Fall 2022

First Year College Experiences of California's Central Valley Latina/o/x Students

Alonzo Campos
Claremont Graduate University

First Year College Experiences of California's Central Valley Latina/o/x Students

Alonzo Campos

Claremont Graduate University

2022

ABSTRACT

First Year College Experiences of California's Central Valley Latina/o/x Students

By

Alonzo Campos

Claremont Graduate University: 2022

Making the decision to attend and pursue college as a means of social mobility is an option students in the state of California make every year when graduating high school. Scholars have contributed extensively to understand how students prepare and transition into their first year of college, as well as the benefits and outcomes that allows students to acclimate and succeed. The multiple factors that contribute to students' acclimation into higher education has been a central point. The aim of this study was to explore how Latina/o/x students from California's Central Valley navigated their college transition in the first year by drawing from their high school experiences and a summer youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD. Through conducting 21 semi-structured interviews, data were analyzed using zoom platform to explore their education experiences.

This study found that students cultivated a college-going mindset in high school, engaging in everything that was available to them, including college preparation programs such as AVID and TRiO. Additionally, part of cultivating a college-going mindset included students' contributions on and off campus being actively involved in extra-curriculars that included ASB and community service opportunities. This study also found that attending the summer youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD, cultivated students' aspirations and validations by what the

program offered: a cultural wealth of knowledge and information rooted in community, culture, college access, career aspirations, leadership, and civic engagement. I present an emerging theory and argue that students in this study were given *ánimo* (encouragement) that draws from ganas, critical consciousness, and aspirational capital. Finally, this study found that when students entered college, they were able to reap the benefits of their labor from having cultivated college-going mindsets and transitioned at their respective colleges by actively contributing to leadership opportunities and establishing supportive networks on campus.

This study finds that culturally relevant college preparation programming founded on making college access equitable has contributed a positive transition giving students a foundation of *ánimo* to persist in the first year of college. Implications for research, theory, policy and practice are discussed.

DEDICATION

To my Dad, José de Jesús Campos Muñoz. You left us too soon. I miss you.

Gracias por estar a mi lado y poder sentir tu presencia estos últimos años.

"This is for La Raza…"

-Kid Frost

"…who died, scrubbed floors, wept and fought for us."

-José Antonio Burciaga,

The Last Supper of Chicano Heroes

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Where to begin: Si se pudo. Si valió la pena. Gracias a mis Padres. Mi Madre, Angelica Campos [Azpeitia Pérez], y Padre, José de Jesús Campos Muñoz, por el apoyo de poder tener la gran dicha de seguir mis metas en mi educación. Este logro es también de ustedes. I am because of the both of you.

I have been able to persist in higher education because of people who saw something me and understood the importance of student success rooted in mentorship. At Sacramento City College: RISE (Respect, Integrity, Self-determination & Education) was instrumental in my sense of belonging, retention, and persistence, being validated as a first-generation college student. Thank you, Keith Muraki and Juan LaChica (RISE counselors) who guided a group of students and saw us persist into 4-year colleges, grad school, and beyond. RISE will always hold a special place in my heart for what it instilled in me. I would not have gone to UCLA if it wasn't for this program. You all believed in me before I did. Thank you to UCLA's Community College Partnership program SITE, which provided a transformational space before transferring. When I look back, I see how the dots connected, and am grateful for the persistence I cultivated to make it at UCLA. I am also forever grateful to the friendships I cultivated at Sac City College and UCLA which contributed to my retention and success. This includes my time with MEChA and the people who were part of this journey: por mi raza habla el espiritu.

I also could not have been able to persist early in graduate school if it wasn't for the mentorship and guidance from faculty in the Mexican-American (now Chicana/o) Studies Department at San José State University. Magdalena Barrera, Genevieve Negron-Gonzalez, and Marcos Pizarro: Thank you. You all allowed me to develop my thinking and writing. You all saw and believed in me when I yet still did not believe in myself. Throughout the years as I

navigated my doctoral studies, your support near and far has been a source of ánimo. You all helped demystify the graduate school journey. It is through the mentorship I received from the three of you that I do my best to lead by example. Each one reach/teach one.

My early graduate school journey would not have been the same without the friendships I made during my brief stint at UC Davis: Cristian, Denise, Elenor, Rosa, thank you for the laughs, the study sessions, and celebrating life throughout the years. My development understanding students in higher education would not have been possible without working in university housing and the amazing people I got to work with and learn from at San Jose State. I left my anchor of curiosity in student development, and it followed me to Claremont.

Claremont Graduate University would not have been the same if it wasn't for all the folks I crossed paths with and developed a sense of community. *La Raza de Claremont* from across departments: Alicia, Nancy G., Pablo, Lucia, Janet, Gabe, Agustin, Frank, Luis, Jess, Michelle, Gloria M. and others. Those early years hold a special place in my heart. To the Academic Affirmations Raza Writers: Rocio, Rachel, Marco Antonio, Nancy R., Iliana, and Maria: thank you. Ya'll helped cultivate a space to learn and grow. Las Pláticas de Resistencia, breaking bread, and the laughs are etched forever in my heart. Las Señoras de Hagelbarger's, including Marta: *gracias por el ánimo y cariño a nosotros, sus "hijos"*. I am also grateful for the space Ariel and Yey created early on with the SLDL house. Thank you.

To my dissertation committee: Dr. Deborah Faye Carter, my chair and advisor, thank you for showing me the balance of engaging in conversations about popular culture and getting back into writing. You saw something in me that I finally see, and appreciate how much you have allowed me to grow in my writing and thinking in your courses. Taking courses with you to allowed me to critically understand and establish a foundation in higher education and college

Running with everyone in the San Gabriel Valley has humbled me. Enjoying a few beers over these past few years with everyone has allowed me to enjoy life outside these academic walls.

I also am forever grateful for being part of the Sunday Hiking Crew early on in my doctoral journey: Adriana, Ana, Jazmin, Estela, and others- who created a space to enjoy the outdoors in the busy metropolis of Los Angeles, "The mountains are calling, and I must go"- John Muir. Muchas gracias. I could not have finished this dissertation if it wasn't for spaces that allowed me to work safely during the pandemic. Tierra Mia Crew- Nico, Ivan, Brisa, Oscar: ya'll made me feel like I was part of the crew, too. Thank you.

This journey has been a long time coming. I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me. My maternal grandparents, Teresa Pérez Hernández, who, at no fault of her own grew up illiterate and worked en los campos de Los Altos de Jalisco alongside her siblings and father; and Amando Azpeitia Vélez, who came from a line of Carniceros in Arandas, Jalisco, Mexico. My paternal grandparents, Margarito Campos Ascencio and Maria Socorro Muñoz Gonzalez, a Bracero and farmworker respectively. Through their labor contributions in California's Central Valley is how we planted our roots in Davis (Yolo County). I am reaping the benefits from the fruits of their labor. Gracias a la vida.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Conventional wisdom tells us that education is the great equalizer in the United States. Pursuing college is one way to obtain access to social mobility. Equipped with a college degree, individuals can contribute to the economic workforce in which a degree may be needed. The transition to college in the first year is an area that should be continuously examined, because not all students persist and obtain a bachelor's degree. Latinas/os/x- Chicanas/os/x are one of the fastest growing demographics, having their high school graduation and college enrollment rates increased in recent years. Therefore, the future of economic prosperity in the U.S. and California from Latinas/os/x- Chicanas/os/x should be of interest to stakeholders, and one approach to this understanding should be exploring their access into higher education (Fry & Lopez, 2012).

Emerging research trends find that schooling experiences in the suburbs differ for students of color. For the last thirty years, there have been demographic shifts in which communities of color have changed the landscape that was once historically and exclusively white (Avila, 2004; Baldassare, 1992). These communities are historically known to have better academic resources for preparing students to succeed and matriculate into college (Frankenberg, 2013; Reardon & Yun, 2001). Scholars have noted that students of color often perform better academically when attending suburban schools, and are twice as likely to matriculate to college in comparison to students who attend urban schools (Rogers et al., 2006; Oakes et al., 2006). The educational experiences of suburban Latinas/os/x- Chicanas/os/x have not been examined in length, in comparison to other schooling contexts that have contributed a wealth of knowledge of Latinas/os/x- Chicanas/os/x schooling trajectories in higher education.

Moreover, college transition research notes that student success is dependent on many factors, including the type of schooling environment they were provided with. Exploring this area can provide a lens on how non-urban schooling experiences for Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students are being prepared for college, along with how they navigate their first year of college in a strategic manner for success. Examining factors that may influence Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students in how they navigate their college transition from having attended non-urban schools has not been extensively examined as it relates to – and addresses – a new demographic of students emerging from this schooling environment. Thus, it is necessary to examine how the mundane experiences of race, class, and privilege from this perspective can inform higher education stakeholders about students from non-urban school settings that have not been fully explored.

Emerging literature examining suburban schooling has been centered on African American students and parental experiences navigating school environments, addressing schooling inequality (Diamond & Lewis, 2019; Lewis-McCoy, 2014, 2016, 2018). Given the growing demographic across suburban public schools, this gives reason to explore and understand Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students in this context.

Purpose of the Study

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students navigate their college transition, given their experiences of attending a high school in California's Central Valley[1]. How their schooling experiences influence their first year of college transition warrants exploration. Therefore, the following questions will guide this research study:

---

[1] This region encompasses both the Sacramento and San Joaquin Valleys, which span across nineteen of the 58 counties in the state.

1. What experiences from a Central Valley suburban high school environment influence Latina/o- Chicana/o undergraduates during their first year of college?

2. How are suburban Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x undergraduates seeking social and academic support during their first year?

For this study, the term "suburban" is used in the literature review and classified as not being part of a central urban city, but rather a gateway to the city. This has been known by scholars to be a marker for living the prosperous – and historically exclusive – mythical American Dream (Avila, 2004; Frankenberg, Orfield, 2012; Strauss, 2014). The term Chicana/o/x is defined as persons from Mexican origin and those who may self-identify as gender non-conforming (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). However, Chicana/o/x will also be used interchangeably with Latina/o/x throughout the literature review. Moreover, as the findings will show, a majority of participants self-identified as Latina/o/x, which encompasses a pan-Latina/o/x identity, individuals with origins from Latin America (including Mexico), and gender non-conforming individuals. Given the research around demographic shifts within the Latina/o/x community, it is necessary to be inclusive of all subcategories, even if other research provides reasons to focus exclusively on Chicanas/os/x of Mexican descent, or non-Mexican Americans[2].

Significance of the Study

This study is important for several reasons. First, this study seeks to address an area that has not been extensively explored, examining the experiences of non-urban Latinas/os/x-Chicanas/os/x in their first year in college. Second, this study contributes to demystifying the perceptions of non-urban schooling and Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students by addressing

---

[2] Researchers focusing on exclusively Mexican American student demographic do so because of the extensive education research on the subcategory (Gandara, Contreras, 2009).

education experiences and how they may influence the college transition process. Third, this study is timely for Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students who have contributed to shifting the demographics in the state of California. This study has the potential to inform and engage stakeholders in school districts, colleges, and universities to understand a student demographic and their ability to navigate and access social mobility via higher education.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I present a holistic review of research on Chicanas/os, the suburbs, and college transition to examine an area that has not been extensively explored. First, I provide a brief historical examination of Chicanas/os in the U.S., and then transition to suburban schooling research. Second, I review college transition literature and describe some emerging factors that contribute to this area. Lastly, I present Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth framework, which will guide this study. To provide a holistic approach of this research, I draw from the fields of Chicana/o/x Studies, Sociology, History, and Higher Education.

Overview of Chicanas/os and U.S. Education

Situating a historical foundation allows for examination of the legacy of struggle, agency, and community of Chicanas/os in the United States. Historians have noted that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have been subjected to racist practices since the annexation between the United States and Mexico with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 (San Miguel Jr., 1999). This included language and schooling segregation during the second half of the 19th Century. By the turn of the 20th Century, schooling segregation was normalized, and Americanization programs became popularized to encourage American values on communities of color (Gonzalez, 1999; Menchaca, 1999). Gonzalez (2004) notes that schooling segregation increased through the use of tracking students, putting them into labor intensive jobs, and requiring IQ tests. This type of discrimination continued throughout the first half of the 20th Century. Other researchers note that the increase of deficit thinking of Mexican Americans during the first half of the twentieth century was legitimized through public opinion which influenced policy decisions, preventing social mobility for the Mexican American community (Gonzalez, 2004; Molina, 2005). A tipping point of injustice and the start of advocacy for the

Chicana/o community – including education equity reform – was catapulted during the Chicano Movement in the late 1960s and into the early 1970s (Avila, 2004; Delgado Bernal, 1999).

Additionally, the demographic growth in urban communities provided an opportunity for suburban communities to become gateways into the city for others. Avila (2004) notes that the growth of suburbanization in Los Angeles and its surrounding communities influenced a *white flight* in the mid-1950s, causing many Whites to leave the urban metropolis and move into suburban communities. The growth of suburban communities led to housing development, and was restricted to people of color known as restrictive covenants. Freund (2007) describes that the rise of suburbanization and racial politics of housing discrimination practices were heavily influenced by the perpetual deficit discourse and perspectives from public officials across different organizations (e.g., urban planners, loan officers, and economists). Thus, a lack of housing opportunities for people of color limited how resources were allocated across different areas, including schooling.

Suburban Research

Research of the suburban space is not a new phenomenon. Baldassare (1992) noted the field of Sociology should increase research on suburban communities in order to better understand the factors of a changing demographic in the decades to come. Throughout the 1990s, suburban communities doubled in population, increasing the number of racial-ethnic residents from 19% in 1990 to 35% by 2010; an overall increase of 8 million residents in the first decade of the 21st Century (Kotok & Frankenberg, 2017). Additionally, Lacy (2016) provides three decades' worth of research to describe emerging areas of the suburbs that warrants further research: 1) suburbanization of poverty, 2) the settlement of post-1965 immigrants in the suburbs, and 3) reverse migration to the South on black suburbanization. Specifically, to the

author's second point, the wave of immigration provides a contextual factor to underscore the rise in the demographic shifts from the Latino immigrant community arriving to suburban communities in the western region of the United States, with the majority of immigrants, Hispanics[3], who reside in suburban California communities (69%). Resultantly, the rapid demographic increase has impacted suburban school districts, where education leaders cannot keep up with meeting diverse student needs, missing out on opportunities to provide support for all students (Evans, 2007).

Emerging studies examine K-12 suburban schooling inequities emphasizing the shift in demographics. Reardon and Yun (2001) describe that the increase of segregated school districts came from the result of an increase of Black, Hispanic, and Asian students between 1987 and 1995. Other suburban schools with lower minority enrollment were less segregated. Additionally, Frankenberg, Orfield, and colleagues (2012) examined different school districts from across the United States to understand factors in what they coin as *resegregation of suburban schooling*. These authors provide an anthology of research to address larger issues of segregated schooling and provide policy implications. Thus, school districts are overlooking the demands of needs for students (Holme et al., 2013; Holme et al., 2014).

To contextualize suburban schooling environments, Frankenberg (2012) describes six typologies to present differences between school districts, arguing that racial changes have influenced how some school districts create inequity across the country.

---

[3] The term "Hispanic" is only used in the review of literature.

Typologies of Suburban School Districts	
Exclusive Enclaves	High shares of white students, low poverty, minimal racial change
Countywide Districts	Very large districts, racially diverse with moderate percentages of black and Latino students
Stable, Mixed Income	Very little racial change, few minority students, mixed socioeconomic status, many located far from central city
Inner-Ring Transitioning	Extremely rapid racial change, small size, moderate percentages of minority students and low-income students, few whites, located close to central city
Satellite Cities	Moderate racial change, low-income students with high percentages of black and Latino students, larger size
Developing Immigration Meccas	Slower racial change, larger size, moderate percentages of Asian, Latino, and low-income students

Note. Typologies of Suburban School Districts.[4]

Similar to Frankenberg's typologies, Lewis-McCoy (2018) provides three typologies to describe how race and ethnicity are met with challenges from demographic shifts in suburban communities. Lewis-McCoy (2018) notes: "the diversity of the suburbs, in many ways, captures the best and worst of American possibilities. The transformation of these historic bastions of plenty to communities with emerging poverty means that schools face new challenges and opportunities." (p. 151). Below are the typologies:

Majority-Minority Suburbs	School districts are susceptible to racial and class mismatch, where students of color are the majority and the people who oversee/govern the district remain white. Overlooked by school board.
Exclusive Enclaves	White population dominating the suburbs, where other people of color are vulnerable to academic resource hoarding.
Gateway Communities	Communities have shared immigrant residence increase, so there is an institutional response from schools, labor force and local communities, but are met with challenges.

Note. Description of Suburban Communities.[5]

---

[4] Adapted from Chapter 2: Understanding suburban school district transformation: A typology of suburban school disctricts in Frankenberg, E., & Orfield, G. (Eds.). (2012). The resegregation of suburban schools: A hidden crisis in American education. (p.27-44).
[5] Adapted from Lewis-McCoy, R. L. (2018). Suburban black lives matter. Urban Education, 53 (p. 145-161).

The similarities between Frankenberg's (2012) and Lewis-McCoy's (2018) typologies of suburban communities vary with how they define their typologies, with the exception of how both scholars describe *Exclusive Enclaves*. Lewis-McCoy centralizes his definitions around race to challenge the implications of race and class. Yet, both typologies are grounded, highlighting how inequities are present across different community types.

Similarly, researchers note that the type of schooling students experience can influence their academic outcomes to college matriculation. They have noted that students in suburban communities are exposed to schooling environments that perpetuate competition and are presented with a level of privilege, and continue to experience racialized experiences. Emerging studies have examined school effects, suggesting that structural factors such as the organizational norms (e.g., schooling environment) can establish positive perceptions of college (Hill, 2008; Lee et al., 2017; Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015).

Suburban Schooling: Privilege, Competition, & Racialized Experiences

Suburban schooling has become an area of inquiry as demographic shifts change the landscape. To understand the experiences of first-year college students from these schooling environments, it is necessary to examine pre-college characteristics that students experience while attending high schools. Scholars examining these schooling environments note a cycle of inequities being perpetuated that disproportionately affects students of color. Emerging research trends find that students of color are experiencing school differently, yet they are gaining social cues which allow them to navigate the terrain of social mobility via higher education.

More often, suburban schools outperform urban schools across different benchmarks, including having higher rates in test scores, graduation, and college matriculation (Muller et al., 2010). For suburban students, the college-going schooling environment perpetuates a competition focused on academic performance. Examples include students feeling the need to

outperform their peers, being overwhelmed by the pressures of being admitted to highly selective

institutions, and parental pressures at home. Moreover, within this context, the literature finds

that most students have greater access to schooling resources, including teachers and school staff

who support and provide them with cultural and social capital – or what scholars refer to as a

Cultural Resource – contributing to how students may navigate college settings (Galloway &

Conner, 2015). Demerath (2009) explores how suburban high school students perpetuate a

culture of competition, contextualizing the school culture of academic competition between

students and coining the term *Construction of Advantage*. This is understood to provide a rich

curriculum with dedicated teaching staff that socializes students for individual competition. As

resulting consequence of this is the increase of student anxieties about their futures and post-

graduation plans. Demerath also notes that African American students in the study had different

experiences navigating the culture of competition, feeling alienated in being enrolled in

advanced honor courses. It has been noted that fewer students of color enroll in advanced

placement or college honors courses than their white peers, perpetuating a disadvantage at

preparing all students academically for college (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002).

     Another area within suburban schooling is the racialized experiences, creating hostile

campus climates that inadvertently create barriers for student success. The mundane experiences

for students of color have been discussed across researchers, with most using the umbrella term

suburban schooling inequality to assert hostile learning environments as one contributing factor

in creating roadblocks for students to succeed academically (Benner & Graham, 2001; Holme et

al., 2014; Lewis-McCoy, 2014; Rhodes & Warkenstien, 2017). For example, Nunn (2011; 2014)

explored the role of school staff, teachers, and administrators to understand the ways that schools

adopt different types of cultures to define success within groups of students in different

schooling environments; urban and suburban settings. The author's findings include teachers

creating racialized learning spaces and pedagogical styles, limiting positive student-teacher

interactions and academic tracks, while perpetuating ethno-racial tensions between students.

Despite this finding, other researchers note the perpetuation of suburban schooling providing

students with a sense of self, advantage, and entitlement (Galloway & Conner, 2015). College

transition research has not extensively explored suburban schooling factors of Latina/o/x-

Chicana/o/x students. Given the aforementioned on schooling experiences, this area of research

warrants further investigation to explore secondary schooling experiences in order to understand

how Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students navigate their first year of college.

Higher Education Attainment of Chicanas/os/x

Emerging trends show an increase of Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students matriculating to

college (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Despite the steady increase in high school graduation rates,

however, college enrollment numbers of Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students are still a concern

(Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x college students continue to more

likely be the first in their families to attend college and have high aspirations to obtain a

bachelor's degree, yet they continue to face barriers while in college – including mentorship

from other Latina/o role models (Hurtado, 2015). In California, Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students

are overrepresented at the community colleges (roughly two-thirds), and many of these students

enter institutions having to enroll in developmental courses, increasing the difficulty of

progressing in their educational trajectories and transferring to four-year institutions (Solorzano

et al., 2005; Solorzano et al., 2014). Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students are also more likely to

attend college within a proximity of their home communities, and may be part of what scholars

refer to as *mix-matched,* where students may not be matriculating to a college of their first choice

as a result of lack of support, and matriculate to a community college (Turley, 2009). Using the

2015 U.S. Census data for California, Covarrubias et al. (2018), provide the attainment trends of

Chicana/o students matriculating into higher education and beyond. As figure 1 shows, for every

100 Chicana/o students that start in elementary school, roughly 62 of them will have graduated

with a high school diploma, and only 32 will matriculate to college, with approximately half

(17%) obtaining a college degree, and less than half (15%) will have been pushed out. Figure 1

provides additional information regarding matriculation to graduate schools and obtaining

professional and doctoral degrees that are also important to acknowledge, but beyond the scope

of this study.

Figure 1

The California Chicana/o educational pipeline, 2018
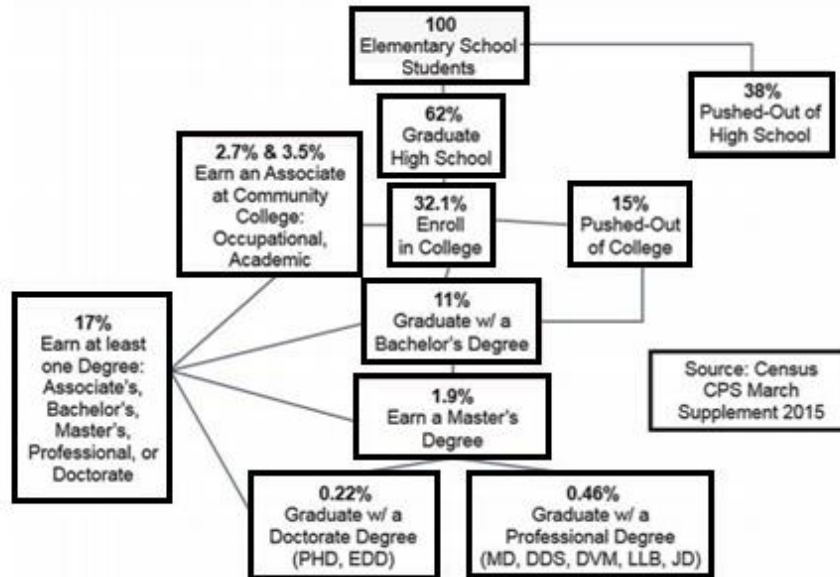
Figure 1. The California Chicana/o educational pipeline. As shown in Covarrubias, A., Nava, P. E., Lara, A., Burciaga, R., Vélez, V. N., & Solorzano, D. G. (2018). Critical race quantitative intersections: A testimonio analysis. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 21(2), 253-273.

Despite a slow increase in college matriculation for Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students, research has provided an understanding that more work needs to be done to explore experiences around retention and persistence across different student groups. For this reason, research should begin to explore suburban Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x students and their transition to college.

