Dissertations   Theses and Dissertations

Fall 2022

Measuring What They Value: Exploring the Meaning of Student Success for Community College Students of Mexican Origin

Destiny M. Quintero

Recommended Citation

Quintero, Destiny M., "Measuring What They Value: Exploring the Meaning of Student Success for Community College Students of Mexican Origin" (2022). *Dissertations*. 3974.
https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/3974

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MEASURING WHAT THEY VALUE: EXPLORING THE MEANING OF STUDENT

SUCCESS FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS OF MEXICAN ORIGIN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

DESTINY M. QUINTERO

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have always had big dreams. Early on, I wanted to be a Luvabull. Yes, a professional cheerleader. After all, they were famous. Someone then told me they make no money. My Grandma Diane always told me to do what I needed to make enough money to take care of myself, so that was not going to work. In what can only be classified as a natural leap, I then decided I wanted to be a Supreme Court justice. It did not matter that I had no idea how to get to the highest court in the land, I was a good student with a supportive family . . . I could certainly figure it out. It turns out I was wrong. All the will in the world couldn't help me get past the fact that law was just not for me. It was ok, though. I was going to be the next best thing—a philosopher. That was until I found out they *also* make no money. It was then that I decided to pursue a career in the most rewarding field of them all—education.

I share this evolution of aspirations in jest. My goals were not always clear; my path was not always straight. Yet, I have arrived at the pinnacle of educational pursuits. However personal this achievement may seem to be, I could not have gotten here without the inspiration provided by my family and friends. Alex, thank you for always lending an ear. As my younger brother, you have definitely had to deal with far too many of my rants, but maybe you are better off for it. After all, you will soon be an educator yourself. I look forward to seeing how you inspire others. Jason, my dearest older brother, thank you for your unwavering optimism. In a world plagued by challenges, you have always believed in my ability to persevere. I hope you know that even if I

don't always seem to share your cheerful disposition, I am more equipped to take on the world because I have you in my corner.

Mom, thank you for being you. Your open mind and free spirit have always been my guide in life. You have helped me be comfortable with who I am and you have shown me all that I can be. I know you had wished to continue your own education, but that was not your path. With absolutely no power vested in me, I grant you an honorary doctorate, because with all the advising you gave me over the years, this degree is as much yours as it is mine. Dad, thank you for never questioning my choices, even when you have not entirely understood them. I have taken risks and aimed higher simply because I knew you were always right there behind me. Know that in reaching my goal that you have reached your goal—you have left the next generation far better off than was even imaginable. As grandpa would say, "ya done good."

Mi familia Quintero—gracias por todo su apoyo. You will never know all the ways in which your love of life has motivated me. I especially want to call out my nieces and nephews. I want you all to know that this dissertation is the embodiment of the love I have for you. It is because of you that I did this study—because I will not accept an education system that does not see you and your successes. You are amazing young adults with all the capabilities needed to reach *your* goals, *your* dreams, *your* version of success. Teresa y Jose—gracias por mostrarme el poder de tener corazón. You have built a remarkable life on the back of hopes and dreams—a life that I feel very fortunate to now be a part of. Thank you especially for bringing Michael into this world and raising him the way you have. He is truly an incredible human being. On that note . . .

Michael, thank you for your patience, your commitment, your forgiveness, your understanding, your love. I have achieved what I have—*we* have achieved what we have—

iv

because each and every day you chose to walk beside me. As you read this dissertation, my hope is that you see yourself in it and that you reflect on just how successful you are as a professional, as a father, as a papa. Which brings me to Mateó, mi hermoso bebé. When I started this journey, you were but a dream. As I end this journey, you are my motivation. There were many times over the course of the years that I wanted to throw in the towel, but I persisted because of what it would one day mean for you. Know that completing this degree is but one way in which I will dedicate my life to improving yours and that there isn't anything you can't do with momma and papa on your side.

Speaking of near non-completion, Eric, my boss and counselor—thank you for telling me that being ABD was not an option. If it weren't for your encouragement and flexibility, I would have never finished. To my other colleagues—Claire, Kim, Janice, Susan M., Jan, Rosemary, Jenny, Jillian, and Jon—thank you for being so understanding over the years and for entertaining all of my "big ideas" that have stemmed from this research. I would like to specifically thank Susan H. and Amber. Your work on "hassles to tassels" laid the groundwork for this study. You two are equal parts trailblazers and mentors. I feel incredibly fortunate to have such a talented and dedicated group of colleagues that I also get to call my friends.

Norma and Michelle, or as Michael calls you, "my Loyola friends"—thank you for carrying me through this program. We overcame imposter syndrome, unquantifiable unrest, and the unknowns of dissertating because we stuck together. When I said I couldn't, you said "believe" and for that, I am forever grateful. Dhara, my best friend and confidant for more than 25 years—thank you for putting up with me. High school friendships are intense, but they typically fade as people grow older and change. Somehow, ours persevered, navigating every

twist and turn that life could throw our way. I couldn't imagine celebrating this achievement without you. Last, on the friend front, Mundo—my faithful companion. I say thank you for all the ways in which you have comforted me over the years. There was not a day that went by that you were not at my feet, snoring while I clicked away at my desk. Though it was sometimes difficult to think over the noise, you let me know that I was never alone.

Finally, I want to thank my committee. Blanca, Gigi, Lorenzo. Thank you for supporting an unorthodox method and believing in the power of a photo to tell a story. It would have been much easier for all of us if I would have just went with a document analysis or something of the sort, but where is the fun in that? I thank you for being open and honest. I take your feedback as a sign of genuine care and commitment to my success as a student. Blanca, I especially want to thank you for guiding me on this journey. When I felt the most isolated and misunderstood, you took me under your wing and showed me that there was a place for a scholar–practitioner in this program. Your love for learning and commitment to social justice are inspiring and I just know that wherever the journey of life may take you, you will have a lasting impact on all those who cross your path.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

x

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

Current student success measures have been shown to be necessary, but insufficient, often masking the successes of specific student populations by virtue of their 4-year institutional centricity, aggregate calculation, and reflection of hegemonic definitions of student success. For far too long, academics and policymakers have valued what they measure rather than measuring what students value; that which is easily quantifiable and comparable takes precedent over that which is descriptive and personal. This study was designed to promote more holistic and inclusive interpretations of student success that are reflective of the unique life experiences of the diverse populations of students pursuing higher education in the United States today. Specifically, this qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study involved exploring the phenomenon of student success as it is lived and understood by community college students of Mexican origin—the largest and fastest-growing Latinx subgroup. The guiding research questions for this study were: What does "student success" mean for community college students of Mexican origin? How does the meaning ascribed to student success reflect the lived experience—past and present—of these students? Using the photovoice method, photos chosen by the participants were used to facilitate conversation in an interview and focus group setting about what student success means to them and what they believe it to mean to their family and to those with a similar cultural background. Whole-part-whole analysis revealed three overarching meanings of student success that are reflective of culturally nuanced interpretations of traditional measures of student success: paving the way, finding your path, and crossing a finish line. The

findings have implications for Critical Race Theory/LatCrit studies, accountability measures, and

practice.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

One warm fall morning in 2007, I was working on rehabbing a home with my dad. My parents had bought the house some months back to flip for a profit, but the flip was taking longer than anticipated because of some large and costly unforeseen repairs. To move the project along, all hands were on deck at this point. On this particular day, my dad and brother were hanging drywall in what would soon be the kitchen/dining room combo. This room would have taken my dad a week to complete by himself, but with the help of my brother, it was promising to take far less time. Despite their tag-team approach to the work, my dad was clearly in charge, calling on his years of expertise as a carpenter to guide the process. My brother was ok with that and took every direction my dad gave him with grace. Having previously dreamed of being a firefighter, a train conductor, and a race car driver, now my brother wanted nothing more than to learn the craft that he perceived made my dad the man he was—a man my brother would be proud to become. My dad, plagued by a life of hard work with perceived little reward, wanted nothing less than for his son to follow in his footsteps.

As I sat on the floor in the space that the kitchen island would soon occupy, I watched my dad and brother work and pondered why my dad had such an aversion to my brother becoming a carpenter. If he was interested in learning a trade, why not let him, especially if the alternative was a road that seemingly could lead to nowhere? These thoughts swirled in my head as I did what I could to help pick up debris. As the day ended, my brother headed out to meet up with his

friends and my dad and I stayed behind to close up the house. When we were alone, I, a little

brazen, broached the topic of my brother's career interest:

> Dad, just curious, but why don't you want to teach Alex to be a carpenter? Isn't there an apprentice program you can sponsor him for as a union member? Wouldn't that be his best chance at making a good living?

My dad replied sternly, "Des, no." Naïve and persistent, I replied, "I just do not understand your

aversion," shaking my head in dismay. Knowing his daughter was not one to back down, my dad

slowly put down the tools he had in his hand and turned to me with a very advisory stance. He

said:

> Listen. I was taught one simple thing in life—it is every generation's responsibility to make the next generation's lives better. My only job as a parent is to ensure you have more opportunities than I had. I did not work hard my whole life for your brother to live the same life I have lived. My life is better than my dad's was and yours will be better than mine. You can bet on it.

Reflecting on Student Success

I have come to understand my dad's definition of "success" to mean upward mobility.

The meaning he associates with the term is steeped in his impoverished upbringing in rural

Arkansas and his family's blue-collar roots. It is also reflective of the American dream he

embodies—the belief that following the rules and putting in the work can afford you great

opportunities. His view of success ultimately shaped my own, influencing every decision I have

made whether I was aware of its influence; success is not something to be achieved but passed

on. For this reason, I have pursued a doctorate, believing that getting an advanced degree is what

I need to do to best position myself to support the success of the next generation. In this way, my

view of success has always been tied to a credential and all that a credential affords those around

me.

However, not everyone has had my experience, and therefore, they do not unilaterally share my (or my dad's) conception of success. The meaning each person assigns to success is highly contextual and is ultimately shaped by their experiences, identities, and cultural associations. Despite this, Americans often treat success as a known end to commonly be pursued by all. Relative to education, that end is considered degree completion, which can be said to make all other forms of success possible. Nevertheless, success is not always denoted by a degree, as degree completion is not everyone's goal. As my brother's experience would suggest, students of today "have multiple goals that change and shift over time" (Higher Learning Commission [HLC], 2018, p. 2), constantly altering what success means to the individual. Student characterizations of success can undoubtedly include traditional measures like earning a credential and making a living. However, they also can exclusively or interchangeably include personal growth, the development of a sense of purpose, an increase in self-efficacy, an affirmation of identity, and the establishment of new goals for the next phase of life. In this sense, student success is more of a becoming—a journey of meaning-making that starts far before a student enters an institution's doors and extends far after.

As academics and policymakers push to find new measures of student success, it must be acknowledged that success "can only be understood as the outcome of a series of events and actions that span a continuum on both sides of a college matriculation boundary" (Oliva, 2004, p. 212). This fact has often been overlooked, with the examination of the interrelationship of pre- and postmatriculation experiences and their combined effect on student success having not yet sparked even a nascent interest among researchers. When it has, a trail of confusion follows, with

researchers using different terms and variables to discuss and gauge success (Astin, 1999). Those variables are almost exclusively reflective of a dominant ideology that values tangible, measurable outcomes that do more to gauge institutional performance than they do to capture the paths and goals of students. With society's preoccupation with the aggregate, little has been done to understand students' varying definitions of success and how the intersections of specific group identities and histories may shape their meaning-making process around that definition. If we are to change this reality and make headway in supporting the success of all students, we must interrogate the American cultural association of success with completion by studying the lived experiences, past and present, of the diverse students of today (Ireland, 2015, p. 154).

Statement of the Problem

Historically, education has served the dual purpose of creating an educated workforce with a strong moral base, and facilitating economic and social mobility (Brint, 2017; Collins, 2015; Larabee, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a). It is in this context of this duality that accountability measures for higher education have been conceived; institutions are considered successful when they offer a quality education that yields these desired ends. As calls for accountability have intensified in the United States over the decades, "easily quantifiable metrics" have been used to gauge this type of institutional success, inadvertently taking "precedence in shaping what counts as *student* success" (E. Chang et al., 2019, p. 481). Nothing has cemented that fact as much as the hallmark data points collected in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) implemented by the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education [USDE], n.d.). IPEDS data are namely

centered on completion rates (number of recognized degree completions by degree level),

retention rates (percentage of first-year students who persist to the second year), and graduation

rates (first-time, full-time undergraduate students who graduate within 150% of normal

completion time) and have become the normative measures of success in the U.S. higher

education system (USDE, n.d.). Adopted first at the federal level, accrediting agencies and state

boards of education now also rely on these metrics in their reporting requirements, further

legitimizing their usage as the marks of success and institutional effectiveness (E. Chang et al.,

2019).

Yet, three significant problems exist with these data points: (a) they exclude specific

cohorts of students (e.g., part-time); (b) they are not uniformly and clearly disaggregated by race,

ethnicity, or gender (making it hard to analyze inequities); and (c) they do not wholly or

accurately capture what success means to all students. Within the last decade, IPEDS definitions

have been adapted to reflect more pathways and forms of success for the diverse student body in

the United States. Most notably was the addition of outcomes measures in 2016 that captured

"data from degree-granting institutions on 4-year degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate

student cohorts, specifically full- and part-time attendance levels for both first-time students and

non-first-time entering students" (USDE, 2011, p. 5). Despite this change, a disheartening reality

remains in higher education—the system is flawed; measurements of success are skewed; lived

experience and difference are ignored. Particularly discouraging is the continued 4-year

institutional centricity of outcome data and the tacit acceptance by those in the higher education

community of the way those data mask the successes of community college students—a growing

number of whom are of Latinx descent (Boerner, 2015, p. 19; Carales & Lopez, 2020; Ireland, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

Though disheartening, there is promise in the growing consciousness around the need to better support the unique populations of students in the U.S. higher education system and their goals and definitions of success rather than continuing to be tethered to institution-centric measures that silence lived experience. As of late, key educational stakeholders, including leadership from institutions, state agencies, accreditors, and professional associations, have begun to discuss the flaws in the continued reliance on traditional measures of success, focusing instead on the need for more holistic, student-centric measures of success (HLC, 2018; Mullin, 2012). "Student success" has become the nation's newest accountability measure and a movement responsible for a plethora of research and new programming at institutions across the country. With deep roots in the access and completion agendas of previous decades, the term is symbolic of the fact that completion is a necessary but insufficient measure of success (Clotfelter et al., 2013; HLC, 2018). It is an invitation to institutional leaders to turn their attention inward, to engage in a more systematic analysis of who their students are and why they are there, and to evaluate what they, as leaders of the institution, may be doing that is aiding or hindering their students' success (Fingerson & Troutman, 2020; Ireland, 2015). Furthermore, it is a calling to academics to work together, with students, toward a deeper understanding of what "student success" means in context.

Against this background, I designed my study to explore more holistic interpretations of student success reflective of distinct life experiences and identities. More specifically, in response to the previously mentioned shortcomings of federal outcomes data, I centered this qualitative, interpretative phenomenological study on understanding the phenomenon of student success for community college students of Mexican origin—the largest and fastest-growing Latinx subgroup (Carales, 2020; Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). For far too long, academics and policymakers have valued what they have measured rather than measuring what students value; that which is easily quantifiable and comparable takes precedent over that which is descriptive and personal. To combat the tendency to seek out measurable definitions of success that can be universally applied to all students, my goal within this study was to increase the awareness and acceptance of the fact that it is not the academy's (or government's) definition of success that matters, but rather students' relation to success with which we, as practitioners, should be concerned. It is only through that relationship that we can better understand the phenomenon of student success, better respond to the various needs and interests of our diverse student populations, and better position ourselves to support equitable educational outcomes.

Research Questions

To explore the relationship between student and success, the primary questions for this study were: What does "student success" mean for community college students of Mexican origin? How does the meaning ascribed to student success reflect the lived experience—past and present—of these students? I designed these questions to place the experiences of an otherwise marginalized group at the forefront of the conversation, aiming to center their voices in the

discourse around what constitutes student success in the United States. Secondary questions to help further the understanding of how the phenomenon reveals itself to the students included: What contextual factors play a role in the development of their understanding of student success? How did their identity as a student of Mexican origin affect what student success means to them, if at all? To what extent do students in this project associate traditional measures of academic success with their own understanding of success?

Justification for Study

As previously highlighted, data aggregation is a common practice in academia, as it is perceived to yield accessible information about an institution's student population. Yet, aggregation as a practice encourages ignorance among higher education stakeholders as it "masks variations between ethnic groups that can create misconceptions" (Ibarra, 2004, p. 121) and leads to uninformed decision-making by practitioners as well as oppressive pedagogy. One such instance of aggregation can be found in the treatment of the Latinx community in the college access and attainment research. The 2020 Census indicated there were 62.1 million individuals of Latinx origin residing in the United States—an increase of 23% over 10 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b). Latinx population growth is expected to account for over 25% of the U.S. population by 2050 (Geertz Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Salinas et al., 2020; Santiago & Calderón Galdeano, 2015; Schak & Nichols, 2016), with the Latinx population projected to reach 111.2 million people by the year 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a). Population growth of this size should be of particular interest to higher education professionals as the growth in the general population will naturally mean growth in the number of potential students from the

Latinx community. Returning to the discussion of the dual purpose of education, improving outcomes for this expanding population thus has become both a social and economic imperative. As a result, there is a body of well-established evidence about the "Latinx" or "Hispanic" student population's experiences and outcomes.

Relative to access, what we know about the population is that their college choice process is compressed and nonlinear, leading to smaller than average choice sets; college attendance of Latinx students is up, yet as a group, these students remain underrepresented in higher education; and finally, Latinx students are less likely to choose a 4-year institution and most likely to select a community or technical college (Ahn & Dominguez-Villegas, 2022; Alvarez, 2015; American Association of Community Colleges, 2021; Carales, 2020; Carales & Lopez, 2020; Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Perna, 2000; Santiago & Cuozzo, 2018; USDE, 2021). Relative to attainment, we know Latinx students are more likely to have mixed-enrollment status, alternating between part-time and full-time status due to changes in life circumstances; they have increased associate and baccalaureate attainment levels, but only relative to a low starting point; and they typically take more than 150% of the normal time to complete a degree, leaving them out of federally calculated completion rates, in effect, silencing their individual and collective achievement (de Brey et al., 2019; The Education Trust, 2018; Excelencia in Education, 2018; Lumina Foundation, 2022; Noe-Bustamente, 2020; Shapiro et al., 2017).

The problem with this knowledge is that it is based on the aggregate experience of a largely heterogeneous community of people comprising a rich diversity of racial/ethnic identities and "starting points" (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004, p. 51). Despite variations in national origin,

familial immigration histories, language, generational status, and cultural norms within the group, the Latinx population has been historically studied as pan-ethnic (Bohon et al., 2006; Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Ibarra, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Ayala and Chalupa (2016) pointed out that this practice has served to "homogenize Latinos' experiences, neglecting to recognize the intra-group differences that exist" (p. 379). Researchers have more recently begun to consider the differences in the educational experiences of Latinx subgroups (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Alfaro et al., 2018; Campa, 2010, 2013; Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Cortez & Castro, 2017; Crisp et al., 2015; Núñez & Crisp, 2012; Schak & Nichols, 2016), but largely data remain disaggregated and variations in experiences unexplored. As a result, the academic community has been left with general findings of limited practical utility; a lack of clarity around the systematic, relational, and individual variables that influence the educational experiences of different Latinx subgroups before and after they enter college; and a narrow understanding of what student success looks like for each subgroup. Specifically of concern is the limited knowledge about the nuanced differences in the educational experiences and outcomes for those of Mexican origin, who are among the least likely of their Latinx peer groups to obtain a tertiary credential (Lumina Foundation, 2022).

With the limited information available on the success of students of Mexican origin, the master narrative has become a story of limited value placed on education by those in this group. Such a narrative, according to Espino (2016), has led to a lack of recognition for the richness of the lived experience of students of Mexican origin in research "distinct from that of the generalized Latinx population" and has created a "convenient excuse to deny support" (p. 74) for

their success in the academic arena. Ignoring the circumstances surrounding their personal or familial history of separation and incorporation into the United States and the community cultural wealth they bring with them to educational spaces has led to a gap in understanding around the student success of those of Mexican origin (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Pérez & Ceja, 2015). Solorzano (2001) believed more interdisciplinary research is thus needed to challenge the dominant ideology of homogeneity perceived in the Latinx community, fill these gaps in the knowledge about specific subgroups like those of Mexican origin, and provoke transformative action. Pérez and Ceja (2015) specifically believed the "college access and choice process" of students of Mexican origin needs to "be further scrutinized to increase overall achievement and degree attainment rates for the group" (p. 2), connecting their pre- and postmatriculation experiences to their eventual outcomes.

Specifically in focus in the current study are the experiences of students of Mexican origin who have attended or currently attend a community college. As of the year 2020, 35% of total undergraduate enrollment (5.7 million) in the United States was at a community or technical college; 52% of total Latinx undergraduate enrollment is at a community or technical college (The Education Trust, 2018; USDE, 2020). Community college enrollment is dropping at an average of 2% per year, but Latinx students remain disproportionately represented in the sector (Juszkiewicz, 2020). Continued Latinx community college enrollment showcases the power of open access policies in supporting college-going for minority student populations. Yet, as Salinas and Nahra Friedel (2016) pointed out, there are competing agendas within the sector related to

attempting to meet the needs of an ever-changing population while also trying to improve completion rates.

The IPEDS cumulative graduation rate for first-time, full-time community college students who complete a degree in 3 years has increased by over 5% in the last decade but still lags behind all other sectors at 26.6%; that rate is 21% for Latinx students and explicitly unknown for students of Mexican origin (Juszkiewicz, 2020). The only easily identifiable measure of attainment was provided by Noe-Bustamante et al. (2019), who reported 12% of Mexicans age 25 years or older have a bachelor's degree or higher—this tells only part of the attainment story for the population. Measuring student success by the ability to finish a degree within a specified timeline has its limitations (discussed in the next chapter), not the least of which is that Latinx "students might have other reasons for choosing to attend a 2-year institution that are more critical to their success" (Carales & Lopez, 2020, p. 104). Still, the graduation rate represents challenges for Latinx students in a community college setting. I conducted my study to get at the "other reasons" to which Carales and Lopez (2020) referred well as to uncover the contributing factors that affect this population's success in college.

Personal Connection

Beyond the imperatives previously cited, this work's purpose and potential impact are personal. Low college access and attainment among students of Mexican origin represent lost opportunity—past, present, and future—for those I have the honor of calling my family. My partner of nearly 20 years is a man of Mexican origin who was the first in his family to attend and graduate from college. Despite our having achieved similar heights, his college-going

experiences and even his version of success were starkly different from mine, which have historically been associated with degree completion. I come from a White, native-born, middle-class family that always had their eyes set on my college attendance. I pursued a baccalaureate degree directly out of high school at a private liberal arts college on a scholarship. Because of the number of dual credits I received while in a honors track, I was able to complete my undergraduate education in 2.5 years and obtain gainful employment within 6 months of graduation.

