challenge and transform those spaces" (, p.392). For this reason, I plan to utilize *testimonio* as my primary methodology.

In addition, this study will demonstrate that *testimonio* as a valid research tool for identifying and meeting the needs of Latino/a students in a community college setting. This

study intends to add to the literature on *testimonio* as a valid methodology for giving voice to the narratives of marginalized groups. Research shows that Latino/a student enrollment at the community college level is on the rise but degree attainment rates for this group remain low (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Solórzano, 2001). Because of this it is imperative to learn more about the needs of these students, and to create systems and practices to meet these needs. For those campuses with a student body that includes more than 25% of full-time Latino/a students, those identified as HSI, this is particularly important.

Testimonio

It is essential that student voice influence the planning and implementation of student service programs, especially if those services intend to impact a marginalized student population such as Latino/a students. Student voice, and specifically Latino/a student voice, has been omitted or minimized in higher education when policies and student services are implemented (Santiago, 2013). In this study, *testimonio* will be used to help stop the silencing of Latino/a students in community college and will also provide insight on who this unique population is and what their needs are while in college. The *testimonios* collected from first-generation Latino/a community college students in this study will demonstrate direct accounts of the systemic barriers students encounter while also helping student find their voice in a system of higher education that usually mutes their narratives. For HSI campuses in particular, the needs of Latino/a students are expected to be met and this study aims to show *testimonio* as a valid research tool for meeting Latino/a student's needs.

Breaking away from tradition *testimonio* dispels the notion that people are incapable of knowing how to act in their own best own interests (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Instead,

testimonio - unlike a standard interview or survey - allows those marginalized to share the narrative of their lived experiences. This process gives marginalized peoples the power to self-identify their strengths and challenges; it validates the experiences and expertise of oppressed peoples and allows them to create change that comes from within and extends beyond their own community. The *testimonio* gathered by Latino/a community college students will help identify key issues affecting their educational experiences and empower students to asking relevant questions in regards to institutional power dynamics and structures. Through this process community colleges, especially those that are or will at some point become HSI campuses, can dialogue with their Latino/a students. *Testimonio* presents an opportunity to end the cycle of oppression by sharing the narratives of those most affected by it.

I believe that *testimonio* is an ideal research model to be used with first-generation Latino/a community college student's because it will allow these students to address those issues and experiences that hinder the successful completion of their educational goals. Through the utilization of *testimonio* as a research tool, the needs and experiences of Latino/a student will create a critical shift in power dynamics by providing voice to the silenced. In the context of this study *testimonio* will provide an avenue for Latino/a students, who have felt marginalized in the community college system, to have a voice. The research process will allow administrator's access to a Latino/a narrative. It will help administrators and other decision and policy makers to see the strengths and challenges of this student demographic, and to plan strategically to meet their particular needs.

Research Setting

The primary research site for this study is a Northern California community college (CCC),

herein known as Tuck College. Tuck College has a student population that reflects the larger county in which it is situated. The county's population is projected to stabilize from 2000-2020 for all ethnic groups except white and Latino/a (State of California Department of Finance, 2007). During this 20-year period, the Latino/a population is projected to increase a total of 159 percent while the white population is projected to decrease by -17 percent. Currently the county's white majority is mirrored by the population at Tuck College. The proportion of white students (64%) at Tuck community college is significantly higher in comparison to other community colleges (34%) in the state. Mirroring the low number of Latino/a residents in the county as a whole, the number of Latino/a students at Tuck College is low. It is consistently lower when compared to the other California community colleges and hovers around 13 percent in comparison to 29 percent of the proportion at community colleges across the state (California Community Colleges Data Mart, 2008). Tuck college expects the projected population changes to impact their student demographics in similar numbers.

In October of 2010 Tuck was reviewed for its accreditation by a team of 11 committee members comprised of other CCC faculty and administrators. The committee's report made nine recommendations that Tuck needed to address in order to maintain their accreditation. One of the nine recommendations was that Tuck College research its efficacy with the projected changing student demographic. Thus Tuck College must now monitor, and where necessary improve, its impact on Latino/a students. In 2007, in his convocation address to faculty and staff, the President of Tuck College also made note of the changing student demographic. He stated that the Latino/a student demographic at Tuck has shown the most growth in enrollment and he anticipated this growth to continue for future semesters. Since Tuck will likely become an HSI as the Latino/a student population increases, improving the academic outcomes for these students

will continue to be a priority.

In order for a campus to be considered an HSI campus the full-time equivalent student (FTES) population of Latino/a student's needs to be over 25 percent. The latest data on Tuck College shows that the total student population in the Fall 2012 semester was 49 percent White and 23 percent Latino/. Just one year later, the totals were 3 percent lower for whites and 3 percent higher for Latinos. In that same year, Tuck's FTES figures for Latino/a students were at 21 percent. By the Fall of 2014 the total FTES of Latino/a students had risen to 24 percent (California Community College Data Mart, 2014). This campus is getting closer every year to qualifying for HSI status. HSI status will mean both additional financial resources and additional responsibility for meeting the needs of Tuck's Latino/a student population.

Currently the Latino/a student population has several identified needs. Tuck's current Master Plan illustrates that the majority (60%) of students who are on a transfer pathway are white (Master Plan, 2009). Latino/a students showed higher numbers in preparation for workforce by receiving associates and certificate degrees at a larger rate than that of white students. Also, Latino/a students at Tuck entered remedial levels of English and Math at larger rates than white students (Master Plan, 2009). With an anticipated continued growth among Latino/a students at Tuck, there is urgency around implementing strategies and paths to success, including increased transfer rates, for this student population. The results of this study will help Tuck College to understand and mediate the reasons for the disparity in academic outcomes between White and Latino/a student's.

Participant Selection

A group of eight first-generation Latino/a students from Tuck community college

participated in this study. This population was chosen using convenience sampling. According to Creswell (2008),

In convenience sampling, the researcher selects participants because they are willing and available to be studied. In this case, the researcher cannot say with confidence that the individuals are representative of the population. However, the sample can provide useful information for answering questions and hypotheses (p. 155).

Because I work as an academic counselor at Tuck College and because I identify as a Latina, I have a personal connection with the Latino/a student population that allows this type of sampling. I sent out an email to faculty, staff, and administrators on campus for any Latino/a students that they recommended for me contact and be a participant. I received several referrals and three of the participants came from this initial email. I then sent an email to the currently enrolled Latino/a student population on campus, through their college email, seeking additional volunteers. From that second email, that I generated, I received the additional five participants.

The sample was made up of one male and seven female students who are between the ages of 19-28. All are first-generation Latino/a college students who anticipate transferring to a four-year university to acquire a bachelor's degree and possibly graduate degrees. One is half Guatemalan and half Salvadorian, one is half Mexican and half Salvadorian, one has both parents from Guatemalan, and one has both parents from Mexico. Half of the students are undocumented and half are U.S. born. Of the four that were born outside of the U.S., two were born in Mexico and two were born in Guatemala. One of the eight is married and none have children.

As their academic counselor I came to know these students through our counseling

appointments where they slowly opened up and disclosed information on their personal lives, academic goals and interest in serving their communities. All students have felt injustices at varying levels in their lives and wanted to pursue higher education to help or be of help to others in their future careers. The narratives gathered from these students will exclude reflections from previous academic or personal counseling appointments. The information voluntarily shared through the research process will be the only data used.

Data Collection

I plan to begin collecting data at the end of the spring 2016 semester. I offered to meet with the students on campus in a small conference room or in a convenient location off campus that allows for their *testimonio* to come with ease. All opted to meet with me on campus instead of an alternate location. I meet with each student individually for an average of two hours. The intent of the interview will be for the student to learn of my intentions with the collection of their *testimonio* and for me to explain *testimonio* as a research tool. Students will have a chance to answer the two research question:

- 1) What are the obstacles and support systems that first-generation Latino/a community college students encounter while attending community college?
- 2) What can community colleges that are HSIs do to better serve their needs?

The interviews focused on their educational experiences leading up to and while in community college. Specific attention was also paid to the obstacles and support systems on and off campus that impacted their academic and career goals. Some of the prompts for these interviews will be:

- 1) Discuss those factors or influences external to the community college that impact your educational outcomes.

- 2) What programs or services would you recommend for an HSI campus and how should HSI campuses use student *testimonio* to best meet their needs.

I conducted all eight interviews in a two-month span during the end of the spring semester that included the beginning of their summer break. During the end of finals and before summer session began was more flexible and available for most students. In order to make the students feel comfortable and appreciative of their time for the interviews I prepared and brought food and drinks, especially since some of the students were meeting me in between work and family responsibilities and I wasn't sure they had eaten in route to interview. All of the participants appreciated the food and drinks, especially since our interviews were close to a meal time. All interviews were video and audio recorded. The audio recordings were transcribed.

Introduction to the Participants

Julia

Julia is 29, born in the United States to a Guatemalan dad and Salvadoran mom. She states that she identifies more to her mother's culture, because she was raised by her. Her parents separated when she was thirteen years old but they were never married. She is still close to her father and always provided financial support for any of her needs as a child. Julia is very much involved in her Mormon faith and will be transferring in the following semester to a Mormon university. Her mother works as a housekeeper and Julia works on campus in the library.

Francis

Francis is 19 years old and born in Guatemala. She lived in Guatemala until the age of nine, when she and her family left due to a dangerous political climate. Her family went into

hiding after the government forcibly entered their home and held them up at gunpoint as they rummaged through their home. She shares that her parents separated soon after immigrating to the U.S. and their family dynamics have forever lost its close connection. She currently works two part-time jobs and attends college part-time. She is currently an undocumented student who does qualify for the California Dream Act. Francis also lives outside her parents' home, but in the same town as her parents. She is majoring in biology and wants to go into the medical field.

Ana

Ana is 19 years old and born in Mexico. Her parents separated soon after she was born and was raised her first several years of her life by her maternal grandmother. Her mother immigrated to the U.S. when Ana was a year old and they did not reunite until Ana was seven. Ana's father brought her to the U.S. when she was seven, however her mother ended up raising her and her siblings. Ana's is a legal resident and applying for her citizenship in the U.S. She currently lives with her older sister and extended family, as a result of her mother moving back to Mexico during Ana's senior year of high school. Ana is working full-time and attending school full-time.

Tomas

Tomas is 20 years old and born in Mexico. His parents separated when he was in high school and helps his mom raise his younger sister. His father was deported by his mother to Mexico however communicates with his father often and have a close relationship. Tomas, is openly gay and has always felt supported from his family of his sexual orientation. He currently works full-time and attends college full-time. He wants to major in fashion and communications. Tomas is currently in the process of becoming a U.S. citizen.