College Transition

The transition to college is a period of time for recent high school graduates to experience a critical juncture into early adulthood, making decisions that will influence how they navigate their pathways and aspirations to obtain a college degree. Previous research notes that students have difficulty in transitioning into their first year of college and ultimately choosing a path to persist or withdraw from (Hamilton & Armstrong; 2015). Some college students who have a

sense of self and purpose as a result of their high school experiences, such as being academically prepared and provided with the right social cues, may have an easier transition (Galloway & Conner 2015; Mullen, 2012). College transition has been extensively explored, defined, and examined across different areas of race, gender, class, and socioeconomic status to provide holistic perspectives to understand this topic. Researchers have emphasized that preparation, access, and retention are areas that capture the overall college transition experience to degree completion (Carter et al., 2013).

However, this area of research has overlooked emerging demographic trends on students who are entering higher education from non-urban school settings. Scholars have contributed to research on students of color transition, examining frameworks to understand how they make sense of student retention and persistence. One approach to understanding this phenomenon is through the lens of institutional and system-wide factors that can influence student's ability to prepare, navigate, and complete college (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007). Another approach to understanding college transition is through the approach of positive student acclimation (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2007). While there has been a wealth of contributions to understanding current and emerging trends on the topic of college transition, it has continued to be centered through the inquiry of schooling inequities, typically discussed from an urban schooling perspective, where there is more often a lack of resources to prepare students for college (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). It would be of great interest to begin to bridge suburban schooling and higher education contexts as one, since previous research keeps K-12 and higher education in their own silos of knowledge.

Contextualizing College Transition

In their extensive literature review exploring college transition, Deil-Amen and Turley (2007) note that sociologists study students' transition across different areas, including: 1)

academic preparation, 2) access to college, and 3) barriers on college completion. Most sociological studies focus on measuring academic achievement to compare inequities from different schooling environments. A majority of studies on college transition center and focus on disadvantaged students, analyzing schooling experiences to explain why certain factors contribute to postsecondary outcomes. Deil-Amen and Turley also note that individual, family, institutional, and system-wide factors simultaneously influence a student's ability to prepare, navigate, and complete college.

Similarly, Goldrick-Rab et al. (2007) analyzed research of college transitions, dividing it into two areas of inquiry: 1) college preparation, and 2) college access. In their analysis, they note a slow transition in providing research to better understand race, gender, and class inequities. The authors also note that there has been an increase in research conceptualizing different factors in academic, social, and financial preparation to understand differences around cultural and social capital for students of color; however, they explain that there is not sufficient information to understand how college preparation and social class differences may influence outcomes. This point is important for research on suburban students and their matriculation into higher education. There exists a need to fill the research gap specific to the high school to college transition pipeline.

On the same note, providing a depth of college transition research, Carter et al. (2013) critically examined theoretical and empirical evidence to understand barriers of college transition through two areas: 1) pre-college, and 2) higher education. They note that there is research to understand the socialization of students; however, some frameworks may not be appropriate for the student of color experience. Academic preparation is rarely linked to the college transition process, as research continues to be grouped into two groups: 1) K-12, and 2) higher education;

15

not merging these groups to provide a holistic approach to both educational pipelines.

Additionally, the scholars note that student transition can be understood by exploring social

capital formation and validation models. Other researchers have explored college transition by

introducing different approaches to studying and exploring student perspectives. Rios-Aguilar

and Kiyama (2012) suggest that one approach to better understand Latina/o students is by

incorporating the *Funds of Knowledge* framework, which can be understood as the skills,

abilities, practices, communication, and networks that allow students to use to navigate when

entering college (Moll et al., 1992). Arguably, this holistic approach can contribute to analyzing

students' lived experiences and how they navigate their college transition.

The aforementioned provides a brief introduction of college transition context. Early

foundational research does not account for student of color perspectives, yet this foundation of

knowledge presents a critical foundation to allow a new exploration and expand on what is

already known.

Overview of Foundational Contributions of College Transition

Foundational contributions in college transition include Tinto's (1993) college student

departure theory, in which he asserts that students must experience three different phases: 1)

separation, 2) students pre-college intentions, and 3) behaviors, which result in a shift and

alignment with the institutional norms (e.g., daily interactions). This results in an academic and

social integration to a college campus. Tinto further suggests that students who have difficulty

and negative experiences are more likely to not fully acclimate to their college environment and

withdraw. Moreover, Tinto claims that students are successful at transitioning to their institution

if they participate in areas of student engagement (e.g., student government, sports, clubs, etc.).

However, Tinto's statements only focus on specific student behaviors, and do not provide a

critical analysis of the institution and how it may present a different experience for first-generation students of color who may feel more like a *guest in someone else's house* (Turner, 1994). This contribution does not acknowledge an analysis on the student of color experience. Scholars have dismissed and critiqued Tinto's contribution, providing a counter perspective to challenge the dominant notions of the college student (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Terenzini et al., 1994; Yosso, 2005).

Brief Overview of College Pathways

Most students enter college at different levels of advantage as a result of factors which include parents' background (e.g., education and socioeconomic status), academic preparation, and high school environments (Hill, 2008). One approach to understanding the first-year college transition is college pathways. How students choose to navigate their first year academic and socialization experiences can influence their outcomes (Mullen, 2012; Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). For example, Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) conducted a longitudinal study examining how a cohort of female students navigated their first year of college to understand how it influenced college outcomes of withdrawing their first year or persisting to college graduation. The authors provide a typology of pathways to explain how students leverage their college transition and experiences during the first year and persist to graduation. They note that students can be identified from the following: 1) Party Pathway: students who are typically upper-middle class, entering the university with a solid network and connection to navigate their college career; 2) Mobility Pathway: students who are low-working class, entering the university hoping to start their social mobility to the middle-class; and 3) Professional Pathway: typically students who enter the university with high aspirations, have ambition, and are ready to engage academically. Armstrong and Hamilton note that these pathways can provide an explanation as

to why certain students who enter college are able to quickly navigate their first year, while others may have different experiences, transferring out or withdrawing from the institution.

Similarly exploring how students navigate college pathways in their first year, Saunders and Serna (2004) documented the experiences of 30 first-generation Latina/o students enrolled in four-year colleges to understand the long-term effects of college access and intervention programming by understanding how they navigate their transition from high school to college, accessing academic and social support. Their findings are broken down into three categories to describe how students strategically navigated their pathways:

1) Students who demonstrated the ability to create networks, seek resources, and ask for help, demonstrating confidence to explore people and resources.

2) Students who were able to maintain old relationships, networks, and resources, but did not establish new resources to their continued academic success, staying comfortable with what they already knew.

3) Students who were unable to maintain any social ties or social networks and were not involved in socialization activities.

The authors assert that academic preparation in high school plays a significant role in the success of students in college. They also note that students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum, compared to students who complete mid-level curricula or core curricula, do better as noted in their findings. This claim can provide connections to how a pre-college exposure with academic preparation can provide a strong foundation for students to academically succeed, but also the importance for students to navigate their college pathways by creating and establishing networks on campus.

These examples provide an understanding on student pathways and how students can strategically navigate their first year of transition as a result of pre-college exposures that can provide positive outcomes. It also allows for critically understanding how pathways can be shaped from a student's schooling and social background, and the knowledge that they may come with. Future studies should further explore how high school factors provide some type of influential outcome for students that can contribute to the transition in the first year of college.

Engagement, Belonging and Validation

The first year of college presents itself with a variety of uncertainty for students who may need to feel validated on campus. Through validation, students may feel more connected to their institutions and more likely to participate and engage in campus activities. Rendon's (1994) foundational contribution to this research exploring how students are able to be academically successful after receiving support from someone in college (e.g., faculty, peers, advisors) provides an understanding to college transition outcomes. Rendon defines *validation* as a person who engages in a supportive process, fostering both academic and interpersonal development of a student (Rendon, 1994; Linares Rendon & Muñoz, 2011). To understand the process and initiation of validation with students, Linares and Muñoz (2011) the present six steps: 1) it is the responsibility of the person or institution to initiate contact with students; 2) understanding that students have a sense of worth and are able to learn; 3) students obtain a sense of confidence, and are engaged with college life; 4) supporting students through validation is a constant cycle; 5) validation never ends; and 6) validation needs to be initiated within the first week or so of a student starting college. Rendon's contribution to this area of research provides a foundation for researchers to use the framework to challenge and better understand why students of color, in particular, are able to persist and continue in higher education when they have support, for other

reasons than what early researchers suggest with a deficit perspective on the acclimation of a new environment to students.

By the same token, Terenzini et al. (1994) found that validating students is critical in helping them facilitate their transition to college. In their study, the authors explored student perspectives from different types of institutions across student groups on their college transition and examined their level of involvement on campus. They found that experiences can influence negative and positive outcomes, and that student involvement differs across student groups, yet there is not a clear process on how students should transition, given the experiences and outcomes. Terenzini and colleagues note that faculty, staff, family, and friends can be both an asset and a barrier for students in their transition process.

Emerging research finds that having support from friends, family, and the institution can influence and allow for students to gain confidence and motivation to do well, persist, and aspire to career opportunities (Kouyoumdjian et al. 2017; Michel & Durdella, 2018). Orientation programs and first-year seminars can also play a vital role in facilitating the transition from high school to college (Smith & Zhang, 2010). First-generation college students typically present feelings of wanting to do better for one's future, family, and community. Yet, many college students report that their adjustment would be better with a higher sense of self-esteem that would contribute to their sense of belonging and engagement on campus (Yazedjian & Toews, 2006).

Having a solid sense of belonging can contribute to establishing strong relationships across peer support and mentorship (Johnson et al., 2007). Feelings of belonging and the need to have a support system on campus can also contribute to choosing a major or considering career choices (Clayton et al., 2019; Huerta & Fishman 2014; Musoba et al., 2013). Positive

20

interactions, such as socializing with peers, can provide a better sense of belonging for students

of color (Locks et al., 2008). If students feel that they are not supported, then they are likely to

check out and disconnect from the institution, withdrawing for reasons including having

difficulty acclimating (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Baker & Robnett, 2012; Longerbeam et al.,

2004).

Along the same lines, Nuñez (2009a) explored the complexities of both sense of

belonging and campus climate to understand the experiences of Latina/o students by examining

social and intercultural capital. She defines sense of belonging as "represent[ing] a form of social

capital in that it reflects students' feelings about their connection with the university and the

quality of social ties withing that community." (p. 38). Nuñez asserts that Latina/o students who

are familiar with diversity issues may feel more connected socially and academically on campus,

despite whether they experience a negative campus climate. Students may have a positive sense

of belonging and be critical of their surroundings on campus. Similar research on students

becoming critical of their surroundings in college has been noted to influence them to enroll and

take ethnic studies courses, which provides an opportunity to learn about struggles and engage in

the community through a type of barrio service learning (Nuñez, 2011). Similarly, Baker and

Robnett (2012) found in their study that the phenomenon of students engaging with some type of

social support on campus was associated with their retention. An interesting point noted from

their findings is that students who studied in groups with their peers were more likely not to

depart in their first year. Being engaged on campus with peers during the first year of college can

contribute and allow for students to build networks and establish themselves both socially and

academically.

Other studies indicate that students feel a sense of stress or anxiety in trying to make sense of their college environment. Therefore, having someone to provide them with social support can alleviate these feelings before a student decides to disengage from activities or withdraw from the institution (Zurita, 2004). Hoffman et al. (2002) notes that first-year students have difficulty within their transition to college as a result of high stress from academic expectations that they receive, as well as from not having good time management skills. However, Hoffman et al. finds from his study that students are able to develop interpersonal connections on campus with feedback that they receive from their academic and college guidance counselors. Thus, networking may contribute to a sense of caring and belonging, thus enhancing their ability to cope with stress. Moreover, having family support during this time can be a helpful factor for students when they are asking for help from others (Davis-Kean et al., 2012). As a result of these types of interactions, students may feel a sense of belonging on campus from having support, or being praised or validated.

Similarly, exploring supportive relationships across gender and academic stress, Rayle and Chung (2007) examined first-year college students' perceptions, finding that female students reported higher levels of support from friends and higher levels of academic stress than males. Overall, both male and female students reported having college friends who provided them with a form of social support, which was an important predictor to feeling a sense of belonging on campus. This finding contributes to the aforementioned on the importance of having social support to do well academically and have a sense of belonging.

Along the same lines of thinking, when examining gender and self-efficacy of first-year Latina/o college students, Lopez (2014) found that males rated themselves to have higher levels of confidence than their female counterparts; however, as the first year progressed for both

22

gender groups, Latino males shared that they were feeling less confident in their academic performance, reporting the same level as their female counterparts. It may appear that when accounting for gender, there are differences which can influence the first year of the college transition on performance. Smith and Zhang (2010) examined differences of college transition between first- and second-generation students to find how frequent students participated in activities and engaged in helpful behaviors. From a sample of 299 student participants, their findings indicate that parents, friends, high school teachers, professors, and advisors had a significant role in facilitating students' transition from high school to college. The authors also note that students of color who aspire to attend college are more likely than their white peers to use school resources on campus. When accounting for gender differences, females were more likely to seek and ask for help than males. Thus, having support from family, peers, and others can prove a positive factor to the transition of students.

In addition to social support, being engaged on campus is also an important factor for students to acclimate to the college life environment. Hernandez et al., (2013) assessed a national student survey, Student Experience in the Research University (SERU), to explore whether it provides an inclusive framework to accurately assess the Latino college student experience. They note that national surveys on student engagement typically may lack notions of culture for diverse student groups. Hernandez and colleagues find that the SERU survey offers an inclusive approach to assessing Latino student experiences and provides multiple variations of research on student engagement of Latinas/os and Higher Education.

In another study examining student engagement, O'Connell (2020) explains the importance of first-year student engagement for Latino students who are part of a program specific to being a pell-grant recipient. Through an action research approach, the author provides

six emerging themes from student experiences to address engagement in a first-year program, including: 1) students feeling a sense of community, 2) students having an appreciation of professors and advisors, 3) relevant course content, 4) students' appreciation of financial and academic support, 5) students being vigilant of the racial dynamics on campus, and 6) long term implications on first year programs; 6a) positive impacts on students' academics and study skills; and 6b) sense of confidence increase with the support from students that they receive. These emerging themes provide a foundation to understand what type of contributions arise and outcomes they may give students, when they participate and engage in a program that is inclusive to their needs during their first year.

With an understanding of student involvement and validation, the role that friends, family, and peers play can contribute to a sense of belonging for college students, providing a foundation of the first-year experience. What would be of interest is how high school environments influence the way Latina/o students maintain or establish relationships and navigate campus life engagement.

Student Leadership

One area that contributes to students' engagement and sense of belonging in college is participating in leadership opportunities. Researchers note that students who get involved in leadership opportunities in high school are more likely to continue similar opportunities in college. Student leadership development can occur through different opportunities, including retreats, leadership-centered courses, and programming (Kiersch & Peters, 2017). Recent data found that one in four college students is involved in student-led organizations (Rios-Aguilar et al.; 2015). Researchers exploring leadership development have pushed for practitioners and educators to expand better practices to provide future leaders with interdisciplinary approaches and opportunities to include tangible behaviors that are linked to effective leaders for students

(Keating et al.; 2014). Some of the reasons for providing new perspectives within leadership are how closely related collegiate groups mirror structures, roles, and processes similar to post-graduate organizations, and the importance of students' leadership and engagement on campus is the long-term implication of civic engagement and career development (Guzman & Cabrera, 2022; Rosch & Collins, 2017;).

Rosch and Collins (2017) suggest that students who participate in campus organizations experience a "holding environment" which allows them to co-learn from their peers, learn new perspectives, and practice new behaviors (cited in & Heifetz, 1994, p. 104). One way to understand how organizations are providing this type of environment is when students begin to develop a leadership identity, they also contribute to shaping campus life and campus climate. College organizations provide spaces for students to have healthy opportunities for addressing personal development in their values, goals, and self-authorship. However, it is also noted from human development scholars that students can additionally face challenges in these spaces, which include systematic hazing and discrimination, or students being placed in groups for class projects and not having previous knowledge on how to organize collectively, ultimately learning negative examples from a lack of collaborative learning experiences (Foubert & Grainger, 2006).

Kiersch and Peters (2017) present a multidisciplinary approach to examine leadership development, drawing from best practices in learning and training. They argue that stakeholders in student leadership development should begin expanding their approaches to meet the demands of students in the changing landscape of higher education to promote ethical behaviors and decision making for future leaders through 11 competencies by way of utilizing experiential learning, which include: self-awareness, unbiased processing, humility, courage, authentic behavior/authenticity, authentic relational orientation, empowerment, accountability, standing

back, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship. They posit that providing students with the 11 competencies through experiential learning can allow for tangible approaches to understanding leadership and beyond.

Similarly, Haber-Curran and Tillapaugh (2017) explore literature review on gender and leadership and note that now more than ever, it is imperative for practitioners in leadership roles to have intersections and be intentional with programming for students to grow in their development and practice critical self-reflections. They note a continuous comparison of outcomes, styles, beliefs, and efficacy, pointing out that literature points to feminine styles being more collaborative with democratic styles and behaviors, and to masculine styles being seen as authoritative behaviors, perpetuating old ways of thinking about gender and leadership (Haber-Curan, Sulpizio, 2017). They argue the need for new approaches to be more inclusive not only of leadership and gender, but also of non-binary and trans students. This includes presenting new critical lenses having intersectionality as a critical lens to allow for a focus on how systemic power is given and not given to groups of people and their social identities (e.g., gender). They point to how having stakeholders and leadership educators providing critical spaces of reflection in leadership for students can offer students transformative educational experiences.

The aforementioned new perspectives in leadership provide insight into the growing area of leadership in higher education, and how providing perspectives and tangible approaches to understanding leadership development can be linked to the way individuals thrive in post-graduate organizations and how they wish to engage civically in society. Thus, providing students with critical spaces of self-reflection in leadership development can influence and provide a better understanding of their roles as leaders through civic engagement and beyond.

Guzman and Cabrera (2022) examined Latina/o civic engagement post college graduation. They provide a foundation to understand Latina/o student civic engagement through secondary schooling opportunities that include mentoring, tutoring, rallying, and protesting (cited in Leal et. al., 2016). They note that a link to college education is connected to civic engagement, which includes voting, philanthropy, and volunteering. Their typologies of civically engaged Latinx college graduates include: 1) *Activistas*: college graduates who serve as leaders in the community, participate in issues of the Latina/o/x community, and vote, 2) *Mentores*: those who provide guidance and support to Latina/o/x students and families via leadership programs, 3) *Politicos*: voters who encourage members of their families and community to also vote, 4) *Votantes*: individuals who only vote, and 5) *Indiferentes*: individuals who do not engage in any form of civic engagement. The typology provided by Guzman and Collins on civic engagement of Latina/o/x college graduates can also be linked to exploring and contributing to the discussion of student leadership at the collegiate level to understand behaviors that can influence civic engagement.

Thus, collegiate leadership development opportunities and experiences are important for students, as they provide growth and prepare them to continue similar practices in post-graduate organizations, employment, and contribute to civic engagement practices.

Barriers, Challenges, Student Departure
For Latina/o, Chicana/o college students, working to financially support themselves while attending college is a reality. They may have minimal financial support from their college institutions as a result of budget cuts, and may also need to support their families as they continue to handle responsibilities on campus and back home (Kouyoumdjian et al. 2017). Other areas of challenge that students face are time management, dealing with negative experiences on

campus, and struggling with college living experiences: social, financial issues, or family obligations (Hernandez, 2002; Martin 2017; Musoba et al., 2013; Smith & Zhang, 2010;).

Another reality for college students is departing from the university. Zurita (2004) explored experiences of college students persisting and departing from college, providing information as to why it may be important to further explore specific student groups who attend suburban, well-resourced high schools. In this study, they interviewed 10 Latina/o undergraduate students to understand what led to either persistence or to stopping out and withdrawing from college by grouping the findings into two areas: similarities and differences between the students who persisted and those who stopped out. The similarities that emerged from their study included all students feeling a lack of social integration and not being academically prepared for the college curriculum. Interestingly, the differences between each group was the type of high school that they attended prior to college. Zurita notes that students who stopped out had attended segregated schools where Latino and African American students were the majority, but were underrepresented in college. Disparities across resource, college preparation, and achievement also contributed to the social difficulties these students faced. Previous research notes that Chicana/o, Latina/o students often attend segregated and underfunded schools (Gandara, Contreras, 2009). Thus, high school experiences for the students who persisted should be explored further to understand the schooling outcomes that influenced them to continue to stay enrolled in college.

Students who are not actively engaged on campus can feel a sense of isolation, rather than belonging. Martin (2017) explored college students first-year experiences and explained why 23% of the 626 participants (*n*=144) did not return in their second year. He notes that these students provided narratives as to why they may have not returned, explaining that social,

environmental factors may have influenced their decisions not to return. Furthermore, Martin explains that non-returning students wrote fewer stories about their positive school events on campus. Non-returning students shared negative events related to living experiences and struggling socially and financially. The author posits the importance of students seeking out resources for assistance during their first year of college; non-returning students in this study did not have sufficient social support to contribute to their integration on campus. It would be of importance to explore how the student experience in high school influenced how students navigate their first year of college.

As noted in a previous section, friends and family can have a positive impact, but they can also create barriers as students attempt to navigate both family life and academic responsibilities (Sanchez et al., 2010; Terenzini et al., 1994;). Family obligations, living at home, commuting to campus, or working are factors that can create stressful challenges during the transition in college (Baker & Robnett, 2012; Boden, 2001; Longerbeam et al., 2004; Sanchez et al., 2010). Sanchez et al. (2010) note that a challenge for Latina/o college students in transitioning and exploring college life is shifted when students also have to focus on family obligations. When students cannot focus on exclusively their development into adulthood through their college life experiences, this may prolong a new identity. Moreover, managing emotions can be a challenge in college. Johnson et al. (2010) conducted a study of 320 first-year college students who self-reported on how they managed their emotions between family environments and their college adjustment, and their findings indicate a link between how college students navigated their family environment and adjustment to college. Student participants from this study with families that are less expressive with their emotions reported significantly more of a challenge to their adjustment than student participants who came from

expressive family environments. Family challenges are often less discussed, and create more barriers for students in their adjustment to college. It would be of interest to learn more about the type of support students received (or lack thereof) and how it may influence them in their adjustment during the first year.

Finally, an area that has been explored to understand college transition is students' expectations and the realities of college. Many students are not being academically prepared for college, or are entering with little knowledge on how to navigate the necessary academic resources to help them succeed (Convertino & Mein, 2020). Boden (2011) explored student perceptions and their academic preparation in college by presenting four common themes from Latina/o student perceptions regarding their academic preparedness, which include: 1) personal education planning: students having a vision or goal of what they aspired to become in their career choice; 2) Having someone help them guide their college path; 3) having the necessary academic skills to succeed, such as studying and being focused on the end result: college graduation; and 4) determined to do well in college. These themes provide an insight into how students who were not prepared academically can – in essence – become academically sound to navigate their first year with support and create an action plan. It is also important to note that students having a clear vision of wanting to graduate can help keep them on track. An interesting finding from this study, as already mentioned in the previous research, is the emphasis of students feeling that they need to obtain a college degree for career opportunities in order to support themselves and their families. Boden asserts that it is important for practitioners to be mindful of the connection that students have with their families, and to incorporate such knowledge into orientation programs to help in the transition process. Thus, despite challenges which may arise with students and their families – such as a lack of support – it is important to

holistically keep in mind their acclimation in the first year through programs or mentorship. This is another area that should be further explored for students and leveraging the first year of college.

By the same token regarding barriers, Clark (2005) explored how students negotiate the transition process of college. The author notes that students experienced challenges specific to having family obligations or romantic partners who were not enrolled in the college. Students in this study strategically created ways to navigate challenges that they encountered. Clark's analysis provides four themes on how students overcome personal challenges. The emerging themes include: 1) students overcoming an obstacle during the first year, such as improving grades, meeting peers, or family life; 2) seizing an opportunity for students to gain valuable experience or progress for a specific goal, such as creating social networks; 3) students adapting to change, whether it be from positive or negative experience, such as expectations from professor, class scheduling, or commuting to campus; 4) students pursuing a goal that was not a result of their environment, but specific to their overall aspirations to facilitate what they deemed to be successful, such as getting good grades or the ideal job after graduation. Interestingly, the kind of personal characteristics that influenced students to perform academically despite challenges included persistence and confidence. When students have a sense of self through confidence, they can – in essence – persist to do well academically and engage in other activities such as creating networks.