In contrast, my partner is from an immigrant family of modest means that saw work as the natural step after high school. Despite this, he personally understood the value of a postsecondary education for long-term economic stability. Thus, he began his studies part time at a local community college while also working full time at his family's business. Ten years after high school, after two transfers, multiple stop-outs, and a change of major, he graduated with his bachelor's degree in secondary education only to struggle to find a traditional teaching position, ultimately ending up taking on a career in alternative education in the juvenile criminal justice system.

As a novice researcher and mid-level administrator at the start of my doctoral studies, I took our differences in experiences and outcomes to indicate a difference in the value our cultures placed on education. Four years later, I have come to recognize my own thinking around the difference as deficit-minded, inadvertently giving way to culturally deterministic negative stereotypes as a means of explanation rather than an attempt to understand the nuances of lived experience as a means to liberation (Espino, 2016). I have also come to realize that the

academy's traditional conceptualization of student success (once my own) has long ignored how success is understood and experienced by the individual. This lack of recognition, compounded by systematic oppression, has kept so many in my family and others from pursuing their goals. Therefore, to ensure no goal is stopped before it is formed and to uphold the inherent dignity of humans, it was my hope that the interpretations made about student success *by* students of Mexican origin in this study would serve to honor their "world as it is lived, not the world as it is measured" (Vagle, 2018, p. 22). Furthermore, it was my hope that those interpretations would give way to improved policy and practice in higher education by identifying more holistic measures of student success to which we can hold ourselves accountable.

Organizational Overview

This dissertation study strays from the traditional five-chapter format to offer a richer description of the experiences and understandings of the participants. In Chapter 2, I capture a survey of relevant literature, situating the present study within past inquiry and discovery. The chapter includes a presentation of the chosen theoretical framework for this study, highlighting how Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit relate to the purpose of the study. In Chapter 3, I detail the method/ology as well as the data collection and analysis procedures I used that followed the phenomenological tradition. Chapters 4 and 5 are where I present my findings, separating them into findings derived from the individual interviews and a focus group, respectively. In Chapter 6, I put the findings in conversation with the literature to identify points of convergence and divergence with previous thoughts. Finally, I conclude the dissertation with considerations for implications and future research in Chapter 7.

Core Concept Defined

Before proceeding, it is worth mentioning here the intentionality behind my choice to use the term "Mexican origin," first used by Stanton-Salazar and Dornbush (1995). In comparison to the traditionally used terms of "Latinx/a/o," "Hispanic," or "Mexican," the term is more inclusive of the variations of identity for those of Mexican descent (Salinas et al., 2020). As Anzaldua (1999) pointed out, most Mexicans identify with their race or ethnicity, not their nationality or citizenship; "Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship" (p. 84). Therefore, the use of the term in this study is intentional and is meant to speak to all the self-defined ways the current population of descendants of Mexico remain connected to their ancestral or literal homeland. Therefore, I use the term exclusively herein, except where the participants chose to diverge in their self-identification.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Retention, persistence, graduation, completion, attrition, drop-out, stop-out, transfer—these are all meant to be "terms used to describe students' successful and unsuccessful pathways to a college degree" (Mendoza et al., 2014, p. 462). Yet, when considered together and within the historical context of their use, it is easy to see that they are terms that instead gauge an institution's ability to propel a neoliberal agenda of success (Baldwin et al., 2011; Fingerson & Troutman, 2020; Mullin, 2012; Wendel-Wolf et al., 2009). To add insult to injury, this politically induced obsession with institutional accountability for student success has failed to have any noteworthy impact. Access has increased for some, but not for all; disparities in college enrollment remain between White middle class students and students of color and those from low-income families (Burns et al., 2011; The Education Trust, n.d.). Gains made by certain groups are likewise not being sustained, with enrollment dropping for Whites, Blacks, Asians, females, and males between 2010–2018 (Burns et al., 2011). Couple this with the fact that the United States will soon see a vast decrease in the number of students of traditional college age and an increase in the inability or lack of willingness of adult students to pursue higher education during uncertain times (as during a pandemic), and there are growing concerns about enrollment and financial solvency for institutions across the nation (Bransberger et al., 2020; National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022; St. Amour, 2020; State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2021). Meanwhile, completion rates have remained stagnant, increasing by

16

only 1% in the United States between 2011–2016 across all categories of students (USDE,

2018b). Progress has been made toward national completion goals set by the Obama

Administration in 2009 (e.g., repositioning the United States to have the highest proportion of

college graduates in the world by 2020), but the percentage of the population with a tertiary

degree in the United States still lags behind 10 other Organisation for Economic Co-operations

and Development (OECD) countries (Fry, 2017; Mullin, 2012; OECD, 2021); by last count of

the U.S. Census (2021a), only 37.9% of the population age 25 or older have completed a

bachelor's degree or higher. Pressure to improve persistence and completion rates has created a

"fixation on solutions" (Lipka, 2019, p. 4) on campuses without a genuine effort to fully

understand the problems. Initiative fatigue has subsequently become a phenomenon, with

institutional leaders committing more and more resources to programs and services that have

worked for others with no empirical evidence that a specific initiative will work for their unique

student population. Furthermore, equating "success *as* completion has privileged certain types of

learners and behavioral norms" (HLC, 2018, p. 3) and has advanced "meritocratic ideals and

individualistic accountability" for that success "at the expense of ignoring structural educational

inequities" (McCall et al., 2015, p. 20).

The continued challenges with traditional institution-centric success metrics led Wendel-

Wolf et al. (2009) to call for an intentional and concerted dissection of theories and terms related

to student success in relation to their relevance to the students of today. In dissecting and

reformulating notions of success, they and others, like Ireland (2015), urged researchers to ask

themselves "access to and completion of what, and by whom" (p. 154). Wendel-Wolf et al.

(2009) also encouraged practitioners to understand that progress and success are products of the interaction of the student and the institution, among other external influences, and to acknowledge that there is no singular formula for student success. Additionally, if we are to combat the oppressive nature of dominant ideologies, there must be attention given to the contextual factors that influence students' definitions of success (Boerner, 2015). If those in academia are truly interested in getting students where they (the students) want to go, to their self-defined end, they will need to commit to understanding more about what that end is, and more importantly, why that end is.

I thus designed my study to explore the essence of "student success" for community college students of Mexican origin—how they personally make meaning of a phenomenon that remains largely elusive to those in academia. To situate this study within the ongoing dialogue around what constitutes student success, this section begins with an outline of the evolution of success metrics in higher education. Then, to begin narrowing the focus of "student" by population, an overview of the state of access and attainment for the broader Latinx population is provided, with specific attention given to the influence of pre- and postmatriculation experiences on what success means in context. It concludes with an inventory of what is known about access and attainment for the even narrower population of interest—students of Mexican origin— identifying the issues with the pan-ethnic treatment of the population in the outcomes literature. The argument for the disaggregation of experience and outcomes serves as a backdrop for the chosen conceptual framework, which is discussed and considered in light of the purpose of this study. Finally, with a framework as my guide, connections between transdisciplinary studies on

what is known at present about the influence of context of origin on the educational experiences of the population in question are reviewed.

<center>**Traditional Measures of Success**</center>

Policymakers and the public have traditionally been concerned with the ability of institutions to get students to and through college and out into the workforce; an institution is effective—is successful—if it helps students be successful in the ways the institutions have defined. This mentality is reflected in the numerous accountability measures that have driven educational policy and practice for the better part of the last century. Following World War II, public interest centered on mass education—an institution's commitment to getting more students into college. By the 1970s, with a dwindling pool of potential students, interest shifted toward retention—an institution's ability to keep the students it had already recruited. In the 1990s and early 2000s, interest again was altered by social circumstance, this time due to the growing diversity in the United States. Access became the newest accountability measure for institutions—a measure of an institution's ability to ensure students are given equal opportunity to fully participate in their education. Most recently, the interest shifted once more, this time toward persistence and completion, together representing an institution's ability to support students in making progress toward a degree.

Though these measures have served their purpose (i.e., measuring institutional productivity), they have been critiqued for their narrowness of scope and inability to influence the future of higher education. Therefore, in 2006, the Spellings Commission was convened by the Bush Administration and tasked with developing new strategies for reforming postsecondary

education and identifying performance benchmarks to gauge how well institutions are preparing their students for success (Clotfelter et al., 2013). The Commission, however, remained focused on institutional productivity and efficiency in its recommendations, considering graduation rates as the steady gold standard for measuring success. Many critiqued the Commission's status quo mentality, believing an overreliance on a single success measure "doesn't take into account the many different goals of students" (Boerner, 2015, p. 20), particularly those in community college settings. Limitations on the proposed benchmarks were subsequently echoed by the Committee on Measures of Student Success convened in 2011 by then-Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. The Committee specifically found the federal graduation rate equation established by the Student Right to Know Act to be misleading and exclusionary (USDE, 2011). The Committee more firmly recommended new data points than did the Spellings Commission, calling for the expansion of IPEDS cohorts to include part-time, not college-ready, and federal financial aid recipients.

Non-profit organizations have taken the lead on meeting the Committee's call, seeking to identify and gain support for the use of alternative measures of success that "reflect the expressed needs, hopes, or aspirations of students attending institutions of higher education" (E. Chang et al., 2019, p. 482). In response to the documented failure of IPEDS data to capture the success of community college students, the American Association of Community Colleges (n.d.) developed the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (VFA). Implemented in 2013, the VFA tracks progress and outcomes using new "measures defined to encompass the full breadth of the community college mission and the diversity of students' goals and educational experience"

(American Association of Community Colleges, n.d., para. 1). Community colleges now report on progress *and* completion metrics in the VFA system, such as developmental education courses attempted/completed, gateway course completion, Fall to Spring retention, credit thresholds, and transfer rates (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). Community colleges also report on workforce and economic measures in the VFA, such as career and technical education enrollment figures, employment, wage growth, and licensure pass rates (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.).

Achieving the Dream (2018), another community college focused non-profit organization, proposed the use of similar measures of student success, adding to the list the tracking of alternative credentials earned by students and holistic measures like satisfaction and well-being. The HLC, an institutional accreditor in the United States, has added personal goal attainment and student learning to the list of traditional measures of student success in the framework for their Student Success Academy (Hatfield & Denton, 2018). Other initiatives supported by non-profits and state agencies include the Student Achievement Measure (SAM), the Postsecondary Data Partnership (PDP), the Cross State Data Work Group, and VSA Analytics—each contributing to the expanded measurement and intra-institutional tracking of student success.

Researchers have also played a role in the evolution of the conceptualization and measurement of student success, coming up with broader definitions of experiences and outcomes that are worthy of further inquiry and application. Baldwin et al. (2011) proposed three categories of outcomes—graduation, transfer, and continued enrollment—believing student

placement in any of the categories would be considered achievement. Mullin (2012) suggested expanding the definition of transfer to include lateral and reverse transfers as acceptable measures of progress toward self-defined goals. As 65% of stop-outs resume coursework after 5 or more years of being away from higher education, Mullin (2012) also proposed using longer transfer periods for reporting on student outcomes. Fingerson and Troutman (2020) even went as far as to develop a new framework for measuring student success that included consideration of audience (external vs. internal), level of analysis (individual/program/institution), data types (counts vs. derived data), and categories (e.g., performance, efficiency, equity).

Today, most researchers, faculty, and staff dispute normative notions of student success, citing them as being inappropriate for all populations of students (E. Chang et al., 2019). They argue that despite expressed interest in changing those notions, the principal interest of academia remains the measurement of institutional efficiency in getting students to the baccalaureate finish line and not in accounting for the various ways in which today's diverse student body experiences success (Boerner, 2015; E. Chang et al., 2019; Mullin, 2012). As such, what is known about the success of the population and subpopulation of interest in this study is limited to the traditional broad strokes measures of access and attainment.

Access and Attainment of the Latinx Population

The Latinx population in the United States is exponentially growing and improved college access and attainment for the group has become a national priority. Though access to higher education has greatly improved for Latinx students in the United States, increasing over 134% between 2000 and 2016, the 3.3 million Latinx undergraduate college students today

represent only one-fifth of the overall population of 18- to 24-year-olds enrolled in postsecondary institution (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; USDE, 2018a, 2021). The unequal representation of Latinx students *in* college reflects the difficulty they experience in navigating their way *to* college. Researchers have found many Latinx students come from lower socioeconomic status areas, attend poorly-resourced elementary and high schools, and have parents with lower levels of attainment (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Perna et al., 2008; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Such circumstance affords Latinx students less social and cultural capital, often depressing their interest in and ability to—perceived or actual—prepare for college (Acevedo-Gil, 2017). These same factors are considered culprits for the stagnant attainment rates for Latinx college students. Though completion may be an insufficient, hegemonic measure of success representative of dominant ideologies, degree attainment does play a role in an individual's general quality of life (Stamps & Bohon, 2006). Given this correlation, it is concerning that Latinx—the largest and fastest-growing group in the United States and the population with the highest increase in enrollment prior to the pandemic—are among the least well-positioned for overall degree attainment and upward mobility (Bohon et al., 2006; Carales, 2020; Douglas-Gabriel et al., 2021; Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Passel et al., 2022; Quintana, 2021; Stamps & Bohon, 2006).

Many researchers have studied the factors that influence Latinx access and attainment, but they have done so using different frameworks and addressed the outcomes independently. Nevertheless, access and attainment are loosely coupled—they are indirectly, yet intrinsically connected (Weick, 1976). It therefore becomes incumbent upon higher education practitioners and researchers to understand and respond to the factors at play on both sides of the

matriculation boundary (Oliva, 2004). The bodies of literature on Latinx access and attainment are thus reviewed together to further the understanding of the structural, cultural, and personal conditions experienced by Latinx students prior to and during college. Cursory consideration of differences in experience between Latinx subgroups available through a limited body of research is also covered.

Current State of Latinx Access and Attainment

The college choice process and access patterns of the Latinx population have largely remained the same over the years—lower collegiate aspirations and expectations give way to delayed and limited applications, leaving students with few options and ill-positioned to make informed decisions (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Hurtado et al., 2007; Nuñez & Kim, 2012; Perna, 2000). Despite this grim reality, the Pew Research Center found nearly 90% of Latinx youth see college as important for their future even if they do not see college attendance as a real possibility (as cited in L. M. Gonzalez, 2015). This disconnect between what is desired and what is possible translates to 47% of Latinx students reporting having not submitted a single college application by the end of the 12th grade—this in comparison to 45% of Black students, 33% of White students, and 24% of Asian students (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Such is an indicator that when a Latinx student does choose to pursue higher education, their choice process ends up being compressed, nonlinear, and expedited, particularly for those who are first generation (Alvarez, 2015; Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013). In other words, instead of discretely and sequentially developing their educational aspirations over the duration of their high school career, conducting a comprehensive and paced search, and making an educated choice of where

to attend college—as has been cited as the traditional college choice process—many Latinx students find themselves making a choice without fully developed goals or having conducted a true search (Alvarez, 2015; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Fewer applications result in fewer choices, making the notion of "choice" almost non-existent for these students, as they are restricted by an "inequitable distribution of resources" and limited "opportunity structures" (Irizarry, 2012, p. 293).

Notwithstanding such limitations, larger proportions of Latinx students are attending college (20.3% of those who are documented), with college attendance rates doubling for this group in the last 2 decades (de Brey et al., 2019; USDE, 2021). Increased overall enrollment represents a laudable improvement in college access for the Latinx community, yet in spite of this growth, Latinx students remain underrepresented in postsecondary education—reflecting only 21.8% of undergraduates and 12.3% of graduates—indicating ongoing issues of access, equity, and inclusion (Cerna et al., 2009; de Brey et al., 2019; Perna, 2000; USDE, 2021). When Latinx students do pursue postsecondary education, they tend to undermatch—choosing to attend institutions that are not suited for their interests and goals. Latinx students are least likely among all racial/ethnic groups to choose a 4-year institution and most likely to select a community or technical college (Santiago & Cuozzo, 2018). O'Connor (2009) suggested that given the documented challenges of community colleges in supporting student success and the diminishing value of the associate's degree in today's economy, this "choice" and overrepresentation in the sector can be shown to be related to the group's overall low attainment and economic mobility.

The Latinx population has experienced 52% growth in baccalaureate degree attainment in the last decade, yet the percentage growth is relative to an already low starting point (de Brey et al., 2019; Excelencia in Education, 2018). An equity gap in educational attainment still exists among Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Latinx. Only one-fifth of the Latinx population have earned *some* type of degree compared to nearly half of all Whites (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; The Education Trust, 2018; Excelencia in Education, 2018; Schak & Nichols, 2016). Over 30% of the credentials earned in the group are from community colleges and one-quarter from for-profit institutions, and only 12% of Latinx completers obtain a degree from a private liberal arts college (Libassi, 2018). Major choices concentrate around disciplines that typically require an advanced degree for gainful employment (e.g., psychology, social science, public administration, literature), making return on investment—at least initially—lower for these students (Libassi, 2018). The exception is law enforcement related majors, which are pursued and completed at a rate of almost double that of their White counterparts and permit immediate entry into the workforce (Libassi, 2018).

Over 50% of White first-time, full-time students graduate within the federal government's measure of 150% of time to completion (i.e., 3 years for an associate's degree and 6 years for a bachelor's degree), averaging 11 percentage points higher than Latinx students since 2005 (Excelencia in Education, 2018; USDE, 2019). Elongated timelines reflect Latinx students' tendency to have mixed enrollment status, altering between full-time and part-time status based on life circumstance (Shapiro et al., 2017). High remediation and stop-out rates lengthen timelines even more, making any eventual degree completion ineligible to be counted in

the federally calculated graduation rate set by the Student Right to Know Act (Clotfelter et al.,

2013). When part-time, transfer, and stop-out students are factored in, Latinx completion rates

are somewhat higher (47% overall), but still lag far behind the 63% of White and Asian

completers (Excelencia in Education, 2018). Latinx students' community college completion

rates hover around 15%—this is compared to a completion rate of 52% for Latinx students who

start and eventually finish at a 4-year institution (O'Connor, 2009). Attainment gaps between

Latinx and other racial/ethnic groups are most prominent at higher levels of education and

among young adults ages 25–34 years (Cerna et al., 2009; Santiago & Calderón Galdeano,

2015). These disparities are known to be affected by socioeconomic variables, but what remains

"underexamined are the experiences, pathways, and variations" that Latinx youth face and their

effect on "their journeys through high school and into (or away from) institutions of higher

education" (Irizarry, 2012, p. 292).

Variables Associated With Latinx Access and Attainment

Researchers have previously sought to synthesize the literature on documented barriers to

success for Latinx students (L. M. Gonzalez, 2015; Perna & Titus, 2005). L. M. Gonzalez's

(2015) framework of systemic, relational, and individual variables is used here to highlight the

intersection of barriers that influence Latinx students' access and attainment.

Systemic Variables

Governmental agencies, colleges, and high schools converge to form the environment in

which a student develops and pursues their collegiate aspirations. Society's expectations of low-

income, systematically minoritized, and Spanish-speaking communities have yielded both state

and federal policies that have served to systematically keep these communities from equal opportunity. This is, in part, evidenced by the rise of performance-based funding models in higher education. Originally meant to be a stimulus for improved access and attainment by offering those institutions with higher rates more state appropriations, these funding models have pit these accountability measures against one another (Fain, 2017; Hillman, 2016; Hillman & Corral, 2018; State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2021). Because of their low graduation rates, open-access institutions are now receiving *less* state appropriations to support the educational endeavors of the very students they are being asked to *better* serve. This shift in funding is especially relevant for the Latinx community and other low-income, first-generation students who generally tend to enroll at such institutions.

As Latinx students are most affected by institutions' rising dependency on tuition and increase in costs of operations, Muñoz and Rincón (2015) found these students often feel they have no option but to choose the institution with the lowest sticker price. Lowest published cost may not always mean the lowest price paid, however. In a more figurative sense, Latinx students "pay" more for college in that they have to contend with a variety of issues that plague the community college and for-profit sectors, such as insufficient scheduling, master plan capacity limits, lack of transparency in degree requirements, decentralized advising, and broken links in articulation (Crisp et al., 2015). These challenges have translated to the failure of community colleges to adequately facilitate transfer or the completion of some type of credential, compounding the cost to the student in the form of interest on loans, extended time to completion, and unrealized earning potential. This has left the Latinx community the least well-

positioned of any racial group to financially benefit from postsecondary studies (Cohen, 2015;

Mora & Davila, 2018; Perna, 2000; USDE, 2019; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005).

The structural issues in higher education that limit attainment are preceded by those

issues in the K–12 education system that likewise limit access. From the employment of

underqualified, overworked, and culturally dissimilar institutional agents to the funneling of

minorities into segregated, overcrowded, and underfunded schools, primary and secondary

education in the United States fails to support the aspirational development and success of Latinx

students (Conchas, 2001; O'Connor, 2009; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Institutional policies and

practices amplify these issues, further limiting the opportunities for Latinx students to participate

in college-going activities. Tracking and standardized assessments are two such practices.

"Statistically unreliable, inappropriate measures of student knowledge" (Yosso & Solorzano,

2005, p. 3) are continuously used to determine the ability levels of students, rewarding traditional

ways of knowing with a more rigorous curriculum, richer co-curricular experiences, and stronger

support mechanisms. The National Council of La Raza (Sallo, 2011) showed Latinx students'

poor performance on tests was in large part due to the tests' failure to honor the capital and

intelligences of underrepresented populations. Ultimately, standardized tests propagate deficit

mindsets and perceptions of ability, resulting in minorities like Latinx community members

being funneled into lower rigor tracks or out of mainstream education altogether.

Reliance on culturally insensitive assessments and the use of the results to justify the

curricular segregation of students is a practice that is continued within institutions of higher

education. Such practices, combined with institutional histories, demographics, attitudes, and

support mechanisms, all contribute to an institution's racial climate (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Santiago & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). Latinx students' comfort level with their institution's climate has been proven to have a positive effect on degree completion, particularly at 4-year institutions; the more they see themselves in the institution—whether through programming or representation—the more they feel supported (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). However, Crisp et al. (2015) reported Latinx students often have negative feelings toward their campus community, reporting having to negotiate hostile environments despite having "earned" their place to be there. Leaders of institutions of higher education have been encouraged to ensure they have adequate and appropriate resources in place to support the identities of all their students, particularly those with minoritized identities like Latinx students. Yet, higher education as an industry is steeped in the role of advancing hegemonic practices and neoliberal agendas, inadvertently discounting the abilities and community cultural wealth students of color develop from their relationships.