Lilana

Lilana is currently 29 and was born in Guatemala. Her father brought her to the U.S. when she was 17 and has not returned. Lilian was very emotional when sharing her journey into the U.S. through a *coyote* her father had paid. She keeps in close communication with her mother who she desperately misses in Guatemala. Currently Liliana is undocumented but does qualify for the California Dream Act. She is married and has no children. She is a returning student to Tuck Junior College after having studied and received her degree in dental assisting from Tuck. She has continuously attended Tuck since graduating to finish her prerequisites for the nursing program at Tuck.

Perla

Perla is 20 years old and born in the U.S. Both of her parents are Guatemalan, but they separated when she was 8. She still keeps in touch with her father but hardly sees him. While she lived all her life with her mother she has shared that her older sister has been a large influence in her life as a pseudo parent. She struggled academically in high school and was sent to a continuation school where she ended up graduating early. She enrolled and has become very active on campus as a work study students and elected student body treasurer. Perla is studying to majoring in English and has plans to becoming a lawyer.

Sonia

Sonia is 19 years old and was born in the U.S. to a Salvadoran father and Mexican mother. Her parents were never married and separated when she was young. Her father was

heavily involved in a well-known Salvadoran gang and while he was in and out of jail most of her life she has kept a close relationship with him. He was deported back to El Salvador and has lived there most of her life. She shares that she seeks him out more than he does to her but is content with their relationship. Her mother an activist for human rights all of Sonia's life, she remembers countless protest she attended with her mother as a child. Currently Sonia is majoring in Sociology and has plans to transfer to the University of California Berkeley or Davis.

Isabel

Isabel is 24 years old and was born in the U.S. Both of her parents are of Mexican descent. Her parents divorced when Isabel was 17. She is the eldest of three, with a younger sister and brother. Soon after the divorce of her parents Isabel's relationship became strained and minimal. Isabel works full-time and attends school full-time to help her mother financially. She lives with her mother and helps raise her two younger siblings. She commutes close to an hour to and from work and school because the cost of living in the area is too high. Isabel is transferring in the fall to a California State University and has plans to be a lawyer. Isabel currently works for a law firm and feels she has found her calling in life.

Data Analysis

All the data collected was analyzed through a process of organized coding. Coding will be done with the intention of identifying common generative themes that lead to the findings. They were then analyzed into themes based on the research questions. The data is a representation of the voices from the student *testimonios*. After the data was collected and coded, I began writing the analysis of the results. This process will be guided by what

Creswell (2008) calls, restorying. Restorying “is the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story, and then rewrites the story to place it in a chronological sequence” (p. 519). Restorying the *testimonios* of my participants will allow me to examine their narratives and identify which influences and experiences have had the most powerful impact on their academic and career outcomes. I predict that this process of composing the written analysis took an additional two-three months.

Ethical Considerations

All students participating in this study signed a consent form ensuring that their identity would be protected. It is critical to me that my participants feel safe and comfortable with the process. Some of the participants are first-generation immigrants and all are first-generation college students. I thoroughly explained to them the purpose of my study and their participation and role. It was critical to me that my participants understand why and how their *testimonio* would be used as this could be the first time they had ever participated in a research study. These students are very vulnerable because they are current students at the community college where we conducted the research and might feel uncomfortable discussing obstacles and/or hurdles they have encountered on campus. Therefore, I created various opportunities to answer any questions before and while they participants engaged in this endeavor.

Limitations

Limitations are defined as “...potential weaknesses or problems with the study” (Creswell, 2008, p. 207). Some of the limitations to this study are that I could not control are that the majority of the Latino/a student population in this campus and community come are low-income students. This Latino/a student population is also mostly first-generation college students

and/or first-generation immigrants. The community college that the students in this study attend is the only one they can attend, there is no other community college. Lastly, there are more Latina students attending than Latino students at the local community college.

Delimitations

Boundaries of the setting such as a location, time frame, and sample are all considered definitions of delimitation in a study (Creswell, 2008). In this study I chose to focus my study on a small group of Latino/a students in Northern California. Also, this study was conducted at one period of time and not longitudinally. It should also be noted that the programs and services that the Latino/a students utilized on this campus are not reflective of those that are offered at all other community colleges. Lastly, the institutional barriers that Latino/a students encounter in this study are potentially unique to this campus and not necessarily reflective of the barriers at other community colleges.

Protection of Human Subjects

The participants were given written consent forms and were given the option of using pseudonyms. Approval from the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco was obtained to ensure that the study will be done ethically and protecting the participants. All materials gathered during the research process will be kept in a confidential place and regarded with great care.

Background of the Researcher

As a first-generation immigrant, first-generation college student in the United States, a

product of the community college system, and also an employee of the community college system I feel well equipped and positioned to conduct this research. This research better prepared me for my line of work and also demonstrated how student *testimonios* can assist the college in meeting the needs of Latino/a students to be most successful in completing their academic and career goals. This research is of interest to me as an academic counselor at a community college in California.

In my role as an academic counselor, I have the honor of listening to the *testimonios* of many Latino/a students. They confide in me their personal and systemic barriers they encounter resulting in them failing to meet their educational and career goals. Unfortunately, every new year these barriers do appear to be minimizing. What is concerning for me as a counselor has been that while our Latino/a student population increases, their demands for equitable services and attention to their needs become mute. I saw a small number of brave spirits who decided to continue on their journey to transfer while many others stopped attending or chose a short-term degree such as a vocational program on campus. I was astonished as a first-generation Latina community college graduate that the educational patterns and barriers that I faced as a student had not changed much for my students several decades later.

I became interested in researching why that was and how the trajectory of future Latino/a community college students could be changed through the use of students *testimonios*. This population already has many needs and goes through transformative changes in their identity as they enter and go through their community college experience. What makes their situation more complex is that there is a lack of equitable student services provided to them. Also, the accessibility to services are limited or made difficult to utilize. I have seen the further marginalization of this group and also heard narrative after narrative of these experiences from

my students. I wanted to conduct this research because this population of Latino/a community college students will only continue to increase in numbers at the community college system and their experiences and needs should be heard and addressed.

Community colleges need to create a more effective form of disseminating services to Latino/a student. Current practices are not only failing to provide adequate services but they also lack real input from students as to what they would need to succeed. This research will help address two important needs: one to understand the unique identity of Latino/a students at the community college system and the second to utilize student *testimonio* in identifying programs and services needed. The utilization of *testimonio* can particularly be useful for HSIs or soon to be HSIs as they look for innovative ways to provide services to Latino/a community college students.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Testimonio is the methodological approach used in this study to identify Latino/a community college students' needs, in hopes of implementing effective programs and services in higher education systems, particularly HSIs. I used a social justice framework as an analytic tool to address the educational inequalities experienced by Latino/a student's (Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012). The *testimonio* gathered from the participants gave voice to their unique experiences of education and oppression, creating an empowering and liberating repositioning of power inside the traditional academic setting (Cruz, 2006). These deeply personal *testimonios* not only revealed the various needs for academic success but also stories of resilience.

The experiences of the eight participants adds to the literature on *testimonio* as a valid methodology for giving voice to marginalized groups. The participants opened their hearts, souls, and deeply seeded wounds into a world beyond the four-walls of higher education. For the purposes of this study, and as a result of my process of analysis, I have pulled excerpts from these stories and present them in this chapter. The excerpts are organized by the various themes that emerged in the analyses of the research questions through their *testimonios*.

Research Question One

The following question is addressed in this subsection: What are the obstacles and support systems that first-generation Latino/a community college students encounter while attending community college? Subheadings include: family dynamics, immigration, college preparedness, and financial responsibilities

Family Dynamics

All eight participants shared complex family dynamics that created both obstacles and support systems. All felt that being Latino/a in a wealthy, predominately white community resulted in racial tensions in their school and home communities. However, students universally noted that family created a support system to cope with these injustices. To illustrate this, Francis claims,

The other thing that's hard with living in this county is just being part of a minority group around here. There's like a mindset around it, that if you're Latino you're either going to get pregnant, gardener, or become a janitor. That's how people in this county see you. Or when they see me working at Whole Foods, they just expect me to settle for that job the rest of my life and not getting any sort of college education. So that affects you emotionally. We, as Latino students have things in common that get us through those hard times. Like, family it's always like a support base. Family for us Latinos is everything. Tuck can't offer me that comfort that my family does.

Students stated that the stress they encountered at school or in the community was escaped by being around family. All spoke about the racial inequalities that their parents faced as immigrants, but rarely did the parents dialogue about these incidents. The students stated that most of the time they were too young to understand the awkwardness of the situation and later in life they learned it to be a regular occurrence. Like their parents, they too started to not question racial inequalities. Sonia, shares an incident that describes this process.

I guess, you feel or see that you're not equal or the same as others. I see that everywhere as a Latina. I see this happening all the time to my mom. She's a lot darker than me, but people at a store or supermarket would talk to her, really slow like she didn't know what they were saying to her, even though she's been here for 15 years. Her English is perfect.

A lot of people, when she would answer them in perfect English, they would be shocked. So, maybe from seeing that kind of behavior all my life I got the message that certain people were more important than others.

Sonia, Francis, and the other students felt that family gave them the strength needed to combat the injustices, inequalities and stress that they encounter.

Another unanimous form of support for these students' came from their mothers. The relationship between all of these students and their mothers was very strong and provided much needed support for these students. All of the participants felt their mothers believed in their college dreams and provided a great deal of emotional support. A theme that arose from these participants was the mothers' relentless reminders to preserve Latino culture. Ana shares an example of this:

Thinking about my mom, she raised us being proud of our culture and we always spoke Spanish. My mom would say "Always remember where you come from." Being able to speak Spanish has benefitted me a lot, because in my organization there's a couple Latinas, and I was able to do my presentation in Spanish completely with no issues, and I felt really proud. I feel really proud because I'm reliable, and my boss could write about that in a recommendation. I plan on getting a degree here at Tuck in Spanish and when I apply to a job, I basically can get, not necessarily more privileges, but I am bilingual that is an advantage and my mom said "*Los bilingues valen por dos.*"

All of the participants, were appreciative of their mothers' emotional support and reminders to preserve their cultural traditions in the U.S. As Ana shares above, preserving her Spanish was not a deficit but an advantage for her career.