In short, students must navigate realities which include family responsibilities, family obligations, and college life. Despite the challenges that arise, there are opportunities for students to engage and participate in programs that can help navigate college and personal life. It would

be of interest to examine whether students were participants of some type of college enrichment program in high school, and the implications of engagement during their first year.

Campus Climate

Given the fast-changing landscape of higher education fueled by the political landscape in the United States, campus climate is an area that continues to be explored, as it is a factor that influences outcomes in the college transition of students. This is especially crucial for students of color, who are likely to depart from college as a result of negative experiences (Fischer, 2007). Hurtado & Ponjuan (2005) note that students of color have become critical of their campus climates, and employ counterspaces as a way to cope with negative experiences. These counterspaces are typically formed on campus by students who may have similar beliefs or ideals, and are part of a student organization or club (Lopez, 2005; Yosso et. al., 2009). It has been noted that negative campus climate can affect emotional stress and create barriers in the ability to build networks with peers or others at the institution (Solorzano et al.; 2002; Yosso, 2006). Negative campus climates may include students of color feeling that they are being racially profiled, in what scholars refer to as a form of hyper-surveillance. Students of color experience negative interactions on campus, receiving negative subtle messages which perpetuate deficit perspectives known as racial microaggressions (Yosso et al., 2009). They may also feel a sense of anxiousness or stress, the need to speak on behalf of their background, in what scholars refer to as racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2007). This can speak to why students of color still feel like a guest in someone else's house at the institution that they attend (Turner, 1994).

Moreover, along a similar line of thinking, Harper and Hurtado (2007) reviewed 15 years of campus climate research to understand emerging trends of campus climate, providing three emerging themes from research, which they explain as: 1) across student groups of color,

perceptions of campus climate differ. White students assume everyone on campus has similar experiences; 2) students of color report differential treatment and racist campus environments, including feelings of alienation, and unsupportive people and spaces; and 3) students have diverse interactions, and are more likely to have positive outcomes when they participate in meaningful and engaging activities with their peers from different backgrounds. Moreover, Harper and Hurtado also provide nine themes on campus climate to provide a foundation of themes which give tangible examples of campus climate in the fast-changing landscape of higher education:

1. Students agree that colleges and university have been negligent to address issues of diversity
2. Race and diversity continues to be an issue no stakeholder wants to address; this includes courses outside of ethnic studies.
3. Racial segregation on colleges and universities continues to perpetuate inequalities
4. Across student of color groups, satisfaction varies by race.
5. Colleges and universities have historical reputations of racism even before current students matriculated.
6. White students presumed that students of color were also having similar satisfaction with their college experiences.
7. Whiteness was pervasive despite students of color having affinity organizations or spaces on campus; this included the curriculum and campus environment.
8. Staff of color are conscious of the racial/ethnic differences students have expressed, but were not willing to call attention in fear of retribution from their employers.
9. Institutional Assessment had not done enough to explore issues or diversity and campus climate.

Note. Nine Themes of Campus Climate.[6]

These categorical themes provide a critical foundational to understand how institutions continue to create a negative campus climate, and how stakeholders on campus are aware of issues but feel a sense of guilt because of retribution. Understanding and presenting these themes provides reasons as to why students of color experience microaggressions, feel stress, anxiousness, or feel that there is a sense of a hyper-surveillance in their everyday experiences.

---

[6] Adapted from Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2007(120), 7-24.

On the same token of understanding campus climates at predominantly white institutions, Jones et al., (2002) examined how resources and student service programs contribute to students' engagement and perceptions. Conducting student focus groups, their findings suggest the following:

1. Students feel a non-welcoming, hostile campus.
2. Race, ethnicity has a significant role in their college experience, facing alienation or Discrimination.
3. Student involvement on campus is focused within cultural centers.
4) Students are pleased with services that are inclusive of their needs.
5) Students experienced both positive and negative interactions with faculty.
6) Students recommend the hiring of more faculty, staff, and students of color, and better retention mentor programs.

Note. Six Emerging Campus Culture Findings.[7]

Jones and colleagues (2002) surmise the importance of fostering student engagement for the purpose of being involved to enhance a campus climate that will benefit students. Despite the realities of having negative experiences, the authors note that providing inclusive campus services can contribute to student needs, and may influence their sense of belonging. Moreover, having students provide feedback on decision making also enhances a better climate when institutions are willing to collaborate and support some type of change.

Understanding student attitudes on issues of campus climate, Longerbeam et al. (2004) explored differences between Latina/os and non-Latinas/os on student retention. The authors conducted a survey to assess perceptions, attitudes, expectations, and interests on the campus community, and also conducted focus groups. They found that Latina/o students were more likely to accept diversity than their peers, but as previously noted, they acknowledged areas of academic ability, family, and finances as stress factors. Moreover, students recommended that

---

[7] Adapted from Jones, L., Castellanos, J., & Cole, D. (2002). Examining the ethnic minority student experience at predominantly White institutions: A case study. Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 1(1), 19-39.

there be institutional support in providing an increase of diversity efforts by hiring more Latina/o faculty and staff, offering more scholarship opportunities and on-campus employment opportunities for students. As noted, students are critical of their campus climates, and also want to contribute toward making efforts to change and improve their institutions, providing tangible solutions.

Finally, a scholar who has guided and informed the research interest to explore Chicana/o Latina/o undergraduate students from different high school environments is J. Derek Lopez. Lopez' research contributions center on Latina/o undergraduate students and transition into college, and how they leverage and navigate their surroundings (Lopez, 2005; 2013; 2014; Lopez & Horn, 2020). His work has provided foundational understanding to comprehending more critical pre-college factors and experiences. Lopez' longitudinal study examining stress and sociocultural orientation (2005), within group differences and adjustment (2013), gender differences and self-efficacy (2014), retention and grit (Lopez & Horn, 2020) at a predominantly white institution provides a paramount road map to expand his research.

Lopez (2005) notes that Latinas/os experience negative campus climates in their first year of college, causing an increase in race-related stress. As previously noted, students developed counterspaces forming a sociocultural orientation. He argues that Latina/o undergraduate students who experience greater stress in their first year are more likely from racially homogenous high schools, suggesting that they have difficulty assimilating into the campus culture (Lopez, 2013). Interestingly, his finding suggests that Latina/o students who have difficulty in adjustment were more likely to use campus resources, and perceived other Latina/o peers and academic pressures as being less stressful. Moreover, when examining race and self-efficacy, Lopez (2014) found that Latino males reported having a higher level of confidence than

their Latina peers; however, as the academic year progressed, levels of self-efficacy for males significantly lowered, resulting in similar levels to those of their Latina counterparts. Lopez notes what has already been addressed by other scholars on the importance of validating students and having Latina/o students feel valued by the institution. Recently, Lopez and Horn (2020) suggest that students who performed well academically in high school are more likely to be retained in the first year of college, thus suggesting – as previously noted by other scholars – that a strong academic foundation is necessary for retention to be successful. In essence, his longitudinal study provides great insight on a unique student demographic which warrants further investigation to explore the pre-college contextual factors and experiences that may influence the college transition.

Despite a growing number of emerging trends on college transition, the focus continues to primarily be centered on students entering higher education from urban schools. Given the growing and fast changing demographics of suburban communities rapidly changing, with emerging research trends focused on suburban K-12 schooling, it warrants further examination of students entering higher education from the suburbs.

Intervention, Retention Programs

For some college students, participating in some type of enrichment program can provide support during the college transition. Researchers have noted that first-year programs (e.g., orientation, seminars, intervention, retention) can contribute to a students' overall sense of belonging, support, and provide a feeling of confidence to do well academically. As noted, social support from within the college is a vital role to retention (Saunders & Sanders, 2004; Baker & Robnett, 2012). Mattanah et al. (2010) examined a program specific to meeting the needs and improving student's college adjustment for 95 first-year students. They observed two groups:

students who participated in the peer-led intervention program, and a controlled group of students who did not participate in the program. Their study found that students who participated in the program had increased levels of social support and experienced less of a sense of loneliness. These findings contribute to what is known about students feeling a sense of belonging when they are validated by others, or when they feel that others care, including their peers.

Moreover, institutional support can also have a role in students' sense of belonging. Means and Pyne (2017) explored 10 low-income first year students' experiences participating in a program specific to their needs. They define institutional support structures as academic and social spaces, and note that there are multiple facets that help contribute to the college transition including: financial support (e.g., scholarships), joining student organizations, university housing, academic support. and supportive faculty that contribute to a student's sense of belonging. Means and Pyne suggest that perceptions of belonging begin prior to students matriculating to college. In other words, students' pre-college exposure can influence how they will navigate social and academic support in their first year. Researchers also note that students of color who attended diverse high schools also have a greater likelihood of having an easier transition into college and exposure to other student groups, being more comfortable in speaking and socializing with peers who are from a different background (Hudley et al., 2009; Lopez, 2005). This notion allows for some exploring of pre-college experiences and how it may contribute to a student's transition to college and sense of belonging.

Similarly, Murphy and Murphy (2018) critically examined factors of academic success across different platforms, including research articles, book chapters, databases, and think tanks in order to understand what emerging research has to say on individual factors of academic

success. The authors find that most research focuses primarily on organizational influences (e.g., academic and financial support). Their analysis presents that most colleges are aware of strengthening student retention, but note that most colleges do not focus on individual factors of success when creating student programs. They also find two barriers to students' success: 1) high school GPA, and 2) being first-generation college students. Murphy and Murphy explain that being the first in the family to attend college can bring challenges to a family, such as the lack of college information (e.g., financial aid information, college admissions process). They also describe that colleges should provide support across retention and persistence for students with access to information and resources. Moreover, the authors find three areas of influence on college success, which they include as: 1) academic preparation, 2) being first-generation and gender, and 3) cultural, (e.g., student identity) and acclimating to the institution. The analysis provided by Murphy and Murphy allows for a critical examination to understand how institutions are providing intervention programs to contribute to student success. However, they do not account of individual factors, and focus on organizational factors for the academic success of college students. As noted by previous research, there has been a considerable amount of attention placed on urban schooling research and its outcomes on students navigating higher education, overshadowing the growing demographic of students who are graduating from suburban schools.

In sum, programs can contribute to helping students acclimate and provide a sense of belonging. It is important to consider, as previously mentioned, that students enter college with a foundation of experiences and knowledge, and if students can acclimate and find social support, then this may contribute and ensure an easier transition to their experience. Having a low sense of belonging can be detrimental, and may influence disengagement and early departure. It would

also warrant some further exploration to consider overall students' experiences in high school and how they influence their engagement and outcomes.

Theoretical Perspectives: Community Cultural Wealth

An area that has contributed significantly to understanding student of color experiences in higher education is Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Education. As aforementioned on college transition research, some foundational research provides frameworks that perpetuate deficit thinking, and do not encapsulate the daily experiences that students of color navigate to persist in higher education. Critical Race Theory in Education has been an area in which researchers position their work to highlight and explore the student of color experience. This framework has given research a platform to present counter narratives to challenge deficit-based perspectives that view first-generation, low-income students with limited knowledge and experiences when they are entering into college (Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is founded on Law and draws from Critical Theory (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). CRT creates a discourse on the study of relationships across race, as well as encompasses intellectual traditions from broad literature in law, sociology, history, ethnic studies, and women's studies (Matsuda et al., 1993). Linares Rendon and Muñoz (2011) note that contributions from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth have provided a critical insight to better understand validation for students of color. This framework is centered on an asset-based approach to provide examples on how students contribute to their environment. Specifically, Community Cultural Wealth allows for a critical exploration of culture to be an asset for students navigating everyday experiences in higher education and beyond.

Community Cultural Wealth is categorized as the following, highlighting students of color contributions: 1) *Aspirational Capital*, referring to students' hopes and dreams regardless

39

of their current realities; 2) *Linguistic Capital,* which refers to the ability of speaking more than

one language, focusing on the value of being bilingual and using it to navigate people and

spaces, challenging deficit views of bilingualism; 3) *Familial Capital*, which are ways in which

students foster a level of bonding and staying connected with people and the community other

than actual family members, holding space of nurture and caring; 4) *Social Capital*, which

describes students establishing networks and receiving from others a level of support and

resources, 5) *Resistant Capital*, which refers to the knowledge, behaviors, and skills that students

have gained in opposition to challenge inequality, 6) *Navigational Capital*, which is the ability of

students to navigate social institutions that historically present barriers, strategically moving

through hostile spaces. Figure 2 provides Yosso's (2005) community cultural framework.

Figure 2

Community Culture Wealth, 2005
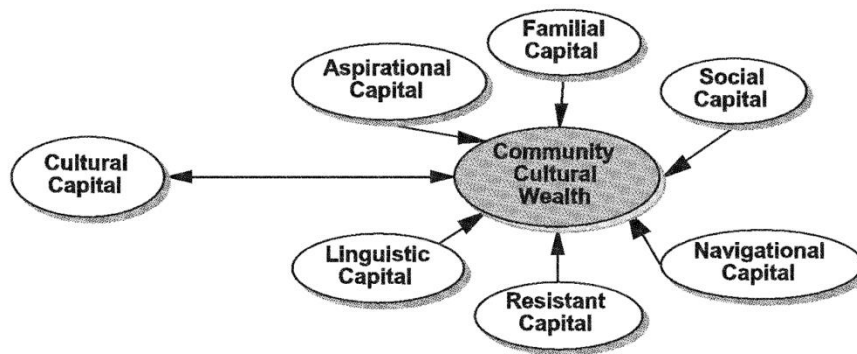
Figure 2. Model of Community Cultural Wealth, as shown in Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose cultural has capital? A crucial race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education,* 8, 69-91.

The Community Cultural Wealth model provides examples on how the contributions of

skills, abilities, and knowledge from communities of color are essential to recognize for students

of color in higher education. Using Yosso's (2005) framework to analyze race provides a

perspective on how institutions are responding to the needs and experiences of Chicana/o

Latina/o students. Emerging studies that have utilized Community Cultural Wealth have contributed to the understanding, experiences, and institutional response of students of color navigating a fast-changing landscape in higher education across race, gender, class, and immigration status (Duncheon, 2018; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Perez, et al., 2018; Yosso et al., 2009). The purpose of this study is to examine and identify challenges, levels of sources and support that students gain, leverage, and use during their first year. In doing so, this study contributes to a greater understanding of a demographic that is prepared to navigate higher education and beyond.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latina/o/x students who graduated from a California high school in the Central Valley navigated their first year of college. Participants must have either been currently enrolled or have recently graduated from college. With this in mind, the exploration of first-year college students from suburban high schools serves as an opportunity for stakeholders in higher education to recognize a demographic that has been understudied. Approaching this through a qualitative design, the research questions guiding this study were:

1. What experiences from a Central Valley high school environment influence Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x undergraduates during their first year of college?

2. How are suburban Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x undergraduates seeking social and academic support during their first year?

Research Design

This study made use of a phenomenological qualitative approach, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews to explore first-year college experiences of Latina/o/x undergraduate students who were currently enrolled in, or have recently graduated from college and graduated from a high school in California's Central Valley. Through the use of a phenomenology approach, Saldaña (2009) states that it allows the researcher "at gaining deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences." (p.140 cited in van Manen, 1990, p.9). Additionally, approaching this study using semi-structured interviews allowed for participants to contribute and guide their unique responses, and define their experiences around them (Merriam, 2009).

This also allowed for questions to be more flexible, for student participants to feel that they are engaging in a conversation with the researcher.

Sample

For this study, the sample was comprised of 21 participants who needed to meet several criteria. First, they had to self-identify as either Latina/o/x or Chicana/o/x and have graduated from a high school in California's Central Valley. Participants were asked to select from a list of 16 counties in the Central Valley[8]. Additionally, all participants must have participated in the summer high school youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD (Learning, Engaging, Advancing, Defending)[9]. Finally, participants in this study must have also been either enrolled in college as either juniors, seniors, or have recently graduated. This specific requirement allowed for study participants to reflect on their first-year college experiences prior to the global pandemic as a result of COVID-19 in 2020. I ensured that there was an equal representation across genders.

Given the global pandemic, participants were selected through a purposive and convenience sampling approach. Participant responses was successful, and snowball sampling was also executed (Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam, 2009). In order to ensure participant confidentiality from other participants and their connection to the summer youth program, Chicanas/os LEAD, data were collected from a cluster sample, selecting participants from across four summer cohorts (2014-2017), thus helping with confidentiality of all participants in this study.

---

[8] The following 16 counties make up California's Central Valley: Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Sacramento, Solano, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tulare, Yolo, and Yuba.
[9] Pseudonym for a statewide high school summer youth conference.

Instrumentation

The data for this study were collected from semi-structured, open-ended interviews which lasted approximately 45-60 minutes in length. The following guided the data collection: interview protocol, research questions, and literature on schooling environments, pre-college factors, Latina/o/x students, college transition, and community cultural wealth. Participants were asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix A). Using Qualtrics software, I verified participant eligibility and collected demographic information which included: gender, name of the university participant attended or had recently graduated from, and which county in the Central Valley they resided in when they graduated high school.

Data were recorded using the audio from interviews. I used Zoom as the platform to audio record interviews. My interview questions allowed participants to be able to freely express their feelings of their institutions and experiences. The interviews I conducted were more conversational. I checked content validity in order to ensure that my findings were relevant to my study. In using this approach first, I coded any meanings that I was not familiar with. I used a computer software system, Dedoose, to help analyze findings and themes. I also used Microsoft Excel to perform additional coding.

Procedures

21 participants met the desired requirements and were interviewed for this study. Once the researcher had received IRB approval from Claremont Graduate University, the researcher contacted participants who participated in Chicanas/os LEAD using social media platforms as the main source of recruitment (e.g., Facebook, Instagram). The researcher provided a flyer with detailed information for perspective participants to review at initial contact. Participants were asked to fill out the demographic survey and consent form using Qualtrics software. After the

first round of recruitment, snowball sampling was executed, and some participants referred their peers who met the same criteria in this study. The researcher was able to successfully recruit 15 participants during the first cycle of recruitment. In order to meet their desired number of participants for this study, the researcher recruited the remaining six participants using social media message boards that participants from Chicanas/os LEAD summer cohorts (2014-2017) used to keep in touch with alumni. Interested participants sent messages directly to the researcher with interest to contribute. The snowball participants also filled out a pre-interview questionnaire and provided consent electronically to participate in this study.

As an incentive for contributing to this study, participants were put into a raffle with the possibility of winning either a $10 gift card to Starbucks (10 winners) or a $50 Amazon gift card (1 winner). Given the pandemic, each participant was asked to select a day and time to be interviewed on Zoom. Prior to the day of the scheduled interview, the researcher collected consent forms via e-mail prior to being interviewed. All interviews were conducted via Zoom. Only audio was recorded. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The researcher documented journal reflections after each interview with the guiding questions[10]: 1) How am I feeling? 2) What did I learn? 3) What touched or surprised me? 4) What am I still wondering? and 5) How can I improve in my work as a researcher? In doing so, the researcher was able to have the opportunity to triangulate data by cross checking themes and concepts to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of this study (Krathwohl, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Setting and Research Context: Central Valley Latinas/os/x College Students

This study does not have a specific research site since the purpose of this study was to explore educational experiences of Latina/o/x students from California's Central Valley. Data

---

[10] Thank you to my colleague, Dra. Alma I. Flores, for the encouraging guiding questions she uses post-interview/data collection.

were collected during the months of May-July 2021 using the Zoom platform to audio record

interviews of 21 participants. Participants came from multiple counties and colleges across the

California's Central Valley.

Table 1 \

Student Participant Demographic Profile- Alpha Order

Name[11]	Identity (self-identified)	CA County	High School Type	Higher Education Institution
Abagail	Latinx	Sacramento	Public	University of California- Santa Cruz
Alex	Latinx	Tulare	Public	University of California- Davis
Angela	Latina	Fresno	Public	CSU Monterey Bay
Anna	Latina	Stanislaus	Public	University of California- Santa Barbara
Beto	Latino	San Joaquin	Charter	University of the Pacific
Clarissa	Latina	Fresno	Public	University of California- Merced
David	Chicano	Kern	Public	University of California- Merced
Emily	Latina	Yuba	Public	University of California- Davis
Fulano	Latino	Stanislaus	Public	University of California- Berkeley
Gallo	Latino	Tulare	Public	University of California- Los Angeles
Isabel	Latina	Kern	Public	University of California- Merced
John	Latino	Stanislaus	Public	University of California- Los Angeles
Jordan	Latino	Solano	Public	University of the Pacific
Lilly	Latina	Yuba	Public	University of California- Davis
Luz	Latinx	Sacramento	Public	University of California- Merced
Martin	Latino	Sacramento	Private	CSU Monterey Bay
Mary	Latina	Tulare	Public	Central Valley Community College[12]
Mia	Latina	Fresno	Public	University of California- Irvine
Paul	Latino	Sacramento	Public	University of the Pacific
Tiffany	Latina	Sacramento	Private	University of California- Riverside
Veronica	Chicana	Sacramento	Charter	University of California- Berkeley

[11] All participants selected a pseudonym for their demographic profile.
[12] Pseudonym used for this California Community College in the Central Valley.

As detailed in table 1, the majority of participants (16) self-identified as either Latina (9) or Latino (7); followed by Latinx (3), Chicana (1) and Chicano (1). All 21 participants represented eight of the sixteen counties in the Central Valley, which included: Sacramento (6), Stanislaus (3), Tulare (3), Fresno (3), Yuba (2), Kern (2), Solano (1), and San Joaquin (1). The majority of participants attended a public high school (17), with a smaller representation of private (2) and charter (2) high schools in this sample. The University of California system was highly represented (15), and fewer participants at other institutions, including: University of the Pacific (3), and California State University- Monterey Bay (2), and 1 participant who enrolled at a California Community College.

Background

Chicanas/os LEAD (Learning, Engaging, Advancing, Defending) was established in the early 1980s after a group of Chicana/o educators and community leaders of the Sacramento region came together to discuss ways in which they could engage Chicana/o high school students with equitable college access and civic engagement. The collective group of Chicanas/os established a youth conference with similar approaches to other youth conferences which included all-boys and girls states. Collectively, they came up with the name and acronym Chicanas/os LEAD: Learning, Engaging, Advancing, Defending, thus incorporating a youth conference founded on community, culture, college access, and career aspirations. These young Chicana/o professionals critically understood the importance of culturally relevant programming at a time when there was no programming offered for Latina/o students. Since its inception, Chicanas/os LEAD has become a non-profit organization, and has been successful in providing a youth conference to Chicana/o high school students from across California's Central Valley

during the summers. Students leave the program to become part of a network who are ready to lead and contribute to California's future.

Researcher Contributing to College Access

During the spring of 2014, I was recruited by a college friend to volunteer for Chicanas/os LEAD. In the first three years I volunteered as a facilitator overseeing a group of 10 students, and in recent years, I have been a contributing member to the conference planning committee. Because I was able to work with high school students, I established relationships with them and had the privilege of seeing many matriculate, persist in, and graduate college. As a result, I was able to recruit via social media platforms of current – or recently graduated – college students. Having the opportunity to recruit from a list of former participants from Chicanas/os LEAD program provided a diverse and broad perspectives of California's Central Valley students, their high schools, and their first year of college experiences.

Establishing Confianza[13]

As a former group facilitator for Chicanas/os LEAD, I had a shared experience with each of the participants in this study. Thus, I made it a point to establish *confianza* with each of the participants. Researchers have drawn from *confianza* as a means to utilize participatory action research with community members (Dyrness, 2007, 2011; Fitts, McClure, 2015). Dyrness (2007) reflected on the importance of *confianza* when working with a group of mothers advocating for education reform through participatory action research. Although Dyrness' understanding of *confianza* was by using it through participatory action research, the notion of *confianza* by establishing trust with participants, provided a sense of solidarity from the shared experiences of

---

[13] Definition: Trust.

both researcher and participant. Thus, having attended Chicanas/os LEAD allowed for myself as the researcher along with the participant to have a shared experience and allowed for an affirming environment. In short, I was critical of developing a space of respect and mutual trust between researcher and participant in this qualitative study (cited in Velez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992; Fitts & McClure, 2015; Ramirez-Melgarejo, 2020).