Relational Variables

The demographics of the United States are shifting, creating new minority majorities that bring with them a collectivist orientation that counters the tradition of individualism in this country (Guerra & Nelson, 2013). The shift from "I before we" toward "we before me" is slow, leaving those with roots in collectivist societies (like Latinx) to "navigate multiple cultural expectations, social norms, and languages" (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013, p. 340), affecting both their educational intentions and outcomes. In the Latinx community, the challenge of navigating two worlds evokes their value of *familismo* and the nurturing of strong, horizontal ties with the

family and friends who have come before them (Muñoz & Rincón, 2015; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006). Traditionally, the higher the familial socioeconomic status and education level, the more capital available to guide a student's collegiate decisions (Muñoz & Rincón, 2015). As numerous studies have shown, Latinx students, often coming from modest means and households with low overall educational attainment, can receive uneven and unfounded information concerning college, leading to low goal setting, uninformed decisions, stunted enrollment, and depressed persistence (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Irizarry, 2012; Person & Rosenbaum, 2006; Quintana, 2021). Even when Latinx parents are more well off, their financial capital is no replacement for the various types or amounts of capital afforded to their White peers (Langenkamp, 2019; Núñez & Crisp, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Perna, 2000). Depending on their family's previous exposure to the postsecondary system, the accepted forms of social and cultural capital available to a Latinx student to help them navigate their way to and through college in the United States can be limited.

Irrespective of familial educational attainment and college-going know-how, over 80% of Latinx parents aspire for their children to pursue a college degree; nearly 70% expect their child to go to college (Achinstein et al., 2015; Langenkamp, 2019; O'Connor, 2009). In fact, Latinx parents show as much desire for higher levels of educational attainment for their children as do their White counterparts (Guerra & Nelson, 2013). Latina heads of households specifically have both high educational aspirations and expectations for their children (Alvarez, 2015; Perna, 2000). The reason for this is that dreams and beliefs about the future are based on the occupational, educational, and social experiences of each cultural group and the generational

statuses[1] represented within it—not personal educational attainment (Ibarra, 2004; Irizarry, 2012; O'Connor, 2009). For the multitude of immigrants who are now parents to first- and second-generation Latinx students, and likewise for the children themselves, the trials and tribulations of the past and present serve as the lens through which they view perceived opportunity in the United States (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Langenkamp, 2019). This "relative opportunity," as described by Langenkamp (2019), reflects a sense of pragmatic optimism in the U.S. educational system in helping their children succeed.

The critical role of family in the educational outcomes of Latinx students should not overshadow the role that weak, vertical ties can play in their lives. Cerna et al. (2009) found Latinx students report being influenced by non-related actors such as counselors, teachers, and peers. According to these researchers, knowing a peer who has attended a college or university or, at minimum, has some familiarity with it, is a predictor of college choice for Latinx students, especially in the absence of guidance from a parent or an institutional agent. Once enrolled, seeing themselves in the faculty and finding a substantial community of peers have been documented to afford these students a stronger sense of belonging and commitment to an institution (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Quintana, 2021). These prerequisites for belonging and commitment are hard to come by, however, as less than 5% of the professorate identify as Latinx (American Council on Education, as cited in Quintana, 2021)

---

[1] Generational status in the context of this study means the distance a person has from the act of migration. This is opposed to generation, also seen in this study, which means the era of coming of age.

and confounding individual variables such as gender, ethnicity, and personal circumstance affect

a person's ability to engage in the campus community (Crisp et al., 2015).

Individual-Level Variables

As a reflection of *familismo*, Latinx students generally see taking care of their family as a

duty or responsibility. Gender norms shape what that responsibility may look like for Latinos

and Latinas, resulting in gendered educational pathways over time. The pressure felt by Latinas

to take care of their family has been shown to often be internalized as pressure to succeed in

school (Ovink, 2014). As such, Latinas tend to outperform Latinos, with a higher rate of

enrollment at 4-year institutions and overall higher persistence rates—both factors contributing

to Latinas holding a greater share (61%) of the credentials held by the Latinx community (Geertz

Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Irizarry, 2012; Nuñez & Kim, 2012). Gender discrimination or

changes in plan, however, can be devastating for the educational goals of Latinas, sometimes

resulting in a reduction or elimination of the goal of completing a degree altogether (Ovink,

2014).

The educational goals of Latinos can similarly be stifled or sacrificed, but more so as a

result of the pressure they feel to provide for both their current and presumed future family

(Ovink, 2014; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). The propensity of Latinos to pursue employment after

high school in response to this pressure—coupled with the higher rate of suspension and drop out

that has been shown to create a school-to-prison pipeline—all have placed Latinos at a long-term

economic disadvantage (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Muñoz and Rincón (2015) found those Latinos

who do matriculate into postsecondary education do so at a later age and have been found to be

generally underprepared, causing them to struggle more academically than their White male counterparts. As a result, Latinos leave college without a credential at a higher rate than Latinas, countering the common narrative that the U.S. higher education system is structured to better support the educational success of *all* males (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009).

Another common narrative—that high school GPA and test scores are predictive of academic performance and attainment in college—likewise does not apply to Latinx students, as low performers in high school have been shown to be able to succeed in a college environment. Torres (2006) attributed this phenomenon to Latinx students being made to feel as though they are not "legitimate students" (p. 305) in high school—a sentiment that is reduced by the discovery of additional support services, mentorship opportunities, and social activities in college. Positive, supportive, and validating experiences can boost their confidence, invoking self-regulating behaviors that increase Latinx students' institutional and goal commitment (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Torres, 2006). Their commitment—the time and energy they have available to dedicate to school—can be adversely affected by their personal concerns about money (Crisp et al., 2015; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Santiago & Cuozzo, 2018; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Latinx students are more frequently unable to afford higher education without assistance, yet are the least likely to seek financial aid or counseling (Cerna et al., 2009; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004). Financing thus remains a hurdle for many Latinx students, leading more to pursue education and work simultaneously. This combination of responsibilities, along with those in their home life, can lead to delayed, deferred, part-time, or mixed enrollment— patterns and statuses associated with lower persistence and completion rates. Working part time

on campus can, however, support the educational attainment of Latinx students by helping them to better understand and navigate the college environment (Torres, 2006). Additionally, their propensity to work to pay for college rather than take out loans and to attend lower cost institutions means they are the population with the lowest student loan debt (Krogstad, 2016).

Considering Heterogeneity

As outlined, much is known about the state of access and attainment for the Latinx group as a whole in the United States, but such data have limited utility for practitioners as they fail to reflect the nuances of lived experience for the various subgroups encompassed in the term "Latinx." Disaggregation of outcomes data by race, gender, and class is a relatively new practice in higher education in itself; disaggregation by ethnicity or national origin within a racial group is even less frequent, leaving academia with a skewed and somewhat incomplete picture of the state of access and attainment for the Latinx community. What is known about the experiences and outcomes of Latinx subgroups is that Central and South Americans are more likely to select and enroll at a 4-year institution than are their Latinx peers in the United States, particularly those of Mexican origin (Núñez & Crisp, 2012). South Americans, specifically Chileans and Peruvians, have the highest college-going rates of all Latinx subgroups, hovering just over 50% for both groups; Hondurans, Salvadorians, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans have the lowest college attendance rates (USDE, 2021). Central and South Americans have high (29.2%) overall attainment; specifically, Colombians (32%) and Peruvians (30%) attain more baccalaureate degrees compared to all their U.S.-based Latinx counterparts (Crisp et al., 2015; Schak & Nichols, 2016). Cubans have the highest reported aspirations for their education and the highest

overall attainment, with nearly 40% holding some sort of a degree (Ayala & Chalupa, 2016; Schak & Nichols, 2016). Their high performance is said to be a result of their mode of incorporation; many were welcomed to the United States as refugees of political exile—a circumstance that has afforded them a higher rate of acculturation and acceptance in American society (Ayala & Chalupa, 2016; Conchas, 2001; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Mexican and Puerto Rican youth, with much more sorted histories of incorporation, can have lesser goals and expectations for college attendance than their Latinx peers, translating to their lower overall attainment rates (Ayala & Chalupa, 2016; Bohon et al., 2006; Schak & Nichols, 2016).

Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, the largest Latinx subgroups in the United States, have marked similarities as well as stark differences in their educational experiences. Age, generational status, GPA, and familial education have been found to be similarly important in college choice for both ethnic groups. Younger, high performers who come from more established and better educated families are more likely to attend a 4-year institution (Núñez & Crisp, 2012). Additionally, Núñez and Crisp (2012) found income is not a factor in determining whether Mexican or Puerto Rican students will choose to attend a 2-year or a 4-year institution when all other variables are controlled; income does become a significant factor in college choice for Mexicans when academic capital is not considered. Puerto Ricans are further differentiated from their Mexican counterparts in that they are more likely to report high academic competency and expectations for college attendance from an early age (Cerna et al., 2009). As a result, they apply to more institutions and attend 4-year colleges at a rate double that of those of Mexican origin (Núñez & Crisp, 2012).

On the whole, students of Mexican origin face the most challenges with enrollment and graduation. Cerna et al. (2009) reported Mexican origin students are historically tracked into the lowest levels of the curriculum in high school and are painted as having low motivation, stifled abilities, undereducated parents, and limited social and cultural capital for college going. These students tend to internalize societal expectations, resulting in their group's low overall attainment. Unlike the broader Latinx population, the researchers also found high school GPA is the strongest predictor of eventual college graduation for both male and female students of Mexican origin, indicating an ability to persist in the face of subdued expectations and negative perceptions. Once at college, the Latinx to White ratio was shown to have a positive effect on the graduation rates for males of Mexican origin; for women, it was the proximity to home and the ability to use their community as a resource (Cerna et al., 2009). Conchas and Acevedo (2020) found a sense of belonging to be one of the key contributors to the overall success of all students of Mexican origin on campus—specifically the presence of institutional agents with shared heritage and empathy for the student experience. That finding follows Campa's (2010, 2013) finding that students of Mexican origin, like their other Latinx peers, must contend with obstacles associated with race, ethnicity, and language. Students of Mexican origin lean on resilience capital and other forms of nontraditional resources provided by their family (e.g., *consejos*) in order to succeed in school (Campa, 2013).

As evidenced by the limited information presented here, it remains unclear why some Latinx students achieve higher levels of education than others. Bohon et al. (2006) posited this is because there is no single variable that can explain within-group differences for Latinx

outcomes. Differentiated achievement is, instead, the result of a combination of factors; if, when, and where a student attends college is based on the interactions of various systems, people, and characteristics (Ayala & Chalupa, 2016; Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Gildersleeve et al., 2015). If all Latinx students "are to have access and success commensurate to their middle-class white peers" and if within-group disparities are to be eliminated, educators must "become culturally responsive" (Guerra & Nelson, 2013, p. 449), giving adequate attention to the assorted histories, norms, and identities that are present in the Latinx community.

Theoretical Framework

In recognition of the need to pay attention to the distinction that resides within the Latinx community, I anchored the present study in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit theory. Independently, these theories support the case for examining the "what" of the lived experiences of the various Latinx subgroups. Together, the theories draw attention to the need to consider the "how" and the "why" of the meaning-making process of students of Mexican origin as they consider what "student success" embodies for them.

Critical Race Theory and LatCrit

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is rooted in Critical Legal Studies (CLS)—an effort to challenge the perceived neutrality of the U.S. legal system (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Tate, 1997). A movement started in the 1970s, CLS was and continues to be a collective inquiry into the ways in which the law conceals cultural norms and perpetuates whiteness (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). CLS scholars question the role of law in structuring oppression, critically examining the impact of its uneven application on different

groups of people (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). CRT builds upon CLS to explicitly name "race-related structures of oppression" in society (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 9). Calmore (1992) depictd the key objective of CRT:

> As a form of oppositional scholarship, critical race theory challenges the universality of white experience/judgment as the authoritative standard that binds people of color and normatively measures, directs, controls, and regulates the terms of proper thought, expression, presentation, and behavior. (as cited in Tate, 1997, p. 197)

CRT scholars believe the rules upon which judicial decisions are made in the United States are limiting and unrepresentative, and that statistical science is inadequate to document inequities in the legal system (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Tate, 1997). Extending from that notion, CRT has been recognized by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1997) and other scholars as a similarly useful framework for studying inequities in the educational system in the United States (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Iverson, 2007; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, 2001b; Tate, 1997).

Educational inequities have been studied with a CRT lens for over 20 years now, demonstrating how racism is engrained in the U.S. educational system and challenging the claim that the system is neutral and objective (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Specifically in focus in CRT in the education literature is the CLS theme of "voice." Characterized by Dixson and Rousseau (2005) as "the assertion or acknowledgment of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge," the voices or stories of people of color are drawn upon by CRT scholars to "challenge the numbers only approach to documenting inequity or discrimination" and counteract the dominant groups' stories that serve to legitimize their superiority (p. 11). CRT scholarship in the education field is heavily

influenced by Freire's (2000) work on social justice in education, aiming to develop a critical consciousness around the structures, processes, and discourses that reinforce inequality with the hope that such consciousness will lead to individual and societal transformation (Huber, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a).

CRT generally and in education places the intersection of race, gender, and class at the center of discourse about differences in experiences and outcomes for people of color (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, 2001b). LatCrit, as a subsidiary of CRT, extends the focal point of inquiry to include the unique experiences of the Latinx community (M. T. Gonzalez et al., 2021; Huber, 2010). Considering such matters as familial and personal immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture, LatCrit scholarship seeks to build community and coalition around Latinx identities and experiences that are often overlooked in the Black–White binary of cultural studies (M. T. Gonzalez et al., 2021; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001b; Valdes, 2012). Iglesias (1997) stated LatCrit extends CRT by incorporating "a richer more contextualized analysis of cultural, political, and economic dimensions of White supremacy, particularly as it impacts Latina/os in their individual and collective struggles for self-understanding and social justice" (as cited in Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, p. 480). Both CRT and LatCrit abide by the following five central tenets.

Tenets of Critical Race Theory/LatCrit

Centrality of Race and Racism. Within CRT, race is seen as a social construct, used to perpetuate notions of difference (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huber, 2010; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a). Racism is a tool used by those in power to make clear what constitutes "American" and to systematically subordinate those who do not fit that label

(Creswell & Poth, 2018; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a). CRT scholars argue that beliefs about perceived innate racial superiority have become so engrained in U.S. society that racism and discrimination based on other intersecting identities have been normalized (Huber, 2010; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Researchers using CRT aim to combat racism being treated as a marginal factor in shaping experiences, centering the many faces of race in defining opportunity and outcomes (Villalpando, 2004). LatCrit extends this practice to consider forms of oppression related to other forms of identities unique to the Latinx community (M. T. Gonzalez et al., 2021; Valdes, 2012). In this way, LatCrit theorists "acknowledge the centrality and relevance of 'difference' in the understanding of the multiple identities embodied by all individuals and messily present in every social group" (M. T. Gonzalez et al., 2021, para. 7).

Challenging of Dominant Ideologies. The U.S. education system is supposed to be objective, neutral, and a provider of equal opportunity (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, 2001b; Villalpando, 2004). Solorzano and Yosso (2001b) found these claims to be disingenuous, a "camouflage for self-interest, power, and privilege of dominant groups in the U.S. society" (p. 597). CRT highlights the need to confront the attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets of institutions and institutional agents that are said to support the success of all, when in fact they are designed to specifically benefit only some (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). CRT and LatCrit scholars take up this tenet by comparing discourse with action, questioning the motive and impact behind institutional policies, procedures, and practices.

Importance of Lived Experience. CRT draws on the power and strength embedded in the experiences of people of color in stark contrast to academia's tendency to dismiss or overshadow the lived experiences of underrepresented groups in research and practice (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; McCoy & Rodricks, 2015). LatCrit theorists aim to further this tenet by illuminating the distinct experiences of those who represent the Latinx population. CRT and LatCrit position the knowledge gained from experiences as not only "legitimate" but also "critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about subordination in the field of education" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, p. 473). Counterstorytelling as a method is critical to this tenet, giving voice to those at the margins and opposing deficit-minded narratives (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015).

Commitment to Social Justice. Higher education professionals, particularly those in student services, are undoubtedly well-meaning and supportive of educating the whole student. Though a laudable disposition, CRT emphasizes the need to move beyond this simple holistic approach toward a more intentional use of curriculum, instruction, programs, and services to eliminate discrimination and empower minorities (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, 2001b; Villalpando, 2004). Culturally-relevant pedagogy specifically is promoted by LatCrit scholars as central to combatting the effects of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of prejudice and oppression associated with and experienced by Latinx students (Villalpando, 2004).

Need for Transdisciplinary Studies. Finally, CRT challenges the "ahistoricism of higher education research, policy, and practice" (Villalpando, 2004, p. 47) by placing race and

racism in a historical and contemporary context. Viewing institutional structures through this lens allows for a greater understanding of their effect on students of color. Considering frameworks and findings of sociological, anthropological, and psychological studies—particularly what is known about culture—is thought to better illuminate the ways in which students of color have been marginalized by systems, thwarting their chances of success.

Application to Present Study

Both CRT and LatCrit highlight "both macro and micro sociopolitical and institutional structure impacting postsecondary access and success" (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015, p. 217). Both, however, have limitations in their utility for the present study's aim to explore the influence of macro- and meso-level variables on micro-level outcomes by focusing on micro-level experiences and the meaning derived from them. The CRT/LatCrit tenets of valuing the importance of lived experience, challenging dominant ideologies, remaining committeed to social justice, and using a transdisciplinary lens are central to the goals of this study; the student's voice is critical to helping the academy see success in a different light and to combatting "ahistorical and acontextual" decision making by policymakers (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015, p. 213). As Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) posited, one cannot analyze, critique, or begin to change the educational system without the voice of students of color. However, the leading tenet of CRT—centrality of race and racism—is somewhat restrictive for the purpose of this study.

Race is an illogical social construct—one that serves only the interests of the dominant class to categorize and characterize groups (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). To add to the

problematic construct, M. T. Gonzalez et al. (2021) pointed out that specifically, "the Latina/o identity is a complex identity" (para. 15) often loosely connected with the construct of race as it is defined in the United States today. Therefore, exploring the oppression that happens when race intersects with gender and class may not adequately capture the lived experiences of students of Mexican origin enrolled in an American community college. These students have a unique ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious background distinct from their Latinx peers, one that may extend beyond U.S. normative definitions of race. LatCrit theorists have recognized that background variables such as these can shape the aspirations, expectations, and intentions a student has for their education (sometimes even more so than the race factor) and the need to study how the intersection of these additional variables influence experience. Yet, both CRT and LatCrit scholars have largely continued to center race over other identities and have stopped short of considering another background variable that was shown by Ayala and Chalupa (2016) to be influential in shaping experience and outcomes—national origin.

At the point of origin, LatCrit, building on critical legal studies, was focused on understanding oppression related to "nation, culture, language, and similar categories of sociolegal action as they related specifically to race, ethnicity, gender, poverty, and Latina/o communities in the United States" (Valdes, 2005). A continued trace of the evolution of LatCrit scholarship, however, revels that national affiliation or allegiance (not to be confused with nationality) is no longer at the forefront of LatCrit theory or scholarship. If we are to "generate transformative change at both micro and macro levels of human life and interaction" (Gonzalez et al., 2021, para. 12)—as is a postulate of LatCrit theory—we must again consider context of

origin, not just race or ethnicity. Specific to this study, the impact of national origin on the pathways and successes of students of Mexican origin needs to be explored.

Context of Origin

Individuals of Mexican origin constitute the largest and fastest-growing Latinx sub-group in the United States, accounting for 62% of the Latinx population (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019). Despite this fact, there is a limited understanding of the nuanced differences in their educational experiences. Assumptions have been made about their value orientations, priorities, and abilities, perpetuating deficit-minded thinking, sustaining oppressive structures, and contributing to inequities in the group's educational outcomes. A critical, transdisciplinary lens is needed to eradicate the assumptions resulting from America's pan-ethnic tendencies and academia's lack of recognition of the "shades of experience" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001a, p. 478) within the Latinx population. To begin down this path, the history of migration and incorporation of Mexicans in the United States are considered. The effects of these processes on the identity of those of Mexican origin today are also discussed.

History of Mexican Migration Past and Present

Migration is a literal and figurative journey over time (Kley, 2011). Changes in an individual's life circumstances and satisfaction with environmental conditions can prompt thoughts about their opportunities elsewhere. For Mexicans, those opportunities began to take shape in 1942 when the United States began the Bracero program and they continue to take shape today.

Pull Factors for Mexican Migration

Stemming from a labor shortage in the agricultural industry after World War II, the Bracero program facilitated the migration of over 4.5 million Mexicans for contract work (Donato, 2017; Fussell, 2004; Fussell & Massey, 2004). During a time wrought with the national security and production issues of the Cold War, Mexicans were seen as "cheap and docile" (Pedraza, 2000, p. 702) labor that met a temporal need of the country. Mexican nationals welcomed the promise of higher wages and the associated freedoms for nearly 2 decades, but activists routinely critiqued the program for its inherent inequities (Donato, 2017; Martin, 2003). A tragic migrant bus accident eventually shined an inescapable light on how the program favored U.S. interests over the humane treatment of the Mexican people, leading to the program's end in 1964 (Martin, 2003). Despite the program's abrupt end, a flow of migration from Mexico's rural Western and Central states had been established with a force that could not be stopped.

Options for legal im/migration from Mexico to the United States after the Bracero program were limited. The 1965 and 1976 amendments to the Immigration and Nationality Act systematically reduced the number of visas available to groups not considered a preferred population by the U.S. government (Donato & Massey, 1993). Still, there existed numerous strong economic motivators for undocumented im/migration from Mexico during this time, most of which still exist today; good-paying, stable jobs were just more plentiful in the United States (Fussell & Massey, 2004; Garsip & Asad, 2016; Huber, 2010). To address the continuous influx, the United States passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in 1986 with the hope of reducing undocumented im/migration through fines and employer sanctions (Cornelius, 1989;

Donato & Massey, 1993; Fussell, 2004; Fussell & Massey, 2004). The IRCA also served to legalize those im/migrants who had been in the country continuously since 1982, with policymakers believing naturalization would acculturate those already situated in the country (Cornelius, 1989; Donato & Massey, 1993). In the end, the IRCA did not serve its purpose; the newfound legal status of 2.7 million Mexicans permitted easier and more frequent movement across the border, leading to a sustained stream of undocumented individuals from Mexico into the United States and a strengthening of their cultural influence on U.S. society (Donato & Massey, 1993). Today, Mexican im/migrants come to the United States for more than just jobs. Quality healthcare and education are additional pull factors not previously in focus, along with the desire to reunite with family and friends who had previously made the journey to the United States (Grava, 2017).