A surprising revelation to me, was having all eight participants share that their fathers were absent for part or most of their lives, leaving their mothers to take on the dual role of father and mother. Julia's parents separated when she was 13 and Sonia's father, heavily involved in a Salvadorian gang, was deported to El Salvador in her early teens. Isabel's parent's separated when she was 18, Perla's father was deported when she was eight, and Francis' parent separated soon after they immigrating into the US. Tomas' father was deported when he was in high school, Ana's parent's divorced soon after she was born, and Liliana's parent's divorced when she was very young.

All, except Isabel and Liliana, have a close relationship with their fathers. Isabel was the eldest of three children when her father decided to divorce her mother. She said, in reference to her father leaving, "He said that I was old enough, and that I didn't need my father in my life anymore." Her lips curl, and it was impossible to tell if it was to stop herself from crying, in anger, or both. Similarly, Liliana, who lived in Guatemala with her mother and saw her father for the last time when she was two, reunited with her father when she was 17. She was very brief in talking about her relationship with her father, explaining:

I don't have any communication with him we're not, like, best friends or anything so it's better to have him away from me because he's not so positive. He's only been in my life a few years and after that we took separate paths.

Like Liliana, Perla's father came in and out of her life and she shared, "He has a different path that he is on in his life and it didn't include us." Six of the eight participants have kept in contact with their fathers but all of the participants lived with their mothers after their parents' relationships ended. Tomas shared that his father was an alcoholic and was verbally abusive to

his mother. His mother, after years of this abuse, had him deported. His father and he still speak and this is how he addressed their relationship

We still keep in contact with my dad because my mom thinks it's important. I think it's important. I don't want to completely cut someone out of my life, even though from my perspective it's a shitty thing that happened. No one wants to be in that situation. But, I believe in second chances and it's another human being and I'm just a compassionate person. So I just can't find the heart to cut all ties. If he calls, I'm going to answer.

Several of the participants, shared Tomas' sentiment. Sonia, shared how she would take more of the initiative than her father to have a relationship. "Growing up, I sought him out more than he probably sought me out. I'm ok with that it's how our relationship is." The participant's reflections show that the dynamics with their fathers was complex but, they also agreed that they felt a sense of emotional support from them.

It is important to note that the role of parent-child was soon reversed for the participants, who grew up speaking English. This resulted in their parents relying on them for guidance and security. Half of the participants were born in the U.S. and did not fear deportation, and grew up consciously knowing they had more rights and responsibilities to their parents. Isabel gives more detail to this.

That's the normal life though of a Latino student. I feel like once we see the reality of what our parents are going through, and the obstacles that our parents are having to face and being mistreated we end up helping in any way we can. The age doesn't matter at that point it's the reality that matters at that point. These injustices that our parents face or the needs that our parents put on us starts at any age and we see it at all different ages, 8 years old or 18. It's all the same, we help our parents when needed.

Isabel echoes this sentiment as she reflects on the obstacles that her parents have faced.

I was so blind, from kindergarten through high school. I never really understood why they had to work so hard, or what challenges they may have experienced at work, or insecurities or anything like that. I feel thankful that I was born in the U.S. I was born here, and I can find a job more easily. I have the language. If they say something to me, I can speak back without fear of them firing me or just making me feel like crap. I feel like my parents they dealt with that. Their whole lives here, they've been dealing with that.

The rights that they were born with resulted in heavy responsibilities for these participants and included advocate on their parent's behalf with landlords, employers, banks, or stores to ensure just, fair and legal practice were enforced.

All of the participants assisted their parent's in translating and interpreting, but they also helped them navigate and understand the new customs, traditions, and systems in the U.S as soon as they understood them. Ana, shares feeling pressured to take on the adult role in her family. "I felt like I was so young, but I was having to grow up quickly or deal with grown up things really early in my life." Perla, adds to the various responsibilities she took on, "I'd have to go to parent-teacher meetings. I would definitely try to help her, even in grocery stores and doctors' offices or with the mail". These excerpts show the various responsibilities these students' faced growing up as pseudo parents - to their parent's and many times to their siblings. Perla, shares more below.

Since the beginning my sister was really trying to, set a foundation here for our family of our culture and traditions back home in this new fast paced land. Like, there would be

times where my sister was like my second parent because she'd yell at me after going to the parent teacher meetings and I wasn't doing good at school.

This subsection described the family dynamics that the participants share, including mothers as keepers of tradition, absent fathers, and the familial duty to help navigate the system and language of a foreign country. Despite the stress they endured, these participants all agreed that they gained support from their families to succeed in college.

Immigration

When asked why their parents made the journey to leave their home countries to live in the U.S., all shared a sense that survival depended on leaving. Many of their countries were, and still are, in war, political distress, financial ruins, and employment decline. The obstacles that come with being an immigrant, or being born to immigrants, is described in the following subsection.

Francis recalls her last memory of Guatemala before her family fled. "I remember that experience pretty vividly. It was really traumatic. Since that our family has been broke apart. They pointed guns at us and just destroyed the whole house and up to this day I don't know why." Ana, also shares memories of being forced by her parents to leave Mexico, "I had no say as to if I wanted to come here or if I wanted to be in here." Tomas and Liliana, who were also leaving their countries talked about the journey into the U.S. through a "coyote", as "emotional" especially for Liliana who was seventeen at the time. Tomas, was two at the time and said, "We by no means came here in a plane or anything." This journey, however long ago, has had lasting emotional scars for the participants and their families. As they reflect on how their families were forced to flee their countries, with not all family members able to escape, the experiences of

immigration still haunts them.

Liliana, emphasizes a common theme saying that upon arriving to the U.S. fears and worries did not subside.

My journey was intense. But, that was not the worst part of my journey. That was not the hardest part. The hardest part was coming here and discovering that we were illegals and with no papers. That was a shock because coming here I didn't even speak English I felt, stupid. And just confused. [begins to cry] I knew from the beginning that I was illegal, but I didn't really know what that meant. Trying to find a job was not easy. It was so hard because I didn't have a social. When I went to school or looking for a job, I had to tell people that I didn't have papers. You're always wondering how they're going to react. Are they going to like me? Are their thoughts about me going to change? What will this person do if they know that I don't have papers? It's so hard to be honest and just say this is who I am.

The participants all shared that as this new set of fears and uncertainty settled in, they feared being judged, rejected, losing friendships or risking deportation. Liliana adds, "There's a lot of shame though. Personally, I have a lot of shame on asking for money and I've always worked for my own money. Being an undocumented student, it mentally affects you." These participants did not feel they deserved some of the same resources that documented students received such as financial aid, health services, or fair housing. As a result, these undocumented student's, have knowingly been employed below the minimum wage, endured sexual assault in the workplace, and been verbally abused by school staff or teachers.

For the four participants who were U.S. born, parent immigration status affects their lives in a similar way. Perla shares an experience keeping her mom's status hidden from others when

she was very young, "Parents, want to stay with their children, that's what they live for they don't want people to know. So they conceal that. They tell their kids, "You know what, don't tell anyone that I'm here without papers." These parents were taken advantage of by landlords or employers and the students remember having several days to move because a new tenant, whiling to pay more, was now moving into their apartment. There were times when they would come home from school and their belongings were outside of the apartment because someone new had vacated their apartment or their parent was forced to work longer hours and they were left waiting at the school for hours or at home unsupervised until their parent was finished working. Isabel recalls when her parents were divorcing, she was 18 and her mother asked Isabel to help her with the divorce proceedings because she was limited in her English skills.

I had to talk to her attorney. It felt like, I was divorcing my own father because she didn't know what to say. She didn't understand the language. I could barely understand legal language. And I had to grow up quick. I was 40 years old, when I was actually 18, and I had to read everything in detail and explain to my mother, translate everything that was going on to her, and tell her what to say so that nothing would harm her in front of the judge.

The *testimonio* excerpts in this section highlight the obstacles of being an immigrant to the U.S., and include enduring the emotional effects of immigrating, combating struggles for equitable treatment, and experiencing injustice in their communities and at school. This section highlights the stress, fear, and adult responsibilities endured by these participants, as a result of being or living with parents who are immigrants to the U.S. Because of these obstacles, the participants cannot solely focus on their education because they cannot escape the dilemmas and difficulties that come with immigration.

College Preparedness

When asked to reflect on their k-12 experiences, participants responded with feelings of “isolation”, “loneliness”, and “invisibility”. Participants discussed the obstacles experienced in K-12 such as cultural insensitivity and a general lack of the information and academic preparation necessary for college. The participants shared that their teachers never made them feel “proud of their culture” and instead made them feel “weird” for being “different”. Ana, explains that because she was Latina and poor, it was hard to relate to her classmates, who were mostly white and of a high socioeconomic status.

Through all of my school career I didn't have a connection with my classmates. I knew I could relate to them on a basic level. But other than that, there was nothing. There was absolutely nothing. I felt completely isolated. My mom also knew that would happen by us going to these schools. You will get a good education, but you will be lonely. It was the lesser of two evils. Like, which one are you going to take? I can take being lonely, sometimes but it was hard because it was that way all the time.

Francis echoes Ana's sentiments of not being able to relate to her white classmates growing up. Francis, explains,

I remember when I was little I invited one person my entire elementary to middle school grades to my home and I really close to her. We lived in a little apartment, so we didn't have a huge house with a pool like they had. It was just uncomfortable because it was just like, "Okay. We can play in my room, but I have an uncle living in my living room and I have my two cousins who share a bedroom with my sister and I. So, I felt like she was uncomfortable because it was pretty stuffy. I never invited anyone over again. So, I just kept my playdates at other people's house.

Tomas, shares similar feelings of loneliness, “As a kid you can't help but wish you had a best friend or someone that you can relate to.”

Sonia shares another common aspect of the K-12 school experience, feeling invisible:

In high school, I was always invisible. I just never felt like I was ever really a part of my school, a part of my community, a part of anything. Where I live now, the part of Marin that I live in is mostly rich, white people. I've never been a part of that community, like community events, ever. I just can't relate to them. But, then I'll go 5 minutes away and go into the poor, Latino part of Marin and I do everything there, like it's more me.

The lack of cultural connectedness was an obstacle the participants faced in K-12. They also faced a lack of preparedness for college.