Moreover, in attempting to establish *confianza* with participants, I allow myself to embrace and draw from an anti-colonial approach, drawing from a Critical Race Nepantlera Methodology (CRNM) and allowing myself to provide participants in this study with immediate guidance and support (Acevedo-Gil, 2019). This methodology combines Critical Race Theory in education, the concept of Nepantlera, and Chicana Feminist Epistemology, which are all rooted in anti-colonial and social justice actions. The author explains that: "if a researcher cares about the well-being of the community being studied, she should enact *buena voluntad*[14] with the aim to have a positive influence before, during, and after conducting research." (p. 233). I made it a point to lend myself as a helping hand to each of the participants in this study. For example, I was able to be of service to some of the participants in this study which included the following examples: a) helping David navigate graduate school application process by providing feedback on his personal statement; b) sharing my reflections with Gallo about grad school after our interview; and c) introducing Fulano – who was interested in a career in medicine – to a friend of mine who is a pediatrician in the Central Valley. My life-long commitment to being of service to others, including research participants in this study, can be understood by what Ochoa (2022) refers to as the importance of "learning and being in community", and speaks to this notion of

---

[14] Translation: in good faith.

confianza: "research is about relationships and reciprocity is a lifetime and way of being." (p. 11).

Protection of Human Subjects

This study received IRB approval from Claremont Graduate University in May 2021. Prior to making initial contact, participants were asked to fill out a pre-interview form, and were given the opportunity to create a pseudonym to protect their identities. To ensure anonymity, any direct identifiers to individuals were kept in a secured computer file. This also included any form of contact information, such as email addresses and phone numbers. Data were collected, including demographic surveys from Qualtrics and was saved on my personal hard drive and maintained under fingerprint, lock and key, which was only accessed by me. To ensure participant satisfaction, the research asked for informed consent during the pre-interview questionnaire and on the day of the Zoom interview. Additionally, on the day of the Zoom interviews, the researcher summarized verbally what the rights of participant were.

Data Analysis

A trusted and verified transcribing company transcribed all interviews during May-July 2021. Once interviews were ready, the qualitative data software Dedoose was used to manage, clean, and organize data to analyze for this study. Prior to coding, I created memos for myself to document personal reflections and impressions by answering five questions which were previously mentioned from a trusted colleague: 1) How am I feeling? 2) What did learn? 3) What touched or surprised me? 4) What am I still wondering? and 5) How can I improve in my work as a researcher?

Part of this process also included answering Saldaña's (2009) guiding questions during the initial coding process. He suggests that researchers reflect on questions that can help during

50

the initial coding phase, which include: 1) What is the data study of? 2) What does the data assume? 3) Whose point of view does this data come from? 4) Who does it represent? and 5) Whose thoughts are they? In doing additional questions as memo formatting, I was allowed to be fully immersed. The first and second round of coding data were analyzed using Dedoose. Finally, Microsoft Excel software was used for a third-round coding of themes. Throughout coding, I was able to share reflections with trusted colleagues who would hear me out and help me untangle myself from mental frustrations.

For this study, data was analyzed using Saldaña's (2009) coding approach. In the first cycle, a descriptive coding approach from interviews was used to analyze themes and patterns as a means to begin categorizing the data. I read through the transcripts to provide general notes. Additionally, I themed the data to help examine my themes and create a narrative and have meaning to interpretation, as noted by Saldaña (2009): "winnow down the number of themes to explore […] and to develop an overarching theme from the data that weaves various themes together in a coherent narrative" (p. 139-40). In my second cycle of coding, I read the transcriptions a second time for a "tentative scheme of categories" (Merriam, 2009, p.182). During the end and beginning of coding cycles one and two, I created a code list/book. Saldaña (2009) notes: "maintaining [a] list provides an analytic opportunity to organize and reorganize the codes into major categories and subcategories." (p. 21). On the third review, I created a codebook using Microsoft Excel Software. My fourth revision included triangulating with the data, comparing and cross checking the data from the interviews and personal memos written after each interview.

Pilot Test

        I conducted a pilot test, and was able to interview two college students who met the desired qualifications from Sacramento State University and University of California, Merced, respectively. Both participants informed me on the specific type of questions that needed to be removed, which were not germane to the research questions of this study. Both of these student participants provided insight to understanding the complexities of perspectives from high school and first year of college experiences.

Limitations

        There are limitations to this study which can be identified to be able to contribute and provide additional perspectives to strengthen this study. The first limitation to this study was its limited sample size of 21 student participants from different high schools and universities across the state of California. For example, there was not a sufficient representation for Charter and Private Catholic High Schools in this sample. Additionally, higher education institutions were represented by the University of California system. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize this study's findings to all high school and higher education institution experiences in the state. However, findings from this study can provide a kickstart to further advance the discussion on California's K-16 educational pipeline experiences.

        Secondly, this study involved 21 participants who all participated in the summer youth program, Chicanas/os LEAD and were self-selected to participate in this study. Despite the possibility of presenting a selection bias, findings provide a narrative of Latina/o/x students' high school and first year college experiences. Self-section bias can exist and not be generalizable to other Latina/o/x- Chicana/o/x in the state of California or the United States.

Positionality Statement

My foundation draws from my educational experiences growing up in California's Central Valley, attending a top performing high school[15] in the Sacramento region. My trajectory to higher education was by luck. I almost did not graduate and receive my high school diploma. Education policymakers enacted the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which was first implemented for students from the class of 2004 to begin taking it in their first year of high school (9th grade). I had difficulty passing the math section, always being a few points away from a passing score. Because there were inconsistencies or some gaps in the CAHSEE exam, by the 2003-04 academic year, education policymakers decided to withdraw from making it a graduation requirement to pass the CAHSEE for the class of 2004. Therefore, I was able to receive my high school diploma. Because I attended a top performing high school, it was expected that I would contribute to the college-going culture. As a first-generation, low-income student, I was under the school's radar, and did not pass some of my classes. At one point, I enrolled in summer school, and took a reading and drama class to receive better English grades (higher than a D grade). By my senior year of high school, everyone was enrolled in two 1-semester English courses[16], and I was enrolled in three courses to graduate on time. In retrospect, I was not prepared for college.

Enrolling at Sacramento City College gave me a foundation that I was missing. I experienced a pivotal moment in which I was encouraged by a friend to meet counselors Keith Muraki and Juan LaChica, who were connected to retention program RISE (Respect, Integrity, Self-determination & Education). Participating in this program allowed me to receive mentorship

---

[15] Sacramento Magazine ranked Davis Senior High School as one of the top performing schools in the region (Cassinos-Carr, 2010).
[16] Davis Senior High School offered semester English courses for 12th graders.

that provided me with opportunities to see my academic potential, which led me to UCLA and beyond. Without mentoring from people like Keith and Juan LaChica, and being able to participate in conferences like the Puente Project statewide conference at San Francisco State University and UCLA's Community College Partnerships SITE program, a week-long summer conference, my educational trajectory could have been different. In essence, my experiences in higher education have provided me with tangible examples of what commitment to student success can look like when it is rooted in mentorship.

I draw from multiple perspectives that have guided my research lens. Pizarro (1998) suggests that we must challenge dominant narratives which have historically left out communities of color through a social justice framework for the need to allow Chicana/o researchers to discuss critical implications that meet the needs of communities of color: "we must seek 'the truth' as Chicanas/os experience it and attempt to disrupt epistemological tradition and racism." (p. 74). As I began to collect and analyze data, I positioned myself through my lived experiences, drawing from what Delgado-Bernal (1998) refers to as *Cultural Intuition,* the importance of allowing lived experiences to inform research, "giv[ing] Chicana and Chicano education scholars some freedom to interpret their research findings outside of existing paradigms, and hopefully develop and propose policies and practices that meet the needs of Chicana and Chicanos." (p. 574). Finally, as previously mentioned, I am also guided by the need to be of service to participants, and therefore grounded by the Critical Race Nepantlera Methodology (Acevedo-Gil, 2019).

Although my lived experiences navigating higher education have been influenced from my own schooling experiences and the mentoring I have received along the way, it may provide

the ability to feel connected with participants. However, I recognize my privilege as the

researcher, while still maintaining a critical approach to work that matters.

CHAPTER 4: OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

In this study, I sought to understand first year experiences of Latina/o/x students from California's Central Valley. In particular and unique to this study was the shared experience from the 21 participants, having all attended a summer high school youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD (Learning, Engaging, Advancing, Defending). Therefore, coupled with their educational trajectories into higher education, I was able to explore their shared experiences of their time from the summer youth conference with their high school and post-secondary education pipelines. This chapter addresses the two research questions of this study:

1. What experiences from a Central Valley suburban high school environment influence Chicana/o, Latina/o undergraduates during their first year of college?

2. *How are suburban Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x undergraduates seeking social and academic support during their first year?*

Data analysis and discussion of the findings was guided by the Community Cultural Wealth theoretical framework (Yosso, 2005). This study presents its themes by exploring the three areas of participants' educational trajectories in their schooling pipelines: 1) high school experiences; 2) Chicanas/os LEAD summer youth conference; and 3) first year college experiences.

Chicanas/os LEAD: Summer Youth Program

This study is unique for two specific reasons: first, all 21 participants came from different regions of California's Central Valley (see Appendix C) providing diverse perspectives of their educational trajectories; and second, all students in this study participated in a summer youth

conference while in high school[17], providing a shared experience that contributed to their

academic pipelines and trajectories into higher education.

Table 2

Student Participant Demographic Profile - Alpha Order

Name	Identity (self-identified)	CA County	High School Type	Higher Education Institution
Abagail	Latinx	Sacramento	Public	University of California - Santa Cruz
Alex	Latinx	Tulare	Public	University of California - Davis
Angela	Latina	Fresno	Public	CSU Monterey Bay
Anna	Latina	Stanislaus	Public	University of California - Santa Barbara
Beto	Latino	San Joaquin	Charter	University of the Pacific
Clarissa	Latina	Fresno	Public	University of California - Merced
David	Chicano	Kern	Public	University of California - Merced
Emily	Latina	Yuba	Public	University of California - Davis
Fulano	Latino	Stanislaus	Public	University of California - Berkeley
Gallo	Latino	Tulare	Public	University of California - Los Angeles
Isabel	Latina	Kern	Public	University of California - Merced
John	Latino	Stanislaus	Public	University of California - Los Angeles
Jordan	Latino	Solano	Public	University of the Pacific
Lilly	Latina	Yuba	Public	University of California - Davis
Luz	Latinx	Sacramento	Public	University of California - Merced
Martin	Latino	Sacramento	Private	CSU Monterey Bay
Mary	Latina	Tulare	Public	Central Valley Community College
Mia	Latina	Fresno	Public	University of California - Irvine
Paul	Latino	Sacramento	Public	University of the Pacific
Tiffany	Latina	Sacramento	Private	University of California - Riverside
Veronica	Chicana	Sacramento	Charter	University of California - Berkeley

---

[17] Participants attend Chicanas/os LEAD the summer before starting eleventh or twelfth grade, but this was not accounted for in this study to respect anonymity of participants.

table 2 provides demographic information of participants, including their hometown county in the Central Valley, high school type, and college destination. Examining students who transfer from a four-year institution to a community college is common for college students, yet it is beyond the scope of this study[18].

Illustrative approach to Findings

Figure 3

Organization of Chapter Findings
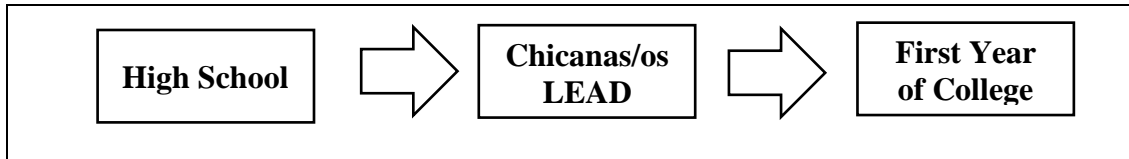
To understand how findings are presented in this study, figure 3 provides an illustrative approach to follow how they are presented, in a thematic approach to students' educational trajectories. The following three themes include: 1) high school: cultivating college going mindsets, 2) attending Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference: cultivating aspirations and validations, and 3) first year of college: students reaping the benefits of their labor.

---

[18] Angela, Martin, and Mary withdrew from the 4 year institution they initially entered. This should be noted for future research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Students from California's Central Valley cultivated college-going mindsets, allowing opportunities for gaining college preparation, knowledge, and also contributing to their campus or community through leadership positions. Attending the summer youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD, became a pivotal moment for students to additionally cultivate their aspirations through validating experiences, which provided them with opportunities to continue to persist. In order to provide and situate the group of students from California's Central Valley and their educational trajectories into higher education, it is important to provide a road map of their experiences in chronological order: 1) high school; 2) attending Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference; and 3) first year of college. The focus for the data analysis in this study are from three major themes across the three areas of students' education pipelines: a) cultivating college-going mindsets; b) cultivating student aspirations and validations; and c) reaping the benefits of their labor: college-going mindsets.

This study revealed students cultivated a college-going mindset coupled with academic and college preparation programing, assistance from gatekeepers or siblings, and leadership opportunities in high school. Attending the summer youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD cultivated aspirations and validations of their college-going mindsets. During the first year of college, students reaped the benefits of their college-going mindsets, which contributed to how they navigated academic and social opportunities in creating supportive networks.

Cultivating College-Going Mindsets

Throughout the interviews, data revealed that the majority of students were motivated and wanted to attend college after graduating high school. Students attributed their reasons of wanting to pursue college to their family's migration to the United States. It was interesting to note that the majority of students, when prompted to share about themselves, began by sharing

their families' migration story to California. The majority of students in this study were first-generation, with their parents having migrated from Mexico to the United States; 5 of the 21 students were born in Mexico. Students who provided their family background contextualized and provided an understanding to their perspectives of wanting to go to college. Abagail, for example, shared that she was academically focused because it was a priority, referencing her parents migrating journey: "[My parents] came to the U.S. for a better life, right. The American dream. So, for me, school has always been like, a number one priority…" Her sentiments about being first-generation and wanting to do well academically were a common theme across other participants who also were first-generation students. Emily shared that she and her sister Lilly were born in Mexico and taking advantage of education in the United States was a priority for her family. Reflecting on her education, she noted:

> "I think that really made my sisters and I think more mindful about, you know, why we're here [in the United States] and [taking] advantage of the opportunities that we have here. And so that is why we've always worked really hard to, you know, […] graduate high school and then go from there, go onto college."

Students like Lilly were mindful of their families' migration to this country, which allowed them to develop a consciousness of understanding their position as young students with the opportunity to seek out social mobility via higher education. As David noted: "For me, I saw college as an exit ticket out of poverty. It's going to give you that extra step to financially support yourself." Moreover, for some students in this study, their parents contributed to the agricultural economy as farmworkers in the Central Valley[19], and for these students, understanding the importance of pursuing higher education was paramount. Gallo, whose father contributed to the dairy labor workforce, expressed how he knew that he wanted to go to college and was

---

[19] Data interviews revealed that some of the students in this study also worked in the agriculture fields, picking grapes to save up money for college.

determined to do well academically, explaining tangible ways in which he was able to find his way when he started high school:

> "Going into my freshman year, that was my focus. Like that was my goal. In those four years, I knew I wanted to go to a good university. And so, I made my network around that, you know […] my network of friends, where like people who would like to talk about school…"

Being first-generation students in the Central Valley continues to be a shared experience for many, and it was apparent for students in this study. Across the Central Valley, family migration continues to be a common lived experience for those seeking better economic opportunities. Previous studies have documented first-generation students want to do better for their families and community, and as a result, perform academically well in college (Murphy & Murphy, 2018; Yazedjian, & Toews, 2006). For students who were eager to do well in high school, they took opportunities to seek out like-minded people for support. These early experiences of having a supportive group of peers, in conjunction with their family background of being first-generation students, contributed to a solid foundation of cultivating college-going mindsets. Having this type of mindset allowed students to search for tangible opportunities to contribute toward beginning to cultivate a college-going mindset through academics.

Cultivating Academic Preparation

Students were asked to describe themselves in high school. Most students used words such as *focused*, *driven*, *motivated*, and *engaged*. Data interviews revealed that the majority of students' academic standing in high school was considered to be high achieving. The majority of students in this study were enrolled in advanced placement or honors programs at their respective high schools. In addition to the aforementioned, taking the necessary steps to contribute to their college-going mindsets was also a case of them becoming academically prepared for college. This was indicative to what data interviews revealed when students were asked whether their

respective high schools had prepared them academically for college. A majority of students agreed when reflecting back to their high school experiences that they were prepared academically for college through their exposure of curriculum in reading and writing to improve their skills. Alex shared how her English teacher prepared her for the realities of college writing, never "sugar-coating" class assignments:

> "I really loved [my English teacher] because like, I'm really bad at writing and I know that, and I still am in college, but she was that one teacher that was always pushing, never sugar-coating, like, what college is about and like, you know, giving it to us real, like, you know, this is how it really is…"

Alex's description of her high school English teacher, preparing students for college through writing assignments and sharing her perspective, provided Alex with a preview of what to expect in college assignments, giving her firsthand experience from someone who had gone to college. Similarly, for Isabel, enrolling in AP courses prepared her academically and allowed her to take advantage of being able to pick up another major when she started college: "I passed both of my AP Spanish 3 and 4, which is why I was able to double major so quickly in Spanish…"

For the few students in this study who were in enrolled in parochial and charter high schools, they were enrolled in similar academic programs. For example, Veronica and Beto attended specific charter schools that focused on the theatrical arts and medical field, respectively. Martin and Tiffany attended private high schools, each having strong academic programs coupled with service to the community in different capacities. Martin described how faculty and staff set a high standard for students at his high school, illustrating how a college-going culture was normalized:

> "We were expected to use academic language, you know, when, even outside of the classroom […] like in the hallways when we were interacting with administrators or teachers. And I think that prepared me a lot for college, not only learning the vocabulary, like by definitions and things like that, when we were in the classroom, but also learning

how to express myself in that type of language outside of just reading or filling out worksheets..."

Martin's reflections on expectations from his school provide an example of schools creating college-going cultures and expecting students to contribute to them, leading by example – which students did not speak to, but in essence contributed to their respective high schools by being academically engaged in honors or advanced placement programs, and thus cultivating college-going mindsets. Anna's reflections on taking AP courses and how that prepared her for college is the essence of what she thinks AP courses are supposed to do for students – provide stamina to handle college curriculum:

> "It prepares you more mentally and like, to be able to put in the work […] It gives you the stamina that you need to be able to go to college and be able to be successful, you know, sit through a lecture where they're not, you know, spoon feeding you notes that you're supposed to write."

Anna's reflections on what she thinks AP courses can provide to students speaks to both the academic and mental components of cultivating college-going mindsets. Students in this study were in the top of their graduating classes, with one student becoming valedictorian, and others being awarded scholarships, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Millennium Scholarship, Always Up Foundation, smaller local scholarships, and institutional full-ride scholarships. Academically, it appeared that these students were prepared for college curriculum.

Cultivating College Preparation Programming

Being prepared for college was also indicative of students' participation and engagement involved with college preparation programs at their respective high schools. It is important to note that only students in this study that attended public high schools were afforded the opportunity to participate in college preparation programs. Students described how their experiences in programs, such as TRiO and AVID, were instrumental in them beginning to

understand college. Being able to attend these programs on college campuses and taking courses

for credit provided them with tangible examples of what college could be like for them. Thus,

students who participated in TRiO or AVID were provided with opportunities to navigate

preparing for college, understanding how to strategize when the time came to apply to colleges.

Some students in this study who attended public high schools were part of similar college

preparation programming, including UC Scholars, a program that provided students with college

information and advice on how to prepare college applications to University of California

system. Another program was CAL-SOAP, which offered tutoring support, academic advising,

college information and aid application assistance, in addition to career exploration

opportunities. Thus, students in this study were provided with additional support from the

aforementioned college prep programs, which contributed to their college-going mindsets.

Lilly's reflections on her experience participating in TRiO provides an example on the impact

the programming had for her:

> "We learned about the college application, the colleges themselves, we even visited some
> college campuses. And so, you know, I had never done that. I didn't get that experience
> from high school, but definitely got that from [TRiO]."

Lilly's reflection on the exposure of college she received from being part of a college

preparation program, TRiO, provided her with the opportunity to demystify the college-going

process. Moreover, her reflection provides a tangible example for why these types of programs

are necessary for communities across the Central Valley, where a majority of students are first-

generation and come from working-class backgrounds. For students like Lilly who were exposed

to college knowledge preparation, having the ability to take courses on a college campus, visit

various colleges, and understand the process to prepare for college was instrumental to

cultivating a college-going mindset.

Participating in equitable college access programs prepares students, as Anna pointed out, by providing the stamina needed to be academically and mentally prepared for college. Previous studies note the type of schooling that students experience can influence academic outcomes to college matriculation, and thus, students attending schools where college preparation programming are offered – in addition to having access to advanced placement and honors courses – can contribute to positive perceptions of college (Hill, 2008; Lee et al., 2017; Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015). For students in this study, this was apparent. Students were able to cultivate a college-going mindset coupled with the academic preparation and access to college knowledge preparation, which provided them with a solid foundation.

Co-Cultivators: Teachers, Counselors, and Siblings

In addition to students, data interviews revealed that students in this study were provided with additional help from co-cultivators, from a teacher, counselor, or sibling. For a majority of students, this type of additional help (cultivation) was instrumental and contributed to their college-going mindsets by allowing them to obtain additional college knowledge and information. Some students received support from an older sibling in high school to help them navigate their academics. Interestingly, data revealed that siblings who provided guidance were enrolled in college offering help in strategic ways such as picking certain classes needed to meet college requirements for their younger siblings. Emily shared that her older sister created an academic plan for both she and her sister Lilly: "[She] had like a schedule ready for me and my twin sister. Like, you know, 'these are the classes you're going to take if you want to go through, the college route.' And so that's what we did."

Mia's older brother encouraged her to follow a similar path that he had followed in high school by taking courses at the local community college to earn college credits and increase her chances of being admitted to a University of California school. For students who were able to

seek out support from siblings, they understood that following the guidance of their older sibling would benefit them in the long run, when it came to applying to college.

For others who did not have an older sibling to seek guidance from, interview data revealed that these students sought out assistance from teachers or counselors for additional support. This provided them with pivotal roles in their educational trajectories in preparing for college. Isabel described how her teacher realized that she was a high achieving student early in high school, and enrolled her in AP courses: "[The teacher] moved me. She was like, 'you have a lot of potential and you're a very bright student...'" similarly, Alex described her teachers knowing that she wanted to go far away for college, and that they were helping her prepare for college applications: "A lot of my teachers did help me. I think almost every [one] of my teachers that I had always catered to me whenever I needed something."

Other students were able to seek out emotional support when it came time for them to select which college to accept admissions from. Veronica shared that her history and ASB teacher had helped her process the tough decision-making. Both John and his brother, Fulano, benefitted from having a supportive math teacher, who made time to ensure that they had access to resources: "I had so much support from so many teachers, like my math teacher, [and] my counselor was also very kind to me. She would always help me apply to scholarships." John's reflections on the support he had received from his counselor helping to apply for scholarships were also common for other students who had received scholarship help from a sibling or counselor.

These aforementioned examples highlight that students' experiences with supportive people through knowledge sharing provides an understanding of caring individuals as co-cultivators, helping first-generation students to navigate the process and prepare for college.

Even though a majority of students benefitted from college preparation programs like AVID and TRiO, the experiences of having guidance from others, interacting, and gaining knowledge speaks to the importance of possible outcomes when first-generation students ask for – and receive – help from individuals who want to contribute to their success by knowledge sharing. Moreover, the examples of students' interactions with their teachers left a lasting impact as they reflected on their high school experiences and the importance of asking for help, and seeking out people who will provide clarity in the face of confusion. This also applies to students' and siblings' knowledge sharing, who likely have similar mindsets of being college-going. Students learned the importance of creating relationships and the outcomes of having a supportive teacher or sibling, allowing them to develop strong bonds and critically understand the dynamics of knowledge sharing. Smith and Zhang (2010) note that high school teachers have a significant role in helping in the transition from high school to college. Similarly, Galloway and Conner (2015) note that students who have greater access to schooling resources – including teachers and school staff – provide them with "cultural resources", a form of cultural and social capital that contributes to how students may navigate college settings, in addition to preparing them for college.

Having a support was helpful for students in this study, whether it was an older sibling who was available to provide academic guidance or teachers or counselors who saw academic promise in them. These students were able to seek out help, and with the assistance of their co-cultivators, they continued being academically focused, engaged, and motivated with college-going mindsets. These experiences in which students received help from others provided an important lesson. When in doubt, asking for help proved to be a good outcome for students in this study.