Push Factors for Mexican Migration

Mexico's transition from a self-sufficient import substitution industrialization model to a model dependent on open trade in the 1970s left the government and the people of Mexico with immense economic insecurities for an extended period of crisis that continued through the 1980s (Fussell, 2004). Mexico also experienced dramatic climate changes in the 1980s (that continue today), adversely affecting the agricultural industry on which Mexico was so heavily dependent (Nawrotzki & DeWaard, 2016). Developing, rural, and, to some extent, urban areas were ill-positioned to enact what Nawrotzki and DeWaard (2016) called "in situ" strategies—a form of crisis management—to respond to the economic challenges and climate shock they were experiencing (p. 73). The combination of low wages, disappearing jobs, rising costs of living,

and flaring temperatures left many Mexicans hopeless about their future in their homeland

(Fussell & Massey, 2004; Kandel & Kao, 2000). Ultimately, circumstances forced Mexican

citizens to adopt "ex situ" strategies—crisis withdrawal—im/migrating to the United States

where the climate was (is) perceived to be more favorable and the need for labor more stable

(Jonas, 1996; Nawrotzki & DeWaard, 2016; Pedraza, 2000).

Today, most Mexican im/migrants in the United States come from the rural, more

impoverished interior of Mexico (Fussell, 2004). There they are faced with quality water

shortages, climate change, crime, and job shortages (Grava, 2017). The lack of economic

opportunity in the heartland of Mexico conjoins with the forceful powers of U.S. foreign policies

that make Mexico dependent on the U.S. economy, creating conditions that leave young,

unmarried men (typically ranging in age between 15–40 years old) with a difficult decision about

leaving their homeland (Curran & Rivera-Fuentes, 2003; Donato, 2017; Huber, 2010). Women

and children tend to make the journey to the United States only after a male head of household or

other relatives have established themselves in the new destination (Curran & Rivera-Fuentes,

2003; Donato, 1994; Donato et al., 1992).

Between 2013 and 2018, more Mexican im/migrants arrived in the United States than left

(Gonzalez-Barrera, 2021). This pattern is the opposite pattern of the previous decade, in which

more Mexicans were returning home. The growing number of im/migrants who continue to enter

the United States from Mexico suggests the presence of continued pull and push factors. Donato

(2017) posited that recent migration patterns and figures demonstrate "that Mexico-U.S.

migration is a dynamic social process with a strong internal momentum fueled by social ties that are difficult to stop" (p. 58).

History of Incorporation of Mexicans in the United States

The expediency by which an im/migrant population incorporates into the dominant culture is the rate by which that population is judged; the quicker they adapt, the more likely they are to be accepted, and the more likely they are to succeed in environments like schools. Yet, assimilation is not readily attainable nor equally desirable to all im/migrants. Government reception and the stability of an ethnic community affect a group's ability and willingness to incorporate into U.S. society, as it has for the Mexican community.

Reception of Mexicans and Mexican Culture in U.S. Society

The Mexican population in the United States, past and present, walks the line between voluntary and involuntary minority status. Defined by Ogbu and Simons (1998) as a willing and hopeful group, voluntary minorities see opportunity in the United States as more plentiful than in their country of origin. For the Braceros and the generations that followed, coming to the United States for work was a strategy employed to combat the realities of Mexico's depressed economy. Mexican im/migrants believe(d) that if they put in the hard work and followed the rules, they would be able to reap the benefits afforded to the dominant group. However, with the Mexican population increasing in the United States and approaching 37 million, the group is progressively perceived as a threat to U.S. culture (Israel & Batalova, 2020; Noe-Bustamante et al., 2019).

This perceived threat, in many ways, is a result of cultural differences between those of Mexican origin and those native to the United States. The United States is a country with a low

power distance—a propensity to challenge authority, question disparities, and initiate change

when hierarchies are used for anything other than to create order (Hofstede, n.d., 2001, 2011). In

contrast, Mexico's high power distance is reflective of a hierarchical society in which role

specialization is central to daily operations. The United States is a highly individualistic country,

with Americans promoting independence and personal achievement over group interests

(Hofstede, 2001, 2011). Conversely, relationship building, shared responsibility, and cooperation

are valued over the individual in the Mexican collectivist culture (Guerra & Nelson, 2013;

Shkodriani & Gibbons, 1995). Both cultures are centered on work, yet for different reasons. In

the American culture, hard work opens doors for future opportunity; in a Mexican context, hard

work provides security (Hofstede, n.d., 2001, 2011).

The need for stability and security correlates to the Mexican culture's high uncertainty

avoidance (UAI) and the propensity to implement rules to provide order and control (Hofstede,

n.d., 2001, 2011). The United States is a mid-range UAI society, where innovation and new ideas

are how people cope with the unknown. Americans largely believe they control their destiny by

making it; learning is a journey to a self-defined future end (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). The

United States is a highly future or long-term orientated society (Hofstede, n.d., 2001, 2011);

Americans generally have a linear conception of time, with every action leading to another.

Mexico differs significantly from the United States in this dimension as it is squarely a present or

short-term orientated culture (Hofstede, n.d., 2001, 2011). Believing that time follows a cyclical

pattern, Mexican people tend to have a natural disposition toward tradition and honoring the past

by living in the moment. Mexican *testimonios*, *consejos*, and *dichos* passed between generations are symbolic of the culture's orientation and the respect they have for time.

As a result of these differences and a collective inability to see the value in difference, Stamps and Bohon (2006) found that, in the minds of the dominant class, Mexicans are growing more akin to the involuntary, conquered, or colonized minorities who live in the United States. A population once openly invited to fill "American" jobs is now being systematically oppressed by all major American institutions. This oppression has led subsequent generations down divergent paths from their Latinx peer groups that arrived in the United States under different, more accepted circumstances (e.g., Cubans). "America can be a harsh place . . . shattering the dreams of many and leading others to lower their sights and adjust in any way they can to its realities" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 72). Those of Mexican origin have historically responded to a lukewarm reception and related adversity by banding together as a community.

The Role of the Mexican Community in Incorporation

Demonstrating their collective aspirational capital—defined by Yosso (2005) as the ability to define and pursue goals in the face of adversity—millions of Mexicans have made the journey across the border, turning adversity into opportunity. The choice to im/migrate to the United States may be an individual decision, but acting on that decision and establishing oneself in the new land is a community effort. Family and friends who have made the journey to the United States offer both social and navigational capital—the information, resources, and skills needed to help individuals navigate institutions and structures to make their aspirations a reality (Espino, 2016; Yosso, 2005). Particularly of importance is what Portes and Rumbaut (2001)

called "between family" (p. 64) social capital. Described as "the density of the ties that bind" Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 64), between family social capital is measured by an ethnic community's solidarity—their trust and commitment to one another as well as their ability to provide others access to opportunity (. Between family social capital is more readily available to Mexican im/migrants who choose to im/migrate to an existing gateway community—a place where there is a large population of people of Mexican origin for new im/migrants to lean on (Stamps & Bohon, 2006; Torres, 2003). There are many gateway communities in border states and places with high industrialization or agricultural-based economies (Stamps & Bohon, 2006). These communities have increased in number and strength over the years in response to the government reception described in the previous section, providing newcomers with stability and security in an otherwise unstable and insecure circumstance.

Gateways, however, have proven to have their drawbacks. The insularity of these communities has created conditions that limit exposure to the knowledge and skills needed for mobility in the United States—a goal of new Mexican im/migrants. Less-established locations have been shown to result in higher levels of education, employment, and income for the Latinx population on the whole (Stamps & Bohon, 2006). This result is thought to be associated with the expediency by which people acculturate in these locations. Consonant and selective acculturation occur when multiple generational statuses are acculturating at the same pace, with the former being more progressive and the latter being a slow and constant learning process over time that permits sustained "pride in the culture of origin" (Torres, 2003, p. 167). Dissonant acculturation is more frequent among Mexican im/migrants, as children tend to outpace their

parents in terms of adaptation to U.S. culture (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This type of

acculturation sometimes results in role reversal between parent and child as the child becomes

the cultural and linguistic broker. These children's linguistic capital can afford later generations

more opportunities than their Spanish-speaking parents. However, it may also expose their

family to more overt discrimination against their collective intellect (Yosso, 2005). In those

circumstances, Mexican im/migrant families lean on the familial and resistant capital available in

their communities to take on challenges associated with incorporation and establish their own

identities in the new society (Yosso, 2005).

Impact of Migration and Incorporation on Identity

Identity formation is seen as a socially constructed process over time (Torres & Baxter

Magolda, 2004; Torres et al., 2009). Development begins in young adulthood when "possible

selves" (Gandara et al., 2004, p. 41) are explored in an environment shaped by social and

historical context. Phinney (1993) delineated ethnic identity development from general identity

development as a process by which an individual comes to understand the implications of

ethnicity on their life. This process is challenging for those in the Latinx community, particularly

in the United States, where the hegemonic practice of creating a boundary between race and

ethnicity contorts genuine identification (Telles, 2018). The government's preference for discrete

terms has further marginalized the heterogeneity of the Latinx population, diminishing agency

and confidence in identification. Telles (2018) found those of Mexican origin specifically have

trouble processing the race question, considering it inseparable from their ethnicity. When

pressed, those of Mexican origin, with a sorted history of incorporation in the United States,

most often identify as White (Telles, 2018). This is not because of a personal connection with the

categorization, but because "White is understood as American" (Telles, 2018, p. 160) in a

country where Brown is understood to be illegal. In this way, the identity development process

has become a reactive one for those of Mexican origin, as they are trying to downplay the

"Latino threat narrative" (Núñez, 2014, p. 89) as they aspire for greater opportunity.

Phinney (1993) believed identification with the dominant group represents a lack of

genuine exploration of ethnicity. Exploration of ethnic identity is typically prompted by a life

experience—something that causes curiosity or conflict. Dissonance between how one sees

themselves and how others see them can cause *un choque*—a collision of realities (Anzaldua,

1999; Torres, 2003). Identity, being shaped in part by recognition, can be damaged if it is

misrecognized in this way, mirroring back to the individual "a false, distorted, and reduced mode

of being" (Taylor, 1991 as cited in Molesky-Poz, 1997, p. 1). For those of Mexican origin, this

comes in the form of assumptions—they are undocumented, they do not speak English, they are

poor, they are woefully uneducated, and they are of lower intellect. These stereotypes are often

institutionalized, resulting in discriminatory practices and policies in the U.S. education and

justice systems. To Feliciano and Rumbaut (2018), artificial "boundaries between insiders and

outsiders" (p. 27) upheld by systems can be internalized, leaving some never to develop their

ethnic identity apart from social ascription. System-justifying sentiments are instead developed,

leaving those with minoritized identities to believe that their limited opportunity is because of

their innate inferior intellectual abilities. This mentality ultimately can hurt the academic

performance of those of Mexican origin and depress their educational aspirations (Cerna et al.,

2009; Núñez, 2014). For others, system-reinforcing boundaries can lead to anger and resistance toward the dominant group as it did in the Chicano movement. Still others find motivation in the divide, driving them to discover who they are and how they want to be identified.

Identifiers or labels, when socially defined, can divide and disempower; when avowed and self-defined, they can be a connection between past and present. Masuoka (2008) described three identification labels that represent group consciousness of ethnic identity: national origin, pan-ethnic, and racial. Racial identification is least popular among Latinx members because of the group's racial diversity and the social ranking of skin color in the United States (Telles, 2018). Though pan-ethnicity is largely an American construct, there was a use for it at one time when various subgroups chose to be recognized as Hispanic as a means of coalition building around political and economic interests (Núñez, 2014; Telles, 2018). Latinx/a/o has been adapted in place of Hispanic, trading the overtones of the latent colonization term with a stronger sense of connectedness across the Americas (Núñez, 2014). National origin is the most preferred and consistent form of ethnic identification in the Latinx community (Masuoka, 2008). The choice of a nationally-affiliated label is particularly strong for newer im/migrants, representing a sustainable connectedness to their literal or ancestral homeland (Masuoka, 2008). "Mexican" or some derivative of the label (e.g., hyphenation with American) tends to be used by people from each generational status in this subgroup as an outward expression of pride for their heritage, even if they were not born in Mexico. Their nationally-derived ethnic identity does not necessarily mean a rejection of U.S. culture but rather a sort of transnationalism—a simultaneous "walking forward" while "always looking back" (A. Chang, 2018, p. 39).

Strong identification with national origin is also used by those of Mexican origin as a defense tactic against broader racial or pan-ethnic stereotypes and oppression—thickening their identity and intentionally distinguishing themselves from their Latinx peers (Núñez, 2014). In an educational setting, such distinction has historically been a burden shouldered by the students themselves, with students of Mexican origin having to proactively combat the failure of academia to adequately delineate their experience from others by finding spaces and outlets to represent themselves and their interests. Misrepresentation of identity in the education system reflects the fact that Americans are confused by what constitutes sameness and anxious about the results of difference (Jonas, 1996; Vertovec, 2011). When attention is given to the context of origin—to the life experiences and cultural norms that make someone who they are—the threat narrative fades and a new narrative emerges. Students of Mexican origin have hopes rooted in adversity, beliefs rooted in experience, and strategies rooted in community—just like their fellow Americans. Furthermore, they attain new levels of success each and every day, even if it is not the type of success that is most commonly recognized—the type of success that Americans privilege.

Conclusion

Dominant ideologies of what constitutes success in education have long overshadowed success as it is defined—as it is lived—by the student. Despite the attempt of those in power to control what we measure—what we value—success is a complex and personal phenomenon. The lack of recognition of this fact in the higher education space has resulted in decades worth of stifled progress and inequitable outcomes—failing to serve either the public or private good. For

the Latinx population specifically, gains in access and attainment have been negligible. Researchers have examined the structural, relational, and individual variables that have thwarted this group's progress in general only to find that no single variable affects the outcomes of the various subgroups represented in the Latinx community. What is most telling is the effect of the varied histories of the Latinx people on their experiences and the sense they make of what constitutes success in an academic space. Only through a transdisciplinary lens can we understand how the lived experiences of a group of students like those of Mexican origin—shaped by past and present sociopolitical, institutional, and cultural factors—influence their relation to student success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

I designed this study to contribute to more holistic interpretations of student success that
are reflective of the unique life experiences of the diversity of the students entering higher
education in the United States. Specifically, I wanted to engage in an inquiry into the meaning
that community college students of Mexican origin ascribe to student success and the factors
contributing to their meaning-making. A survey of available literature on traditional definitions
and measures of success was provided in Chapter 2 to position this study within the ongoing
dialogue about student success. A review of literature on contextual variables that influence the
success of this population was also provided. In this chapter, I outline the research design
developed with sensitivity to the tenets of the chosen conceptual framework and variables of
influence. Data collection and analysis procedures are also detailed, with attention given to
ethical considerations.

Research Design

Rooted in the assumption that lived experience influences a student's understanding of
student success, the present study was entirely qualitative in nature. Qualitative researchers
attempt "to make sense of or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to
them" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 7) by relying on multiple forms and data sources. According to
Creswell and Poth (2018), the goal of qualitative research is not to count or define but to gain
further insight into the role context plays in experience. To better understand perceptions of

student success in a sociohistorical context, I approached this study from an interpretive

phenomenological (IPA) standpoint. With this lens, phenomena are seen to come into being—to

exist and be understood—through the interactions we have with the world; there is no essence to

be discovered or single truth to be learned, only interpretations of relations to the phenomenon to

be made (Plunkett et al., 2012; Vagle, 2018). In that regard, IPA was an appropriate

methodology for this study as it aims to "bring into nearness that which tends to be obscure"

(Vagle, 2018, p. 64), in this case surfacing the complexities of lived experience for students of

Mexican origin and the way those experiences have shaped their relationship to student success.

Before further detailing the merits of IPA as the chosen methodology for this study, I provide an

overview of the foundations of phenomenology in general that served as the foundation for the

study.

Philosophical Foundations of Phenomenology

Popular in social science research, phenomenology is a response to the tendency of

scientific inquiry to privilege that which is measurable (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al.,

2009). Phenomenology as a philosophy has roots in both Eastern and Western ideas around

states of consciousness, perception, and thought. Phenomenology as a methodology came to be

through the works of philosophers Husserl and Heidegger, who focused on the meaning of

meanings (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016). Husserl's transcendental, descriptive

phenomenological approach to research was grounded in the belief that we must transcend the

everyday experience—that which we take for granted—and be reflexive about how we

experience it (Laverty, 2003; Smith et al., 2009). Using the phenomenological practice of

bracketing (epoché), Husserl believed a researcher is meant to set aside existential questions and judgments they may have about the natural world so they may question human consciousness of the world (Smith et al., 2009). As consciousness was depicted by Husserl to always be "of" something, experiences can "neither take place 'in' the subject (the human), nor 'in' the object (everything outside the human)" (Vagle, 2018, p. 8). Instead, experience can only exist in relation to the experiencer; consciousness of the relationship as it is lived between experiencer and experience, directed from subject and object, is said to be the starting point for coming closer to knowing the true essence of a phenomenon (Laverty, 2003).

Heidegger, a student of Husserl's, departed from the "of-ness" study of phenomenon and moved toward "in-ness" (Vagle, 2018). Heidegger believed all experiences occur in the lifeworld—the world as it is lived—and cannot be conceived of separate from the social and cultural influences present in our everyday lives (Plunkett et al., 2012; van Manen, 2016). His hermeneutic or interpretative approach to phenomenology challenges the researcher to find their way back to where meaning originates to understand how the phenomenon comes to reveal itself to the individual. This expedition involves continuous interpretation of the parts and whole of past and present experiences in the name of deepening our understanding of the phenomenological meaning of those experiences (Laverty, 2003; van Manen, 2016). Meaning is not directed from subject to object but rather manifested in the intersubjective relationship between the subject and object (Vagle, 2018). In this way, Vagle (2018) found this type of phenomenology to be less about consciousness and knowing (epistemology) and more about ontology—understanding how "we find ourselves in the world" (p. 42).

In a contemporary context, IPA is used to examine the particulars of how people make sense of their experiences (Plunkett et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2009). It is an attempt to explain phenomena while knowing that explanation is not possible; "Experience as we live it from moment to moment is always more complex, more nuanced, more richly layered than we can fathom" (van Manen, 2016, p. 42). In the IPA tradition, there is no assumption that experience is universally describable, nor meaning entirely discoverable. Any such attempt can be disempowering for the subject, ascribing meaning to that which is inherently personal. Rather, IPA assumes that interpretation of meaning is an ambiguous and never-ending act that has the potential to reveal the "rich realities of human existence" (Vagle, 2018, p. 68). Hermeneutics consequently requires a phenomenological attitude that leaves the researcher and participant alike open to questioning and interpreting the everyday taken-for-granted experiences in search of new phenomenological meanings (van Manen, 2016).

Central Concepts of Interpretive Phenomenology

My intention within this study was to find new, more contextualized and personalized meanings for a phenomenon that has otherwise been socially ascribed. The following methodological concepts of IPA guided my research effort to give voice to past and present community college students of Mexican origin about how they experience and understand student success.

Phenomenon. Vagle (2018) defined a phenomenon as a concrete but complex experience. Stemming from the Greek word phainein, which means to "bring into light," a phenomenon is a contextually defined appearance (MacMillian Dictionary, n.d.). Rejecting the

positivist notion of an objective truth built into our minds, phenomena reflect the state of being and becoming and the dependency of meaning on intentional relationships with the world (Vagle, 2018). Despite their inherent complexity, phenomena are typically described in a phrase or single word (Creswell & Poth, 2018). "Student success" was the phenomenon or unit of analysis for the present study.

Intentionality. How we connect—the ways in which we are attached to the world—encapsulates what phenomenologists call intentionality (Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 2016). Distinct from the traditional definition of intention as a plan, strategy, or choice, intentionality in a phenomenological context has to do with the relationship between a thing and how it reveals itself to a subject in comprehensible ways (van Manen, 2016). Vagle (2018) acknowledged that this is a difficult concept for Westerners to grasp as the presence of ego prevalent in Western life will always overshadow the perceived interconnectedness of the world that guides Eastern thought. However, it is easier to comprehend when experience is approached as being an experience "of" or "about" something. Relative to this study, understanding the meaning of student success involves understanding the object that the success is directed at; that is, succeeding entails a perception of succeeding at something. What the perception is—at least my interpretation of it—is covered in Chapter 6.

Manifestation. In Husserlian fashion, Dahlberg (2009) depicted the act of intentionality as seeing phenomena and their essences as they are. An essence of a phenomenon is what makes the phenomenon what it is. Said another way, essences are the characteristics or aspects of a phenomenon that define its structure (Dahlberg, 2009). Essences belong to the lifeworld and are

unaffected by social context, and phenomenological research is merely an exercise in peeling away layers of experience to expose the essential core or structure of the phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2009; Vagle, 2018).

Conversely, in the Heideggerian tradition, there is no central truth of a phenomenon to be discovered. Intentional relationships are meant to be continuously interpreted, yielding contextually laden, ever-evolving meanings of phenomena (Vagle, 2018). For this reason, Heidegger used the term manifestation in place of essence, capturing the notion that phenomena come into being through living (Vagle, 2018). A phenomenon manifests for us only "through rigorous interaction and understanding" (Allen & Jensen, 1990 as cited in Plunkett et al., 2012, p. 160) through a hermeneutical circle of interpretation. As it was my position that there is no universal truth to what constitutes student success, manifestation was used for this study.

Epoché, Reduction, and Bridling. Epoché is a Greek word meaning suspension of belief (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). Operationally in IPA, it signifies an opening of the mind to other than what is assumed or taken for granted so "everything can be perceived freshly" (Moustakas, 1994 as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 77). The related concept of reduction is a way of thinking—an "attentive turning to the world" (Vagle, 2018, p. 218) that puts into force epoché. Hermeneutic epoché-reduction requires that researchers become aware of the assumptions and inclinations they may have about the phenomenon in question and reflect on their influence on their understanding of it in the world. Dahlberg (2009) called this bridling—a constant naming and questioning of judgments that permit openness, reflection, and interpretation. For this study, this act of bridling for me began with an examination of traditional

conceptualizations of student success in higher education literature. It continued during data analysis and writing with a critical reflection on how dominant ideologies of success and my position within the academy may have influenced my own understanding of the meaning of student success for the participants and how I described meaning in text.

On Conducting Phenomenological Research

Because of the exploratory and interpretive nature of IPA, as described in the previous section, it follows that a defined procedure for this study would have been counter to this methodology. Some researchers, however, have suggested general components to phenomenological research that should be present in an IPA study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018). As with all qualitative research, it is recommended that the researcher start with determining the problem at hand. Creswell and Poth (2018) posited researchers may be concerned with the universal in phenomenological research, but should approach it through the particular; the problem should be related to the everyday experiences of a phenomenon in the name of improving policy and practice on a broader scale. The universal problem at the center of this study was the hegemonic definition of student success that has silenced the individual experience and limited academia's ability to improve student success; the particular problem was the limited knowledge we have around the experiences of students of Mexican origin—the fastest-growing and least upwardly mobile underrepresented population—and how they come to understand student success.