Some of the participants took the initiative in college to take classes that they longed for in their K-12 education. Sonia expands on this notion in her *testimonio*, “Like I've always had just such a deep yearning to know more about my culture's history. Mostly because it was never there in my education before college. So it's just like that hunger to find anything that can connect you with your history, with who you are.” However, the countless barriers these participants faced also intensified in college. The participants acknowledge a myriad of obstacles but also acknowledged the importance of higher education. College, as Julia shares, is “something I had to do in order to have a stable life”. However, all the participants acknowledge that their K-12 experiences lacked in providing information about how to prepare and enter into college. Sonia states, “I guess you're supposed to seek out your counselors in middle school and high school. I didn't know how that worked, and nobody ever asked to talk to me about my future and my goals. I didn't really exist.” Several of the participants shared that their schools had tracked them in non-college preparation course or unnecessary remedial

courses. Isabel reflects on this saying, “Now that I look back on my education before starting Tuck it definitely did not prepare me for college. I was put in English language development classes, even though I spoke English and I was born here”

All of the participants shared feeling too “lost”, “confused”, and “embarrassed” and “scared” to advocate for themselves in not only K-12 schools, but also upon entering into community college. Tomas’ *testimonio* adds:

I almost feel like we go into the college experience with blindfolds on. I can take and follow advice, but I didn’t have any of advice on how to get through college or even what college was going to be like from my high school. When I came to Tuck and saw that I wasn't academically prepared for college I just felt so lost. I didn't have parents or older siblings to guide me. I didn't have older cousins or anyone to guide me. There’s so much more to figure out like personally, educationally, and financially. Like, it's just like a myriad of things that come into play when you start college that I didn’t know about.

The excerpt above describes how participants are blindsided by the demands of maneuvering through college. As a result, they soon learned that they need to advocate for themselves, but the response by faculty and staff at the community college was not always positive. All the participants shared feeling at some point that they were, “a bother” to a faculty or staff member. Some were so ashamed by this kind of response that they limited the resources they used on campus or avoided advocating for themselves all together. Sonia’s excerpt below describes this experience.

I definitely wish I had been taught the skills to advocate for myself. I was always ashamed to advocate for myself. Like, you're just embarrassed. Like, you felt guilty asking for help. Even if you needed it and I did, you feel you didn't deserve that help in a

sense. We don't need somebody to shame us for asking for help. Or to make us feeling, lesser because we're searching for help and we don't know these things. Like, we're never taught these things from our family or in high school. Because the system unfortunately failed and ignored us. All of our lives.

The participant's agreed that an obstacle they faced, when entering into community college, was that they under-utilized or avoided the variety of programs and services on campus, mostly because they felt "ashamed" to ask for help or "didn't know they existed" on the campus.

The administration, faculty, and staff in K-12 schools, and on Tuck's campus, were often the key to student success or failure. Francis, shares her experience saying,

Community is a big thing for me and the Latino culture. Growing up in the U.S. and looking back I was really surprised at the lack of community. In the Latino community we come together to help each other, raise each other's kids or just do what's best for the community. I think about when I first got here none of my teachers, none of my teachers ever stopped what they were doing and reached out. So I was really surprised about that kind of culture and lack of community coming together that I felt in the U.S. I was already angry about having to be in the U.S. but not having anyone show they cared that I was alone on playground, or didn't have friends, or falling behind in school made me even more angry. I think that part of me was just like, "Oh, wow! Nobody gives a shit," You know that lack of connection throws you off. Connection, between teachers and student and student to student. That really surprised me, that there wasn't like this community vibe going on in my education before I came to Tuck and also now at Tuck.

With limited access to key programmatic resources and emotional support, the participants did not think of college as a safe community. Similarly, participants noted a lack of access to, and understanding of, college financial aid and resources.

Financial Responsibilities

The participants shared that understanding the financial aid process when they arrived at community college was a common obstacle. Financial aid was “confusing”, “overwhelming”, and “stressful” to the participants. Added to this obstacle was the additional task of explaining financial aid to the participants’ parents.

I don’t think many teachers and staff know that most Latino students struggle to live in Marin county and struggle with having a space to do homework or even a space to sleep. Another struggles that I don’t think anyone at Tuck is aware of is just the fact that some of our parents don't really know how to support us kids. I see it in my family and other Latino families that our parents, can’t really support us in the right way. It would be nice to hear your parent say, "how about, like, I help you get a car? I already filled out your financial aid papers for you." Most Latino parents don’t have that knowledge or ability to do the things we need them to do for us while we are going through college. Our parents are so in need of work and don't really know how to help their kids with college and financial aid stuff here in the U.S.

I was quickly reminded by the participants that the majority of financial aid forms and services are in English. Aside from the language barrier, participants share that explaining the system and process of receiving financial aid in the U.S, as well as the various types of financial aid,

was challenging. Some of the participant's parents had completed a college degree in their home country but since the US financial aid system is different, it still required explaining.

The participants also shared experiences of asking for help in the financial aid office, calling it "scary" and "intimidating." Perla says, "The little financial aid I know, I didn't learn it from the college. I think there's a lot more to know, it's just you don't get the most friendly faces when you ask a lot of questions up there." As a result, most of the participants "didn't bother going back" and ended up funding their way through college without any financial aid or minimal aid.

Francis describes the burden of working full-time, wishing this was not her reality:

I'm 19 and I work 40 hours a week. I just can't afford to come to school, five times a week or four times a week. I have to pay my bills. I have to pay my rent. I have to pay my gas. I have to pay my car, you know. There's so many things that I have to pay and I'm still struggling to pay everything so now I got a second job. I'd love to be a full-time student, but it's just impossible for me. I was thinking about it last night and I was like, "Jesus Christ. It's going to take me two more years to get out of here" Yes, it's going to take me a long time to get out of Tuck, but I'd rather have that than not get out at all. It's really scary to know that you're going to be here and everybody's moving on but I just think that I have to accept it, and I have to work with it.

All of the participants were working at least part-time while attending college. Some went to school full-time and worked full-time. Tomas, like all the other participants, acknowledged that the financial burdens of college could not be relieved by his parents' income. He states, "I definitely cannot go to my mom and say, "I need money for books or clothes". She can't right

now or ever because she barely makes enough to pay our rent and bills. That's why I have to work." He, like the other participants, worked various jobs to pay for his personal needs, to help his parents with rent and utilities, to purchase necessities for younger siblings, and to pay for school. Participants shared testimonios of the tension between "needing" to work and "wanting" to be in school. Ana gives an example: "I'm always looking for more hours at work to help pay for everything. I never say no to them, and I'm always like, 'Yes. I can work that day. Yes, I can work this night,' when I knew I had a test the day after." Participants sacrificed transferring to a four-year college, and accessing resources such as tutoring, in order to prioritize family or financial obligations. All wish they had been more persistent and advocated for more information about financial aid, in order to have worked less and focused more on school. These *testimonios* share how participants have a variety of financial responsibilities and obligations, outside of the college setting, that pose an obstacle to degree attainment. These *testimonios* also reflect on the lack of financial aid resources and support that these participants encountered in college.

Summary of Findings

The eight participants discussed in this section describe the support system that family created for them. The mothers of the participants created the largest amount of support for the participant's. Unexpected to me was that none of the participants had a traditional nuclear family upbringing. Several of the participants shared, family dynamics and gender roles transformed, after immigrating to the U.S possibly contributing to their parent separation. The *testimonios* shared also highlighted the obstacles that being an immigrant and/or being the child of immigrant parents, lacking in college preparedness, and balancing various financial responsibilities had on their college experience.

Research Question Two

The following subsections address the second research question: According to students, what can community colleges that are HSIs do to better serve their needs? Subheadings include college literacy (K-12), influential programs at Community Colleges, and financial aid literacy for students and parents

College Literacy (K-12)

Tomas' candor in the following statement illustrates a recurring theme among the *testimonios* of all the participants. "We just need to get better about introducing college from the very beginning of elementary." Community colleges, especially those that are or will be HSIs, can encourage and collaborate with their local K-12 districts to begin literacy around the topic of college. The literacy needs to be, as the participants shared, "for both the parents and us kids" and translated into many languages. Sonia shares her struggle to understand the college process: "I mean, my mom tried to help, but it would frustrate her because she didn't know how to help me. She didn't know anything about college in the U.S." Sonia and Tomas' reflections demonstrate a need throughout K-12 for college literacy.

Very few of the participants were exposed, during K-12 schooling, to college preparatory programs. Those that were they found them to be very impactful, but "too late" in their educational lives. For some their roadmap into the college system had not been paved to lead them directly into the four-year college system. Others could have gone directly from high school to a four-year college or university, but lacked the knowledge and information to do so. Julia's shares, "I think one of the things being a first generation college student is that, it's just

kind of hard because there's things out there that you just don't know about.” The participants felt their high schools did not adequately inform them about college.

Some of the participants shared that after high school they were not convinced they would enroll in college, primarily because they had little knowledge or information about the topic. Their trajectory was changed when introduced to elective classes in high school, such as AVID or MESA. One of the focuses of programs such as these are to encourage educationally disadvantaged student's to prepare for college. Ana reflects on her experience with AVID, “I got into a program called Avid since I was a freshman, Avid just helped me so much. I think Avid was primarily one of the reasons why I matured so quickly. I learned and realized that I wanted to continue my education after high school.”

The participants realized that not every high school can offer these electives, but encouraged a dialogue between the community college and its local K-12 districts to realize the positive impact that these programs have when offered. Tomas remembers learning about the complexity of applying to college and says, “I wouldn't know any of that stuff, so I'm glad I did AVID in high school.” Participants would encourage community colleges to collaborate with the K-12 system, and to begin at the elementary level with college literacy workshops, classes, and conferences. The participants emphasized that these events need to be on a continuous and annual basis, and planned with the intent to serve first generation college students and their parents.

Influential Programs at Community Colleges

The participants spoke of several programs at the community college level that helped them understand the college system and how to maneuver through it to achieve their academic

goals, such as transferring. They feel that for HSIs who have such programs, it is critical that these institutions continue to fund or expand their services, or add such programs on their campus to serve their needs. Lilana, shares below the needs of first-generation college students.

Everybody deals with work and other family issues, but as a Latino student it's also sometimes, getting the help with so many other family needs and also knowing how to go through college. Tuck needs to understanding, that we don't know a lot of what we're doing when we first start college and that we need guidance. That's what I needed, a lot of support while I was at Tuck. I think other Latino students feel the same way, we need a lot of help.

A common dilemma was not knowing what resources were available to them, as they struggled to maneuver through college. Tomas, shares the need for colleges to connect students to resources. "We need to know where and what our resources are on college. I wish there were signs that said, 'Please come to me for help.'"