Cultivating Resistance from Schooling Inequities

In addition to students cultivating their college-going mindsets with their preparation and seeking out guidance, data interviews revealed that students in this study experienced challenging moments that provided them with tangible examples of schooling inequities. Students in this study were not shielded from the realities of inequities at their respective schools. In addition to sharing moments of cultivating college-going mindsets, students reflected on experiences they had confronted. There was a common experience between students feeling different, being treated differently by teachers, and being at a disadvantage when comparing differences between high schools. Despite confronting these challenges, students were focused with their college-going mindsets, but were able to gain a critical understanding of schooling inequities.

Challenges Navigating College Entrance Exams. A common reoccurring feeling from students in this study was one of being at a disadvantage when it came time to prepare to take college entrance exams, including the SAT and ACT. Students described the challenges of preparing to take these exams and the differences they witnessed in not having access to adequate test preparation materials. Research notes that disparities on equitable access for Latina/o/x students taking college entrance standardize exams perpetuates the education gap (Contreras, 2005). Isabel shared that she did not realize how important it was to take college entrance exams, and that she simply followed the norm at school. She described the lack of preparation her school offered:

> "…my senior year that's when we started getting introduced the SAT and the ACT. No one told me what that was. We didn't have prep classes. We didn't have study classes. It was just thrown at us. I took the SAT because my friends were taking the SAT. I didn't know what the SAT was. The SAT and the ACT were mandatory, and I wanted to go to like a [University of California school]…"

Similar to feelings of not receiving equitable access for college entrance exams, Mia shared that her school did not provide adequate material, explaining that she was only provided with minimal resources. She did not feel prepared to take the ACT or SAT. Being aware of the differences of test prep material between her high school and neighboring schools, she shared the following:

"We would always hear that other schools had like a bunch of like prep classes for those [college entrance exams]. And then we were always just like -- the material that we were taught was never -- it never reflected in the exams we would take […] we were learning you know, the basics, but we were never learning like further beyond. We'd get those booklets about like SAT prep or ACT prep. We were just like, 'what is going on?' 'cause we just didn't know."

Mia's reflections on how challenging it was to not have equitable access to prepare for standardize exams provides an example of inequities between schools of California's Central Valley. These types of inequities have been noted to be as a result of having less state funding from school districts (Epstein, 2011; Evans, 2007). This additional stress from students can make the process of applying to college more challenging, since part of the process is preparing for, and taking, college entrance exams for admission. Jordan expressed his frustration when it came down to preparing for the exams, feeling disadvantaged for not having access to resources he could not afford, such as tutoring services or test prep:

"I kind of felt disadvantaged at the time and I think a lot of my peers who couldn't afford such resources felt disadvantaged. So that was a challenge for sure. I did everything I could for free and that was available to me…"

The challenges, coupled with the difficulty of taking multiple tests for college admission, can add additional frustration to students, as John pointed out when having to take ACT, SAT, and AP exams: "[It] was very challenging, just navigating both standardized testing and realizing that that they're really important in the college admissions process…"

Prior to students being admitted to college, they were already feeling a sense of defeat and uncertainty, and were well aware of the unequal access to prep when it came to taking the exams. Taking AP courses was challenging while navigating standardize college entrance exams, yet students managed, and took the SAT or ACT for their college admissions.

Experience Differential Treatment in the Classroom. In addition to students being critical of the inequities in test prep, a common theme revealed by interview data was students being critical of their schooling environments and the type of treatment that they experienced or witnessed by teachers. Gallo's reflection on differential treatment outside of school provides a critical understanding on how the feelings of impact – whether at school or in the community – can be traumatic. Describing the power dynamics in the Central Valley from his community, he reflected, "you really notice that the way that people engage, even at grocery stores, like, you see how your parents are treated. Like, they're not really treated with that much respect [...] and that can be, you know, traumatic growing up."

Gallo's reflection described a tone that people would use toward his parents versus the way that he would witness people interacting with him in his community. Although students did not explicitly state that their experiences were traumatic, they were still experiences which shifted or provided a critical understanding of treatment by those in power: gatekeepers at school.

Other students in this study shared moments of receiving low expectations from teachers. Despite these frustrations and arguably traumatic experiences, students in this study experienced the power of agency and self-advocacy that came out of those interactions, ensuring that there was a tangible solution with the help of another adult on campus. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) provide a framework to understand Chicana/o school resistance, explaining that students

70

who have oppositional behavior do so because they have a critique of social oppression and are motivated by social justice. Each of these students in this study who had this type of experience shared how they had sought out help and asked for some type of intervention from administration. Arguably, these students equipped themselves with transformation resistance, being aware of their environment, "with a deeper level of understanding and social justice orientation, transformational resistance offers the greatest possibility for social change." (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, p. 319, 2001). Despite these experiences, with their cultivation of having college-going mindsets, and critique of their environment conditions, these students understood what was previously mentioned about having supportive stakeholders to ensure positive outcomes from the "cultural resources" afforded to them (Galloway & Conner, 2015).

Other students described experiences of witnessing their peers being treated differently by their teachers for not being AP or honors students. Abagail explained how teachers at her school treated students who were enrolled in the honors program differently than those who were not. Reflecting on how teachers' expectations differed, she shared the following:

> "I think the treatment between like how the teachers treated me and just like the class in general, I could really see that difference. Like, in my honors courses, you know, they believed in us, pushed us to really work hard and all these other things. And then like my math classes, especially my teachers, were kind of just like, 'okay, well, if you don't want to pass this class, that's on you' you know? So, I think that really kind of shocked me […] my high school was very much divided. Like they focused on like their students that brought them good -- you know, good media, good news..."

Abagail's reflections of witnessing differential treatment between students who were in honors courses versus those who were not is common for students, and has been documented in the literature that explores student experiences and low student perceptions. Examples that students encountered of differential treatment in high school can cause negative consequences, which include academic outcomes and students being pushed out of their education pipelines.

71

Despite these challenging and negative experiences, however, students in this study sought out reflection, critique, motivation for change, rather than reactionary actions, and advocated for themselves. Thus, students made space to become critically aware of their environment, providing themselves with a foundation for understanding the inequities they experienced. Having students in this study reflect and share their feelings or their witnessing of differential treatment allowed them to understand what it means to be an agent of change in a small scale at their respective high schools, as well as the importance of advocacy.

Cultivating Leadership on Campus and the Community

In addition to the aforementioned, students also used similar words interchangeably to describe their engagement on campus during their time in high school being involved with leadership opportunities on campus and in the community. Data interviews revealed that students in this study cultivated their college-going mindsets to include their development with leadership opportunities, providing them with an understanding of their individual influences and contributions. Students described different types of leadership, which included on-campus athletics (e.g., being a team captain), student organizations, and off-campus contributions such as community service opportunities. Students shared their involvement with off-campus activities like community service projects, which included contributing to the beautification of their community, participating in a toy drive during the holidays, or volunteering in community events.

More than half of the students in this study shared their participation in student affinity clubs, athletics, or both. Anna reflected on the importance of being involved in high school to feel like part of the campus community: "If you're not involved in anything, you can be a little bit distant from the community of the high school..."

Her reflections provide an important perspective on leadership and contributing to campus culture: staying connected with the high school community through active participation. For Anna, it was her participation in student health club promoting self-care. For others like Abagail, being part of Yearbook was instrumental for her own development in leadership, taking an active role in executing tasks from her teacher: "I really think I developed like leadership skills and in part, it was because of my good relationship with the teacher and the fact that he really trusted me to take things on..." Abagail's reflections provide an example to how giving students in general opportunities to develop and execute tasks can contribute to moments of leadership development.

Moreover, an interesting revelation from the interview data was the active involvement of students in this study with the Associated Student Body (ASB) at their respective high schools. Roughly half of the students in this study were active participants of their ASB. Students used their experience to be actively involved in school, serving in cabinet leadership positions. The majority of students who participated in ASB either served as Vice-President or President of their student body graduating class at some point during their time high school. As Veronica comedically stated: "I was part of ASB, you know, became ASB President as one does…" For others like Luz, who was also her class President, this allowed her to get to know her classmates better and understand the concerns of the campus climate and finding ways to bring the students on her campus together.

As previously noted, Martin and Tiffany were the only ones who attended a private high school which included community service expectations. Reflecting on her time in high school, Tiffany shared that her school provided community service opportunities: "We were located in a community where there weren't a lot of opportunities. So, we gave back a lot to the community.

We did a lot of volunteering and that was pretty much like the main mission of our school is to give back…" Similarly, Martin shared that his school provided opportunities to connect with the community: "My [senior] year I worked for an assembly member here in California, and then I also did a summer internship for a pair of lobbyists."

These leadership experiences provided students in this study with a critical foundation of paying it forward and giving back to their community – on or off campus – through different forms of contributions, which provided these students with another perspective of understanding their roles as student leaders, and of what could be. Being engaged in extracurriculars, whether it was on campus or in the community, provided leadership and a tangible experience on the importance of critically understanding their purpose in things larger than them, whether it was contributing to school spirit and campus culture, or contributing to the community and paying it forward during the holidays. Students in this study understood how their contributions, big or small, provided an experience to make their high school memorable. Their hard work in cultivating college-going mindsets, coupled with leadership opportunities, would become validated along with their aspirations by attending the summer youth conference Chicanas/os LEAD.

Cultivating Aspirations & Validations: Chicanas/os LEAD

Unique to this study was the summer youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD, which all 21 students attended at some point in their high school pipelines, during either their summer entering the 11th or 12th grades. All students in this study attended between the summers of 2014-2017. Interview data revealed that Chicanas/os LEAD summer youth conference provided a foundation for cultivating validation and aspiration to students' college-going mindsets. The ways in which students were validated from the conference included the emphasis on the

importance of leadership and civic engagement opportunities and the role that pursuing a college

degree has in achieving career goals. In addition to feelings of being validated by their

engagement in the conference through workshops and hands-on activities by the different daily

experiences of Chicanas/os LEAD, their cultivation of college-going mindsets also allowed for

their aspirations to be cultivated. Thus, Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference contributed to their

cultivation in being college-going minded with the aspirations and validations that arose from

students attending the conference.

Brief Overview of Chicanas/os LEAD Youth Conference.

Throughout the week of Chicanas/os LEAD, students engage in presentations that

address issues across race, gender, immigration, sexuality, leadership, and civic engagement

from community leaders across the state of California in their respective career fields – including

government, STEAM, education, and community non-profit spaces. Students learn new

information about the Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x community contributions. Daily themes throughout

the conference allow students to critically understand knowledge centered on identity,

community, culture, civic engagement, leadership, career aspirations, and college access.

Examples include students being presented with a foundational understanding of "Chicana/o

Studies 101" on the different typologies of the Chicana/o/x- Latina/o/x community. Students

watch the 2005 movie "Walkout", which depicts real-life events from the 1968 walkouts that

took place in East Los Angeles that catapulted the Chicano movement. Students were provided

with different guest speakers from different career paths to share their own academic journeys.

In addition, the purpose of this youth conference is to also introduce high school students

to understanding the importance of contributing to civic engagement. They participate in mock-

campaigns to understand elections, and are taught to strategize on how to go about the process of

creating a campaign. By mid-week of the conference, students take a field trip to visit the state

capitol building in Sacramento, and participate in mock-legislation initiatives, being provided

with opportunities to understand the legislative process for public elected officials to pass bills

for the state. Part of this mock process is that students are given roles, including committee

members and community members who are either for or against an assembly bill. Finally, by the

end of the week, students are presented with a college fair from colleges across the state. This

includes them being provided with different presentations on how to apply for financial aid, how

to write a strong personal statement for college admissions, and financial literacy. In addition to

the exposure of college knowledge, students are provided the opportunity to have a one-on-one

college advising session and discuss their high school transcripts to determine their eligibility for

admission to a University of California, California State University, and Community College

institutions.

Pivotal Moments

Students described the summer youth conference as *transformative*, *life-changing*,

empowering, and *encouraging*. It was a pivotal moment in their educational pipelines, in which

their college-going mindsets were validated. As Paul simply described and reflected on his time

participating in Chicanas/os LEAD, he presents the overall feelings on their impact that the

youth conference had on students:

> "It's one of those quintessential programs that can help define who you want to be
> academically, culturally, professionally and who you want to be in your community. It's
> one of those programs where it helps you at a very young stage of your life figure out
> who you are, who you've been, who you want to be…"

Paul's reflection describing what Chicanas/os LEAD can be for students provided one of

the overarching themes in this study: contributing to students cultivating college-going mindsets,

and how the aspirations and validation that emerge from attending the conference. In other

words, attending the youth conference cultivates and helps students understand new purpose in

their education pipelines, with Chicanas/os LEAD thus becomes a pivotal moment for them. Espinoza (2012) defines that pivotal moments occur "when a college educated adult- often a teacher, counselor, academic outreach professional, or professor makes a concerted effort to support and mentor a disadvantaged student[s] whether informal or an official role or both" (p. 59). Espinoza explains that trust, mentoring, advocacy, sharing of academic knowledge and skills are the components of creating pivotal moments, which Chicanas/os LEAD provided to students in this study. Data interviews revealed that students' reflections described pivotal moments in their educational trajectories, with them feeling an overall sense of aspirations and validations being cultivated with their college-going mindsets.

Moreover, students in this study pointed out that Chicanas/os LEAD helped them realize that the pursuit of higher education and career aspirations was possible. Angela expressed: "I think if I wouldn't have went [to Chicanas/os LEAD], my life would probably be a little bit different right now." Others, like Beto – who at one point did not think that college was possible for him – shared: "It basically changed my life. Honestly, I don't think if I would've went to [Chicanas/os LEAD], I would have not gone to college."

These reflections provide reasons for why Chicanas/os LEAD established a space for high school students to feel validated, empowered, and provide the aspirations to their college-going mindsets, to know that they could achieve anything that they put their mind to. Luz's reflection speaks to this point:

> "I felt a sense of a group of folks that believed in us. Believed in an entire room - did so much work to bring an entire room together. I was among one of them, and they're letting me know that I have the power to change different things that I may feel oppressed in…"

Luz's reflection points to how the conference presenters provided students with validation and the additional seed of aspirations and encouragement to know that they, too, can

be able to finish high school, matriculate and graduate college, and begin a meaningful career.

To provide a critical context for this theme, Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference, the following

subsections describe the cultivation for high students, which includes a) cultivating affirmations

and validations; b) cultivating a newfound knowledge, pride in being Chicana/o/x- Latina/o/x;

and c) cultivating leadership, community, and success.

Cultivating Affirmations and Validations

Students reflected on their experiences attending the summer youth conference. Data

interviews revealed that there was a theme of affirmed feelings by students from other

conference participants whom they could relate to, and who were like-minded with similar goals,

creating a community of networks. Students in this study shared that they were provided with

knowledge and history of their community. David shared that attending the conference changed

his outlook of his future, feeling empowered and realizing that he had never been around other

Latina/o/x people with advanced degrees who looked like him:

> "I felt really empowered, and just seeing like all these Brown professors, I remember all
> the guest [speakers] that had PhDs and I was like, 'wow, that's so cool!' Because before
> that, I was always like, 'oh, well, I never really thought about -- oh, Latinos are like
> professors' you know? They're like out there, like having these really cool job titles like,
> deans and stuff..."

David's reflection provides an emphasis to the importance of representation and how

much it matters for students to be seen, heard, or acknowledged – especially at a time when the

curriculum in the classroom oftentimes does not reflect the students in the classroom (Marx,

2008). Similar sentiments came from Martin, who provided a reflection which contextualized the

importance of representation and sense of belonging. Reflecting, he expressed never feeling like

he was part of his social circles at his high school, and that after attending the conference, he felt

a new sense of belonging:

78

"Being somebody who is Hispanic or Latino, I always felt like being white was kind of the default in my social circles. After [Chicanas/os LEAD], I had a big sense of belonging in California, specifically just learning that we're really, you know, the majority when it comes to the population here in California. So that gave me a big sense of belonging. And that goes not just for belonging here in California in general, but also belonging in higher education. I got to see so many people who were so successful with their academic careers and belonging in a group of successful people outside of education too."

Martin's reflections speak to what makes Chicanas/os LEAD a unique youth conference, bringing community and culture to the forefront for student development. The conference deepens cultural awareness through historical perspectives and current contributions to the state. Having guest lectures from different individuals who hail from different careers and backgrounds provided Martin with his critical reflection on the feelings of belonging. The summer youth conference staff and presenters provided students with a space to be validated and affirmed in, fostering their academic and interpersonal development with their aspirations. Scholars have noted the critical impact that validation has on students and their transition into college, and a sense of belonging from validation can facilitate strong relationships across peer support (Johnson et al., 2007; Longerbeam, 2007; Rendon, 1994; Terenzini et al.,1994).

Isabel, in her reflection of attending the conference, pointed out that she was able to meet other peers that she could identify with who were also first-generation and the oldest siblings in their families, as well as DACA recipients, and led to her realizing that she was not the only one experiencing multiple identities:

"I met other individuals who were DACAmented, first generation, an older sister, and I was like, 'oh shit,' like, 'we should be friends.' So, I felt really empowered when I left that program. Because I knew I wasn't the only one. And because I also met other students who were undocumented, who were already at these bomb [colleges]. And I was like, if they could do it, I could do it too."

Isabel's reflections not only pointed to her peers, but also to other conference attendees – including speakers – who shared similar identities. For most students in this study, it was their first time being in a space with other students who also wanted to pursue similar goals and consider careers in policy, advocacy, education, and civic engagement. Alex reflected on what it meant for her to see students who shared similar values of being college-going minded:

> "I never been around that many people who wanted to go to college or already thinking about [it] […] it was really interesting to see, you know, that many people, that many students talking about these universities and I was like, 'Wow! Oh my God!' You know? Like, they're around the same age as me, and they're also trying to do the work to get there."

Like Alex, students in this study left the youth conference feeling a sense of being part of a community, and as part of a group of future leaders and contributors to California's future, understanding the responsibility of their individual contributions.

Cultivating a Newfound Knowledge and Pride Being Chicana/o/x- Latina/o/x

In reviewing Chicanas/os LEAD mission and values (see Appendix D), including what the conference offers: workshops and being able to listen to guest speakers share their own narratives and educational trajectories, interview data revealed that students felt a sense of pride in their own identities of being Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x with newfound knowledge from having attended the conference. For most of the students in this study, they were introduced to foundational Chicana/o/x- Latina/o/x Studies frameworks, such as understanding terminologies and the historical significance of how the Chicana/o/x- Latina/o/x community has contributed to California and the United States. Anna's reflections on what she learned from the youth conference provide a perspective on the importance of culturally relevant information on needing to know one's history:

> "Newfound knowledge of my culture and how much of an impact my people and my community that I am a part of has actually made in the United States […] in our history

classes, we really don't hear very much about how Chicano movements have affected -- have impacted, you know, legislation, interrupt, impacted anything. We really don't hear about any Chicano figures at all. I didn't actually hear it or learn about really many of them besides [Chicanas/os LEAD]."

Anna's reflection speaks to the importance of understanding contributions from all communities of color. She explained that in school, she had not learned about Chicano History and contributions to the state. Other students had similar feelings about walking away from Chicanas/os LEAD with confidence in being Chicana/o/x. Veronica, for instance, also expressed feelings of confidence and pride in understanding her history:

"I walked away with a greater sense of like who I am and the history of you know, the great activists that came before me. […] I walked away feeling more confident of who I am, and feeling proud to say, 'I am a Chicana. Yeah. I am Latino.'"

Veronica's reflection present this transformation in students' outlook about identity and pride in knowing more about their history of Chicana/o/x communities. Similarly to Anna and Veronica, Abagail reflected on the impact that the conference also had on her identity and culture, and highlights the essence of what community cultural wealth's is about:

"I think that was the first time that I had ever heard the word Chicanx. And I really understood that like, my Mexican American experience was very unique. Before it was always like, 'okay, well, yeah, my ethnicity is Mexican-American,' but I never thought about it as an experience. And I think being at [Chicanas/os LEAD] and seeing that being celebrated and using that as a strength when oftentimes they feel like, it's only brought up in statistics […] But with [Chicanas/os LEAD], it was something that was just so celebrated and something that's so normalized. And it was really the first time that I had experienced that before. Before I had really kind of just ignored like my culture…"

Abagail's reflections describe the impact that the conference had for her and for witnessing a shift in herself, explaining her views prior to attending the youth conference and ignoring her culture. Her emphasis on how the conference empowered her and drawing from the strengths communities of color also points to the essence of what community cultural wealth, as well as to the importance of drawing on the strengths that communities of color contribute to

higher education settings and beyond. To be able to celebrate being from the Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x community is one of the pillars of Chicanas/os LEAD, emphasizing community and culture. Along the same lines of Abagail's reflections, Gallo emphasized how attending Chicanas/os LEAD led to a curiosity for using his identity for good, reflecting back to his previous thoughts about traumatic experiences and the power dynamics of being treated differently, he shared the following:

> "…[Attending Chicanas/os LEAD] makes you curious of how you can use your identity, but also like your background, and the traumas you have growing up, and how you can learn to utilize that to yourself and how you can use that for your advantage to make like a contribution to your community and whatever in whatever way you want it to be..."

Gallo's reflections also bring up positive impacts that Chicanas/os LEAD that provided for him in being able to focus on his strengths and use them to make a positive contribution in the community, and to leadership. Thus, for students in this study, Chicanas/os LEAD provided them with the opportunity to celebrate their identities and communities, cultivating newfound knowledge and pride in being Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x.

Cultivating a Commitment to Leadership and Engagement in the Community

In addition, attending the youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD provided students in this study feelings of having a sense of purpose and the eagerness to contribute to their communities in the near future. This included students' sentiments on their aspirations of community contributions and becoming successful. As previously mentioned, Chicanas/os LEAD provided students with a foundation for understanding the importance of leadership and civic engagement through workshops and hands-on activities which included running mock ASB elections and understanding the legislative process. Angela's comments point to an eagerness of being ready for the next chapter of her educational trajectory. Sharing her aspiration, she stated: "I walked

away with eagerness of wanting to do better and achieve more like, [Chicanas/os LEAD] opened the door and I wanted to run straight through it and be able to be, you know, successful."

Similar feelings came from John regarding the eagerness of wanting to complete high school and wanting to get to the next chapter of his educational trajectory: "I remember just going through all my summers as fast as I could […] I really wanted to see myself in the same position […] seeing all these cool, you know, all these awesome leaders. All these people. All these panelists who are coming to talk to us. And, and I told myself that I wanted to be like those people." These feelings of excitement, and of being fired up and ready for the next phase of their educational trajectories, stem from the impact that Chicanas/os LEAD provided for students in cultivating leadership mindsets.

In addition to the youth conference cultivating a focus on the strengths and contributions that the Chicana/o/x-Latinx community has provided, leadership and civic engagement was another central focus for students to critically understand the contributions that people can make through civic engagement and giving back to communities. Paul's reflection from attending the youth conference provides an understanding of the impacts of wanting to contribute and be successful in the future. His reflection provided an example of what the youth conference can cultivate to students after they attend, with him stating that: "I want to be someone who can be a productive member of this community. I'm not sure if I would have had those understandings, had I not gone to this leadership conference."

Similar feelings came from Clarissa, who shared that she had learned and understood advocacy better "not only for myself, but for others, and for the community." Abagail also reflected and emphasized similar feelings, understanding the importance of leadership and community: "I think [Chicanas/os LEAD] really gave me that groundwork of what community

means, first of all, and what community looks like, and also just how you can always keep uplifting your community and like helping one another…"

Students' reflections on leadership provide an understanding of the impact that Chicanas/os LEAD has on students' own development. Jordan had the opportunity to run for a student representative position – to which he was selected – and upon reflecting, he shared that he did not think he was good enough to be in a leadership position, and yet as a result of being selected as a regional representative for Chicanas/os LEAD, he explained feeling better afterwards about leadership positions: "[after] the conference to be able to be comfortable to run for leadership positions and just be an informal leader and even without a position in high school or with positions in high school." Chicanas/os LEAD provided students in this study with a unique experience promoting a cultural wealth of knowledge, which included drawing from aspirational, cultural, social capitals. Generally speaking, all 21 students walked away with a new sense of purpose for being able to continue their educational trajectories.