From there, the unit of analysis needs be determined—identifying the phenomenon to be studied. Researchers naturally have initial thoughts about the phenomenon, but Vagle (2018)

warned not to get too attached to these ideas as the phenomenon as it needs to be studied should present itself. In the case of my study, the phenomenon to be studied followed from my original desire to further understand student intentions. It was only through the literature review that I conducted as part of my comprehensive exams that I came to realize that the intentions, as strategies employed to reach educational aspirations, are but mere manifestations of the phenomenon that is student success. At any rate, whether the phenomenon to be studied is defined at the onset or revealed as part of the research process, Vagle pointed out the importance of remaining focused on the lived experience of the participants throughout the process, giving ample consideration to the ways in which historical and social factors affect meaning-making. Such consideration permits a showcasing of life at the margins, enhancing the probability of understanding the world beyond traditional conceptualizations (Plunkett et al., 2012).

Plunkett et al. (2012) asserted good phenomenological research also includes some aspects of theorizing. As phenomenology is oppositional to positivism, it can be argued that there was no place for theory in this methodology as it drives researchers toward explanation; theoretical frameworks inherently create a lens of interpretation, limiting openness to life as it is lived (van Manen, 2016). Phenomena are "too complex, too fluid, too ever-changing to be captured in, or worse yet, constrained by a theory" (Vagle, 2018, p. 81). That said, parameters and techniques from theory can help guide elements of inquiry like the literature review. The chosen theoretical framework of CRT/LatCrit was thus considered in the design of the study, but was relied on to a lesser extent in the interpretation of the data collected on the phenomenon.

Method

Data on phenomena can be gathered from several sources. Interviews are a frequently used data collection method in phenomenological research, as they enable the researcher to verbally and directly inquire about what participants have experienced and what contexts have influenced those experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, Plunkett et al. (2012) argued that focus groups are a better method to facilitate expression about phenomena. Group dialogue "among individuals with lived experience of the same phenomenon may contribute to a deepened understanding of the social meaning of that phenomenon" (Plunkett et al., 2012, p. 160). Though both methods have merit and were used as a component of this study, it was hard to ignore the preference of researchers to use methods that rely solely on verbal and written communication when designing this study. Latz (2017) postulated that society's tendency to privilege certain types of data and data collection methods has "enormous ramifications for understanding human behavior and interaction" (p. 32). The words used to describe phenomena become normative, not accurately reflecting the lived experiences of participants (Tsang, 2020). "Student success" has become fixed in this way—it has been conceptualized as retention and graduation or persistence and completion while simultaneously lacking meaning to the students themselves.

In contrast, visual methods are considered more advantageous in capturing the connotated meaning of a phenomenon as they are more personal, subjective, and steeped in cultural context. For this reason, van Manen (1999) claimed photovoice to be a particularly useful method for phenomenological researchers as the data generated "may fill a void in understanding furnished

by limitations of spoken language" (as cited in Plunkett et al., 2012, 158). Thus, I chose photovoice as the method for this study, using photography as a medium for expression relative to a phenomenon that has been historically difficult to describe in a word. In the next section, I describe photovoice as a data collection and analysis strategy ahead of detailing the data collection process I used for this study.

Photovoice: Purpose and Practice

Photovoice was initially developed as a way to give people the opportunity to document and discuss community health concerns (Plunkett et al., 2012; Tsang, 2020). At the time of origination, Wang and Burris (1994) called their newly developed method "photo novella," encapsulating the importance of the story behind the photo, not just the photo itself. Since then, photovoice has evolved into a method suitable for studies in multiple disciplines, including education (as cited in Latz, 2017).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Photovoice

Photovoice is influenced by three distinct theories: feminism, critical consciousness, and participatory documentary photography. Feminism, like CRT, aims to center research on the lived experiences of people at the margins (Latz, 2017). In a predominantly male-dominated society like the United States, feminist theory finds the "dignity, personhood, wholeness, and humanity of participants [to be] paramount" (Latz, 2017, p. 39) and their experiences irreducible to what is measurable. Photovoice takes up this position by giving marginalized populations an alternative form of expression that can more appropriately capture the richness of their lives. As an extension of a focus on dignity, photovoice was also influenced by Freire's (2000) concept of

critical consciousness, which focuses on the role systematic oppression and privilege play in

creating and sustaining inequality. Freire's basic assumption was that inequality is most

forcefully maintained when people are "unable to decode their social conditions" (El-Amin et al.,

2017, para. 6). Education contributes to this by depositing knowledge and "regulating the way

the world enters students" (Freire, 2000, p. 30) instead of cultivating a critical consciousness that

leaves them feeling agentic in knowledge acquisition. As Achinstein et al. (2015) put it, students

are taught how to play the game, not change it; educators teach students what is needed to

succeed in society, not how to define or challenge what success looks like. Photovoice pursued

with an IPA recognizes that consciousness is not within the person, but accessible only through

engagement around social identities and experiences as well as individual and collective critical

analysis (Hahn Tapper, 2013; Latz, 2017). It follows that the method is also informed by

participatory documentary photography, which "empowers vulnerable populations to capture and

express their subjective stories about the world" (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017, p. 3).

Goals of Photovoice

In photovoice, participants are encouraged to use "cameras to take photographs of

persons, contexts, or situations that they consider representative of particular aspects of their

individual and/or social life" (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017, p. 3). In this way, photovoice is a form of

participatory action research (PAR) and therefore is inherently emancipatory in nature.

Therefore, the traditional approach to photovoice is the critical approach in which participants

are encouraged to document their lives on their own terms and bring about change in their

communities (Plunkett et al., 2012). Latz (2017) described critical photovoice research as placing

"participants behind camera lenses and [asking] them to assign meaning to their own images, thereby addressing and dismantling the traditional researcher-centered approach to photography as a research method" (p. 20). The focus is on the participant's lifeworld from their perspective, not the researcher's observation of it. Though seemingly very personal, photovoice approached in this way is meant to empower the individual and the community. The photos are merely a medium for communication; photos are not data in themselves, nor alone are they meant to empower. It is only through the critical dialogue among participants about the realities behind the photos (e.g., what is happening, why it happened, why they care about it) that change can occur. Photovoice, in this tradition, aims to foster relationships and shared learning experiences that can lead to a collective critical consciousness that yields social change (Latz, 2017; Tsang, 2020).

However, there is another form of consciousness supported by photovoice, and that is a reflective consciousness. Kelly and Kortegast (2017) found that "through the process of taking, selecting, and explaining participant-generated photographs, individuals can reflect and make meaning of their own thoughts, memories, and experiences" (p. 20). Emancipation or freedom supported by photovoice in the phenomenological tradition is not necessarily about freedom from oppression like it is with the critical approach. Instead, it is about having the freedom and the space to come to terms with the experiences the participants encounter every day (Kelly & Kortegast, 2017; Latz, 2017; Tsang, 2020). Research questions in a phenomenological study using photovoice are thereby used to guide the study of how individuals make sense of their environment, giving access to both the objective and subjective factors that contribute to a

deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017). Common linguistic-based methods do not always capture these layers of lived experience. According to Tsang (2020), it is only through the art of the photograph that "deeper meanings of the world" (p. 139) can be unearthed.

A Note on Method/ological Congruence. When using photovoice in an IPA, one must consider the tensions between the goals of the methodology and method. Simply stated, researchers using interpretive phenomenology seek to understand, researchers using photovoice seek to empower. Plunkett et al. (2012), in their own attempt to reconcile the tensions between this methodology and method, made the claim that "photovoice pursues the identification of oppressing structures" and "seeks emancipatory change" (p. 161) when phenomenology does not attempt to achieve such ends. Additionally, phenomenology tends to involve a focus on the individual experience, to understand it more truly. Photovoice also values and centers the individual's experience, but does so primarily to contribute to collective betterment. Latz (2017) believed tensions such as these are not insurmountable but rather necessary to strengthen the quality of the research; balance is essential. For this reason, the phenomenological approach to photovoice was the most appropriate choice for this study, harmoniously uniting the goals of understanding and empowerment. The choice of approach also aptly reflects how the method has been used in higher education research to better understand social phenomena. In this case, the phenomenon was student success, shifting the focus away from common understandings to a focus on the experiences of a marginalized student population that otherwise has gone unnoticed in the study of student success.

Data Collection

The study of a phenomenon requires an openness that a prescribed procedure cannot necessarily achieve. How one finds their way back to the origin of meaning can be (should be) a meandering path of inquiry and interpretation—of simultaneous data collection and analysis. I walked that path with the participants of this study with photos, not process, as our guide. Latz's (2017) components of photovoice research served as stops on the path—as designated space for the participants to listen, reflect, share, and come to terms with the experiences they have had that have shaped their view of success. The following is a recounting of those stops.

Identification

As with most other qualitative research methods, the first step in using photovoice is the identification of the issue to be explored, why it should be explored, where to explore it, and who is at the center of the exploration. As outlined in Chapter 1, the issue at hand had to do with the hegemonic practice of defining student success for students instead of with students and how institution-centric, quantifiable measures mask the successes of swaths of students in the U.S. higher education system. Given that a large portion of those students whose success is not captured by traditional metrics are those who attend 2-year institutions, I selected community colleges as the appropriate setting for exploring the meaning-making process around student success. Specifically in focus were students who had or currently attended community colleges in the Chicago metro area, an established destination for Mexican immigrants and their descendants. This subpopulation of the Latinx community is known to be disproportionately

represented in the community college sector and adversely affected by the sector's challenges in supporting improved outcomes (O'Connor, 2009; Santiago & Cuozzo, 2018).

Invitation

Given the intention of centering life at the margins, purposive sampling was the most appropriate choice for this study (Latz, 2017). The defined criteria for participation were (a) past or present community college student at an institution in the Chicagoland area; (b) fit into one of Baldwin et al.'s (2011) classifications of "graduated," "transferred," or "still enrolled" (as that classification was most encompassing of forms of student success); and (c) identified as being of Mexican origin. Being of a certain generation (age group) was not a criterion for the study, but was a question on the participant interest form and a factor considered in choosing participants. The time in which someone comes of age inherently has an impact on their experiences and thus was presumed to have an impact on how the person would define student success. Therefore, a participant group representative of the perspectives across generations was sought out. Potential participants were not asked to indicate their generational status (i.e., distance from the act of migration) on the participant interest form, but their statuses did come out during the course of the study as a latent factor in their understanding and thus are included in the participant demographic table (Table 1).

In terms of the number of participants, Latz (2017) found it more important to spend more time with fewer people in a phenomenological study using an art-based method than less time with more people. Therefore, I chose to reach out to four potential participants known to meet the criteria mentioned above. I initially contacted each participant via email with a brief

introduction to the study and the invitation to listen in on an informational webinar for more detail (Appendix A). The personal nature of photovoice begged for in-person recruitment. However, given the present challenges around health and safety during a pandemic, electronic-mediated communication needed to suffice for this study.

Generally speaking, communication proved to be a challenge throughout the study, starting with the invitation process. One of the initial four participants expressed interest but then decided they would not have time for the study. Others had to be contacted multiple times by text and through social media. In one case, I had to reach out to a shared acquaintance in the hopes that they could get the attention of the potential participant. Unfortunately, some potential participants did not respond, necessitating identification and contact with other people. When I finally had a group of four participants who completed the participant interest form (a tool for qualification), met the criteria, and expressed interest in learning more, I attempted to set up the information webinar for the group (Appendix B). The main goal of the information webinar was to inform the participants about the goals of the study and their role as participants. Another goal of the webinar was to establish a connection among the group from the start of the study so the participants would feel more comfortable sharing personal stories with each other and with me. Developing comfort with me was important because, in the end, after numerous changes to the potential pool of participants, I only personally knew two out of the four participants; the other two were relatives of friends who were referred to me. In this way, the sampling process ended up being a mix of purposive and snowball sampling. An overview of the participants is available in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Name	Generation	Sex	Cultural identifier	Generational status	Father's generational status	Mother's generational status	Highest degree
Geovany	Generation Z (Under 24)	M	Mexican American	Second	Immigrant	First	High school diploma (Pursuing Associate degree)
Liz	Millennial (25–29)	F	Mexican	Second	Immigrant	First	Associate
Martin	Millennial/ Oregon Trail (30–39)	M	Mexican American	First	Immigrant	Immigrant	Bachelor's
Laura	Generation X (40–56)	F	Mexican	Immigrant	Immigrant	Immigrant	Bachelor's

Attention and availability continued to pose a challenge even after participant selection. I ended up hosting two separate webinars to accommodate the participants' schedules. Rapport building from the onset thus was not achieved. Reflecting on this "stop" on our journey, I was and remain unsure as to the reasons why it was so hard to communicate with the participants. Now, after interviewing them, I know all of the participants had many responsibilities in their lives and participating in this study was just another thing on their plate. I also suspect that the time of year (i.e., winter months) during which the study was conducted contributed to their delayed responses and limited availability, as there are a lot of holidays and family celebrations during that time. Finally, I believe Zoom fatigue played a part in our communication challenges,

as the meetings I held with the participants were just one of many online meetings they had during that week. Whatever the culprit, we found a way to proceed.

Education

The first information webinar occurred on a Sunday morning in early November using the Zoom platform. Three of the four participants preferred an early morning meeting on the weekend because they had work and family responsibilities during the week. I started the webinar with introductions. Though we were missing one of the participants, I still thought it was important to have those on the call familiarize themselves with one another and with me; talking about personal experiences can be intimidating in any setting, particularly when talking among a group of strangers. I told the participants they could choose a pseudonym to protect their identities and share as much about themselves as they wished. They all opted to use their real first names and share personal identifiers (e.g., husband, mom, health care administrator), indicating some comfort level with the group setting.

From there, I shared the purpose of the study, the nature of photovoice research, the participant's role, expectations for their participation, and the intended use of their photos. Next, I introduced the multi-step photovoice process they would be taking part in, outlining each step's distinct and interconnected purposes: photo capture, interview, focus group, and member-checking. The bulk of the time with the group was spent describing what they were being asked to do—namely take photos that represented student success. I also explained the purpose of a photo logbook and the importance of the photo release and subject waiver forms (detailed in the next section).

The second webinar was held on the same day as the first webinar, but at night. This webinar was solely for the fourth participant who worked weekends and could not make a Sunday morning meeting work. The participant joined from their phone, making it difficult for them to see the presentation slides I had prepared. Therefore, we opted to have a more informal conversation about the topics discussed formally and sequentially in the webinar held that morning with the other participants.

Immediately following the webinars, I sent out personal invitations to private Dropbox folders to each participant. As shared during the information webinars, their Dropbox folders were meant to serve as a secure repository for their photos, logbooks, and photo release forms. I then sent individual follow-up emails to the participants with a link to the study's general Dropbox folder where they could find all the materials they would need to participate, including the informed consent statement, photo capture instruction sheet, photo logbook, photo release form, and subject waiver form (Appendices C–G). The participants were instructed to review the materials and email me within 5 days to confirm their participation in the study. As I would never meet with the participants in person, the combination of email confirmation and verbal confirmation during the interviews (which were recorded) was used to document informed consent in place of a signature on a form.

At this point on the path toward better understanding student success, I took note that the group was generally attentive, more than expected given our communication issues up to that point. The webinar's goal was to inform and educate as a foundation for the later activities that were meant to promote understanding and empowerment. None of the participants had served as

participants in a study of this kind before, and therefore they were unfamiliar with academic research. The webinar served to provide them with a general understanding of the purpose of qualitative research. I used layperson's terms and examples to explain the method/ology, making a seemingly complex design conceptually accessible to the participants. The participants were able to reframe what was shared about the purpose of the study in their own words and asked clarifying questions regarding participant expectations. By the end of the calls, the participants agreed it was evident what was being asked of them and were eager to share their take on student success.

Documentation

Following the information webinars and email exchange, the participants had to "walk" alone for a while. Photovoice is a method meant to inspire participants to make choices on how to visually represent a particular aspect of their life through the use of photos (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017). The group was given approximately 2 weeks to take, select, and submit photos that reflected (a) how they conceived of student success, (b) how they believed their family to see student success, and (c) their take on how their culture portrays the phenomenon of student success. They could take as many photos as they wanted, but they were asked to submit only one per category. One participant emailed me during the photo capture period to ask if he could submit more than one photo per category. Wanting to honor the participant's way of telling his story, I told him that was fine. After that, I wrote the others to grant them the same permission to submit multiple photos per category. Only that one participant chose to do so, however.

It is worth noting here that I did not define family or culture for the participants at this point or at any other point in the study. The photo capture instruction sheet actually included a note that stated, "For purposes of this study, family is a self-defined boundary and could include your immediate or extended family. Similarly, your culture is as you define it." It is for this reason that family and culture are used herein without a qualifier. However, verbal cues indicate that when the participants talked about family they meant immediate family and when they talked about culture they were talking about the Mexican or Mexican American culture.

I gave further instruction to the participants to document their thoughts and observations about each photo they took as they took it in a logbook. The logbook was a response to the fact that "photographs always represent the participants' gaze, something the researcher can never fully experience or understand completely" (Latz, 2017, p. 76). Specifically, I asked the participants to write down where the photo was taken, when it was taken, the subject of the photo, the meaning of the image to them at that time, how it represented student success, and any other reactions they had that they wished to reflect. These notations were meant to help address the inherent temporality of pictures and how meaning may change for the participants as they change over time—meaning from the time they took the photo to the time we discussed it (Plunkett et al., 2012).

Finally, I asked the participants to submit a photo release form giving me permission to use their selected photos for this study and subject waiver forms for any subject in the picture who was over 12 years old. If they did not have a waiver for a person in the photo, they were instructed to blur that person's face prior to submitting the photo. Unfortunately, when it came

time to submit their photos and accompanying materials (i.e., logbook, forms), the participants

missed the deadline. Two of the participants cited trouble with Dropbox for the delay. The other

two did not indicate a reason why they had not submitted their materials. All four eventually

submitted their photos and photo release forms, but one participant did not submit their logbook.

Some subject waiver forms were submitted, permitting me to use photos with non-participants in

them, but by and large, subjects' faces were blurred in the photos submitted because the waivers

were not secured or because the subjects were underage. At any rate, with the photos in hand, we

were prepared to move on to the interviews and focus group.

Narration

Talking about personal experiences and meaning can be intimidating in any setting

(individual or group), but a discussion facilitated by images can be liberating. Photos have been

shown to give participants a common ground from which to start a conversation, leading to the

co-construction of themes about shared experiences they did not know they had (Latz, 2017).

Recognizing that photos alone are not data but a medium to elicit data, I conducted interviews

and a focus group as part of this photovoice study. Interviews served to gather a sense for who

the participants were and how their past experiences had shaped their views of student success.

The focus group, often coupled with image-based research because of the power of group

dialogue in creating "data not possible through the use of discrete interviews" (Latz, 2017, p.

83), was used as a forum for unveiling shared (and divergent) experiences and understandings of

student success.

Interviews

As the photos and supplemental materials came in, I set up individual interviews with the participants to be conducted via Zoom. Availability was again a challenge, requiring interviews at subjectively odd hours (e.g., Friday at 8:00 p.m.) and necessitating rescheduling more than once due to unexpected circumstances. Once scheduled, I prepared by downloading the participants' photos and logbooks, having them available to display during the interviews, and revisiting the questions that would guide these semi-structured interviews, as defined in the interview procedural overview (Appendix H).

Given the inherently personal nature of the photos and the potentially sensitive topics that were to be discussed, I felt it best to start each interview by asking for the participant's permission to record the interview using Zoom (for visual record) and Otter.ai (for transcription). After receiving approval to record, I read highlights from the informed consent statement. I asked the participants to verbally affirm that they understood what the study was about and that they wished to participate. From there, I named my commitments to them, informing them they had the right to request a break, pass on a question, or stop the interview; that the information they shared would remain confidential; and that I would be respectful of their time. All the interviews lasted just less than an hour, which proved to be the right amount of time to begin to elicit meaning from the photos and stories shared by the participants.

Prior to me asking the participants to describe their photos, I asked them to elaborate on their educational backgrounds. Each participant had attended or currently was attending a community college in the Chicagoland area, but their postsecondary experiences were so much

more complex than that. Stories of stop-outs, transfers, competing responsibilities, and shifting intentions proceeded the student success they believed they had achieved today. As will be illuminated through the portraits of the participants in the next chapter, community college was just a part of their journey, not the entirety.

Next, I asked the participants to reflect on the photovoice process—specifically how they went about selecting photos to submit. Thirteen of the 15 photos submitted were photos that were previously taken by a participant or someone in their family; only two photos were actually taken by a participant for the purposes of this study. Possible meanings behind that choice are explored later in Chapter 6. For now, it is worth noting that some participants began by thinking about photos they already had that represented success without fully contemplating what student success really meant to them. Further thought about the meaning of student success led some participants to swap out pictures prior to submitting them, but that additional thought did not lead them to taking photos as instructed.

From there, I displayed the participant's photos one by one, asking who the photo was of and how it represented student success to them, their family, or to others in their culture. The showcase portion of the interviews began with these fundamental questions, but ended with personalized lines of inquiry—with me probing deeper into the stories behind the photos to better understand each participant's unique meaning-making process around student success. Though I attempted to give the participants equal time to talk about each photo—each vantage point—the bulk of the interviews centered on their families' views on student success. Even when the

participants and I talked about their personal or culturally derived views on student success, they somehow always found their way back to stories about their parents, expectations, and values.

The interviews concluded with me taking time to stop and reflect on where we had been in the last hour—what their experiences, on the whole, told them about the meaning of student success. That question was by far the hardest for the participants to address. None of them could sum up how they understood student success in a word or a phrase. Sensing their discomfort, I told them we could explore that more during the focus group. I ended the interviews by revisiting the purpose of the focus group and setting expectations for how the group discussion would be handled.

Focus Group

Individual interpretation is an important element of a phenomenological study because it gets at the personal, subjective meaning of the phenomenon, but collective understanding and empowerment is the goal of a photovoice study pursued in the phenomenological tradition. A focus group was held in early January in service of that goal (a procedural overview is listed in Appendix I). Hosted via Zoom due to ongoing pandemic concerns, the focus group lacked a certain connectedness that typically is the bedrock of an effective group discussion. The participants and I made the most of the time and space we had by using a PowerPoint with embedded participant photos to facilitate the discussion. Each participant took about 5–10 minutes to explain their photos in the same categorical sequence (i.e., you, family, culture). Unlike the interviews, I tried not to interject with reflections or questions, although at times it was hard not to because conversation had stalled.

At the end of each participant's showcase, I opened the floor for reactions and questions. Group dialogue was inconsistent. At points everyone chimed in, whereas at other points there was silence. The photos effectively drew out shared experiences, proving Latz's (2017) point that visual aids can give participants a common ground to start from when talking about something that can be difficult to put into words. Like in the interviews, engagement was higher around the topic of family and their role in shaping the meaning of student success to the participants. The participants talked about their parents' sacrifices and struggles, how they wanted more for their children, how they expected more of their children, and their parents' pride in meeting or exceeding those expectations. Least engaged were individual notions of student success, as the photos chosen by the participants for that category were most disparate both in subject and in meaning.