Julia echo's, Tomas' sentiment that the college needs to connect its students to the services available that can help them reach their degree and transfer goals. Julia describes one such program that has done this for her and the importance of these types of programs.

But one of the programs that I think really got it through my head that I kind of needed to transfer and that that was, the best goal that you could probably have at a community college was 10,000 degrees. So I think because of them I knew that I needed to kind of come here but not stay here. So not that I don't like this school but I think one of the things being a first generation college student it's just kind of hard because there's things out there that you just don't know about.

10,000 Degrees is a local non-profit agency working with mostly first-generation college students and their families from K-college levels. They provide, scholarships, college advising, and leadership opportunities for the students and their parents. Several of the participants use 10,000 Degrees' services, receive a scholarship from 10,000 Degrees, and find the program extremely helpful. 10,000 Degrees cultivates a strong collaborative working relationship with the schools and colleges that they provide services to, and also teach parents how to support their child while in college. Liliana, shares the need for programs like 10,000, where they help students connect with campus resources. "I feel like maybe we didn't grow up with the same opportunities as other student's in school, or get the best grades in high school, but we do want to do better for our future, we just need a little bit of help."

Another, program that more than half of the participants engaged in on campus is the Equal Opportunity Programs Services (EOPS) program. This is a state-funded program whose model is to provide services to educationally and economically disadvantaged students. Julia describes her experience with the program, saying,

A program at Tuck that has helped me figure out college has been the EOPS office for the tutoring and counseling. That was very helpful. I feel like they are super helpful. It's not only business with them they, they get to know you and they're very friendly. They always tell us that we can go in whenever we want and just talk or complain or whatever we want to do.

It's the relationship building that Julia speaks about that made EOPS impactful to her. Ana, shares a similar experience with EOPS.

I think about my EOPS counselor, who I see all the time, he knows everything I'm going through and he's always checking up on me. He's like, "Okay. So first, you were dealing with all this, and you were not really doing good with math, but what's going on in your life now?" He's always trying to help or be just a support but he also is trying to understand why you're failing your classes. I think other Latino students at Tuck need that. Definitely. Outside of EOPS and I don't think I really know of any other programs on campus. Actually, I was initially going to start trying to go to therapy but it's too expensive and then found out just last week that Tuck has that for free for students. So, I think more Latino students would take advantage of programs where they won't judge you and where you're in an environment where you're not the only one going through certain struggles.

Ana demonstrates how this program provides support for her personal struggles and not just her academic dilemmas. Ana, also highlights being unaware of other student services programs, such as psychological counseling. She also states that, she and other Latino/a student's, fear judgment for the utilization of services and instead need to feel welcomed and encouraged to take advantage of the services.

All but one of the participants enrolled in the Puente Project at Tuck. Puente's mission is to increase the number of educationally disadvantaged students to transfer from a community college to a four-year colleges or universities, earn college degrees and return to the community as mentors and leaders to future generations. The program is interdisciplinary in approach, with writing, counseling and mentoring components. Students in the program enroll in a cross-listed course in the English and Counseling department that are specifically earmarked for the Puente

Project. This learning community model, of two or more departments and teaching faculty working together on a cohort of student's is a strategic model for student success.

Isabel's *testimonio* below shows the impact that this interdisciplinary and learning community model has had on her, particularly in regard to the mentoring and academic counseling components.

I feel like we really need a system like Puente, I feel like Puente does help a lot where it's connecting different classes, networking with professionals who are Latino or who have gone through college. I feel like we as Latino students, we need to build more confidence within ourselves. I don't know how to explain it but, we need a system where we can transfer out quicker. I honestly wanted to give up after the third year, because I didn't want to be there for that long. For me, I found my biggest support to transfer as soon as I was in Puente I felt like I was at home, and it opened my eyes.

Tomas also felt lost and overwhelmed by college and the transfer process when he began college. However, Puente helped relieve some of his doubts.

The Puente program at Tuck Junior College helps prepare you for transferring. So doing this programs definitely helps, not even just the Latino community, just anyone who feels like they're lost within the education system. Puente definitely helped me, because it was that extra step of having someone guide you through college and letting you know step-by-step on how to get through college and transferring was so helpful.

Sonia, echoes Tomas' sentiments in the quote below:

My goals after high school were just to work, so going to community college is a big deal for me. So, when I got to Tuck, I saw a Puente flyer about being in a transfer program. That's actually where I found out most of this information about transferring. But, before Puente nobody told me anything. I just didn't know what to do. Now, my goals are to hopefully major in sociology and transfer. I'd like to transfer to a UC like Berkeley or Davis. When I was in middle school and high school I thought going to one of these schools was like untouchable, unless you were white. Or your parents had been in college before you. My parent's didn't have either one of these things, so I was like, "Oh, okay. Well, that's not going to work." If I had known all that I know now, about who can actually apply to college, back then, I probably would have worked a lot harder in school, a lot harder. I was basically on my own again, when I started Tuck, to try to figure out this whole college thing, until Puente.

The Puente Project fills a need for these participants and helps them to understand the transfer process and how mentoring and learning communities can move students through the college process with more focus and fulfillment.

These participants demonstrate, through their *testimonios*, the need for community colleges, especially those that will be or are HSIs need to invest their resources on influential programs such 10,000 degrees, EOPS and the Puente Project, that focus on increasing the college rates of underrepresented students. In particular, the *testimonios* show a particular need for programs that assist students in understanding that transferring to a four-year college or university is an option as a community colleges student. This might bring more clarity on the transfer process, and create a streamlined progression to transferring.

Financial Aid Literacy

Tomas summarizes a recurring theme from the other participants regarding financing their education.

I definitely wish I would have known more about what other kinds of financial aid there is. I can tell my 18-year old cousin, who's going to Tuck next semester, about all of these things that I had no idea about. That's another thing, I didn't have siblings growing up and I had these parents who just came here to this country knowing nothing so I definitely wish I knew more financial aid because any help takes the stress off of school.

The participants in this study struggle to understand the financial aid process and have little to no guidance from their parents or the college in alleviating the confusion. Some, like Liliana, assume they do not qualify for aid and simply fund themselves through college. “Since I still don't have papers, I didn't even bother to do my research to see if I qualify for financial aid or not.” Regardless of their legal status in the U.S. these participants feel it was their financial responsibility, and not the responsibility of the college, to fund a college education. Jackie summarizes this thought, “I think that’s just part of our culture. We don’t want to put what’s on our plate on someone else’s plate.”

The participants *testimonio* demonstrates a need for financial literacy from the college and in the K-12 system on the various forms of financial aid. For those students who do seek financial aid, they share that they are “confused” and “unsure” of the aid they are receiving. All of the participants exhibited not knowing if there are various other forms of aid available to them. Francis shares the need for financial literacy below.

The college can do a better job at letting kids know what's available for them to use. One example is financial aid. That sometimes is a stumbling block for students in college. I think that's always a thought on every student's mind. Up to this day when I go to the financial office I don't fully understand what they're telling me.

The participants in this study stress a need for colleges, especially those that are HSIs, to offer financial literacy to parents and students, throughout the K-12 process and throughout their college years, as new policies, processes, and legislation continuously changing.

Undocumented students in this study demonstrate the most need in terms of financial aid literacy. Liliana, gives more insight into additional and specific attention needing to be given for undocumented students in college.

But, maybe if a person at Tuck was telling me this is what you have to do to get financial aid. This is where you have to apply. And this is what you need to do. That might be helpful, I wonder though if you have to pay back financial aid? I don't know. I didn't do my research because I was always afraid that they would say, "No, you don't have papers, you don't qualify." I feel like being a student is so hard, because you have to worry about so many things.

Maybe if Tuck knew students didn't have papers they could pull them aside and tell them their options. That might be a good idea instead of pretending they don't know what's happening. I know that they don't have to, but if they reach out to that student it would be really helpful. If financial aid said "It's OK, I know you don't have papers but I'm here for you to help you and it's up to you if you want to take it or not." But at least have the option of knowing you have choices. Yes, that would be great. Because I was afraid,

I am afraid. That's why I don't ask. It is still a thought in my head. I might be wrong, but it is still what I think. It's better if I, don't tell people or they don't know anything. And I'm just going to see how I can pay for it myself.

The four participants who are undocumented, pointed out various misconceptions of financial aid, “fear” of deportation by the financial aid staff. Institutional support might work to ease their fears and clear up fallacies. The *testimonios* of these participants demonstrates a need for the financial literacy to be a collaborative process with the college and various community agencies whose focus is to increase the college rates of educationally underrepresented students.

Summary of Findings

These *testimonios* share the various strategies that administrators, staff, and faculty at community colleges, especially those that are HSIs could use to better serve the needs of Latino/a students. Latino/a students and their parents still lack financial aid literacy and college preparedness information from their K-12 systems and evidence from the *testimonios* suggest that institutions and community agencies collaborate to eradicate this deficit. The participants also encourage continued support and development on campus for programs that specifically work with first generation college students and their parents. This might help students navigate the college system and help students accomplish their career and educational goals in a time-efficient manner.

Conclusion

This chapter highlights the obstacles and support systems that Latino/a community college students experience while at Tuck. Also, this chapter underscores the importance of student *testimonios* as a resource for community colleges, especially those that are HSIs to

understand how best to serve Latino/a student needs. It was shocking to me, as a first-generation college student and immigrant, that most of the obstacles to achieving educational success mirrored mine, decades ago. While I hear their stories in my office and classroom as a counseling faculty member, I was left with a better understanding of their identity and needs. Listening, documenting, and sharing their stories and lives was such an honor and gift in my doctoral journey.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

It has always been my intention with this doctoral process to learn how best to serve my students, especially those who had been marginalized and oppressed in our educational systems. I acknowledge, recognize, and feel better prepared in my capacity as a faculty member to serve my students through this experience. It is through the utilization of *testimonios* that I realize the impact that students' narratives can and should have on our campus decision-making processes in providing programs, services, and trainings on campus. Through the participants in this study, I better understand who the Tuck Latino/a student population is, but also how to better serve their needs. In this chapter a summary of the findings, based on research question one, will be discussed with the literature review. After that, research question two findings will be discussed, using the following two theoretical frameworks; Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Elenes & Delgado Bernal, 2010).

Discussion

Discussion of Research Question One

This section answers the question, "What are the obstacles and support systems that first-generation Latino/a community college students encounter while attending community college?" It includes the following subheadings: Family Dynamics and its Systems of Support and Obstacles; Immigration and Fear; College Preparedness and the Aftermath; Financial Responsibilities and Assumptions; A Balanced Identity; Aspirational Capital. A summary closes the section.