Through workshops, presentations, students' reflection of sharing information with one another on strategic approaches for applying to college, understanding civic engagement through leadership, and learning to view the strengths and contributions of Chicanas/os/x-Latinas/os/x, a critical consciousness was developed – and thus, a contribution to a cultivation of aspirations and validation to students' college-going mindsets. Diemer et al. (2016) note this type of critical consciousness for youth can influence academic engagement, achievement, and increase levels of enrollment in higher education. Chicanas/os LEAD provided the space for students to reflect the social norms of their communities, address the historical social structural inequities, and engage in a collective experience of wanting to contribute to change through civic engagement.

84

Reaping the Benefits of their Labor: College Going Mindsets

Students in this study graduated high school and matriculated to four-year institutions, with some having the opportunity to participate in summer bridge programs prior to the beginning of the academic year, whereas others only participated in orientation. Students cultivated a college-going mindset with their experiences from high school and cultivated aspirations and validations from summer youth conference, which prepared them to begin college and reap the benefits of their hard work. Part of cultivating their college mindsets stemmed from being first-generation students and their high school experiences, which included becoming academically prepared, taking advance placement and honors courses, and their contributions in extracurriculars, developing their skills in leadership both on- and off-campus. In addition, experiencing a pivotal moment in their educational trajectories of attending the Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference provided students in this study with a critical consciousness, aspiration and validation. Interview data revealed that students reaped the benefits of their labor from their college-going mindsets to navigate their first year of college, resulting in them being able to seek out across academic and social opportunities. This in turn provided opportunities to cultivate leadership opportunities and supportive networks on campus. The following subsections provide students' experiences in their first year of college: a) cultivating leadership opportunities; and b) cultivating supportive networks on campus.

Leadership Opportunities

Previous experience from leadership opportunities in high school and learning the importance of leadership and civic engagement through Chicanas/os LEAD, it was not surprising for the interview data to reveal that students in this study sought out similar leadership opportunities by establishing themselves with campus organizations at their respective colleges. Students who were engaged in high school on campus and in their communities, and who had

reflected on how Chicanas/os LEAD provided a space to understand leadership through civic engagement, continued opportunities of leadership participating in student body representation or student organizations (e.g., affinity groups, Greek organizations). Joining campus organizations was one way for students to develop and help themselves acclimate and transition to college in order to understand the different intricacies of leadership and student advocacy. Alex, who knew that going to college meant being away from home, explained that she needed to look for community and establish a sense of family on campus. Reflecting back on what she had learned from participating in Chicanas/os LEAD and the importance of community, she found the university's ballet folklorico group to be her community:

"…I think finding my familia, my community -- you know, how we talked about [in Chicanas/os LEAD] I found it with [Grupo Folklorico]. And I think it was really great because, you know, I was able to reach out, you know, and ask for help…"

Alex reflected on what she learned at the youth conference about creating community, and finding familia on campus was instrumental in her being able to acclimate to college by finding a student organization that she could be part of, and one in which – if she needed help with something – she could ask her peers. For other students in this study, joining their college student body organizations was a good fit for them, since they had already experienced similar student leadership roles in high school. The majority of students who were part of ASB served in a student representative position during their first year of college. Similar to Alex's sentiments about building a community in college, Veronica described being part of leadership roles as something important for her in her first year of college, which included joining a Latin American student affinity group and diversity student committee ("a really beautiful family for me")

explaining that she wouldn't have been able to feel comfortable in student representative roles, further reflecting: "…and so that has like my full heart and I'm really thankful for it."

Veronica's experience in high school – as she jokingly put, "becoming president as one does…" – provided her with a foundation of feeling comfortable joining a student position in college, along with her own sense of pride in knowing more about Chicana/o activism that she learned in Chicanas/os LEAD.

Other students reflected on joining student government as a time for them to contribute and be part of representation. As Abagail reflected on her first year in a student representative role, she described how she was able to see behind the scenes of campus life, bringing her awareness to student contributions to campus life:

> "I got to see not only all the cool stuff and like what orgs were doing, and was able to like help fund, or like, events that they were having. But I also got to see all the struggles, and all students really voicing their opinions with like what administration was doing, and like, what things worked and what didn't. And I thought that was also very empowering to see, like at a school-wide level."

Abagail's reflection participating with student advocacy provided her with an understanding of the impact that student advocacy can have for her peers and community, holding stakeholders accountable and sharing challenges that come with organizing. In addition, Abagail developed an understanding of her role as a student leader on campus and making impactful contributions participating in shared governance. Similar to Abagail's reflections, Luz shared how important it was for her to meet other students of color as an external representative from her college attending the University of California Student of Color Conference. She expressed how there was a collective shared experience that she witnessed:

> "[We were] kind of dealing with the same struggles when it comes to academia and navigating it. So being able to have a space to talk about it and for students to like -- without kind of having to explain too much of why we felt like intimidated in some spaces -- it was like the emotion that was just like, 'okay, I get it.'"

The aforementioned examples from students in this study speak to what Nuñez (2009) explains, in which Latina/o college students who are familiar with diversity issues may feel more socially and academically connected on campus, and may resultantly have a positive sense of belonging and being critical of their campus climate. For other students, participating in leadership opportunities by joining a sorority or fraternity in their first year of college was their experience to develop leadership skills. Tiffany joined a sorority, and was elected to the executive board as Vice President of Programming, overseeing the committee in her first year. She described how she was responsible for bringing guest speakers to sorority events, explaining the importance of her position as: "when you have a seat at that table, you have voice. So, you have the opportunity to make a change." Jordan and Beto joined the same fraternity, and had similar reasons for joining, explaining that they wanted to establish themselves and develop the necessary skills to succeed in college, as well as in a future career where they can seek out their networks.

For students in this study, their experiences of being involved in student leadership opportunities in high school allowed them to ease into campus organizations. For other students, joining a specific student organization – such as a fraternity or sorority – in their first year was imperative for them in establishing their objective to what they hoped to achieve throughout their college careers. Regardless of where they focused on being involved, these students understood the roles of leadership, student representation, and advocacy.

Establishing Supportive Networks on Campus

In addition to participating in leadership opportunities, students sought out opportunities to cultivate supportive networks on campus. Data interviews revealed that students sought out supportive networks from peers who were classmates, roommates, or neighbors in their residence

88

halls. Ways in which students were able to cultivate community with their peers included

creating study sessions which led into friendships. Others cultivated community with their

roommates and residence hall neighbors. Anna shared that her group of friends were peers who

lived on the same floor as she did, and that they would regularly check-in with each other.

Abagail's reflections on cultivating with peers to create a supportive network allowed for a

community of caring in her college residence hall, sharing how everyone supported each other

on a daily basis:

> "We would leave our doors propped open. And if you were walking by the hallway, you could just like pop in and say hi. And I think just having -- we had such a strong sense of community that first year […] it was just really nice because it allowed for like genuine conversations…"

Abagail further explained how she and her peers would at times engage in conversations

rooted in care and participate in random topics of discussions, something upon which she

reflected fondly. Others, like Emily and Lilly, were able to live in the same residence dormitory

with another peer whom they had met participating in TRiO in high school. Both Alex and John

were part of residential themed housing communities at their respective colleges which focused

on the Latina/o/x-Chicana/o/x community. This provided John with a sense of "a home away

from home". Alex, meanwhile, expressed being able to establish friends with other peers who

had similar cultural and linguistical backgrounds. Interestingly, everyone in Alex's themed

community was part of a first-year seminar, which allowed her to establish a community and join

ballet folklorico. These examples of students being able to socialize with their peers in

residential communities and establish networks provides the importance of college student

socialization. Scholars have noted that positive interactions, such as socializing with peers, can

provide a better sense of belonging (Locks et al., 2008; Saunders & Serna, 2004).

Peer Study Sessions. In addition, students in this study were able to establish community with their peers in class leading to study group sessions. Interview data revealed that some students engaged in study groups with roommates or peers from class. Students shared that participating in study sessions with their peers was helpful to their studies. Peer support has been noted by scholars as being important for students' sense of belonging and their academic outcomes (Johnson et al., 2007). After being asked to leave from his initial calculus study group in the first week of the semester, Fulano thought that he would end up studying alone for his course for the rest of the semester; not long afterwards, however, he found two peers who invited him to their study group. Reflecting and expressing gratitude, he shared how supportive his peers were: "They were totally open to me studying with them. And that was probably the most reassuring part."

Mia shared how she had met another Chicanas/os LEAD alum in one of her science classes, and that they would take lab classes together and be partners, providing how cultivating networks in the classroom can be helpful:

> "I saw this girl and I was like, 'why does she look so familiar?' and then afterwards we were talking, and she was like, 'oh, you went to like—' I dunno how Chicanas/os LEAD came up in the topic, and then afterwards we just kind of bonded and we were just like, 'oh yeah, I remember you.' And it was just like really helpful because like, I had her and like, for the most part, when we needed to take labs, like we would try to choose the same labs so that we could be partners."

Reaping the benefits of their college-going mindsets to create community as a form of supportive networks allowed students to navigate coursework in a positive outlook, and – in essence – as a form of academic support. These students who sought out opportunities with their peers were also likely to seek and receive academic support through academic advising and campus resources. Yet, there were also participants who took advantage of academic centers on

campus, or if they were affiliated to a campus academic group, then they would use those services (e.g., honors program, scholarship academic component, TRiO college center).

Campus Academic Resources. Receiving academic help was necessary and crucial for students' academic development of improvement. This was indicative to the students in this study who experienced academic challenges in their first year. Interview data revealed that most students used academic services, resources, or sought out academic advising during their first year. Alex, Emily, and Lilly received formal notices from their university, being placed on academic probation or subject to being dismissed during their first year of college. For students in this study, using academic campus resources came because of failing exams or a class. This resulted in them becoming intentional in seeking out academic support by visiting an academic advisor or academic tutoring center on campus. As Tiffany described, "I would set up one-on-one meetings to access help, whether that'd be preparing for like a midterm, whether it be preparing for like the homework that we were given that week, that day."

Others, like Fulano and John, took advantage of the academic centers at their respective campuses. John would visit the academic resource center and use most of the additional resources he could on campus. Reflecting, he shared: "I would go to office hours for English every single day, and then would go to the writing center almost every single day. So, I was spending more time on campus than in my dorm."

Others, like Mia, attended tutoring on campus, and described the sessions as being busier when students prepped for exams: "I would always go to tutoring. They had like midterm review sessions before every midterm and those were pretty big. All the students from the class, like 400

students, would attend those sessions just because those classes were just like so intense. So, I was always in tutoring."

Campus services and resources were helpful for students who needed assistance in specific areas and were readily available to them when they needed to use them. Mary described a time when her math professor at her community college informed her about the MESA program (Math, Engineering, Science, Achievement) and walked her over: "…once she took me there and everything, that's when I signed up and started to hear -- meet one of the directors. And that's when I started to like get the resources and the help I need and even met with the STEM counselor, like regards to my courses I need to take and also regards to my major and everything." Mary's reflection draws another example of the importance that a pivotal moment can have. She received guidance and clarity about campus resources from her professor who saw promise in her which helped her to be successful.

Academic Advising. In addition, there were students in this study who used academic advising, which helped them navigate policies and protocols of their academic standing in the first year of college. Interview data revealed that without the help of an academic advisor, students may have had different outcomes in their first year of college, which could have resulted in academic dismissal or lower grade point averages. Alex, Emily, and Lilly received notices regarding their academic standing in their first year, with them being placed on subject to either academic dismissal or academic probation. Emily and Lilly both used their academic advisor to

help them figure out their next steps. Since both were part of TRiO in high school, their college

had instituted a TRiO Scholars program which provided academic services and advising for

students. Emily reflected that when she was placed on subject to academic dismissal, "They were

actually sharing a lot of empathy for me. So, I think that's what was really helpful about this this

process, that you know, I felt the support".

Alex described reaching out to her respective academic advisor in her college. In

reflecting the support she received, she shared the following:

> "I went and did visit [my academic advisor] like a week before school started. And he
> said, 'all right, let me see your schedule. What are we going to do?' And we legit planned
> my whole week. Like, when I'm sleeping, when I'm eating, when everything— [my
> academic advisor] planned it with me and he's like, 'you're going to follow this strict
> schedule. I'll incorporate your [folklorico] practice, but other than that, you're going to
> give up your weekends- your Friday nights. You're not going out anywhere. Your butt
> better be in the library.' And [my academic advisor] explained how much time I actually
> had to study…"

Alex further explained that because she had established a good relationship with her

academic advisor during orientation, she able to reach out to him and ask for help. She was open

to being advised, allowing for her advisor to implement times throughout the week when she

would need to study. Similar to Alex, Beto had also established a good rapport with his

scholarship academic advisor. The scholarship program that he was a part of provided both

emotional and academic support on a weekly basis. Reflecting, he shared: "My scholarship

program [was] really support[ive], like showing me, like what to do, what not to do, how to get

through finals, how to prepare for finals, how to get to classes, um, how to deal with like credits,

classes, GEs and stuff like that […]"

Similarly, Anna also sought out academic advising when she began struggling in her

math course and failing exams. She shared that without early intervention and attending tutoring

sessions, she likely would not have been provided help:

> "[Academic advising] told me, 'You know what, because you came in a while ago and
> you told us that you were really struggling and you were trying to figure out how to get
> better -- at how to improve yourself in this class, there's an option [for you].'"

Since Anna had been attending academic advising throughout the academic term, they

were aware that she was attending tutoring, and were able to offer her the option to withdraw

from the course rather than receive a failing grade, which would have affected her GPA.

Furthermore, Anna's eagerness to seek out help was a direct result of being the engaged learner

in class, always asking for help when she needed it in high school, especially taking advance

placement courses, and – as she described earlier – having the stamina to be able to take college

classes. These examples of students using academic advising to help them navigate their

challenges in their academic transitions presents another example of advocacy: seeking for help.

This included students who were part of specific academic programs on campus, as they

participated in advising and support.

Cultivating supportive academic networks was crucial in the development of navigating

the transition in the first year of college for students in this study. The academic support, in

addition to how to navigate the institutions with academic policies and procedures, is important

to note – especially as first-generation students who often may not be familiar with the

bureaucracy of higher education. The students in this study were provided with the social and

cultural capital necessary for navigating the hardships that come with the transitions of college

academics by attending academic centers and advising on campus.

Moreover, important to note in this section are a group of students in this study who opted not to seek out academic resources on campus, and wanted to figure out the first year of college on their own as part of their development. As Gallo put it: "I did not look too much for [academic] support. Kind of wanted to deal with it myself…"

Others, like Paul, shared that they did not feel the need to ask for academic support out of pride. Yet, there were students who only sought out office hours if they needed help, or otherwise spoke to the teaching assistants of the course for clarity. These different approaches have been noted by scholars to contribute and influence positive outcomes with a sense of belonging on college campuses and the transition in college (Lopez, 2005; 2013; 2014). Thus, Students who sought out support through study sessions with peers were able to have a shared experience and provide support to each other.

Conclusion

My findings suggest that students in this study had begun cultivating college-going mindsets in high school prior to attending a Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference. Students cultivated their college-going mindsets through academic, college preparation programs, and leadership opportunities, in addition to being first-generation students and wanting to excel academically. Yet, part of their experience in high school was them becoming critically aware of challenges and inequities through a transformational resistance approach. What came out of those experiences, however, was a foundation of self-advocacy and seeking help for support during challenging moments. After students attended the Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference that emphasized culture, community, college access, and career aspirations, they were provided with additional cultivation of aspirations and validations through a critical consciousness of cultural wealth of tools and the knowledge necessary to persist in their educational trajectories.

Students understood the greater good of leadership and opportunities with civic engagement that resulted in students' aspirations and feeling that they could accomplish their goals of attending college and contributing to their communities.

During the first year of college, students reaped the benefits of their labor of having college-going mindsets to navigate social and academic opportunities. Students engaged in leadership opportunities, wanting to be part of a collective shared governance at their respective college campuses in order to begin exploring different forms of student advocacy. Other students contributed to leadership by participating in Greek organizations which embedded community service as part of their experience. Finally, students cultivated networks on campus which allowed them to establish themselves and seek academic help when needed by attending tutoring centers on campus, receiving academic advising and support from their peers.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The first year of college is a time when most students make decisions that can influence how they will navigate their higher education journey. Transitioning into college often presents itself with moments of growth and development, from contributions to campus climate, as well as challenges that can influence how students respond to those predicaments. College preparation in high school has been noted to provide students with a solid foundation for helping them transition into the college academic rigor and other opportunities in the first year. The aim of this study was to explore the post-secondary and first year of college experience of Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x students from California's Central Valley. Additionally, exploring how the pivotal moment of attending Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference played a role in their education pipelines. There has not been significant research to bridge two silos of education research, pre-college, and college experiences to understand the trajectories of Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x students' pipelines from California's Central Valley.

The framework that guided this study was Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) founded on Critical Race Theory in Education to examine first-year college experiences of Latina/o/x students in California's Central Valley who are currently enrolled, or recently graduated from, college. This study was conducted using Zoom, and data was collected from 21 semi-structured interviews with participants who attended University of California institutions, a California State University institution, a private institution in the Central Valley, and a California Community College. All 21 participants participated in the summer youth college access program, Chicanas/os LEAD. Through a purposive and convenience sampling approach, participants were selected from four summer cohorts of the Chicanas/os LEADS youth conference across four years (2014-2017). Data was analyzed using Dedoose and Excel software.

This chapter provides a summary of the study's findings, in addition to the implications and recommendations. I begin this chapter with a brief overview providing the purpose of the study. I then proceed to provide the summaries of each emerging theme from the interview data. This chapter concludes by providing tangible and practical perspectives, including future research, theory, and policy and practice. The research questions guiding this study were:

1) what experiences from a Central Valley high school environment influence Chicana/o, Latina/o undergraduates during their first year of college?

2) How are suburban Chicana/o/x, Latina/o/x undergraduates seeking social and academic support during their first year?

Implications of Key Findings

Major themes that emerged from this study are broken down twofold in order to understand the post-secondary and first year of college experiences. The key findings from this study include: a) cultivating college-going mindsets; b) cultivating student aspirations and validations; c) reaping the benefits of college-going mindsets; and d) research of Latinas/os/x and the California's Central Valley suburbs.

Cultivating College-Going Mindsets

This study found that students from California's Central Valley were first-generation students who were focused on wanting to go to college, providing a foundation to having college-going mindsets. Students cultivated to their college-going mindsets' academic preparation for college by taking advance placement or honors courses. Their engagement with academics at their respective high schools speaks to what literature has found as schools creating college-going environments. Researchers suggest that students who are active participants in college-going environments are more likely to matriculate to college. Previous research explains

that students attending schools with college-going environments can develop a better sense of self and experience an easier transition into college (Galloway & Conner 2015; Mullen, 2012). This was indicative to a majority of participants being enrolled in multiple AP or honors courses, and – in essence – becoming competitive candidates for college admissions in California.

Researchers note that college prep curriculum can influences students' academic outcomes in their college matriculation (Hill, 2008; Lee et al., 2017; Martinez & Del-Amen, 2015). Interestingly, students in this study did not share feelings of participating in an environment of competition with their peers. Unlike mentioned in the literature, the feelings of outperforming their peers, or the pressures of being admitted to highly selective institutions, were not present. This could likely be linked to the fact that students who attended public high schools had access to college preparation programs TRiO and AVID.

Thus, their participation in college preparation programs contributed to students cultivating their college-going mindsets, providing them with tools and knowledge for understanding and navigating applying to college. These experiences contributed to their social and academic development through helping them obtain information they were not learning in their advanced placement and honors courses. In addition, students contributed to their college-going mindsets by participating in high school leadership or community service opportunities. Yet, with cultivating college-going mindsets, students were subjected to challenging experiences of witnessing differential treatment or experiencing low expectations. Despite these frustrations, however, students gained a critical understanding of inequities and challenges in the education system – whether it was a lack of appropriate resources to prepare for standardize exams for college admissions or low expectations. Students kept their focus on their aspirations of going to college.

This study also found the importance of the role of teachers, peers, and siblings in contributing to students' emotional social support and college aspirations. Teachers provided emotional and social support to students, showing a level of validation at times and providing students with the opportunity to develop in their strengths of taking ownership of college choice or assigned tasks. Students who sought out support from their peers found a level of solidarity network in terms of supporting one another, wanting to collectively perform academically well, and wanting to go to college. Additionally, findings also noted that older siblings provided unique academic support or guidance to their younger siblings in terms of what classes to consider taking for college admissions and extracurricular opportunities, such as receiving college credit at a community college.

Cultivating Student Aspirations and Validations

Unique to this study's findings was the shared experience that students participated in the summer youth conference, Chicanas/os LEAD, during their time in high school entering the 11th or 12th grades. When students were asked to reflect on their participation with Chicanas/os LEAD, they described ways in which their college-going mindsets were able to be cultivated with validation and aspirations. This became a pivotal moment for students' educational trajectories. Chicanas/os LEAD provided a space to also impart cultural wealth of capital for students to navigate and prepare for college. Students were exposed to a cultural wealth of knowledge founded on community, culture, college access, and careers, coupled with leadership opportunities through civic engagement. Student reflections included having a sense of pride in being Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x, as well as a sense of belonging. This was attributed to students gaining newfound knowledge and understanding of the contributions that have been made by their community.

In my analysis drawing from Community Cultural Wealth, I discovered that Chicanas/os

LEAD provided students with the opportunity to experience and understand community cultural

wealth through tangible actions across aspirational, cultural, social, and resistance capitals. The

critical understanding of the importance of leadership through civic engagement, workshops, and

presentations provided students with a foundation on the importance of advocacy. Thus, students

were able to cultivate leadership, community, and success to their college-going mindsets.

Previous scholars have noted the importance of college preparation programs for integrating

culture and identity into college access (Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005). By doing so, college

preparation programs can contribute to college matriculation.

In addition, the youth conference providing students with a space to critically understand

the role of leadership and civic engagement is an empowering act for young people to be

demystified of civic duty and engagement as an elected official. Providing students with tools

and knowledge and making it relevant to their current trajectories, e.g. running for student

government in high school or college, allows them to see the influence of advocacy at multiple

levels and the role of shared governance. Students in this study left the conference with a better

understanding of their roles as student leaders and advocates on their campuses.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish that Chicanas/os LEAD is unlike other college

preparation programs[20], in which they do not integrate culture and identity the same way

Chicanas/os LEAD has approached their conference programming. In many respects,

Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference draws from Ethnic Studies foundations in Chicana/o/x

Studies rooted in the philosophy of "each one teach one" and "each one reach one"[21]. As the

---

[20] Throughout this paper, I have referred to it as a youth conference and program interchangeably.
[21] Early foundations in Chicana/o Studies curriculum focused on giving back to the community, referring to
curriculum foundations of Barrio Service Learning, the act of going into the Chicana/o/x- Latina/o/x community and
being of service to others.

years have progressed for Chicanas/os LEAD Conference and more people of color have moved into careers which have historically been white, students have been provided with concepts and knowledge about the demographic shifts of Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x community contributions. They have had the privilege to learn from and understand the Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x perspective from civic engagement, Public Health, STEM, Law, and Education. Arguably, Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference has been producing important work contributing to retention and persistence for California's students in higher education settings.

Reaping the Benefits of College-Going Mindsets

Finally, students in this study matriculated to college with their cultivated college-going mindsets, along with their experiences of their pivotal moments of cultivating validation and aspiration of attending Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference. Students were able to reap the benefits of what they had cultivated before entering college and allowed them to navigate social and academic opportunities on campus, as well as establish themselves in a similar fashion in student leadership and advocacy that was similar to their experiences in their respective high schools. In this sense, students were able to put into practice what they had gained from experience in high school, along with the additional knowledge and cultural wealth they received from Chicanas/os LEAD into practice by participating in student leadership and advocacy groups.

Additionally, students were able to establish themselves on campus in cultivating supportive networks. These opportunities to network and established themselves led to them being able to seek out academic help, receiving tutoring from campus centers and study sessions with peers. Part of navigating the resources on campus included seeking and accepting assistance from academic advising. These experiences provided students with support that was crucial to

their retention and persistence during their first year in order to be able to matriculate to the following year. This was especially important for a majority students in this study who were first-generation, with limited knowledge in how to navigate university academic policies and procedures through essentially gaining the cultural wealth of social and cultural capital from university stakeholders. Ultimately, this could have otherwise turned into failing grades impacting grade point averages or dismissal from their respective university.