I ended the focus group with some summative thoughts about how the participants had depicted student success and the influential experiences that shaped their understanding. I then shared a bit of my intended analysis process and detailed what came next for them. Specifically, I spoke about the importance of having them review transcripts for accuracy and completeness. I explained how their photos would be used in my dissertation's written and oral defense portions, inviting them to attend the defense if I did in fact host it in person. Finally, I thanked them for their contribution and willingness to open themselves up to sharing personal images, stories, and meanings.

Data Analysis

Latz (2017), whose framework for conducting photovoice research guided this study, admitted that there is not a lot of guidance from image-based research literature on how to analyze data collected using photovoice. What is agreed upon, and supported by effective data analysis practice in the phenomenological tradition, is that analysis is not something that starts after all the data are collected but rather something that is pursued in tandem with data collection (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017; Plunkett et al., 2012; Tsang, 2020; Vagle, 2018). I did in fact conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously throughout the study, but for descriptive purposes, they are presented in separate sections. This section focuses on Latz's (2017) recommended two final components of photovoice research—ideation and presentation—presenting them as the road between the discrete and sequentially data collection activities.

Ideation

Tsang's (2020) suggested analysis procedure for photovoice data, which was most closely considered for this study, has the researcher begin by interpreting the photos submitted as they come in. Some would argue that this could produce an unconscious bias on behalf of the researcher and that the photos are not themselves data, suggesting instead to start with interpreting the texts from the interviews and focus group (Plunkett et al., 2012). Tsang (2020), however, made the case that such an order makes it hard for the researcher to bridle their understanding of the phenomenon, or to name their judgements and contemplate their influence on the interpretation of the phenomenon. Therefore, I took Tsang's recommendation to reflect on my own interpretation of their meaning as the photos came in, ahead of hearing the stories

behind the photos from the participants themselves. I reviewed each participant's set of photos separately and then on the whole. With each set of photos I reviewed, I saw similar images and emerging meanings of student success. The subjects of the photos, though different in some way for each participant, largely were of family units, celebrations, and locations. To me, the images represented achievement, thriving, independence, togetherness, support, and economic security. As an act of bridling, I took note of my judgments regarding the meanings of the photos and how my own experiences and identities, shared later in this chapter, may have influenced my interpretations.

When looking at the collection of photos on the whole, I noted that none of the pictures looked like they were taken specifically for this study; there were visual indicators that pointed to the photos having been taken in the past. As previously mentioned, this proved to be the case for all but two photos submitted for the study. The logbooks the participants submitted with their photos thus failed to serve as a tool for capturing "the participant's gaze" because, for the most part, it was not the participants who took the photos (Latz, 2017, p. 76). Why the participants chose to use existing photos instead of taking new photos (as they were asked) was unclear to me at this point in the analysis. I made inferences regarding their choice to use existing photos at the time of the review. Specifically, I assumed it was easier and quicker to find a photo than it was to deeply contemplate the meaning of student success and take a photo that encapsulated that meaning—an inference I later affirmed with the participants.

Interpretation continued during the interviews and focus group sessions. As participants talked about their experiences and understandings of student success, I noted my observations

about their dispositions and peculiarities about their descriptions (e.g., when the participant gave

one topic more attention than another, when they contradicted themselves, when they conflated

student success with success). I did not want to jump to conclusions about what student success

meant to them in the moment, so I made no notation about that. The participants' verbal

interpretations, as captured in the transcripts and reflected on in my facilitator notes, were

subsequently cross-referenced with my own interpretations of their photos, "creating a dialogue

between the researcher's interpretations and those of the participants to develop an integrative

explanation of the phenomenon" (Tsang, 2020, p. 144). In comparing the two, I did not code or

look for themes in the traditional sense, as phenomenological research is not congruent with such

practices (van Manen, 2016). Instead, I approached the final step in Tsang's (2020) analysis

procedure—theorizing—as a "free act of seeing meaning" (van Manen, 2016, p. 343).

Specifically, I called on the phenomenological hallmark of whole-part-whole analysis to look at

the entirety of the participant experience for general meaning and the parts of their stories for

significance in a cyclical, repeating sequence (Vagle, 2018).

Analysis began with me listening to the interview recordings. Having had to actively

listen and drive the conversation during the live interviews, I felt I needed to sit and listen to

what was being said about each photo. It is for this reason I opted to listen to the recordings

captured in Zoom as they included a visual of the interview as it happened, permitting me to see

the photos as the participants talked about them. I took notes about critical influences in the

participants' lives, trying to piece together their meaning-making process around student success.

I called on Tinkler's (2013) steps for analyzing participant interpretation, asking myself what did

the participants see; how do the photos fit their lived experiences; what was said; what was not said; how does what they said compare to the visual they presented; and in what ways is their narrative reducible to discrete moments (as cited in Latz, 2017). I then listened to the interviews again, this time in Otter.ai to focus solely on what was being said. I took a few additional notes on points of significance in the participants' stories that were not picked up on during the interview or when listening to the recordings in Zoom. The second time listening to the interviews, however, mostly served to help me clean up the transcripts ahead of the analysis of the text.

From there, I moved to a more selective and detailed reading of the interview transcripts, focusing on what was revealed about the phenomenon in the discrete moments depicted in each of the participant's photos. Unlike when I was listening to the recordings, I was no longer interested in the broader meaning of student success that was being presented by the participant. Instead, I was concerned with how the meaning of student success evolved from moment to moment, from photo to photo, from cultural influence to personal understanding. I read each interview twice, each time dwelling on what I was assuming about the phenomenon and the participants' experiences, all the while interpreting possible patterns.

After that, I turned to the focus group recording and transcript. I engaged with both artifacts in the same way as the interviews—first watching the Zoom recording to get a sense for the broad strokes of the participants' meaning-making journeys, then listening to the audio recording to identify anything that was missed. It was during this time that I also reviewed the transcript to understand the significance of their experiences, looking for commonalities and

points of divergence between the particulars of the participants' stories and understandings of student success. During this process it was imperative for me to continue to be open to the ambiguity of interpretation, recognizing in the phenomenological tradition that not all experiences are rational, describable, or relatable; the tension between what is unique and what is shared is to be honored rather than explained away (van Manen, 2016). This movement from broad to narrow to units and back again, as described in my analysis of the interview and focus group dialogue, eventually yielded a deeper understanding of student success that is presented in Chapters 4 and 5, and interpreted in the discussion in Chapter 6.

Presentation

Presentation of the findings in this study occurred in two forms—writing and visualizing. Van Manen (2016) found writing to be essential to phenomenological research, saying that "to write is to reflect; to write is to research" (p. 20). Said another way, understanding meaning is as much discovered through thinking and writing as through data collection and analysis. Though qualitative findings and discussion sections are typically about reporting and interpreting, translating speech into text, and relating that text to previous texts, writing in a phenomenological study is about reflecting on language. Specifically, writing is about reflecting on the words used by the participants to describe their lifeworld, continuously considering my inclinations to use words that have traditionally had descriptive meaning to me as an act of bridling (van Manen, 2016). Vagle (2018) emphasized this critical reflection, positing that there is "no way to pry language and meaning apart, and hence no way to do phenomenology without

it being an analysis of language" (p. 65). For this reason, I include excerpts from the interviews and focus group in both chapters on findings and consider the participants' diction in Chapter 6.

Nevertheless, writing could not be the sole medium for presenting the meanings revealed from this interpretive phenomenological photovoice study. As van Manen (2016) stated, writing is an unforgiving act of attempting to "bring into presence that which cannot be represented in plain words" (p. 370). For this reason, in addition to writing about the findings in the poetic textual tradition of phenomenology, I also present the photos themselves within the text and displayed them as part of the dissertation defense. These visual displays served to present how the participants saw student success in the most immediate and direct sense, augmenting the mediated and indirect interpretation of understanding described in Chapter 6 (van Manen, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Though always a concern in qualitative research, confidentiality is even more pressing in a study using photovoice. Photographs are inherently personal, opening the viewer up to some portion of the photographer's life. Latz (2017) cautioned researchers to not overexpose the participants in the process of trying to give those at the margin a voice, recognizing that "telling and displaying your story can be difficult and painful" (p. 108) for some. Furthermore, though there is a communal aspect to the research, not every participant will be interested in or comfortable with the burden of representing the shared experiences of students of Mexican origin. Participants needed to feel comfortable with their role in the research and not further marginalized by the study. Even before the study began, one way I assured participants were

protected was to ensure they were clear on the purpose of the study, their role in it, and the way in which their photos, stories, and logbooks were to be triangulated and used.

Additionally, I felt it prudent to give the participants control over the use of their images. I asked for their consent to use their photos at more than one point in the study. Giving them the right to make temporally-driven decisions on what was displayed, to whom, and how was a way to support agency among the participants. The photos used in this study were the property of the participants and were theirs to give access to; when access was granted, I was careful to correctly attribute ownership in the way the participant wanted me to. Regarding access, the photos and logbooks submitted by the participants were kept on Dropbox. Each participant had their own password-protected folder to share their files with me; participants did not have access to the folders of others. The Dropbox folder was also used to house the interview and focus group transcripts. Participants had access to those files as part of the member-checking process in which I asked them to engage to review and affirm my narrative representation of their lived experiences. None of the participants chose to take part in the member-checking process, despite multiple invitations to review the transcripts and written analysis. As with the invitation process, I understood their lack of response to be a function of the competing priorities of the participants in this ever-changing and challenging sociohistorical environment in which we live.

Trustworthiness

The population of students for this study was narrowly defined so as to draw attention to the unique life experiences of students of Mexican origin; the sample size was intentionally small to be able to get at the richness of those experiences. The meanings and measures discussed by

the participants and interpreted by me as the researcher in subsequent chapters are only some of

the ways students may understand student success; the results may not be transferrable or

generalizable, but the design of the study would certainly be able to be applied to other contexts.

For the participants in this study, however, the meanings and measures presented are their truth.

The findings, having been derived from a cross-interpretation of photos, interviews, and a focus

group, are believed to be credible. They are also confirmable, representing the participants'

perspective, not my own. My own judgements about the phenomenon were named at the outset

of the study (detailed in the next section) and revisited during data analysis. In doing this, I was

not attempting to eradicate my biases, but rather to consciously familiarize myself with them so I

could understand their influence on my interpretation of the participants' understanding. Should

the study be replicated with the same population of students, it is expected that the general

essence of the findings would remain the same. Yet, with different students and a different

researcher, there may be different interpretations of the phenomenon.

<div align="center">**Positionality Statement**</div>

As an act of bridling and a matter of positional reflexivity, I reflected on my positionality

and its relation to the phenomenon both at the beginning of and throughout the study. Presently, I

serve as the Vice President of Education & Training for an accrediting agency. My role within

the agency is to oversee elective programming offered to our membership covering areas that

historically have proven the most challenging for institutions to demonstrate improvement in.

One of these areas is student outcomes, specifically the improvement of retention, persistence,

and completion rates. Presently, standards dictate that an institution has defined goals for

improvements of these rates, that those goals are ambitious but attainable and sensitive to mission, that data are collected and analyzed in relation to those goals, and that the information gleaned from that analysis be used to inform decision making. With nearly 1,000 institutions in its membership of various size, setting, and control, our agency has intentionally not defined thresholds or targets around these metrics, leaving it up to the institutions to do so within the context of their mission. Each year a sizable number of the institutions under evaluation are cited on the standard related to these outcomes, most often because they are unable to provide evidence of their efforts to improve. For this reason, our agency started a program back in 2014 to address the inability of institutions to significantly improve (or demonstrate improvement of) their students' persistence and completion rates.

Known originally as the Persistence & Completion Academy, the program ran from 2014–2020, assisting over 100 institutions in developing initiatives to better support their students' success. In 2017, under my leadership, a program evaluation was conducted after having recognized some challenges posed by the program's curriculum and focus on institution-centric measures of success. At the same time, our agency pursued numerous projects centered around defining and improving student success with the help of a grant. Practitioners and scholars were convened in 2018 to identify ways in which an accrediting body could contribute to the growing national conversation about the need for change in measuring and supporting student success. I took part in many of the convenings, working with a group on testing variables that influenced success outcomes. The result of the Student Success Initiative (SSI), as it was called, was the development of a glossary of terms filled with definitions of existing and newly

proposed metrics, recommendations on how our agency might promote and evaluate the disaggregation of student outcomes data, and a thought paper on the need for more student-centric measures of success. The combination of the program evaluation findings and the SSI led to the rebranding of the Persistence & Completion Academy to the new Student Success Academy, a revisioning of the program's objectives, and a reworking of the curriculum. Additionally, it led to the development of the Outcomes Committee, a steward of our agency's strategic objective to improve student success, which I co-chair.

It has been nearly five years since our agency's focus on student success took shape, and I can honestly say I do not believe we in accreditation, or the academy more broadly, have made much headway in placing the student at the center of the conversation. We like to think we do, using terms like "heuristic model" and "student-centric measures," but we largely have failed to define or implement either. Instead, the focus remains on institutional success and traditional outcomes measures. Such is evidenced by thought leaders and funders who continue to tout the notion that the vitality of our nation depends on our ability to get a certain percentage of the population a credential by a specified date and who make it a strategic priority to increase completion above all else.

I have and will always recognize the value of completion and why increasing the number of individuals with a quality credential is paramount to our nation's economic security. Equating completion or a credential with success, however, is a slippery slope. Not everyone attends college to complete a credential. Some have much more existential interests in their attendance; it is about the journey, not the destination. By privileging the destination, we have tacitly decided

that we are satisfied—as an industry, as a nation, as a people—with only telling certain students' stories. That the only success that matters is the success we deem acceptable—the success we can measure. Eradicating the oppressive nature of that ideology has been what has driven me professionally and led me to advocate for changes to our criteria and evaluation of institutions. It was also a large factor in determining the direction of my dissertation.

As a member of the academy, I recognize it is hard to completely open myself up to the phenomenon as it is lived. Traditional notions of success have been engrained in my mind by my profession, not to mention by society and my identities. I am a White, cisgender female from middle-class America who completed a degree and saw the return on the investment I made in my education. Decoupling my own experience with success was not possible, nor should it be desirable. Interpretative phenomenology and bridling beg for transparency in how phenomena reveal themselves. My experiences and my sense of success, though not the focus of the study, were critical to my understanding the spectrum of that which constitutes student success.

Conclusion

The combined goals of photovoice and phenomenology are to promote understanding and to empower. In the context of this study, the goal was to reveal new understandings of what constitutes student success to current and past community college students of Mexican origin by giving them the space to explore and validate why they understand student success in the way they do. In addition, photos were used to elicit meaning, providing a visual aid for sharing experiences that have shaped the participants' views of student success. I offer insights into their

meaning-making process around student success through individual portraits of the participants

in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PORTRAITS OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR MEANING-MAKING JOURNEYS

As described in Chapter 3, I chose four participants based on criteria defined at the outset of the study. Each participant took part in an informational webinar that served to inform and instruct them on the photovoice process. The participants were asked to take and submit photos representing student success to them, their family, and their culture. The photos served as conversation starters during the respective interviews, prompting participants to share and reflect on the personal experiences that shaped how they saw student success. These are their experiences.

Participant Portraits

I gathered information on the participants through four sources: the participant interest form, the photos and supplemental materials, the personal interviews, and the focus group. The following are summative descriptions and visuals of the participants' identities, experiences, and understandings of student success as gathered through the first three mediums. These individual portrayals are followed by a description of the group's perspective on student success that is presented in Chapter 5.

Martin

Martin is a male in his late 30s who identifies as Mexican American. Martin grew up in Chicago but came of age in the Western suburbs just outside the city. He began attending the local community college after a short period of time off following high school. Online classes

were not common, so he opted to take classes part time on campus, scheduling around his full-time job. Martin spent an extended period of time at the community college—beyond the accepted standard of 150% time or 3 years (USDE, n.d.)—and never completed an associate's degree. Instead, he transferred to a private university in the Chicagoland area to finish his bachelor's degree when he was in his late 20s. There, he was much more focused, being older and paying higher tuition than what he paid at the community college. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in Latin American studies, intending to get an advanced degree at some point and pursue a career in academia. He, however, chose a career in finance and now works at a healthcare company.

Martin was the first participant I interviewed. We met via Zoom on a Sunday morning before his kids got up. He was a proud father and husband, so those responsibilities came first. He was very prepared for the interview, and it was clear he had given the topic much thought before we spoke. He was an artistic person by nature, so pictures meant a lot to him. Martin was the participant who asked to submit more than one photo per category. He kept the family photo album in order, so when asked to submit photos representing student success, he turned to existing photos that he immediately thought of as reflecting what student success meant to him, his family, and those who shared his cultural heritage background.

Student Success to Martin

The first photo Martin submitted to represent what student success meant to him was a picture of him as a young boy standing in an airport in El Paso, Texas (Figure 1). He was around 4 years old and was traveling back from his parents' hometowns in Mexico. His parents had sent

him there to spend the summer with his grandparents. His mom and dad were from the same

state in Mexico (Durango), but because of the area's rural nature, their hometowns were worlds

apart.

Figure 1. Martin at age 4, returning from an independent trip to Mexico.

Martin recalled his journey to and from his parents' hometowns: "I took a plane, I took a bus, I

took a small bus, I took a regional plane, I took a car, and then I took a mule. To get to each

location was a journey in itself." Back then, Martin did not quite understand what his parents had

done for him by sending him on that journey. Now, as an adult, reflecting on the photo of

himself smiling in the airport, he recognized that he was able to enjoy a 3-month vacation

because of his parents' sacrifices and hard work. As undocumented immigrants, going to and

from Mexico was not a luxury they had. Martin felt fortunate that he was "able to be sent to

Mexico and be able to come back." That trip to Mexico ignited a passion for traveling within

Martin. The second photo he chose to represent his view on student success was of his own

family in Cancun (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Martin, his wife, and his two kids on a recent trip to Cancun, capturing his love for travel.

Martin noted how happy his kids looked as they stood on a balcony with the ocean as their

backdrop. He and his wife loved to share their joy of travel with their children and to expose

them to new places and cultures. He reflected on why he saw exposure as necessary for his kids:

"It just gives them a different perspective that later down the line makes them hopefully more

well-rounded individuals by experiencing different things, by seeing other people's situations in

other countries."

In talking about the two photos together, Martin saw parallels between what his parents

provided him and what he was providing for his children—experiences and perspective. Just like

him, his kids "have been fortunate enough to be able to travel to certain locations that at [his] age

[he] never had the chance to." He credited hard work and success in school with providing for

those sorts of opportunities and the happiness derived from them.

Martin also talked about how traveling instilled independence in him when sharing these photos. His solo trip to Mexico, depicted in his first photo, captured his "first time on a plane, first time being in an airport, first time being away from parents." Martin never commented on how he felt about traveling to a new land alone to visit people he had never met, only that he did it. Like his parents in coming to the United States, he pursued the unknown and was better off for it. Martin saw such pursuits and affiliated independence as both a mark and a means to success. He acknowledged that he "wouldn't have gotten where [he] is now if it wasn't for that independence [his] parents instilled in [him]." Likewise, his parents would not have achieved what they did if it was not for the support and encouragement that their parents gave them. "Everyone pushes each other to have more than the other person did" and to do more than they have done.

Student Success to Martin's Family

As with his personal photos, the photos Martin selected to convey how he believed his family understood student success were separated by decades. The older picture was of Martin as a young boy in their family's apartment in Chicago, his parents seated on a couch behind him (Figure 3). He noted the décor and clothing style as markers of the time period and the condition of the apartment as an indicator of their socioeconomic status: "one bedroom apartment, not the best of conditions, broken windows, roaches, mice." He depicted their apartment as modest, but enough for him, his parents, and the "rotating lineup of uncles and aunts that came from Mexico." Looking beyond the poor conditions of the apartment, Martin reflected on how their home was always filled with people and smiles:

This picture kind of reflects—makes me remember that my family, my parents, were always optimistic regardless of the situation they were in. They always kept a straight face, at least in front of me. I am sure they were going through things during those years, but they never showed it to me. They always had a good mood. Always worked hard. So this picture kinda reflects—well, makes me remember how far we have come along, where we were, no matter what situation we are in, we can make it work.

Figure 3. Martin and his parents smiling in their apartment in Chicago in the 1980s.

As a parent, Martin now knew the difficulty of remaining optimistic in front of his kids even when there were challenges ahead. His parents wanted a better life for him, so they put their best face forward and worked to provide it. Martin now was doing the same, just in a different way. Martin's parents came to the United States from Durango, Mexico, in search of a better life for themselves and their future children (his parents met here). That included better educational opportunities than they had. Both his parents had less than a high school education and their parents were illiterate. Martin's parents thus saw a high school education as the goal for their children.

Martin shared that "as long as [he] graduated high school that was success to them," as his parents thought a diploma automatically meant he could get a better job than they had. So when Martin graduated high school, his parents felt "they had achieved something, making it worthwhile that they came up here."

Martin graduating high school was an achievement, but he wanted more. His parents worked long hours overnight in factories for most of Martin's childhood. Their work schedules limited the time they could spend with Martin and his younger brother. When they were home, they were happy but tired—a sentiment Martin shared after working at a factory one summer himself. Working with his hands, standing on his feet all day, doing hard labor—the life his parents lived—was not the life he wanted for himself. He wanted a work–life balance. Success to him was having a job that afforded him time with his kids, as depicted in the second family photo Martin submitted for this category (Figure 4). He knew he could not have that if he did not pursue advanced education. With an education, he was able to get a "normal" job during the day where he could be home in the evenings. Referring back to his parents' absence in his childhood, he reflected, "My kids don't ever have to go through that."

Figure 4. Martin's wife and children at a recent birthday celebration for her.
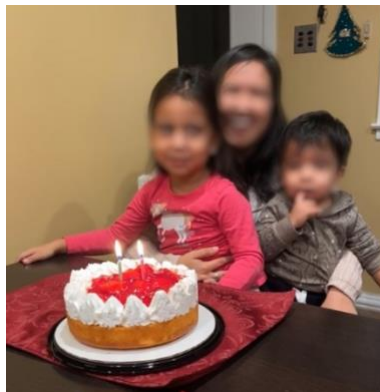
Student Success Through Martin's Cultural Lens

The final two pictures Martin shared were of a plow and a farm. The plow was his grandfather's (Figure 5). The latter was a farmer by trade, but also was somewhat of a blacksmith. He and his son (Martin's uncle) crafted the plow years ago to work the land, as depicted in the second photo Martin chose for this category (Figure 6). According to Martin, that plow "has single handedly fed [his] family for many, many decades." Martin's dad was not fond of farm life, hence his decision to move to the United States. Martin recounted his dad saying "there had to be something better—could not be worse" than working on the farm. Martin, on the other hand, felt a connection to the plow; it "ties in with [his] love of Mexico and the time [he] spent there." So he asked his grandfather, who now lives in the United States, if he could have the plow. His grandfather was pleased to give it to him, going back to Mexico to retrieve it from storage and lugging it back to Chicago on a bus. To Martin, the plow and the picture of his uncles working in the fields represented how his family thought of success and how others in his culture viewed success. That is, doing what you have to do to survive or doing whatever it takes to get a job done. Being more financially stable than his parents and grandparents, Martin translated that survival mentality to now mean "putting in the work" to have the life you want. He saw a strong work ethic as a cultural value and a familial expectation but felt that there was now more latitude in choosing what you apply that work ethic to. To him, everyone's route to success is different, but what matters is that a person is doing what they want, for their own reasons, for their own satisfaction, and working toward their own self-defined ends.