Family Dynamics and its Systems of Support and Obstacles

All eight of the participants were first-generation college students, half were U.S. born, and all had parents that were non-U.S. born. All grew up with Spanish as their native language and Spanish being the dominant language in the home. I was amazed with their *testimonios* of resiliency, strength, commitment, drive, and passion for life. These participants opened up to me as an educator, showing their world in a new light. I saw the many facets of their identity and the strength of their spirit to endlessly dream.

These participants all live in a very white, middle-high income county, where they are one of few Latino/a students in the community and in the schools. They grew up in low-income housing and felt disconnected from the community, school, and their peers. Their parents had settled into this county for financial reasons, and view racial tension as a tradeoff for having their children in safe neighborhoods with high-performing public schools. Pizarro's (2005) study of Latino/a university students demonstrates that there are lasting psychological imprints on identity, from childhood experiences of race and racism such as those experienced by the participants in this study.

The primary source of employment for the parents of the participants in this study is service sector jobs such as landscaping, housekeeping, construction, and nanny. While most of the parents have no college degrees from their native countries, they all instilled a strong value of education for their children. Education is a value and opportunity that participants' parents wanted their children to pursue, a common theme among immigrant families, as noted by Suárez-Orozco (2010). Even though none of the participants come from two-parent households, education and family are virtues that define their upbringing. Regardless of the reasons for their fathers' absences, all the participants felt a commitment to having a relationship with their fathers. Their mothers naturally became one of the most influential people in their lives and all

universally felt a responsibility to honor their mothers' sacrifices by succeeding in college. This supports and affirms findings by Nielsen (2013) and Espinoza (2010) that family is not only a large part of student identity, but also their biggest form of support.

The relationship between the participants and their parents is non-traditional in the sense that the participants help their parents navigate the customs and traditions of a new land. The participants feel a need to take on adult roles and responsibilities, and from a very young age felt an obligation to help their parents as translator and interpreters. At times this responsibility extends and the participants feel as if they are their own parents, making their own doctor's appointment for example, or being of assistance to a sibling. Hoffman (1989) and Guerrero (1988) observe these types of roles reversals between immigrant parent and their children, as children can adapt to the host country more quickly than their parents. Even though this role reversal was an obstacle for the participants in this study, and at times conflicted with their college responsibilities, the participants still feel family is a critical part of their identity and see family as a support system. This sentiment echoes claims made by Arnett (2002).

Immigration and Fear

Something new, that my study adds to the current body of literature, is the obstacle created by a fear induced by immigration status. Even though half of the participants born in the U.S., all shared instances of needing to advocate for themselves or their parent's with employers, landlords, billing offices or banks with practices that discriminate against undocumented immigrants. Some of the participants did stay silent when sexually assaulted by a landlord, underpaid in the workplace or racially attacked by a teacher because they had been threatened with deportation.

All of the participants spoke of living in fear because of their, or their parent's,

immigration status. Montoya (2000) writes about policies and practices that give reason for immigrants to live in silence and secrecy. The participants were raised to avoid deportation and in turn did not seek financial aid in college, or medical attention when needed, for fear of deportation. Some of the participants do not even share this information with close friends, classmates, or teachers because they fear judgment and negative reactions. Rios (2008) and Quinones (2011) write that established power structures create fear as an oppressive tool of dominating immigrants in our society. Even though the immigration status of some of the participants allows them or their parent to legally reside in the U.S., they still live in fear of deportation. The climate in the U.S., on the topic of immigration and immigration reform, is and has always been heated, but through the participants' testimonios I see the scorching scars that inhibit their ability to live life in the U.S free of fear.

College Preparedness and the Aftermath

The participants reflect on their K-12 educational experiences and feel they lagged behind their white peers in understanding what was needed to prepare for college. Chau (2012) confirms this, noting that Latino/a students have more insecurities than their white peers upon entering community college. All of the participants shared that their parents were not able to provide them with any college support. Their high school counselors never reached out to them to provide them with the resources for applying or preparing for college. Community colleges serve as the first point of entry for the majority of Latino/a student's because they offer a low-cost higher educational experience close to home, while also preparing them for the four-year university system (Martinez & Fernández, 2004). As a result, most participants felt that community college was the most economical choice for them and their family. Looking back, some realized that they had all the requirements to apply to a four-college directly after high

school, but lacked the information from their high school. Others realized their senior year in high school that they had not been placed in the correct academic courses during high school and did not meet the admissions requirements for the four-year college systems. Escobar (2013), shares that these circumstances have a long history of being true for Latino/a students. Carnoy (2010) shares that even though Latino/a students disproportionately enroll in community college at higher numbers than any other ethnic group, they transfer at much lower rates than any other ethnic group.

Kirwan (2010) writes that Latino/a community college students are encumbered with obstacles when trying to maneuver through the college process, and most take the short vocational track at a community college versus, the longer strenuous road of transferring. Student *testimonios*, can be utilized to address their struggles to complete college. Julia recommended colleges,

Take more time or consideration towards figuring out why we drop or why it's so challenging for us sometimes to be in school. I don't think it's because we don't want to be here, it's just because things outside of school are sometimes out of our control.

The participants had the obstacle, upon entering community college, of feeling disconnected with most faculty and staff on campus because of a lack of cultural connectedness. Berry (1997) feels this naturally occurs because the college culture and Latino/a cultural traditions and beliefs are not equally valued or acceptable. Colleges must make a commitment to creating a campus culture where students understand their role in society. Francis, shares this importance, “I think as a society it's where we're failing to learn about different people and learn about ourselves. So, I think moving forward I would take these types of classes even if I don't need them for transfer. It's important for me to grow as a person in this world.” Yosso (2005) refers to student's community capital wealth not being valuable by the dominant culture, or in this case not being

redeemable in the college system or pedagogy. Anzaldúa (1987) writes about *mestiza* knowledge, or knowledge that is unknown to a dominant land, being silenced in the dominant society and schools as a form of continued oppression or disempowerment. A few of the participants have felt supported, by a faculty or staff member, resulting in making a difference and changing the trajectory of their lives. Liliana states, "At Tuck my teacher she was always like, "You can do it. You can accomplish anything that you want."

Financial Responsibilities and Assumptions

For these participants both the K-12 and community college system did a poor job of explaining the financial aid process. Martinez & Fernández, write that community colleges need to take the initiative and provide financial aid resources to Latino/a student's (2004). The participants in this study felt overwhelmed with the process of applying, receiving and maintaining aid. The process was further complicated by needing to explain the process to their parents. The participants shared that they did not have anyone in high school or at the community college that could translate the information to their parents in their dominant language of Spanish, so the participants needed to not only learn the process for themselves but also for their parents. Being that the financial aid process was extremely confusing and overwhelming to the students, several participants did not receive aid and paid for college out of pocket.

Because undocumented students were fearful of the financial aid process and its relationship to their legal status in the U.S., they did not apply. Some assumed that because of their status they would not qualify. All of the participants, especially the undocumented student's, wished they had additional information on financial aid, particularly because all felt their parents could not afford tuition, nor did they want to burden their parents with their

financial needs. “First-generation students are often at a disadvantage when navigating the world of higher education because, unlike their traditional peers, they have not grown up in an environment that acculturates them to college (Jehangir, Williams & Jeske, 2012, p. 269).

All of the participants worked, not just for their college needs, but also to help pay for any personal needs and to help augment their parents’ income, helping to pay for rent and home utilities. The participants all agreed that work and family needs competed for their time and as a result caused their focus on education to suffer. Tinto (1998) argues that the financial, academic, and cultural obstacles that Latino/a students encounter in college need to be eased by the colleges. Community colleges, especially those that are HSIs, can better understand and serve these needs by utilizing student *testimonio*. The *testimonios* shared in this research demonstrate that Latino/a students and their families made inaccurate assumptions about financial aid. Also, the college wrongly assumes that if students do not apply for aid, they must not need it. Both of these assumptions have, and will continue to, hurt Latino/a students unless both the K-12 and college systems overcome this hurdle. According to Bernal (2006), Latino/a students in college “maintained an emotional and financial commitment to their families and communities” (p. 125). Community colleges, especially those that are HSIs, need to learn more about the financial struggles and responsibilities that Latino/a students encounter and provide resources to help students and their families build financial literacy.

A Balanced Identity

The participants discussed in length the journey they took in developing their identity. While they acknowledge that identities are constantly evolving, the participants in this study experienced dynamics that were not discussed in length in the current literature. This subsection

adds to the literature, from the *testimonios* of the participants, on the topic of identity formation for Latino/a student's in the U.S. Being able to navigate the language, customs, norms, food, and other traditions of a culture shapes a person's identity within that culture. The participants in this study felt had to live in two cultures; Latino/a and U.S., in one environment. Their shared obstacle was that these two cultures collided and contradicted each other, causing confusion in identity formation. Sonia helps give insight to this topic, "Being American is very different from being Guatemalan. They are each a different life, but I'm in the middle. So it's like hard and weird at the same time. I don't know how I'm supposed to act or be sometimes."

The participants shared that it was difficult living in a society that was vastly different from their cultural upbringing. Meeting the expectations of each culture was never possible and it seems to participants that neither cultural group acknowledged or empathized with their efforts. Sonia shares what most of the students did to cope with this difficulty, "It's like you have to integrate both worlds. Or, adapt to both worlds when you're in them. Most of the time I live in these two worlds in separate times." The participants share the challenges they faced as they compartmentalized the needs of each world.

Regardless of the length of time living in the U.S., the participants feel a responsibility from their Latino/a family and friends to practice their culture in the U.S. Julia shares, "they expect me to still be Latina". Some of the central expectations were preserving their native language, customs, traditions, and history. Many remember being ridiculed by family or friends, when they fell short of not meeting these expectations. Sonia states, "Because I grew up with mostly white kids in the rich part of Marin my cousins would tell me or other people that I didn't sound like, Mexican. I've always gotten that, 'Oh, you sound white.'" There was a heaviness in the participants' *testimonios* when they felt they had failed to meet the demands of their

cultures. These participants also avoided being labeled a “sell-out” or “*una niña fresca*” because it resembled to them a sense of cultural shame.

I feel like I'm kind of needing to step on egg shells around my cousins with this part of my life. I don't want to come off as, cocky. I don't want to be called whitewashed. People thinking that you think you're better than them or trying to show off or full of myself

There were times when they withheld personal accomplishments at work or school, as did Julia in her *testimonio* above when she found out she was accepted to a prestigious university. She not only feared judgment by her cousins in sharing her transfer goals, but she was also aware and mindful that these barriers were “too big” for others like her cousins to conquer.