Moreover, because students were engaged in opportunities of leadership and advocacy, and were engaged participants using academic campus resources in their first year, this provided a positive contribution to their acclimation and transition in college. Students had a critical understanding of the importance of receiving help from academic stakeholders, academic resources, and being engaged with student involvement from their experiences in high school, having received similar support – in addition to college preparation programs and having attended Chicanas/os LEAD – which provided them with a sense of *ánimo*. *Ánimo* is an exchange provided by the cultural, social, and aspirational capital knowledge of the summer program. *Ánimo*, I argue, draws from Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference foundations that emphasized culture, college, community, and career aspirations.

Latinas/os/x Students and California's Central Valley Suburbs

The findings in this study also provide implications for Latina/o/x students and California's Central Valley suburban communities. The implications provide a reason to consider future work on a demographic that has not been fully explored in California: the Central Valley, its suburbs, and Latina/o/x students.

Researchers must make a commitment to examine Latinas/os/x in California's Central Valley. As this demographic continues to grow across the the state of California, it is without a

doubt that stakeholders and policymakers must examine current and future policies that will contribute to the Latina/o/x community in a fast changing political landscape. Specifically how are current policies contributing to Latina/o/x students, their families, and community. Especially education policies that contribute to both college preparation and equitable college accesss.

Additionally, it is important for researchers explore Latina/o/x suburbs. These 21 student participants provided insight to understand their schooling in experiences in non-urban environments and how they were able to cultivate their college-going mindsets with academic preparation and resources to help them create a tool-kit to navigate applying to and navigating higher education. One of the sub-findings in cultivating college-going mindsets was cultivating resistance. This sub-finding was telling as it speaks to what is known within urban schooling experiences on the having unequal access to resources and being treated differently in the classroom. This finding highlights students being hyper-aware of their treatment. Given that the schools they attended were diverse and not monolithic, students observed differential treatment by student groups. Future research could examine how community and schooling environments, in addition to college preparation programs, influence students mindsets as it related to wanting to pursue college as a means of social mobility.

Although this study missed the opportunity to address California's Central Valley suburbs, future studies can explore student percepctions of their communities to understand if in fact suburbs are socially constructed or not. Previous studies note that suburban communities are marked by factors including, socio-economic status, education attainment, and homeownership. It would be of interest to allow younger perspectives like those from this study to reflect on their communities and neighborhoods. Additionally, it would be of great interests to understand how they perceive growing up and navigating suburban environments. In this study, students

cultivated college-going mindsets from having access at school that offered college preparatory programming. It would be of interest to understand the role of their environment outside of school and how if any contributions were made to their college-going mindsets.

Moreover, The Central Valley is a that should be explored to understand how education policies contribute to students navigate from high school into higher education and beyond into the workforce to contribute to the state's economy. As the Latina/o/x community continues to grow, the future of California's economy is depentment on all demographics, including Latinas/os/x who reside in Central Valley and its suburbs. It would be of great interest to beging to explore all areas of policy and to understand the ways Latina/o/x students to pursue social mobility by way of higher education. As employment continutes to be more competitive, more jobs will require baccalaureate degrees and more graduate degrees.

In short, the California's Central Valley suburbs and Latina/o/x students are important to further study to examine to understand the role of space, race, and access to social mobility and how the future workforce is prepared to contribute to the economy by way of college access opportunities.

Future Research

The results of this study have implications for future research. This section will detail recommendations to plan ahead for research centered on post-secondary experiences, college preparation programs, and first-year experiences. Future studies should continue to bridge high school and higher education experience in order to better understand college transitions and the student experience. This study attempted to begin establishing a bridge of both areas of research which have historically been situated in silos for education researchers. One approach to conducting this type of study is to further examine student college experiences by increasing the

sample size to include equal representation from all regions of California, higher education institutions in the state, including community colleges. It has been well documented that Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x overwhelmingly begin their higher education trajectories in California community colleges. Findings from this study suggest that students were able to seek out social and academic opportunities, and were actively involved in student advocacy and building networks – much of which was influenced from their high school experiences and the validation and aspirations that came afterwards from attending Chicanas/os LEAD. Thus, future research could examine similarities and differences of student experiences occurring in all colleges and universities in California's.

Another potential area of research is to further explore other college access and preparatory programs similar to Chicanas/os LEAD that provide underrepresented students with programming and enhance student experiences, providing foundations of cultural wealth and knowledge. Students in this study indicated that they felt a sense of newfound knowledge and pride from Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x community contributions to the state of California. It would be of interest to explore other youth programs/conferences and whether they are also founded on community, culture, college, and careers. In a time when there have been new policies passed by California lawmakers making Ethnic Studies part of the general education curriculum experience for students, it would be of great interest to see the implications of college preparation programming that incorporate a culturally relevant curriculum similar to Chicanas/os LEAD. Similarly, a comparison across students who attended these type of college programs to students who did not attend, and to examine the influences and outcomes in their first year college experiences, would also be of significant interest.

Future research in the aforementioned areas could provide multiple approaches, including conducting a longitudinal study on students' trajectories of their higher education pipeline to further understand college transition, retention, and persistence. In this study, some students had already graduated from their institution, and were either currently enrolled or about the begin in a graduate program, or working in a specific field that could be contributed to by their educational trajectories in college. This type of research focus could potentially inform stakeholders across leadership roles, student engagement, advocacy and academics in influencing post-undergraduate outcomes into graduate school and beyond.

Theory: Cultivating Ánimo in College Transition

This study drew from Community Cultural Wealth model (Yosso, 2006) to help guide how to begin anchoring and framing this study with the opportunity to provide a theoretical contribution to better understand the influence of Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference had on students' college transition. Drawing from the community cultural framework provided an understanding of how student experiences attending the conference were pivotal in their educational trajectories and development in understanding the role of community, culture, college access, career aspirations, civic engagement and leadership. In addition, students gained a sense of pride in knowing the contributions that Chicanas/os/x-Latinas/os/x have made across different spaces in STEM, Education, Law, and Politics. Additionally, the Community Cultural Wealth framework provided a foundation for understanding the role and influence that Chicanas/os LEAD played in students' educational trajectories, and – in essence – planting a seed of *ánimo* in their college transition.

Ánimo is translated in English from Spanish to be understood as form of motivational encouragement. What I found in my study is that the cultural wealth students gained from

attending Chicanas/os LEAD – specifically the exchange provided by the cultural, social, and aspiration capital of knowledge from the summer youth conference programming activated *ánimo*. This includes the information and resources consisting of elements from community, culture, college access, and career aspirations that was presented to students. In essence students were given *ánimo* which was activated by the validations they received the aspirations they gained from attending Chicanas/os LEAD. Students were given the opportunity to understand how to continue navigating their education pathways, and when the time came, the start of embarking in higher education. For students, participating in an equitable college preparation program like Chicanas/os LEAD allows for them to begin creating their pathways. They may not know how their educational trajectory ends, but at least for the transition into college, they are provided with access to begin their pathways in higher education with *ánimo*. They are presented with a guide of self-advocacy that is rooted by the intersections of culture, community, college and career aspirations. Students know that higher education may be good for them, their social mobility, and future careers (e.g., becoming a teacher, lawyer, doctor), but what they are missing is motivation not from within, like *ganas*, but the exchange of *ánimo* they received attending Chicanas/os LEAD.

Ganas. For this reason, it is important to distinguish the difference between *a ánimo nimo and ganas*, which has been well documented in education research. Meek (1989) defines *ganas* as the desire to learn, the ability to sacrifice, and the wish to get ahead, arguably the term being popularized from the film *Stand and Deliver*. To further expand the notion of *ganas* Gámez, Lopez and Overton (2017) state, "*ganas* connotes a basic sense of desire or drive that serves as a motivator to action." (p. 156.) Other studies found that *ganas* has similar components to Grit. Duckworth (2007) defines grit as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit

entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity and plateaus in progress." (p. 1087-88). Easley et al. (2012) defines *ganas* as grit or a desire from internal motivation. They found in their study examining the motivation of Mexican heritage students' motivation to succeed from five components: 1) acknowledgement of parental struggle and sacrifice; 2) strong value of family and family's history; 3) parental admiration and respect; 4) desire to repay and pay forward; and 5) resilience and willingness to persevere. Whereas grit stems from an individual standpoint, *ganas* is rooted in and draws from a collective shared experience of internal motivation to come out of structural inequality. From my standpoint: they are not the same.

More recently, Mireles-Rios et al. (2021) explain that Latina/o/x students have benefited from the culture of *ganas* emphasizing a collective of success and community reciprocity. This perspective helps to distinguish why grit is not like *ganas,* it is a collective exchange, as noted by the authors: "education institutions need to work on helping students believe academic achievement matters, that is available to them, and that it can help them and their communities in tangible ways." (Mireles-Rios et al., p.100, 2021). This is essentially what Chicanas/os LEAD offers to students, a space of community reciprocity and providing students the *si se puede*[22] mentality. Chicanas/os LEAD can be an example that contributes to students' *ganas*, yet the exchange taking place is providing *ánimo* to students. As noted, *ganas* comes from within an individual and *ánimo* is the action of an exchange between people such as Chicanas/os LEAD.

Critical Consciousness. In addition to the cultural wealth of information and knowledge students gained attending Chicanas/os LEAD, they experienced a critical consciousness. Coined by Paulo Freire (2000), in which he helped rural individuals learn to read and understand the

---

[22] Translation: Yes, we/you can.

world around them through critical reflections understanding their social conditions and marginalization to develop agency and self-advocacy. Heberle et al. (2020) conducted a literature review of 67 studies drawing from critical consciousness finding developmental outcomes to include academic outcomes. They find contemporary formulations of critical consciousness have been used in different areas. In one area that revealed 10 of the 67 studies focused on extra-curricular interventions through out-of-school programming. The authors note the programs fostered strong relationships between youth and leader fostering critical consciousness "to build trust in the organization and to empower youth to engage in shared decision-making, thereby fostering a sense of efficacy and develop youths' leadership skills" (Heberle et al., p. 541, 2020). This finding essentially mimicking similar experiences students had attending Chicanas/os LEAD. Watts et al. (2011) note contemporary forms of critical consciousness has focused on youth by providing three elements: 1) critical reflection: learning to question social norms and structures; 2) critical motivation: the ability to commitment to address inequities and injustice; and 3) critical action: engage as a collective or individual to change the current injustices. Approach critical consciousness through the three elements with youth can influence academic engagement, achievement, and increase levels of enrollment in higher education (Diemer et al., 2016).

Aspirational Capital. Draws from Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth model which is understood to be "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers." (p. 77). Scholars have documented that high school students developed college aspirations from family and social contexts, such as being inspired from family immigration journeys and/or lived experiences (Lopez, 2016). Luna and Martinez (2013) found that Latino students value education and have educational aspirations having academic

110

goals and wanting to attend college, "[their] aspirations are shaped by their lived experiences, family, and school interactions" (p. 15). Similarly, Liou et al. (2009) found that a group of students in their study identified their support system that included peers, churches, and family members to access information to support their aspirations. The authors conclude that it is vital for students to have access to high-stakes information networks which include adults who are effective in mentoring and provide psychological support through knowledge and information of college access, "high-stakes information is one existing component of community cultural wealth that guides students to navigate between their school, communities, and personal aspirations." (p. 551). In general, studies that draw from Community Cultural Wealth integrate different forms of capital. As noted by Yosso (2005) capitals are not "mutually exclusive or static," and can inform one another (p. 77). Thus, combining aspirational capital with *ganas* and critical consciousness to result in Ánimo.

Figure 5

Ánimo in College Transition
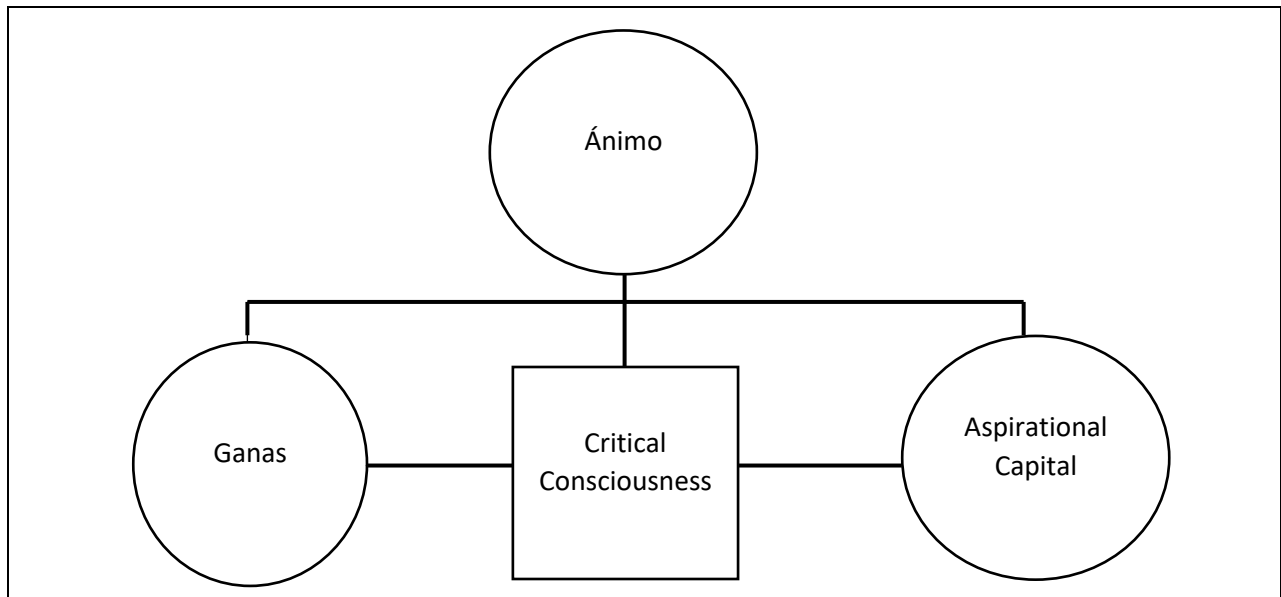
As depicted by figure 5, *Ánimo* combines Ganas, Critical Consciousness, and Aspirational

Capital that results in an approach providing students with a critical form of support, Knowledge

and encouragement in their college transition. *Ánimo* is operationalized through the motivation

of aspirational capital, critical consciousness and ganas. Chicanas/os LEAD provided students

the space to establish a critical consciousness to understand themselves, their community and

beyond gaining a cultural wealth of knowledge rooted in community, culture, college access, and

career aspirations. Students are presented with a guide of self-agency to embark in higher

education. Providing this perspective allows for ways to explore and understand how access to

some forms of community cultural wealth can activate or mobilize cultural resources (Rios-

Aguilar, Deil-Amen, 2018). Finally, this theory can be applied and used by stakeholders in

higher education both inside and outside the classroom as a form of contribution to retention and

persistence work. If individuals are mindful on the importance of ánimo, they can contribute to helping students understand the obstacles of navigating higher education .

Policy & Practice

Data from this study suggests that funding should be made available for college access and preparation programming that is culturally attuned to students' needs that emphasize community, culture, college access, and career aspirations. With recent California state bills, such as AB-101 and AB-1460, passing and requiring ethnic studies as a high school requirement and a general education requirement for the California State University system, the state values cultural relevancy. We must continue to incorporate cultural relevant programming in other sectors, such as college preparation programming like Chicanas/os LEAD. As a non-profit organization, like most organizations, funding is always a top priority. Policymakers should consider funding programs which may be overlooked along with federally funded programs such as AVID and TRiO. It is only a matter of time for policymakers to consider funding culturally relevant programming. Data showed that students gained a sense of validation and received aspirations of cultural wealth, knowledge becoming more prepared to navigate the process of applying to college, understanding the importance of student advocacy, leadership, and civic engagement. In essence provided with *ánimo*

In a time when funding in education is scarce across the board, the long-term implications of student success and contributions in becoming future leaders in their respective fields is worth the investment. These are future leaders of California's economy.

In addition, data suggests that students being actively engaged on campus with leadership and advocacy opportunities contributes to their feelings of belonging, contributing to campus culture, and providing a positive transition to college. Students who sought out academic support and cultivated networks was also very telling, critically understanding that community is important. Student affairs practitioners in academic affairs and residential housing should consider institutionalizing programs in which there exists cross-collaboration which fosters students' engagement with contributing to campus culture and promoting academic success. Specifically, they should emphasize cultural wealth and the strengths of students' communities. Typically, student affairs programming and university housing work in silos, making it challenging to collaborate and promote environments of student leadership, advocacy, and academic success. This could be institutionalized with a holistic approach with first year programs and/or seminar. Moreover, having student affairs practitioners and university housing staff (e.g. resident advisors, resident directors) have specific diversity, equity, and inclusion training centered on this topic would be instrumental in the methods they communicate with students. Simply knowing the foundations of college student needs does not suffice for the contemporary college student. As noted by leadership development literature, it is necessary to incorporate intersectionality drawing from students' identities and strengths to incorporate best practices.

This study found that some of the students were part of programs that were institutionalized by their respective college, which provided additional support for meeting their

needs – such as providing academic advising and wellness. If colleges and universities institutionalize programs that fostering cultural wealth coupled with students' strengths and follow students' trajectory from their first step on campus, college orientation to their last step, graduation, this could contribute understanding how positive student outcomes are cultivated through academics, leadership and advocacy. This can contribute to promoting the cycle of student success.

Conclusion

This qualitative study investigated the first-year college experiences of 21 first-generation Latina/o/x students from California's Central Valley. Students participated in Chicanas/os LEAD, a high school youth conference that emphasizes culture, community, college access, and career aspirations. As a result of attending Chicanas/os LEAD students experienced *ánimo* that combines *ganas*, critical consciousness, and aspirational capital. Community Culture Wealth (Yosso, 2006) served as a guiding framework and provided a critical foundation on the importance of college preparation programs that are culturally attuned to students' backgrounds, promoting culture, community, college access, and career aspirations.

This study contributes to the field of Chicana/o/x-Latina/o/x students in high school and higher education by exploring their school, college preparation programming, and first year of college experiences. This study also contributes to the importance of Ethnic Studies programming that focus on the strengths and contributions from communities of color. Thus, culturally relevant college access programming validated these students' college-going mindsets and gave them aspirations, providing what I explain as *Ánimo* to continue onwards in their education pipelines.

The purpose of this study was to explore the education trajectories of Latina/o/x students from California's Central Valley and to highlight their first year college experiences. Chicanas/os LEAD youth conference, a program that is dear to my heart and continues to be a source of *ánimo* for me, was examined. I am hopeful this study provided a space to examine the experiences of cultivating a college-going mindsets, the influence of culturally relevant college access programming and cultivating validation and aspirations, providing *ánimo,* and how reaping the benefits of cultivation provided students with the ability to navigate social and academic opportunities in the first year of college. I hope that I have provided the space and opportunity to inform stakeholders and community members who work in college access programs and in higher education to critically examine the importance of culturally relevant programming, academic success and outcomes.

REFERENCES

Acevedo-Gil, N., Santos, R. E., & Solórzano, D. G. (2014). Examining a Rupture in the Latina/o College Pipeline: Developmental Education in California Community Colleges. PERSPECTIVAS: Issues in Higher Education Policy and Practice. Issue No. 3, Spring 2014. *American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education*.

Acevedo-Gil, N. (2019). Toward a critical race nepantlera methodology: Embracing liminality in anti-colonial research. *Cultural Studies↔ Critical Methodologies*, 19(3), 231-239.

Acevedo, N., & Solorzano, D. G. (2021). An Overview of Community Cultural Wealth: Toward a Protective Factor Against Racism. *Urban Education*, 00420859211016531.

Armstrong, E. A., Hamilton, L. T. (2013). *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Avila, E. (2004). *Popular culture in the age of white flight: Fear and fantasy in suburban Los Angeles*. University of California Press.

Baker, C. N., & Robnett, B. (2012). Race, social support and college student retention: A case study. Journal of College Student Development, 53(2), 325-335.

Baldassare, M. (1992). Suburban communities. *Annual review of sociology*, *18*(1), 475–494.

Benner, A. D., & Graham, S. (2011). Latino adolescents' experiences of discrimination across the first 2 years of high school: Correlates and influences on educational outcomes. *Child development*, *82*(2), 508–519.

Bernal, D. D. (1998). Using a Chicana feminist epistemology in educational research. *Harvard Educational review*, 68(4), 555-583.

Boden, K. (2011). Perceived academic preparedness of first-generation Latino college students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 10(2), 96-106.

Buchman, C. (2009). College Inequities in the Transition to College. *Teachers College Record*.

Cassinos-Carr, C. (2010, May 12). Rating the high schools. *Sacramento Magazine.*

    https://www.sacmag.com/bos/rating-the-high-schools-3/

Carter, D. F., Locks, A. M., & Winkle-Wagner, R. (2013). From when and where I enter:

    Theoretical and empirical considerations of minority students' transition to college. In

    Higher education: Handbook of theory and research (pp. 93-149). Springer, Dordrecht.

Cerna, O. S., Pérez, P. A., & Sáenz, V. (2009). Examining the precollege attributes and values of

    Latina/o bachelor's degree attainers. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 8(2), 130–

    157.

Central Valley. (n.d.). Stories From Our Newsletter.

    https://dogtrekker.com/Destination/central_sacramento_valley

Clark, M. R. (2005). Negotiating the freshman year: Challenges and strategies among first-year

    college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 296-316.

Clayton, A. B., Medina, M. C., & Wiseman, A. M. (2019). Culture and community: Perspectives

    from first-year, first-generation-in-college Latino students. *Journal of Latinos and*

    Education, 18(2), 134-150.

Contreras, F. E. (2005). Access, achievement, and social capital: Standardized exams and the

    Latino college-bound population. *Journal of Hispanic higher education*, *4*(3), 197-214.

Covarrubias, A., Nava, P. E., Lara, A., Burciaga, R., Vélez, V. N., & Solorzano, D. G. (2018).

    Critical race quantitative intersections: A testimonio analysis. *Race Ethnicity and*

    Education, 21(2), 253-273.

Convertino, C., & Mein, E. (2020). Latinx students' transition to college: When readiness meets

    barriers. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 19(3), 313-321.

Davis-Kean, P. E., Mendoza, C. M., & Susperreguy, M. I. (2012). Pathways to college: Latino

   youth and the transition to higher education. In *Transitions across schools and cultures*.

   Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

Deil-Amen, R., & Lopez Turley, R. (2007). A Review of the Transition to College Literature in

   Sociology. *Teachers College Record*, 109(10), 2324–2366.

Delgado Bernal, D. (1999) Chicana/o Education from the Civil Rights Era to the Present. In

   Moreno, J. F. (Ed.) *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 years of Chicano/Chicana*

   Education. Harvard Education Press.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2001). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. NYU Press.

Demerath, P. (2009). *Producing success: The culture of personal advancement in an American*

   high school. University of Chicago Press.

Diamond, J. B., & Lewis, A. E. (2019). Race and discipline at a racially mixed high school:

   Status, capital, and the practice of organizational routines. *Urban education*, 54(6), 831-

   859.

Diemer, M. A., Rapa, L. J., Voight, A. M., & McWhirter, E. H. (2016). Critical consciousness: A

   developmental approach to addressing marginalization and oppression. *Child*

   Development Perspectives, 10(4), 216-221.

Duncheon, J.C. (2018). "You have to be able to adjust your own self": Latinx students'

   transitions into college from a low-performing urban high school. *Journal of Latinos and*

   Education. 17(4), 358-372.

Dyrness, A. (2007). 'Confianza is where I can be myself': Latina mothers' constructions of

   community in education reform. Ethnography and Education, 2(2), 257-271.

Easley Jr, N., Bianco, M., & Leech, N. (2012). Ganas: A qualitative study examining Mexican

heritage students' motivation to succeed in higher education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 11(2), 164-178.

Espinoza, R. (2012). Finding Pivotal Moments. *Educational leadership*, *69*(7), 56-59.

Fischer, E. M. J. (2007). Settling into campus life: Differences by race/ethnicity in college involvement and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(2), 125-161.

Fitts, S., & McClure, G. (2015). Building social capital in hightown: The role of confianza in Latina immigrants' social networks in the new south. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 46(3), 295-311.

Frankenberg. E. (2012) Chapter 2: Understanding suburban school district transformation: A typology of suburban school disctricts. In Frankenberg, E., & Orfield, G. (Eds.). (2012). *The resegregation of suburban schools: A hidden crisis in American education*. (p.27-44). Harvard Education Press.