Figure 5. A farm plow made and used by Martin's grandfather to farm land in Mexico.

Figure 6. Martin's uncles in the fields outside his dad's hometown in Durango, Mexico.

Liz

Liz is a female in her late 20s. She identifies as Mexican rather than Mexican American, although she was born in the United States. Liz came from a small town on the outskirts of the Chicagoland metro area. It was there that she attended community college immediately following high school while also finishing cosmetology school. She did not initially have intentions to go to college, but her parents encouraged her to do so. Once there, she realized she actually wanted to continue her studies. So after getting her associate's degree, which took her 3 years, she applied to a private university in Chicago. Cost was prohibitive, so she ultimately opted not to pursue a bachelor's degree, instead focusing on her career as a barber.

I interviewed Liz on a Sunday morning via Zoom. When we spoke she had just gotten out of bed and was enjoying a cup of coffee in her downtown apartment in Chicago. She admittedly had a hard time with the assignment. That partly had to do with her busy schedule and her inability to just sit and think about student success. She ended up submitting one photo that she had on-hand (the family photo) and took two new photos for the other two categories. Though she was the only participant who submitted photos taken specifically for this project, she noted that the photos were rushed, taken opportunistically with what was around her.

Student Success to Liz

Liz's photo for this category was an image of high rises outside her apartment in the Gold Coast, a very wealthy neighborhood in downtown Chicago (Figure 7).

Figure 7. A photo taken from the balcony of Liz's apartment in Chicago's Gold Coast neighborhood.

Liz talked at length about her personal goal of moving to the city—about moving beyond her

small-town roots:

> [Hometown] is a very small town and I've always hated the small-town mentality. The whole—you marry your love of your life that you went to high school with, that you grew up with for the past 20 years. This is what you do. I feel like coming from a small town, people have an expectation of you. So to me that's why it was a huge goal to leave and kind of break that system.

She credited her career, not her education, for her ability to reach her goals. She did not "want to

discredit the fact that [she] went to community college"—it was a part of her journey—but she

did not see it as necessary for her to be successful in the field she was in. At one point in the

interview she did mention the skills she believed she acquired as a result of attending community

college (e.g., communication, organization), but to her those were not "educational things." To

Liz, she was a successful barber because of what she learned in cosmetology school (which she did not really see as a form of school until we talked) and on-the-job training, not from a traditional college course.

Liz spoke of on-the-job training as a form of education—as something that facilitated success—for her father as well. Her father worked in construction and had his whole life. When he arrived in the United States, though, he knew nothing of the trade:

> He didn't know what the hell he was doing. So he was going every single day, learning how to do sidewalks, curbs, work this machine, blah, blah, blah. And now—now he's a foreman. He knows how to do all that [expletive]. And he's doing all this in a safety class. And he does have to learn how to do all the hard work outside. He's still getting an education in a way. It is just not your typical go to class and take a test.

Her father's success without a formal education was further proof that a traditional education was not needed to reach her goals. She knew many who had gone the traditional route and were not successful, as they were unable to find jobs after accumulating debt to go to school; graduation—walking across a stage—was therefore simply not an indicator of success to her.

Student Success to Liz's Family

Much like the other participants, Liz shared a similar story of challenges and sacrifice when she talked about her parents' lives, namely when she spoke about her dad. Her dad came to the United States from Guanajuato, Mexico. According to Liz, "This guy had to give up everything at the age of 14 to have a better life for him and his family." Even though Liz's parents were not yet together when her father migrated, nor had Liz been born, her father knew he wanted to be able to provide his future children with opportunities he did not have. Liz said her father never pressured her to go to school, but being able to offer his children the support to do so was rewarding for him.

Liz depicted her mother as being more of the "stereotypical parent" who believed kids should go to college after high school. Liz's mom, unlike Liz's father, was born in the United States. She finished high school and went on to college. During her time in college, she met Liz's dad and became pregnant with Liz. As a result, she dropped out, returning some years later to get a certificate for insurance. Her mom's experience with postsecondary education was what, in Liz's opinion, led her to believe that college was "the only way you could be successful." Now that Liz had an established career and was succeeding at taking care of herself, Liz felt like her mom had changed her tune: "She even thinks that it's kind of silly that I went to community college."

Being able to take care of herself—being independent and meeting personal goals—was another way Liz's family characterized success. Liz spoke of her dad's long-time goal to own a vacation home back in Mexico. In the picture she submitted for this category, she and her father are standing in front of that home, which they just purchased in 2019 (Figure 8). That was a proud moment for her father—being financially stable enough to have a house in the United States and a place for his family to return to back home in Mexico. Liz felt her father was equally as proud of her independence today—having a career, living on her own, enjoying her life. That was all he ever wanted for his kids.

Figure 8. A photo of Liz and her Dad in front of their vacation home the year they bought it.

Student Success Through Liz's Cultural Lens

Both when discussing her own view of student success and how she had come to

understand success through the lens of her cultural values and norms, Liz spoke of different

routes to success. Having taken a nontraditional route to success in her eyes (i.e., not having

finished a bachelor's degree), she felt success can come in multiple forms, by multiple means. To

her, those various routes to success were represented in the entrance arch to the Little Village

neighborhood in Chicago (Figure 9). Situated on the southwest side of Chicago, Little Village is

one of Chicago's oldest enclaves for Mexican immigrants. There you can find restaurants with

authentic Mexican fare and shops with Mexican-made goods. When Liz was little, it was where

her family would go whenever they wanted a piece of home. Today, it is where Liz goes for a

reminder of the success of her people: "It just proves as a community what we have done to

make a better life, a decent living, which is why I went over there [speaking of Little Village].

Because regardless of what people decide to do, it's still a success." She spoke of the collective

accomplishment of those of Mexican origin who have settled in the United States. Specifically,

she spoke of their ability to choose myriad career paths, make a living, and have a better life.

Figure 9. A picture taken by Liz of the main corridor of the Little Village neighborhood in Chicago.

Liz was cautious not to equate success with money, however. Others in her family did,

questioning why she did not choose a more lucrative career, but she thought "that's kind of a

shallow way of thinking." Liz was more concerned with the life that could be built as a result of

working hard and doing what you love. That was what she thought was important to those who

shared her identity as a Mexican, speaking of how so many immigrants of Mexican origin work

in the United States only so they can one day return home to Mexico and live more comfortably.

She recognized that money is what can give someone the opportunity to be financially

stable and have a "healthy lifestyle." She also recognized that education can play a role in

achieving that stability for some. Yet, money was just a means to an end to her; she felt having

money should not be seen as a success in and of itself. This view on success was in contrast to that of Geovany and his family, who saw career and income as ways of measuring one's success.

Geovany

Geovany is a male in his early 20s who identifies as Mexican American. Like Liz, Geovany attended college right after high school. Unlike Liz and the others, Geovany went to a private university first, believing going straight into his baccalaureate studies was the best thing for him. Unfortunately, Geovany's first year in college was thrown off course by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The difficulty of online courses and a lack of a sense of belonging at a predominantly White institution (PWI), coupled with the loss of his grandfather around the same time, prompted Geovany to stop-out at the end of his first year. He worked for 6 months before deciding to return to school, this time at the local community college in the Western suburbs of Chicago where he grew up (which happened to be the same community college Martin attended). Geovany was currently pursuing his associate's degree there, attending classes on campus as a full-time student while also working (he did not mention in what field). He lived at home with his parents. He intended to transfer back to a university after completing his general education requirements.

Geovany's was the last interview I conducted. We met on a Friday night on Zoom after one of his shifts at work. He was seemingly tired, and a man of few words comparatively speaking, but made some compelling statements. He, like the others, submitted photos that he already had. During the interview, he admitted that he struggled with the instructions. With more clarity around the purpose of the study that he gathered from the interview, he said he could have

submitted more pictures that were more representative of student success. Still, he could get his ideas across with the pictures he had chosen.

Student Success to Geovany

Geovany, having recently graduated from high school, chose a picture of himself holding his diploma to represent his personal understanding of student success (Figure 10). To him, it was his most significant accomplishment thus far in life, representing the hard work he put into his studies and the time he had spent figuring himself out—a "coming of age kind of thing." He, more so than the others, saw completion as student success. He saw that association as a reflection of how he was raised—to be task-oriented and finish the job. His parents "can't really watch the journey" to his success in school; they only could see the outcome. So that was where the emphasis lies with them and, now, with him—on graduating.

Figure 10. A photo of Geovany at his high school graduation.

Student Success to Geovany's Family

In Geovany's family, the expectation was not just to graduate high school, but to graduate

college and choose a lucrative, professional career field; if this does not happen, you are limiting

your possibilities. He elaborated on these expectations:

> The expectation from my family is as soon as you finish high school you go on to college
> or university. You do the time there and then after that you go straight to the job or your
> career—basically start living the rest of your life. As far as picking up a job right out of
> high school or something like that, I feel like they don't think of that being something
> that like—I feel like they're saying that we're holding ourselves back in a way by not
> going all the way to finish school and get the career we want.

Though Geovany could appreciate his family's interest in him having a better life, he felt as if such an expectation put a cap on what he and his siblings could do with their lives. He was not sure that his siblings even wanted to go to college, but again, that was the expectation and that was the precedent set by those who came before them. One of the people who had gone to college before him was Geovany's cousin. She was the subject of the photo he chose to represent his family's understanding of student success (Figure 11). The picture was her professional photo for dentistry school. To Geovany, this photo was the best example of what student success meant to his family because it represented what his family wanted for their children—for "the next generation to have an easier life than what they had gone through to give us the life that we have." His cousin was doing what she enjoyed and would be able to make a lot of money doing it—and that was a better life than her parents could have dreamed of for her.

Figure 11. A photo of Geovany's cousin who chose a career in dentistry.

Oddly enough, Geovany never really spoke about his own parents—not their immigrant status, not what they did now in the United States, not their specific expectations for him. When

he referenced family in the context of this discussion, he seemed to be referencing his extended

family. The absence of information on his background made it difficult to fully understand

Geovany's viewpoints. Therefore, I asked him about it after the interview via text. I learned that

his father migrated from Jalisco and his mother was born in the United States. Not unlike

Martin's parents, they both currently worked as warehouse associates.

Student Success Through Geovany's Cultural Lens

The discussion we were having about having a better life helped Geovany connect his

thoughts about student success from his family's viewpoint to how he believed those in his

culture to understand it, commenting:

> I feel like the culture kind of expects us to lead a better life—do things better just in general. Like just build upon what the previous generation has done before . . . We're supposed to kind of reach new heights and levels that weren't even possible to the previous generations.

In his opinion, that was why people come to America from Mexico—to "build." He believed that

education acts a facilitator for such growth—"a platform for . . . how they [people from Mexico]

can improve themselves."

Yet, education alone does not make someone successful, according to Geovany. A person

needs their family. He thought "families and success . . . well, they kinda go hand and hand" in

his culture. It was for this reason he chose a picture of his family at a recent party to represent

student success through his cultural lens (Figure 12). He saw education as something that

brought them together and allowed them to stay near to each other. Not pursuing education can,

in Geovany's eyes, lead people down paths that take them away from family. He did not want

that himself in the same way that the final participant, Laura, did not want that for her own

children.

Figure 12. A photo of Geovany's family together at Christmas time.

Laura

Laura identifies as a Mexican woman in her early 50s. Like eight of her nine siblings, she

was born in Mexico and was brought to the United States in her later adolescent years. We did

not discuss her current immigration status. Laura had children very young, which became the

focal point of her attention after high school. She did not choose to attend college until she was

in her 40s. Living on the south side of Chicago, Laura attended an institute within the local city

college that focused on career and technical education. It was there where she received

certifications for medical coding. She continued her studies part time at that city (community)

college and eventually at a private university in Kentucky, which she attended online. Laura felt

"she did everything backward" at the time—having a child and getting married before getting an

education and a career—but looking back, she was proud of her journey and that her children

were a part of it. She was married to a man she was pleased to say supported her goals after being married to a man who was not. Laura currently worked in healthcare administration.

Laura and I conducted her interview on a Saturday afternoon via Zoom. We were initially scheduled to talk mid-week one day after work, but a family emergency had arisen, and Laura needed to focus on that. Family clearly meant a lot to Laura. She, like Martin, opted to submit photos she had on hand rather than take new photos. At the onset of the photo capture period, she had a set of pictures that she thought she would submit, but with more reflection on what student success meant to her, her family, and within the Mexican culture, she opted to swap those pictures out for others. Laura felt strongly that she wanted to submit photos without blurred faces so people could clearly see the life she was proud of, but time was against her, and she could not get the waivers signed in time.

Student Success to Laura

The photo Laura chose to represent her own understanding of student success was that of her and her husband at her college graduation (Figure 13). As noted earlier, he was her second husband. Laura married right out of high school to a Mexican man who expected Laura to fulfill her duties as mother and wife and nothing more. Laura was happy to start a family but was worried (as she felt many Mexican women are) that her "whole life [was] going to be about attending to the kids or attending to [her] husband." She saw that play out firsthand with her mother, whose life was centered on taking care of the home. Though Laura greatly appreciated what her mother did for her and her siblings, Laura did not want her own life to be defined by her home responsibilities. Her current husband, also a man of Mexican descent, supported

Laura's interest in going to school and becoming a professional; she "wanted more and he

encouraged [her] to do more."

Figure 13. A photo of Laura and her husband at her baccalaureate graduation ceremony.
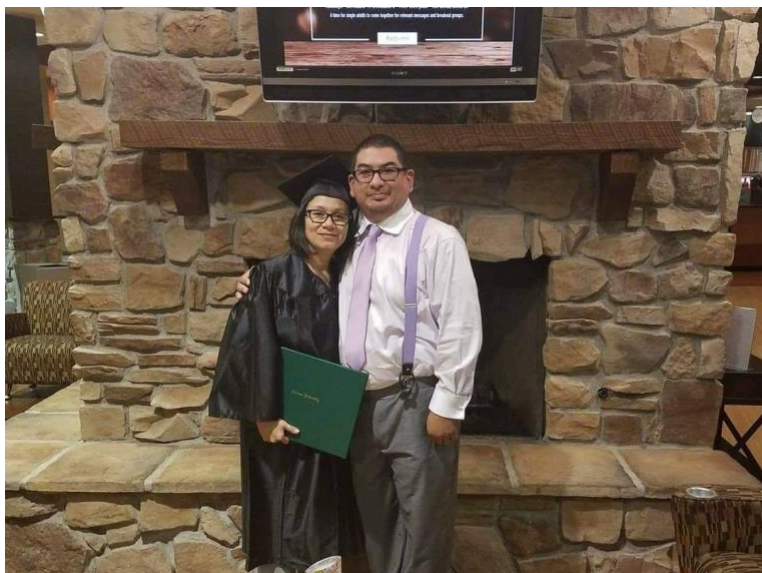
For Laura, more meant myriad things. At first it meant learning about the medical field.

She had a natural curiosity that led her to start studying medical coding. Her interests, coupled

with encouragement from counselors at the community college, led Laura to pursue "more" in

the form of a bachelor's degree in health information management. She wanted more education

because she "wanted to keep moving up and eventually be a lot more successful" than she was

previously. Success to her at this point in her life meant getting a promotion, being financially

independent, and being a role model for her children. She talked at length about wanting to set an

example for them—not only so they did not get pregnant and marry early like she did, but also so

they saw that getting an education as an adult was possible and doing something you love was

plausible.

Student Success to Laura's Family

Most of Laura's interview centered on her father and how his sacrifices shaped their family's understanding of student success. Laura did not talk much about their family's life in Mexico before her parents migrated to the United States from Michoacán, a state in western Mexico. Instead, the story she told started after she and her siblings were born in Mexico after her parents made their move to the United States. Like many immigrants, Laura's father came to the United States alone at first, leaving his wife and children in their homeland while he worked to establish himself in the new land. Once here, Laura's dad worked for a railroad company. The job provided a sound economic foundation for their family, affording him the opportunity to send money back to Mexico to support his children. While describing a photo of her home in Mexico that she did not choose to submit, Laura reflected on how poor her family was and how hard her father worked so he could bring their family to the United States:

> I was going to send in a picture of my grandfather and grandmother and in the background, it looks like—it almost looks like they're in an alley. It looks very poor. And that was our home. Like I came here when I was seven so that was our home . . . where I lived, where I grew up. My father was here. We were all in Mexico. So he, again, worked very hard to bring us all here so we didn't have to live that way.

The picture she did submit for this category—a photo of herself, her siblings, and her parents at a party—reminded her of how hard her father worked for them, to bring them together (Figure 14).

Figure 14. A photo of Laura's family together for her parents' anniversary in the United States.

Laura's father's ambitions did not end at bringing his family together. Coming to the United States was not just about getting his family out of poverty; he came to the United States to give them the opportunity to get a better education and a better job than he had. Like Martin's parents, he expected his children to finish high school and get a job. Laura shared that "people at the time were not even finishing high school, so to him, it was like if we made it through high school, if [we] graduate from high school, that was huge for him." Laura could not recall her father talking about college with her ever. Two of her older brothers decided to pursue postsecondary education on their own. They set an example for Laura and her other siblings, inspiring her to continue her own studies. Laura and six of her siblings now held certificates or degrees, working in accounting, computer engineering, and healthcare—not only meeting her father's expectations but exceeding them.

Laura only briefly talked about her mother's expectations—about what would be a success for her children. As mentioned, Laura's mom was a homemaker; her father was the

breadwinner. Laura's mom was happy to fill that role, tending to her husband and children's needs. Laura's mother, however, did not want that for her children, specifically her daughters. She, like her husband, wanted her children to finish school, but for a different reason. Laura's father wanted them to finish school so they did not have to "bust [their] butts" as he did. Her mother wanted the girls to finish school because "she didn't want [them] to depend on a man taking care of [them]"; financial independence was what Laura's mother considered student success.

Student Success Through Laura's Cultural Lens

For her third picture, Laura shared a photo of her hometown in Mexico taken from up on a hill (Figure 15).

Figure 15. A picture of the farm land just outside of Laura's village in Mexico.

Compared to the other two photos, it was not immediately clear how this represented student success or success of any kind. However, through a conversation about the photo and life back in

Mexico, it became clear that the picture was about sacrifice and the success that stems from such sacrifice. Laura recalled waking up in the mornings as a child and seeing those fields outside her window: "When somebody went to work, this is where they went." The fields were how they provided. Though their family was poor, Laura said she did not know struggle; she was a child and was protected from the challenges of labor and the ills of comparison. It was only when she arrived in the United States that she realized what they did not have back in Mexico:

> I remember coming here and seeing things I didn't see over there, eating foods that I didn't eat over there. I remember my grandmother telling me stories how sometimes she wouldn't eat for days and that she was ok because my dad and his siblings were eating. That comforted her. It didn't matter whether or not she ate, as long as they did. So I think a lot about that now that I'm here because there's a lot of people there of course.

Laura was speaking of her family in Mexico then and now who sacrificed to make her life possible. She was grateful for those sacrifices and saw the photo as a reminder of where she came from and how far she, her family, and her community had come. Community members, including her parents, had established financial stability in the United States and were now even returning to Mexico. Her older siblings were a part of that movement, having joined together to rebuild their childhood home. That was a form of success to her: "They didn't just leave and forget about [their home], they kept up with it." She credited the education they each got in the United States for making that sort of reinvestment possible.

Conclusion

The preceding portraits and photos begin to reveal the participants' perspectives on the phenomenon that is student success—perspectives that reflected stories of sacrifice, love, and ambition. They also begin to reveal how the participants perceived their family and community to understand success. Yet, those perspectives were but mere interpretations of another's

understanding. It was not until the focus group that those interpretations were validated and

expanded upon by the other participants. It was in that setting that the participants connected on

shared identities, experiences, and meanings. Those connections are described in the next

chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

A GROUP PERSPECTIVE ON MEANING

I explored the meaning of student success for a second time with the participants in a focus group setting, this time with all four participants present. Each participant used their photos as visual aids for telling their story during the showcase portion of the focus group. Storytelling about their meaning-making process around student success led to an open dialogue about shared experiences and understandings of the phenomenon. The following summarizes the findings derived from the two-part conversation.

Showcase

Martin was the first to share his photos. His descriptions were much more succinct than before, presumably because he had the chance to think things through during and after the interview. He began with the photos that represented his own understanding of student success. The two photos he submitted for this category were up on the presentation slide side-by-side as he talked. He described the one photo as him returning from Mexico on his first solo trip at age 4, and the other as being of his wife and kids on a trip to Cancun. Reflecting on both, he shared that he believed "succeeding in academia and thus work and career allows experiences for us to enjoy, from travel to leisure." His parents provided those experiences to him as a result of their hard work on the job and he provided those to his children as a result of his hard work in school.

Martin described his two family photos as his "previous life with [his] parents" and as his wife and kids at a birthday celebration. He commented that as a first-generation student of

124

Mexican descent, family had been an important part of his educational journey. He saw being together and having time to spend with his kids as "what it means to succeed in life and specifically education." He ended his showcase with the two photos representing how he believed those in his culture viewed student success. Talking about the plow and the picture of his uncles on the farm, Martin said the pictures reminded him where he came from and what needed to be done to succeed.

Specifically, Martin was reminded that if his family could work on the farm, struggling, he could do his "little piece of cake" office job. That resonated with Laura, who said the following about Martin's photo of the farmland:

> The background looks just like Mexico to me. It reminds me of being in Mexico and how hard they worked for us and hardly seeing them because they spent most of the time up there working to provide for all of us. So I understand how sometimes [work] can be overwhelming, but that's nothing compared to what [our family] had to go through for us.

Reflecting on the hard work ethic to which Martin and Laura were alluding, Geovany asked if Martin thought that work ethic played a role in his own education. Martin did, as evidenced in the following exchange:

> *Geovany*: Do you feel like that hard work ethic went into your education as well? Even outside of work?
>
> *Martin*: I think it made—I mean, before the age of the internet in the late 80s and early 90s we—you really couldn't look things up fast. You know, I think of first-generation kids in the late 80s and 90s as project managers—we kind of figured everything out on the fly. It kind of—it was out of necessity that one had to really focus and want to succeed in school because our parents depending on us so much . . . My parents being from rural [Mexico]—didn't really you know—my mom can read, but my dad struggled with reading and writing until a few years ago. So I was writing mortgage checks at the age of 8. So I kind of had to really pay attention in grade school. It kind of pushed me to want to learn even up until I graduated high school, because my parents depended on me for certain things. You know, my relatives as well—I can't tell you how many job applications I filled out for them, how many forms I filled out, how many letters I've

translated over my time. Ordering—even something as simple as ordering food back in the early 90s when there wasn't really that many Hispanic workers . . . it forced you to kind of learn.