Just as these participants were judged for “acting white” in the Latino/a community of family and friends, they were also criticized for acting “too Hispanic” in their white community. Perla gives insight to this topic.

At first it hurt a lot when people thought I wasn't proud of my culture, because it was just like, no that's not true at all. It made me want to be more Hispanic, but then if I did that I would get more segregated than I was already getting for being like one of the few Mexican kids in school. That has happened to me all my life.

These participants share a demand from society to meet white cultural standards. Ana reflects on her experiences.

We have to, meet these unrealistic and unattainable expectations. It's the price you have to pay if you want to live here. We're just trying to fit in but really we are just wanting to be accepted. Sometimes it's hard not to feel that pressure. It's also hard because you

know as hard as you try you will never be equal or accepted.

The participants feel constrained by the dual expectations. Sonia shares, “You can't win either way, You're not enough for both, you're just not enough for either. So you're just like, ‘What the hell am I?’” The participants are conscious of these double standards and the barriers to achieving them. Isabel describes this, saying,

I have to be better than a man. I have to work harder than someone who's white, or I have to compete with a woman who's white. And I didn't realize that. I thought I was the same. I thought, everyone gets to be treated the same way, and it's not like that. So you have to know what's going on in the English world like its culture, history, everything and, you have to know what's going on with your Latino culture. You have to be more Mexican than the Mexicans, more American than the Americans. It's overwhelming. You're trying to satisfy both, and you can't. It's hard because I feel my heart is torn in two. I love being Mexican. I love being American. But, I feel like the American world is telling me, "Oh, dream big, but don't dream too high because you can't be better than me." It's a lot to deal with.

The participants in this study forge beyond the pressures and expectations of each culture when creating their identity. They create new identities that incorporate elements of both cultures. In making a new way to exist, by coexisting in both on their terms, they redefine the definition of being Latino/a in the U.S. The participants in this study rejoice in their new identity and force others to redefine their expectations. Tomas shares his *testimonio* on his identity formation.

I'm completely entitled to feel like I can be Mexican in my own definition of what it means to be Mexican. I still enjoy sushi and pressed juices as much as I enjoy tacos and enchiladas. Like once you really blend the two worlds and make it your own you're so unapologetic about it all. It's just like, once you become comfortable with who you are between both worlds, then you're okay within yourself.

Redefining the definition of being Latino/a in the U.S. is a task that these participants have taken on with little to no guidance or support from either cultural group. The college needs to provide support and direction to Latino/a student's as they work to finding their identity. This need must be addressed by colleges, especially those that are HSIs, because college culture can play a critical hand in encouraging or halting Latino/a identity formation.

Aspirational Capital

I also discovered from the participants' *testimonios* a second aspect lacking in the literature. These participants were extremely determined to succeed in achieving their academic and career goals. Tomas, shares his drive to completing his academic goals of being a college graduate.

Getting a college degree means a lot to me. It might be because growing up in the Latino community your immigrant parents are wanting you to have this education that you wouldn't have had in your home country. That sticks with you. I want to accomplish this goal even if I'm in my 30s when I finish it.

The participants in this study demonstrated resiliency that is astounding. Liliana shares how she strives for a better future and encourages herself to believe that is possible, even when others did not.

I've always told myself, and I've always had this belief that no matter how hard it got, I never wanted to abandon my education. I feel like, yes sometimes people might not

believe in you but you have to ignore them and believe in yourself. I thought my future would be at McDonald's. But, I didn't want that future for me I wanted better for myself and I knew deep inside I could do it.

Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as ones' abilities to maintain hopeful of their future and dreams, regardless of the obstacles they may face. This cultural wealth is very valuable to the student, but does not necessarily carry any capital in the school context. Isabel shares her aspirational capital, "We always, always find a way to make it over that hurdle. We don't care what we have to do, but we will do it." Gándara (1995) has written about Latino/a parents that hope for themselves and their children for a better future. Gándara shares the possibilities that these parents have as they represent 'the creation of a history that would break the links between parents' current occupational status and their children's future academic attainment' (p. 55). Others (Aurebach, 2001; Solórzano, 1992) write that despite Latino/a students having lower educational outcomes than other cultural groups in the U.S., Latino/a parents maintain high aspirations for their children. Sonia states the importance of sharing her aspirational wealth, "Tuck needs to know that we're really determined." Community colleges, especially those that are HSIs, need to realize the importance in utilizing student *testimonios* to better serve their needs by recognizing this important source of strength and determination.

Summary

The participants in this study share how various obstacles, such as immigration status, family obligations, and financial responsibilities, affect the college experience. The *testimonios* shared also describe how entering college unprepared and lacking information on resources and financial aid programs can negatively impact the college experience. Finally, despite struggling

to find an identity that embraces their dual cultural experiences, the participants utilize aspirational capital as an asset to overcome personal, financial, and academic obstacles.

Discussion of Research Question Two

This second section answers the question, “According to students, what can community colleges that are HSIs do to better serve their needs?” The section is divided into the following subsections: Theoretical Framework; The Five Central Tenants of CRT; Summary.

Theoretical Framework

Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, began the early works of CRT, in response to the dissatisfaction of Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and its inability to fully address the issues of race and racism in United States law (Ladson-Billings, 2006). CRT allows examination of social and educational inequalities through the lens of race and equity. Solórzano (1998), explains the five central tenants of CRT to an educational setting as (a) The Centrality of Race and Racism in Society- race is central in disparities and injustices (b) The Challenge to Dominant Ideology- there should be a challenge to dominant ideology (c) The Commitment to Social Justice- eliminate structures of subordination (d) The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge-ones knowledge and experiences should be central in policy and pedagogy and (e) The Interdisciplinary Perspectives- various interdisciplinary perspectives need to be acknowledged. LatCrit derived from CRT to expose the power and knowledge structures built within our society as oppressive tools for dominating Latinos/as in schools and society (Quinones, 2011).

The *testimonios* gathered from the participants in this study contain intersections of ones lived experiences with racism, classism, oppression, and sexism in their home, community, and institutional settings. This section analyzes these intersections through the theoretical frameworks of CRT and LatCrit. The participants *testimonios* are framed in this section by the

five tenets of CRT, as a means for colleges - especially those that are HSIs - to learn how to better serve their Latino/a students' needs.

The Five Central Tenants of CRT

The tenet of CRT, The Centrality of Race and Racism in Society, emphasizes race and racism is a central characteristic of American society (Solórzano, 1998). LatCrit, focuses on the experiences of Latino/a students specifically, and of their experiences of racism in institutional practices such as higher education (Zarate & Conchas, 2010). All of the participants in this study had incidents of racism on campus with a faculty or staff members. Isabel, shares one of these incidents.

I went to the, the transfer center, and I would tell the lady that was in there that I wanted to transfer to certain schools. She'd look at me, and she'd be like, "Oh, no. No, you should aim lower. You should settle for this school and you shouldn't look at that school, and that's way too hard, that's way out of your league," but she didn't even know me.

LatCrit, agrees with this first tenant of CRT that while racism is endemic in all parts of society, it, intersects with other forms of oppression such as immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, gender, phenotype, accent, surname (Rios, 2008). Colleges need to provide programs and services that validate Latino/a students' identity formation in a safe space. Colleges must also train their faculty and staff to work with culturally diverse students and their needs.

Colleges need to address the impact that faculty and staff have on Latino/a students. The participants in this study share how faculty and staff were instrumental in their educational journey both as support systems and gatekeepers to resources and information. Francis, shares "The lack of community on campus was shocking." The lack of commitment to Latino/a student success is felt by all the participants in this study. These student *testimonios* show that when

faculty and staff demonstrate an investment in their Latino/a students' success, the college is transformed and the community becomes more culturally salient. Ana clarifies, "I think students would be doing better if they had a teacher that reached out to them or asked how they were doing. I think that's what Tuck needs, like open communication and feeling like you can trust your teacher." Campus' need to show a serious commitment to Latino/a student success, by creating a campus community that feels safe and supportive.

Some of the participants in this study did feel supported by a faculty and staff. They share that the faculty and staff never realized the impact their encouragement had on student persistence and motivation to stay enrolled in college. Participants sought refuge and solace with many faculty and staff members as they journeyed through their identity formation and struggles in declaring a major. Many also felt validated and mentored by faculty and staff when encountering racial oppression on campus or in their communities. Student *testimonios* can be utilized to expose the racism experienced by Latino/a students, as well as the people and practices that push back against structural racism on campus, by creating dialogue between the students experiences and the campus culture, programs and resources. (Patton et al., 2007).

The tenant, The Challenge to Dominant Ideology, challenges the traditional claims seen in the educational system such as race neutrality, equal opportunity, color-blindness, and objectivity. The participant's in this study spoke most on this tenant and could relate most to wanting and needing to challenge these dominant ideologies. Isabel shares, "I never had anyone in high school tell me I needed to work on my writing. Nobody told me about college". All the participants shared Isabel's experience, that their K-12 educational experiences lacked in preparing and informing them for college. Also, the *testimonios* of the participant's described the need, for themselves and their parents, of financial literacy but felt the college was not

objective in its delivery of information. There were also issues of access for the participants, with regards to equitably sharing information and resources about the college to Latino/a students.

When a college campus lacks inclusiveness in student development programs, policies, and practices, it then supports the notion of colorblindness (Patton et al., 2007). “Colorblindness is a mechanism that allows people to ignore racist policies that perpetuate social inequity” (DeCuir & Dixson, 1999, p. 27).” Liliana shares about the vocational programs on campus and notes that programs are very competitive and that students in the program self-segregate. “When I did my program as a dental assistant here at Tuck, you can see the groups. Like, the Latino group or the white group or the other groups you see the segregation there.” Several of the other participants noticed this in some of their classes and believe that faculty, though they do little to stop segregation, noticed it too.

The participants feel that the college is blind to the importance of hiring a diverse faculty, especially Latino/a faculty, and share this as something that community colleges, especially those that are HSIs, can do to better serve their needs. Sonia states, “We need to see people that look like us more. And I don't think anybody knows how to help more than one of our own. I guess somebody that knows the struggle needs to be in a position where we can see them all the time.” The participants shared that the few Latino/a faculty have been a support system for them on the campus. Francis, much like the other participants, states that these faculty members became allies that she can trust and relate to on a personal or academic level.