Freund (2007*). Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America.* University of Chicago Press.

Foubert, J. D., & Grainger, L. U. (2006). Effects of involvement in clubs and arganizations on the psychosocial development of first-year and senior college students. *NASPA Journal*, 43(*1*), 166-182.

Gámez, R., Lopez, W., & Overton, B. (2017). Mentors, resiliency, and ganas: Factors influencing the success of DACAmented, undocumented, and immigrant students in higher education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 16(2), 144-161.

Gandara, P. C., Contreras, F. (2009) *The Latino Education Crisis: The Consequences of Failed Social Policies*. Cambridge: Harvard Education Press.

Galloway, M. K., & Conner, J. (2015). Perpetuating Privilege: Students' Perspectives on the

Culture of a High-Performing and High-Pressure High School. Educational Forum, 79(2), 99–115. Routledge.

Goldrick-Rab, S., Carter, D., Winkle-Wagner, W. (2007). What higher education has to say about the transition to college. *Teachers College Record*, 109(10), 2444–2481.

Gonzalez, G. G. (1999). Part one: a history of Chicano/Chicana education segregation and the education of Mexican children, 1900-1940. 53-76. In *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 Years of Chicano/Chicana Education* by José F. Moreno (Ed). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gonzalez, G. G. (2004) *Culture of Empire: American Writers, Mexico, and Mexican Immigrants, 1880-1930*. Austin: The University of Texas.

Guzman, A., & Cabrera, A. F. (2022). Uncovering typologies of civically engaged Latina/o college graduates at 4-year institutions of higher education. *Journal of Latinos and .Education*, 1-15.

Harper, S. R., & Hurtado, S. (2007). Nine themes in campus racial climates and implications for institutional transformation. *New Directions for Student Services* 2007(120), 7-24.

Haber-Curran, P., & Sulpizio, L. (2017). Student leadership development for girls and young women. *New directions for student leadership*, 154, 33-46.

Haber-Curran, P., & Tillapaugh, D. (2017). Gender and student leadership: A critical examination. *New directions for student leadership*, 2017(154), 11-22.

Heberle, A. E., Rapa, L. J., & Farago, F. (2020). Critical consciousness in children and adolescents: A systematic review, critical assessment, and recommendations for future research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 146(6), 525.

Heifetz, R. A. (1994). Leadership without easy answers (Vol. 465). *Harvard*

University Press.

Hernandez, E., Mobley, M., Coryell, G., Yu, E., Martinez, G. (2013). Examining the cultural

validity of a college student engagement survey for Latinos. *Journal of Hispanic Higher*

Education. 12(2), 153-173.

Hill, D. L. (2008). School strategies and the "college-linking" process: Reconsidering the

effects of high schools on college enrollment. *Sociology of education*, 81(1), 53-76.

Hoffman, M., Richmond, J., Morrow, J., & Salomone, K. (2002). Investigating "sense of

belonging" in first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research,*

Theory & Practice, 4(3), 227-256.

Holme, J. J., Frankenberg, E., Diem, S., & Welton, A. D. (2013). School choice in suburbia:

The impact of choice policies on the potential for suburban integration. *Journal of School*

Choice, *7*(2), 113-141.

Holme, J. J., Diem, S., & Welton, A. (2014). Suburban school districts and demographic

change: The technical, normative, and political dimensions of response. *Educational*

Administration Quarterly, *50*(1), 34–66.

Hudley, C., Moschetti, R., Gonzalez, A., Cho, S. J., Barry, L., & Kelly, M. (2009). College

freshmen's perceptions of their high School Experiences. *Journal of Advanced*

Academics, 20(3), 438–471.

Hurtado, S., Carter, D. F., & Spuler, A. J. (1996). Latino student transition to college: Assessing

difficulties and factors in successful adjustment. *Research in Higher Education*, 37 (2),

135–157.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus

racial climate on Latino college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, 70 (4), 324–345.

Hurtado, S., & Ponjuan, L. (2005). Latino educational outcomes and the campus climate. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(3), 235-251.

Hurtado, S. (2015). Trend analyses from 1971 to 2012 on Mexican American/Chicano freshmen: are we making progress? (p. 53–75) In: Zambrana RE, Hurtado S, (Eds.). *The Magic Key: The Educational Journey of Mexican Americans from K-12 to College and Beyond.* University of Texas Press.

Jayakumar, U., Vue, R., & Allen, W. (2013). Pathways to college for Young Black Scholars: A community cultural wealth perspective. *Harvard Educational Review*, 83(4), 551–579

Johnson, V. K., Gans, S. E., Kerr, S., & LaValle, W. (2010). Managing the transition to college: Family functioning, emotion coping, and adjustment in emerging adulthood. *Journal of College Student Development*, 51(6), 607-621.

Johnson, D. R., Soldner, M., Leonard, J. B., Alvarez, P., Inkelas, K. K., Rowan-Kenyon, H. T., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2007). Examining sense of belonging among first-year undergraduates from different racial/ethnic groups. *Journal of College Student Development*, 48(5), 525-542.

Jones, L., Castellanos, J., & Cole, D. (2002). Examining the ethnic minority student experience at predominantly White institutions: A case study. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 1(1), 19-39.

Keating, K., Rosch, D., & Burgoon, L. (2014). Developmental Readiness for Leadership: The

Differential Effects of Leadership Courses on Creating" Ready, Willing, and Able"
Leaders. *Journal of Leadership Education,* 13(3).

Kiersch, C., & Peters, J. (2017). Leadership from the Inside Out: Student Leadership
Development within Authentic Leadership and Servant Leadership Frameworks. *Journal
of Leadership Education*, 16(1).

Kotok, S. & Frankenberg, E. (2017). Demography and educational politics in the changing
suburbs. *Challenges Facing Suburban Schools: Promising Responses to Changing
Student Populations, 1.*

Krathwohl, D. R. (2009). *Methods of Educational & Social Science Research: The Logic of
Methods* (3rd ed.). Waveland Press.

Kouyoumdjian, C., Guzmán, B. L., Garcia, N. M., & Talavera-Bustillos, V. (2017).
A community cultural wealth examination of sources of support and challenges
among Latino first-and second-generation college students at a Hispanic serving
institution. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 16(1), 61–76.

Lacy, K. (2016). The new sociology of suburbs: A research agenda for analysis of emerging
trends. *Annual Review of Sociology.* 42, 369-384.

Leal, D. L., Patterson, J., & Tafoya, J. R. (2016). Religion and the political engagement of
Latina/o immigrants: Bridging capital or segmented religious assimilation? *Journal of the
Social Sciences*, 2(3), 125–146

Lee, J., Weis, L., Liu, K., & Kang, C. (2017). Which type of high school maximizes students'
college match? Unequal pathways to postsecondary destinations for students from
varying high school settings. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *88*(4), 529-560.

Lewis-McCoy, R. L. (2014). *Inequality in the Promised Land: Race, Resources and Suburban*

Schooling. Stanford University Press.

Lewis-McCoy, R. L. (2016). Boyz in the 'burbs: Parental negotiation of race and class in raising black males in suburbia. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 91, 309-325.

Lewis-McCoy, R. L. (2018). Suburban black lives matter. *Urban Education*, 53, 145-161.

Linares Rendon, L. I., Muñoz, S. M. (2011). Revisiting validation theory: Theoretical foundations, applications, and extensions. *Enrollment Management Journal*, 2(1), 12-33.

Liou, D. D., Antrop-González, R., & Cooper, R. (2009). Unveiling the promise of community cultural wealth to sustaining Latina/o students' college-going information networks. *Educational Studies*, 45(6), 534-555.

Locks, A. M., Hurtado, S., Bowman, N. A., & Oseguera, L. (2008). Extending notions of campus climate and diversity to students' transition to college. *The Review of Higher Education*, 31(3), 257-285.

Longerbeam, S. D., Sedlacek, W. E., & Alatorre, H. M. (2004). In their own voices: Latino student retention. *NASPA journal*, 41(3), 538-550.

Lopez, J. D. (2005). Race-related stress and sociocultural orientation among Latino students during their transition into a predominately White, highly selective institution. Journal of *Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(4), 354-365.

Lopez, J. D. (2013). Differences among Latino students in precollege multicultural exposure and the transition into an elite institution. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 12(3), 269-279.

Lopez, J. D. (2014). Gender differences in self-efficacy among Latino college freshmen. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 36(1), 95-104.

Lopez, J. D., Horn, J. M. (2020). Grit and retention among first year Hispanic college students

at a Hispanic serving institution. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 42(2), 264-270.

Luna, N. A., & Martinez, M. (2013). A Qualitative Study Using Community Cultural Wealth to Understand the Educational Experiences of Latino College Students. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education*, 7(1).

Martinez, G. F., & Deil-Amen, R. (2015). College for all Latinos? The role of high school messages in facing college challenges. *Teachers College Record*, *117*(3), 1-50.

Mattanah, J. F., Ayers, J. F., Brand, B. L., Brooks, L. J., Quimby, J. L., & McNary, S. W. (2010). A social support intervention to ease the college transition: Exploring main effects and moderators. *Journal of college student development,* 51(1), 93-108.

Matsuda, M. J., Lawrence, C. R., Delgado, R., & Crenshaw, K. W. (1993). *Words that wound*. Westview.

Martin, J. M. (2017). It just didn't work out: Examining nonreturning students' stories about their freshman experience. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 19(2), 176-198.

Means, D.R., Pyne, K.B. (2017). Finding my way: Perceptions of institutional support and belonging in low-income, first-year college students. *Journal of College Student Development.* 58(6) pp.,907-924.

Meek, A. (1989). On Creating" Ganas": A Conversation with Jaime Escalante. *Educational Leadership*, 46(5), 46-47.

Menchaca, M. (1999) The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo and the Racialization of the Mexican Population. In Moreno, J. F. (Eds.) *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 years of Chicano/Chicana Education.* Harvard Education Press.

126

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley
     & Sons.

Michel, R., Durdella, N. (2019). Exploring Latina/o college students' transition experiences: An
     ethnography of social preparedness and familial support. *Journal of Latinos and*
     Education. 18(1), 53-67.

Mireles-Rios, R., Rios, V., Solis, B., & Gutierrez, J. (2021). Ganas as a Praxis: Cultural
     Responsiveness in Latinx/a/o Higher Education Success. In Studying Latinx/a/o Students
     in Higher Education (pp. 91-105). Routledge.

Molina, N. (2006) *Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939*.
     University of California Press. Berkeley, CA.

Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching:
     Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*.
     31(2), 132-141.

Mullen, A.L. (2012) *Degrees of Inequality: Culture, Class, and Gender in American Higher*
     Education. Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore.

Muller, C., Riegle-Crumb, C., Schiller, K. S., Wilkinson, L., & Frank, K. a. (2010). Race and
     academic achievement in racially diverse high schools: Opportunity and stratification.
     Teachers College Record, *112*(4), 1038–1063.

Murphy, J. P., & Murphy, S. A. (2018). Get ready, get in, get through: Factors that influence
     Latino college student success. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 17(1), 3-17.

Musoba, G. D., Collazo, C., & Placide, S. (2013). The first year: Just surviving or thriving at an
     HSI. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 12(4), 356–368.

Nuñez, A. M. (2009a). Latino students' transitions to college: A social and intercultural

capital perspective. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(1), 22–48.

Nuñez, A. M. (2009b). A critical paradox? Predictors of Latino students' sense of belonging in

college. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 2(1), 46.

Nuñez, A. M. (2011). Counterspaces and connections in college transitions: First-generation

Latino students' perspectives on Chicano studies. *Journal of College Student*

Development, *52*(6), 639-655.

Nunn, L. M. (2011). Classrooms as Racialized Spaces: dynamics of collaboration, tension, and

student attitudes in urban and suburban high schools. *Urban Education* (46).

Nunn, L. M. (2014). *Defining Student Success: The Role of School and Culture*. Rutgers

University Press.

O'Connell, S. (2020). A qualitative exploration of pell grant-eligible Latino male students'

perceptions of their experiences and engagement in a first-year college program. *Journal of*

Latinos and Education, 1-12.

Oakes, J., Rogers, J., Silver, D., Valladares, S., Terriquez, V., McDonough, P., Renée, M.,

Lipton, M. (2006). *Removing the Roadblocks: Fair College Opportunities for all California*

students. University of California/All Campus Consortium for Research Diversity

(UC/ACCORD) & UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (UCLA/IDEA).

Ochoa, G. L. (2022). Learning and being in community: a Latina feminist holistic approach to

researching where we live. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 1-13.

Perez Huber, L., & Solorzano, D. G. (2015). Racial microaggressions as a tool for critical race

research. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 18(3), 297-320.

Perez, D., Zamora, B. T., & Pontious, M. W. (2018). Capitalizing on interpersonal thriving:

Exploring the community cultural wealth in Latino undergraduate men's peer networks. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 30(1), 11-31.

Pizarro, M. (1998). "Chicana/o power!" epistemology and methodology for social justice and empowerment in Chicana/o communities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *11*(1), 57-80.

Ramirez-Melgarejo, A. J. (2020). La construcción social de la confianza en investigación cualitativa. El caso de la Vega Alta del Segura (Región de Murcia). *Empiria*: *Revista de metodología de Ciencias Sociales*, (48), 95-113.

Rayle, A. D., & Chung, K. Y. (2007). Revisiting first-year college students' mattering: Social support, academic stress, and the mattering experience. Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 9(1), 21-37.

Rendon, L.I. (1994) Validating culturally diverse students: Towards a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education*. 19(1), 33-51.

Rhodes, A., & Warkentien, S. (2017). Unwrapping the Suburban "Package Deal." *American Educational Research Journal*, *54*, 168S–189S.

Rios-Aguilar, C., & Deil-Amen, R. (2012). Beyond getting in and fitting in: An examination of social networks and professionally relevant social capital among Latina/o university students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 11(2), 179–196.

Rios-Aguilar, C., Marquez Kiyama , J. (2012). Funds of knowledge: An approach to studying Latina(o) students' transition to college. *Journal of Latinos and Education*. 11(1), 2-16.

Rios Aguilar, C., Eagan, K., & Stolzenberg, E. B. (2015). Findings from the 2015 *Diverse Learning Environments Survey*.

Rogers, J., Terriquez, V., Valladares, S., Oakes, J., (2006). *California educational opportunity report 2006: roadblocks to college*. University of California/All Campus Consortium for Research Diversity (UC/ACCORD) & UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education and Access (UCLA/IDEA).

Rosch, D.M. (2017). Editors' notes. *New directions for student leadership*, 2017(155), 5-7.

Rosch, D. M., & Collins, J. D. (2017). The significance of student organizations to leadership development. *New directions for student leadership*, 2017(155), 9-19.

Saldaña, J. (2009). The coding manual for qualitative researchers. *Sage*.

Sanchez, B., Esparza, P., Colón, Y., & Davis, K. E. (2010). Tryin' to make it during the transition from high school: The role of family obligation attitudes and economic context for Latino-emerging adults. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 25(6), 858-884.

San Miguel, G. (1999) The schooling of Mexicanos in the southwest, 1848-1940. In Moreno, J. F. (Eds.) *The Elusive Quest for Equality: 150 years of Chicano/Chicana Education.* Harvard Education Press.

Saunders, M., & Serna, I. (2004). Making college happen: The college experiences of first-generation Latino students. Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 3(2), 146-163.

Smith, W. A., Allen, W. R., & Danley, L. L. (2007). "Assume the position... you fit the description" psychosocial experiences and racial battle fatigue among African American male college students. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(4), 551-578.

Smith W. L., Zhang, P. (2010) The impact of key factors on the transition from high school to college among first- and second-generation students. *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*. 22(2) 49-70.

Solorzano, D. G., & Solórzano, R. W. (1995). The Chicano educational experience: A

framework for effective schools in Chicano communities. *Educational Policy*, 9(3), 293-
314.

Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and
campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of
Negro Education*, 60-73.

Solorzano, D. G., & Bernal, D. D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a
critical race and LatCrit theory framework: Chicana and Chicano students in an urban
context. *Urban education*, 36(3), 308-342.

Solorzano, D. G., & Ornelas, A. (2002) A Critical Race Analysis of Advanced Placement
Classes: A Case of Educational Inequality. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1(4), 215
–229.

Solorzano, D. G., Villalpando, O., & Oseguera, L. (2005). Educational inequities and Latina/o
undergraduate students in the United States: A critical race analysis of their educational
progress. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(3), 272-294.

Tillapaugh, D., Mitchell Jr, D., & Soria, K. M. (2017). Considering gender and student
leadership through the lens of intersectionality. *New directions for student leadership*,
2017(154), 23-32.

Terenzini, P., Rendón, L. I., Upcraft, L., Millar, S., Allison, K., Gregg, P., & Jalomo, R. (1994).
The transition to college: Diverse students, diverse stories. *Research in Higher
Education*, 35 (1), 57–73.

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of students' attrition* (2nd
ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Turner, C. S. V. (1994). Guests in someone else's house: Students of color. *The Review of Higher
Education*, 17(4), 355-370.

Turley, R. N. L. (2009). College proximity: mapping access to opportunity. *Sociology of Education*, 82(2) 126–146.

Van Manen, M. (1990). Beyond assumptions: Shifting the limits of action research. *Theory into Practice*, 29(3), 152-157.

Vélez-Ibáñez, C. G., & Greenberg, J. B. (1992). Schooling processes among US Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans: A comparative, distributive, and case study approach. *Hispanics in the United States*, 270-280.

Villalpando, O., & Solórzano, D. G. (2005). The role of culture in college preparation programs: A review of the research literature. *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach*, 13-28.

Watts, R. J., Diemer, M. A., & Voight, A. M. (2011). Critical consciousness: Current status and future directions. Critical consciousness: Current status and future directions. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development,* 134, 43–57. http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/cd.310

Yazedjian, A., & Toews, M. (2006). Predictors of college adjustment among Hispanic students. *Journal of the first-year experience & students in transition*, 18(2), 9-29.

Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race ethnicity and education*, 8(1), 69-91.

Yosso, T. J. (2006). *Critical Race Counterstories Along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline*. Routledge.

Yosso, T., Smith, W., Ceja, M., & Solórzano, D. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(4), 659-691.

APPENDIX A: QUALTRIC DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Qualtrics Demographic Questionnaire Survey

Thank you for taking time out of your schedule to participate in this study. The purpose of my research project is to understand and explore the experiences of currently enrolled or recently graduated college students that graduated from a California high school in California's Central Valley. By sharing your experiences, it is my objective to better understand California's undergraduate students from the Central Valley. I have a set of questions I would like to ask you about yourself to see if you meet the requirements before I interview you.

Q1. I have been provided with the consent form to review.
a) Yes
b) No

Q2. I have reviewed the consent form provided by Alonzo Campos. By clicking yes below I agree to participate in the study.
a) Yes
b) No

Q3 Please select a pseudonym (first name only) to be used for this study.

Q4 Please provide an e-mail. It will be used to contact you if you have been selected to win a raffle prize

Q5. How do you self-identify?
a) Latina
b) Latino
c) Latinx
d) Chicana
e) Chicano
f) Chicanx

Q6. What year did you attend Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project (CLYLP)? This includes SJVI Conference.
▼ 2014 ... 2018

Q7. Are you currently enrolled and attending a college or a university?
a) Yes
b) No

Display This Question:
Are you currently enrolled and attending a college or a university? = No

Q8. Did you graduate from a college or university?
a) Yes

133

b) No

Q9. Please select which college or university you attended during your first year of college
a) California Community College
b) California State University
c) University of California
d) Private College or Out of State

Q10. Please select which type of institution you graduated from.
a) California State University
b) University of California
c) Private or out of state

Q11. You indicated that you graduated from a California State University. Please select the CSU
▼ Bakersfield ... Stanislaus

Q12. You indicated that you graduated from a University of California. Please select the campus.
▼ Berkeley ... San Diego

Q13.You indicated that you graduated from a private college or out of state school. Please provide the name of the college or university.

Q14. Please select the year you graduated from college.
▼ 2017 ... 2021

Q15. You indicated a California Community College during your first year. Please provide the name of the college.
Display This Question:
a)   If select which college or university, you attended during your first year of college = California State University

Q16. You indicated a California State University (CSU). Please select the campus.
▼ Bakersfield ... Stanislaus
Q17. You indicated University of California (UC). Please select the campus.
▼ Berkeley ... San Diego
Display This Question:
b)   Select which college or university, you attended during your first year of college = Private College or Out of State

Q18. You indicated a private college or university. Please provide the name of the college or university.

Q20 Please select which county you are from in the Central Valley (e.g. where you graduated from). For example: I graduated from Davis Senior High in Davis, CA. I will select Yolo County.
▼ Butte ... Yuba

Q21 Did your parent(s) or guardian(s) graduate college?
c)   Yes
d)   No

Q22 Did your siblings attend college?
a)   Yes
b)   No

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Experiences of Undergraduate Suburban Students

Hello, and thank you for taking time out of your schedule to participate in this study. The

purpose of my research project is to understand and explore the experiences of college students

that graduated from a suburban high school. By students sharing their experiences, it is my

objective to better understand suburban undergraduate students. I have a set of questions I would

like to ask you about yourself, and then transition into specific ones about your college

experience. At any moment during our interview, if you wish to withdraw from the study, we

will end our conversation.

Warm-up Questions
1. Briefly tell me a little bit about yourself.
    a. Hometown?
    b. Siblings
    c. Who did you live with?

High School Questions
2. How would you describe your community or neighborhood you grew up in?
    a. How would you describe your high school?
    b. How would you describe yourself in high school?
    c. How would you describe your peers?
3. Would you consider your community a *California suburb*?
    a. Why or why not?
4. Can you describe a positive experience in high school that you can remember that had a positive impact/influence on you?
5. Can you describe a challenging experience in high school that you can remember that had some impact on you?
    a. What was the issue?
    b. How did you resolve it?
6. How would you describe the summer program, Chicanas/os LEAD to others?
7. What would you say you walked away with from having participated in the summer program?
    a. Can you say more about that?
8. What type of **extracurricular activities** did you participate while in high school?
    a. Student clubs, organizations?
    b. Did you work while you were in high school?
9. Were you participating in **civic engagement** in high school?
    a. Tutoring or volunteering?

       b. Protesting or rallying?
  10. In what ways do you think your high school prepared you for college?
       a. English class (e.g., reading/writing prep)
       b. Enroll AP/Honors courses
       c. AP exams

Questions on First Year of College experiences
  11. Did you attend any type of summer bridge or orientation program before the start of your first semester of college?
  12. Did you participate in any forms of civic engagement during your first year?
       a. Tutoring or volunteering?
       b. Activism: Protesting or rallying?
       c. Student clubs, organizations?
       d. Did you participate in any leadership roles?
  13. Did you work during your first year of college?
       a. On campus or Off- campus?
       b. Did you have Work-study?
  14. How would you describe the support you received from your family?
       a. From friends and/or significant other?
       b. Can you describe examples you have family support?
  15. What type of academic or social support did you seek during your first year?
       a. Academic, Tutoring
       b. Counseling
       c. Career Services?
  16. Can you share an example of a <u>positive experience</u> during your first year of college?
       a. What was the outcome?
  17. Can you share a <u>challenging experience</u> that you remember from your first year of college?
       a. Why was this a challenge for you?
       b. How did you resolve this issue?
  18. As an alum of Chicanas/os LEAD, did it have a role during your first-year of college
       a. Keeping in touch with other alumni?
       b. Support
       c. Attend the same college?

Expectations / Realities
  19. In what ways did your first year of college meet your expectations?
       a. In what ways did it not?
  20. What would you have done differently in your first year of college?
  21. What would you have done differently in high school to prepare you for the first year of college?
       a. Academic experiences
       b. Social experiences
  22. What would you say was like a driving force for you to keep going in your first year of college?

Closing
  23. Are there any questions for me you would like to ask?

APPENDIX C: MAP OF CALIFORNIA'S CENTRAL VALLEY COUNTIES

Map of California's Central Valley Counties. Image pulled from Central Valley. (n.d.). *Stories From Our Newsletter*. https://dogtrekker.com/Destination/central_sacramento_valley

APPENDIX D: CHICANAS/OS LEAD CONFERENCE MISSION & VISION

Image bellow is a copy of main overview of the Annual Youth Conference Chicanas/os LEAD youth Conference held in July 2017. The image provides the conference mission and vision. For purposes of confidentiality, part of this image protects of people, places and organizations.