We need to have more teachers that are Latino so they can relate to us. I don't know anybody else that is a counselor and speaks Spanish and looks like me except for one. So the challenge is talking to someone about what I'm going through and having that person,

not understand or just not know what I'm talking about. That's a challenge for me. Like saying things to a Latino counselor is easier for me than saying that to another person from another different background. Maybe I fear being judged, criticized, ashamed and labelled. So it's hard finding someone who is safe at college.

Institutions of higher education must recognize and work toward dismantling colorblind policies (Iverson, 2007). Colleges need to address the diversity, or lack thereof of, its administration, faculty, and staff on campus. There needs to be a commitment to combating colorblindness on campus. Participants share that this can be combated by creating classroom dynamics and a campus community where students come together and celebrate diversity. Tomas shares,

You know, the college needs to create more spaces for all students to come together and get to know each other better, to create a sense of community. It's important for the college to know, we're all so diverse. Like, in the Latino community something that I think is so great and awesome is that we are all so diverse in our thinking, the way we see the world, and even look. We're all, different colors, hair textures and have different interests.

Student *testimonios* can play a critical role for community colleges, especially those that are HSIs, to reveal strategies to serve the needs of Latino/a students. Isabel expresses this recommendation in her *testimonio*, "I feel like everyone should sit down and listen to our story, to our struggle. I feel like that's how we'll make a change, by seeing each other's strengths not differences."

The next tenant in CRT is, the Commitment to Social Justice, both CRT and LatCrit, emphasize this commitment to social justice as a means to liberate or transform oppression based

on race, gender, or class (Ladson Billings, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). The *testimonios* share the various forms of combating racial, class, and gender stereotypes. Francis details this by stating, “There's like a mindset around here, that if you're Latino you're either going to get pregnant, be a gardener, or become a janitor. They just expect me to settle for that job the rest of my life and not getting any sort of college education.” The participants felt racially oppressed by their communities and schools being stigmatized into “low-skilled” careers that required little to no college education.

Astonishingly, all of the participants draw on their experiences with marginalization and oppression as catalysts for their social justice calling. They feel a need, as Isabel states, to “Right, society’s wrongs. I wanted to be the voice of justice and wisdom. I want to make an impact”. The participants in this study want to finish their degrees and become social justice activist in their communities. Tomas helps bring clarity to this need.

Within the Latino community many of us are needing resources, but so are our parents, who don’t know this American system. I firmly believe that whatever your struggles were growing up later on, you definitely want to give back. It's almost like you're helping your younger self. That's why we all want to do something. That's why we want to give back to a cause, it's like we're helping our younger self.

Tomas’ *testimonio* supports the next tenet of CRT, The Centrality of Experiential Knowledge. This tenet points to Tomas’ experience, thoughts, ideas and identity as an asset (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT aims to understand, analyze and teach about racial subordination through lived experiences. Examples of gathering these lived experiences include storytelling, family histories, *cuentos*, narratives, and *testimonios*. Williams (1991) address the importance of experiential knowledge as an empowering tool in breaking the shackles of

oppression.

Francis, shares the need for dialogue between Latino/a students and the college to address their needs on campus. “We need to be involved with conversations about things we need. Have higher expectations of us. I think that's key. Talk to us more. Communicate with us more. Reach out to us more.” The lack of inclusivity in the academic curriculum supports works against dismantling social inequities (Patton et al., 2007). *Testimonios* serves a valuable purpose in LatCrit because it encourages students to know, understand and interpret their world, and to recognize their knowledge as valid and valuable, especially in research. *Testimonios* was used in this study to gather Latino/a first-generation students’ voices in the community college system to give a space for acknowledging the lived experiences of racism, classism, and sexism in these institutional settings. These lived experiences need to be utilized as a valuable resource for colleges, especially those that are HSIs, in learning what services, systems, and other supports are needed for Latino/a students.

CRT’s last tenant, The Interdisciplinary Perspective, analyzes both historical and contemporary contexts of race and racism and other forms of subordination in education, through interdisciplinary perspectives (Garcia, 1995; Olivas, 1990). LatCrit illuminates power and knowledge structures built within our society as oppressive tools for dominating Latinos/as in schools and society (Quinones, 2011). The participants in this study share how they can see historically, and presently, the racist power and knowledge structures imbedded within their community and school experiences and the need to combat this through interdisciplinary perspectives.

Yosso (2005) proposes that knowledge has been a gatekeeper into some professions and academia has been denied to minorities. "Because we are not allowed to enter discourse,

because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women solely to occupy it" (p. 69). Liliana, much like the other participants, shares about her experience with feeling that knowledge had been withheld from her while in college. She, like all the other participants, shared struggling to find her career path.

Starting at Tuck I didn't know what I want to do with my life because I wasn't exposed from the beginning to different careers. I didn't know what my options were. Like, a lawyer for example, I knew the name, but I didn't know what they did every day in their job or anything like that. Now, that I did my dental assisting program and I'm working with the dentist and nurses over there and I'm like, "Wow, I could be one of them."

That's how I decided to go back for my nursing degree because I saw what they were doing and I was like "I can do this. It's not something that is unreachable."

The participants in this study, not only lacked the knowledge to maneuver through the college system, but also lacked an understanding of how to declare a major and make a career choice. Declaring a major came more easily for the participants who are confident with their identity formation. Tomas, much like the other participants took courses to provide a need for his personal growth and development, "I did take several classes here at Tuck that literally did nothing for me in terms of transferring, or in terms of anything except for, it just helped me out as a person." The participants in this study feel that they needed more support to understand specific careers and fields, since their parents and K-12 schools did not do this. Participants also want to learn about different nontraditional careers or fields. Community colleges need to create opportunities for Latino/a students to explore and expose themselves to various career fields, through programs such as work study jobs on campus, internships, or service learning

opportunities. It would work in student's best interest if various disciplines on campus collaborate to fulfill the need that Latino/a student's have in declaring a major and in choosing a career path.

Summary

LatCrit theory in education is conceived as a social justice project that attempts to link theory with practice, scholarship with teaching, and the academy with the community (LatCrit Primer, 2000). CRT is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses. The participants in this study share the importance and strength of *testimonios* as a collaborative tool to gather important information on understanding and addressing their needs. The theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory critiques the assumption that Latino/a students come to the classroom with cultural deficiencies. Utilizing a CRT lens, Yosso (2005) challenges these assumptions and instead introduces the assets Latino/a students bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom.

Recommendations

Throughout chapters four and five the participants address the recommendations needed to better serve academic and personal goals. What I found so critically valuable through the use of *testimonio* was a richer understanding of the Latino/a student on this community college campus. Who are they? What transpires in their lives on and off campus that impacts their educational lives? *Testimonio* can assist colleges to address the questions and the needs that these participants share. In summary the recommendations shared by the participants as following:

- 1) Provide outreach opportunities that promote college awareness to both the parent and child throughout K-12.
- 2) Collaborate with community agencies that focus on college readiness in k-12 schools.
- 3) Provide financial literacy in multiple languages to parents and children, on the variety of options for funding their education.
- 4) Reach out to students as they are entering college and follow up when they are not meeting a matriculation step.
- 5) Continuously connect and provide information to students on the various programs and services available that will assist in their connectedness to the college social community
- 6) Support and develop on-campus programs that support students that are historically disadvantaged, low-income, or first-generation college students.
- 7) Create a campus culture were students feel safe and valued for their differences.
- 8) Provide programs that assist students to meet their transfer goals.
- 9) Offer more courses that provide cultural awareness and pedagogy of the oppressed.
- 10) Offer service learning or internship opportunities for students to explore their current career choice or others of interest.
- 11) Increase the diversity of faculty, staff, and administrators on campus.
- 12) Provide continuous trainings to faculty, staff and administrators on how best to serve the diverse student population and their needs.
- 13) Make an effort to understand why students drop a course or fail to return.

- 14) Create various spaces throughout the campus where students can congregate to meet socially or academically.
- 15) Offer 24-hour study centers during finals and mid-terms, keep designated study spaces open during the week until midnight and also available on the weekends.

Conclusion

Throughout this collection of *testimonios* there was one line that brought me to tears. I could not help the tears from flowing when Isabel shared an experience with a counselor at her previous community college. Isabel is a small-framed person but has a spirit, energy and voice that fills a room. Below is the incident that I will never forget:

My counselor at the community college before coming to Tuck honestly did not have any faith in me, he thought it was actually ridiculous that I even thought that I had a chance to be an attorney. He didn't think I had what it took. He looked at my high school transcripts, and he's like, "You know what? You're at the bottom." He looked at my classes, and at my grades, and he said, "You know what? You should look at something else. You should probably look at paralegal work if you want to be in that field. Or you should just go somewhere else." That pissed me off because -- how can you tell me that? You just crushed my dreams. When he said that, I felt I walked in there like a lion and I came out as a mouse. I was thinking, "Wow. Like, I really don't have what it takes." But then I thought I'm going to prove him wrong.

Isabel forever imprinted in me a visual of the countless students who enter college as a lion and leave as a mouse. I have learned from this doctoral process and my students' *testimonios* that our Latino/a student's have amazingly high levels of resiliency and aspirational capital. With

certainty, these students have had countless encounters with an educator or community member that discounted their abilities. However, Latino/a students will and have survived obstacles in accomplishing their educational goals. I have learned through this doctoral process that our Latino/a students need advocacy, change, and support more than ever. Our Latino/a students are still being funneled through a broken educational pipeline, surrounded in a social climate of bigotry and racial tension, and being marginalized even more through legislation, executive orders, and propositions. It is critical for this country to invest in providing to its Latino/a population an educational experience that is successful, as this is the largest and fastest growing minority group that will be left to lead the nation in all sectors of our society.

I commit through the participants *testimonios* to continue to find ways in which as educators we can find better practices to serve all our students and create spaces of learning where their cultural capital is utilized and valued. The participants in this study showed the importance of student narratives, as they can be utilized to help the campus better understand its student population and needs. Student *testimonios* can be helpful to implement programs or services that directly support student success, and feel that the participants in this study did so with their list of recommendations. I would like to end with some last words from Sonia, one of the participants, whose words I use to inspire my work.

We are in this really difficult point in our lives right now, but that's not going to stop us we haven't given up on our dreams. Our education is our priority and we're not going to let anyone stop us from getting there. Our culture has been through so much in history and today. We have been through so much pain, struggle, and hardship. We have taken this hardship, we wear it proud, and continue to dream. We are unstoppable.

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