Martin admitted that having that sort of responsibility forced him to be good at school and, in many ways, forced him to grow up. Filling out forms and cutting checks to pay their family bills—"there was no misconception of what life was [like]" for Martin.

Next, we turned to Liz to share a bit of her own meaning-making process around student success. She talked about the picture taken from her balcony and her goal to leave her small town behind her. She shared that living in the City of Chicago was student success to her, but in the same breath said she did not see a college education as something she needed to reach her goals. Referencing the photo of her and her dad in front of their vacation home, she said that education was not something he needed to reach his goals either. Still, she stressed that her dad always told her that education was important, encouraging her to take advantage of the opportunities he never had. Finally, Liz spoke about opportunities more generally (beyond education) when she shared the image of Little Village with the group. Reflecting on the community's success, she said that the entrance to the neighborhood symbolized "the opportunities we [the Mexican community] have had, and what we have done with them and how hard we've worked for it."

There was no immediate response to Liz's photos, so we moved on to Laura's showcase. She began by describing the photo of her holding her diploma, "finishing school." Completion came off as important to her because of what it could mean to her kids. She emphasized her desire to be a role model for her kids, showing "them that there's a lot of possibilities and there is no limit" to what they could achieve. She then segued to the photo of her siblings and parents— the one she chose to represent her family's understanding of success. Like Martin, Laura

emphasized how she valued being together, having spent so much time in Mexico as a child without her father, as he was working in the United States. She reflected that the photo marked a "very emotional moment for [her] dad because [she] knows he probably feels guilty in some way that he could not bring all of [them] together" sooner.

Laura shared that even after her father brought her and her siblings to the United States, he was gone for days working on the railroad. Her perception of his absence was that he worked hard so they did not have to. Laura said her father was always telling them, "*échale ganas*," meaning give it all they had, mainly when it came to school. He wanted them to get an education so they would have more opportunities available to them; he worked to provide them with that opportunity. Laura mentioned how much she appreciated her dad and all of those back in Mexico working to provide for their family over the years.

That resounded with Liz and Martin, as they too saw their parents as providers, although Liz shared that she did not realize that she characterized them as that until this conversation:

> *Liz*: I definitely have noticed that all their families are providers for sure. I didn't really mention that in my discussion [of my photos], but same situation. Like my dad, when he moved down here, it wasn't just supporting himself and his family, but was also taking care of others as well . . . the responsibility of taking care of the family over there.
>
> *Martin*: My father also came at 16 and had 12 siblings, so he financially supported all of them up until they were adults and they all came over.

Both Liz and Martin commented that their fathers had spent a good portion of their lives being responsible for their families back in Mexico *and* their families in the United States. Their fathers, like Laura's, had to work tirelessly to fulfill those responsibilities, leaving very little time for fun:

Martin: I am going to say that our parents didn't have much leisure time—our parents didn't have much leisure time for hobbies. They didn't have hobbies. They worked.

Laura: That is so true. I remember in high school when I wanted to join whatever team I was interested in, my father is like, "There is no time for that. You need to come home, help your mom. There is always something to do. There is no time for fun."

Liz: Yeah, that's kind of how my mother was raised. Like I don't want to say that they weren't allowed to have hobbies but they had the same mindset. like the girls had to stay home and help around the house, help my grandma. They weren't allowed to play sports or do other things because same as you said, both of you have said like it was all about work.

Liz's mom and Laura herself were to go to school and help around the house. Martin, Liz, and Geovany were to go to school and work. Whether it regarded her education or a job, Liz recalled her dad always "pushing that work mindset" on her and her siblings, which she felt reflected "work ethic" as a Mexican value.

The conversation about parental expectations around work and school could have gone on for much longer, but we moved on to Geovany's showcase in the interest of time. He first talked about his graduation picture:

This was the greatest achievement I've done education wise. That and going to college too, but I feel like this one was the like the end of a chapter for me and the beginning of a new one for me too as well. So I just chose [this photo] because I was brought up to finish what we started, kind of like you were saying Martin. Like, if you're going to do something, follow through with it.

He spoke more about follow-through as he talked about the photo of his cousin in dentistry school—the photo that to him represented how his family saw student success. The photo brought the conversation back to work ethic, as Geovany commented on the hard work his cousin had to put in to get where she was at:

> My cousin, she has worked extremely hard just to get where she's at. And I know that in our family we value that heavily because she's actually making it and like going through with it and then hopefully she just sticks with it.

Geovany felt his family valued that sort of hard work and follow-through, much like the other participants had previously indicated, particularly as it related to pursuing a career.

The focus on a career carried through to Geovany's description of his last photo—the one of his family that was meant to represent his interpretation of his culture's view on student success. He saw the photo as representing student success because it showcased a younger generation of trailblazers who were "pushing the bar" and "opening doors" to new opportunities for future generations. Geovany's reflection:

> This is my family. I felt like this was a representation for culture because of like, how I've seen the culture view trailblazers and like—these new generations of Mexicans, I guess, that are kind of paving the way for like this newer generation as well. Just like opening their minds to new things and like, opening doors . . . just thinking outside the box from what we've [Mexicans] been like.

Liz picked up on Geovany's idea of younger generations being trailblazers, commenting that she saw older generations as being "narrow minded" when it came to possibilities for their life paths. To her, "it's awesome to see these younger generations show what other opportunities we have and how we can also be successful in those routes."

At the end of the showcases, I pointed out that each of their families came from a different part of Mexico, with different regional influences on their cultural values; their families arrived here by different means, in different decades, and found their way into different circumstance; and they themselves were each of a different generation, having attended school at a different point in history. Yet they all told a similar story, had shared experiences, and had common understandings of student success. With solidarity having been established, we turned

away from the photos and had an open dialogue about their understandings of student success, digging deeper into the factors that shaped those understandings.

Open Dialogue

The open dialogue began with me sharing the single point in time that I can remember as defining my view of student success. I then asked the group if there was such a defining moment in their own lives. None of them really answered the question, per se, but they did respond. Martin was the first to chime in, saying being sent to Mexico every summer by himself was highly influential in shaping his view of student success. Those trips gave him perspective on a different culture. They also made him appreciate the comforts he had, "seeing it could be a lot worse" when speaking of the poverty he saw while there. Those experiences, coupled with the time he spent working with his dad in a factory, helped him define what he did not want for himself, and, in turn, what he would consider success. Geovany picked up on the idea of comparing one life to another as something that shaped his view of success. He had recently traveled to Mexico, where cell service and other amenities were unavailable. He appreciated the way of life there—that "you get to breathe a little bit" instead of feeling constant pressure like he felt here in the United States—but he insinuated he preferred the opportunities available to him here.

From there I asked the group to reflect on how their identity as a person of Mexican origin had affected the way they had come to understand student success, if at all. Martin, admitting he was the talkative one, again answered first, saying that his identity was both a motivating factor and the focal point of his education. Martin shared that he studied Latin

American history while at university, explicitly focusing on narcotic violence in Mexico in the early 2000s. His papers were on topics connected to his culture; his classmates shared his culture. Though Martin admitted he did not really engage in the traditional college experience (because he had to work), sharing a minoritized identity with his peers made Martin feel as though he was supported in the program. He commented:

> So as far as in the classes, we're all kind of more supportive because we are the minority especially in an academic setting. So I think we're willing—more open to talking and helping each other out and taking notes.

In a similar vein, Liz felt that being bilingual had helped her be more successful generally in life:

> I definitely kind of agree with Martin . . . Like I feel like especially being bilingual has helped me a lot in my in my student success. I have to talk to people a lot. Feel like definitely being bilingual has given me opportunities that others don't have only because, like, I mean, we've all seen it. We all know it like the second you speak Spanish to somebody who has really broken English, the comfort that you see in their eyes, and the happiness if they're able to talk to [you]. This definitely helped me a lot. So yeah, I would definitely tie them together and say that it has given me a lot of a lot more student success.

Laura wholeheartedly agreed with Liz on the value of being bilingual. Interestingly enough, Liz and Laura did not comment on the influence of their identity as Mexican women on their success generally or in school, though they did both skirt around issues they had with culturally-defined gender norms.

I asked the participants if their understanding of student success had changed over time. Liz said it definitely had, as she, like her parents, used to think she had to go to college in order to be a successful barber and open her own shop. Now, 10 years later, she knew that not to be the case. Martin, having been out of college just over 10 years, said he would have told his younger self to finish on time and pay more attention. In his words, he was "just kind of lingering" at his

community college. Today, with the benefit of perspective gained from age, he realized the value of "succeeding when you're supposed to"—referencing a typical timeline for completing a degree.

I then took the conversation in a different direction, reflecting on how the participants each talked about student success and success interchangeably during their interviews and during the showcase portion of the focus group. I used the conversation about success in general terms (discussed in Chapter 6) to transition to my final question about the tensions that may exist between their understanding of student success and how they believed others understood it. Martin started the conversation by saying he felt that in "our culture" (alluding to them as a unified group there for the first time), people believe that once you graduate, you get a job and success was a given; this was a problematic way of thinking to him because there was so much more to it than that. He elaborated, stating, "Our parents don't know about the resumes and the interviews and the phone interviews and the network and the job applications . . . they don't see what else it entails to get to success after school." I called on Geovany after Martin's statement because Geovany had shared a very similar sentiment during his interview that had not yet surfaced. He had talked about his parents' laser focus on the outcome of graduation and not the journey to graduation. He elaborated on that thought with the group:

> My parents didn't see the work that I put in, day in and day out at school and being an athlete. They would just see me walking on stage or me walking on the basketball court or something. They wouldn't see the work and the hours that I've put in to get to where they wanted me to get—[where] I wanted to get to.

For Geovany, where his parents wanted him to be and where he was going were one and the same. For Liz, there was (is) more tension between her family's view of success and her own.

Certain family members saw success as having a career that made money, but Liz believed that "just because you get paid a certain amount doesn't mean you're successful in life."

Conclusion

As previously acknowledged, talking about something as personal as student success can be an intimidating endeavor. The photos helped to reduce that intimidation in both the interview and focus group settings, giving the participants a starting point for discussing how they had come to understand student success—the moments that shaped its meaning for them. Though the photos and the stories shared during the focus group were identical to what was shared by the participants during their interviews, they were reflected on differently by the group, creating "data not possible through the use of discrete interviews" (Latz, 2017, p. 83). Despite their differences, participants connected on identities, values, expectations, and experiences, opening them up to being more honest about how they saw student success. A deeper understanding of the phenomenon as it is lived by past and present community college students of Mexican origin was thus achieved and new meanings of student success were revealed. Those meanings are presented and interpreted in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

A DISCUSSION ABOUT MEANING AND MEANING-MAKING

The concern that drove this study was universal—centering on how traditional student success metrics in higher education can silence the experiences and successes of specific populations of students. However, the approach required more particularity—it required challenging the dominant ideologies of what constitutes student success by placing the experiences of a marginalized student population at the heart of the conversation about meaning and measures. That population in focus was past and present community college students of Mexican origin—a group that is known to have relatively low educational access and attainment (Lumina Foundation, 2022; Núñez & Crisp, 2012; Schak & Nichols, 2016), but whose educational experiences and outcomes have largely been unexplored in the literature as distinct from those of their Latinx peers.

In designing my study, I aimed not to identify a single truth about student success that overrides completion as a measure of success but rather to understand the individual's relation to student success. Using photos as representations of life, the participants and I embarked on a journey of reflection and discovery around that relationship. The stories behind their photos uncovered both the participants' intentionality toward student success and its manifestation in their lives; that is, how the participants made meaning of student success throughout their lives and how they measured achieving student success as of today. Taken together, their intentions and manifestations deepened my understanding of the phenomenon, revealing three new

meanings of student success: paving the way, finding your path, and crossing a finish line. Each meaning is complex and encompasses various measures that have personal and cultural significance to the participants and that are in many ways not measurable.

Ahead of unpacking those meanings, I first contemplate the ways in which the participants spoke about student success, as there is "no way to pry language and meaning apart" (Vagle, 2018, p. 65) in the study of a phenomenon. Having considered the intentions behind the participants' word choice, I then provide an analysis of the participants' experiences through the lens of the literature. In this section, I identify points of convergence and divergence in what is known about the experiences of the larger Latinx group and consider the role context of origin played in the participants' understanding of the phenomenon. With that setting, I then turn to the meanings and measures around student success revealed in this study, considering how they align with, challenge, or go beyond the traditional measures of student success.

Considering Language: Student Success Versus Success

From the onset of the study, I told the participants that the purpose was to explore what "student success" means for current and past community college students of Mexican origin and how that meaning reflects their lived experiences. I asked them to take photographs of people, persons, or things that represented what "student success" meant from three distinct vantage points (i.e., the participant's, their family's, and their culture's) and told them the photos would be used as a basis for discussion during the study. I communicated this purpose and these instructions in the initial invitation email, in the information webinar, and through the photo

capture instruction sheet. Yet, somehow student success did not end up being the focal point of the study—success did.

At times, participants used the terms "student success" and "success" interchangeably, with verbal cues that they were speaking about their success as it stemmed from their education, but using the term "success" still yet without a qualifier. At other times, it seemed as if the participants conflated "student success" and "success," as they seemed unable to separate the success they were experiencing now from the success they had in school. More often than not, though, the participants were truly speaking about success more broadly than in a student context. Having noted this in the interviews and seeing these patterns continue in focus group dialogue, I directly asked the group whether they saw student success as something different than generic success. Liz responded first, saying that because she did not see education as having been necessary for her to be successful in her career, she thought of success more generally. Geovany felt general success encompassed many parts of his life—meaning it affected other people—whereas student success was more personal. General success was more in focus for Laura during the study because of where she was in her life. School and being a student were behind her, and she was now focused on being successful as a professional. Martin did not comment on this topic.

With these brief explanations, it became more clear that the participants were intentional in their diction; they saw "student success" and "success" as separate phenomena and spoke about them differently at different times. Yet, their choice to submit existing photos rather than take new photos to represent student success may suggest a different thought process was at

work. Reflecting on what the participants shared about the photo capture process during their interviews, they each in some way indicated a sense of discomfort with the assignment. Their discomfort did not seem to stem from a need to not expose their personal life, as presumed to be a factor in photovoice research (Latz, 2017), but rather because they had not ever thought about the meaning of student success; no one ever asked them to do so. So, instead of critically thinking about its meaning as a distinct phenomenon and then going in search of a visual that would encapsulate that meaning, they opted to identify existing photos that told a story about success as they generally understood it and then find education's place in that story. This challenge has not been represented in the literature, where student success is presented as a comprehensible and discrete phenomenon that is entirely describable by the student. In recognition of the ways in which participants perceived the phenomenon and not how we in the academy speak about it, "student" in the term "student success" will be put in parenthesis herein (e.g., [student] success), starting within the descriptions of the factors that influenced participants' perceptions.

Factors That Influenced the Perception of (Student) Success

At its core, the focus of the study was on (student) success—a form of attainment. Yet, attainment is predicated on access; in some part, a student's success in or even after college is connected to their experiences before college. In many ways, the photos shared and the stories told by the participants reflected that connection between pre- and postmatriculation experiences. In the following paragraphs, I dissect those experiences to illuminate the underlying factors that

influenced the participants' view of (student) success and relate those to the already known

factors that influence their Latinx peers.

Prematriculation Experiences and Factors

The stories behind the photos submitted to convey the meaning of (student) success, in

some way, each began or involved the participants' parents' choice to migrate. One or both of

their parents each had migrated to the United States from rural parts of Mexico, demonstrating (if

only indirectly) the continued flow of migrants from Mexico's impoverished interior that has

been documented as a result of the Bracero program of the 1940s and 1950s (Donato, 2017;

Fussell, 2004; Martin, 2003). The participants spoke fondly of their parents' homeland, with

some sharing photographs depicting people working in the fields and the relative simplicity of

life there. They also spoke of the struggle associated with that life—the hard labor, the poverty,

the time away from family. Laura commented on this the most, reflecting on the impoverished

conditions she grew up in back in Mexico and her grandparents' sacrifices to feed their family,

including them choosing not to eat so so others may.

Like so many immigrants, the participants' parents desired more—more than what their

own parents had and more than what their own parents did. That desire ultimately pushed the

participants' parents away from Mexico; the economic opportunity available in the United States

simultaneously pulled them here. The availability of better paying jobs as a predominant pull

factor is consistent with the literature on migration patterns from Mexico to the United States

(Donato, 2017; Grava, 2017). However, none of the participants directly talked about the

documented push factors for Mexican migration, namely the economic or environmental crises

that occurred in Mexico in the 1970s and 1980s (Fussell, 2004; Nawrotzki & DeWaard, 2016).

Their silence on this topic could be because crisis withdrawal was not a push factor for the

participants' parents. Alternatively, and more likely, it could have failed to surface as a

significant factor because the participants, distant from the structural origins of those crises, were

unaware of their influence. At any rate, relative opportunity, described by Langenkamp (2019) as

a pragmatic optimism that draws immigrants to our shores, surfaced as the driving force in their

parents' choice to migrate to the United States. Their parents believed they had more

opportunities in the United States to provide a better life for their families, particularly a better

education, so they made the trip across the border.

As detailed in the literature, legal migration options were not plentiful following the end

of the Bracero movement and the implementation of the Immigration and Nationality Act of

1976 and the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (Donato & Massey, 1993; Fussell &

Massey, 2004; Garsip & Asad, 2016; Huber, 2010). As such, the participants' parents (except for

Geovany and Liz's mothers, who were born in the United States) made the trip to the United

States without documentation. They each landed (or were born) into an existing gateway

community (i.e., Chicago) where, according to Stamps and Bohon (2006), the potential for the

transmission of social capital usually is very high. Yet, the role of the community in supporting

integration and success (student or otherwise) was largely not discussed during the participants'

interviews or the focus group. The exception may have been Martin. He briefly alluded to what

Portes and Rumbaut (2001) called "between family" social capital when discussing his

grandparents' support for his parents' migration and his parents' role in helping their siblings

settle in the United States. He also touched on "within family" social capital when he spoke about how he helped his parents operate within the United States by serving as their personal cultural and language broker—a typical role filled by children of immigrants (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The general absence of conversation about the role of the community in incorporation experiences is notable given the documented importance of community in overcoming the challenges of being an immigrant (or a descendent of immigrants) in the United States (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Waldinger & Catron, 2015), as the lack of ethnic solidarity (or significance of it in their lives) could have influenced the participants' views on education and on (student) success.

All but one of the participants' parents (Liz's mom) had less than a high school education, mostly limiting their employment opportunities to blue-collar jobs. Back in Mexico, their parents worked on farms; in the United States, they worked in factories, on the railroad, and doing construction (again, except for Liz's mom, who was an insurance agent). That mirrors previous findings that Latinx students often come from households with low educational attainment and modest means (Asante-Muhammad et al., 2021; Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; de Brey et al., 2019; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Irizarry, 2012; Quintana, 2021)—which was a tacit factor in the participants' choice of a community college over a 4-year institution (Núñez & Crisp, 2012).

Laura, Liz, and Martin recounted how their parents' occupations affected their lives—keeping them away for long hours and leaving them with little time to spend with their families, with work becoming the focal point of their lives. This is consistent with Hofstede's (n.d., 2001)

characterization of the Mexican culture as masculine, centering on hard work as a means of security for they family. Laura, Liz, and Martin also commented on how their parents' occupations, affiliated socioeconomic status, and, in some cases, life decisions translated to their parents' aspirations for their children. This association made sense given previous findings (Ibarra, 2004; Irizarry, 2012) that one's dreams and beliefs about the future are based on occupational, educational, and social experiences of those who came before you, shaped by the realities of the time period.

On the whole, the focal point of the participants' parents' aspirations for their children was on getting a better education. However, parental expectations for their children's education were more conservative, as is the case within many Latinx families (Achinstein et al., 2015; Langenkamp, 2019). For the two older participants in the group (Martin and Laura; from the Oregon Trail and Gen X generations), the expectation was that they graduate high school and get a job. Laura was also expected to "come home, help [her] mom," reflecting known gender norms in the Mexican culture (Hofstede, n.d.; Ovink, 2014). For the two younger participants (Liz and Geovany; Millenial and Gen Z), it was that they went to college and found a career. The difference in expectations can begin to be explained by generational differences in societal educational attainment. In the 1980s and 1990s, when Martin and Laura came of age, completing high school was an achievement, as fewer minorities were attending college than those today (Duffin, 2022). For that reason, graduating high school was "huge" for Laura's dad and why Martin's parents thought a high school diploma was all he needed to be successful. With few of those around them going to college, college was generally elusive to both sets of parents. As

Martin shared, his parents did not know what lie beyond high school, so they could not expect

for him to go beyond that. That mentality is consistent with the literature on Latinx parental

expectations (Achinstein et al., 2015; Langenkamp, 2019) in that it demonstrates that the

participants' parents may have had high aspirations for their children's future, but those

aspirations were tempered by what was known to be possible. These findings go beyond the

literature in that they showcase the relativeness of aspirations, shaped by generational differences

in sociohistorical context.

College was largely an unknown for Liz and Geovany's parents as well, but college

attendance had become more the norm after the 2000s (Dunkin, 2021), when both of these

participants grew up. Family and friends of theirs had attended college, so there was a precedent

for them and available guidance for them to lean on. This finding demonstrates how weak,

vertical ties with friends can influence college attendance, which have been documented as

important contributors to Latinx student outcomes by Cerna et al. (2009). College, therefore,

became the expected minimum form of education to Liz and Geovany's parents. This marks the

significance of social capital in supporting college-going aspirations, as posited by Muñoz and

Rincón (2015), and in setting college-going expectations—a fact not previously considered by

researchers.

The expectations of the participants' parents, in some way, played into the aspirations

and expectations the participants had for themselves. The relationship between parent

expectations and student aspirations is not entirely made evident by previous literature on

educational aspirations and expectations (Achinstein et al., 2015; Langenkamp, 2019; O'Connor,

2009), but was clearly on display in this study. Liz shared that she "wasn't really planning on going to college," but did because her parents wanted her to go. Geovany graduated high school and enrolled in a 4-year university, as his sister did and as his parents now expected him to. Martin and Laura's parents did not want their children to live a hard life, so they encouraged them to get an education; they chose to get an advanced education.

However, none of the participants had a clear goal in mind when preparing to go to college. Stunted goal formation for students of Mexican origin has been documented as being a result of the challenging history of incorporation of Mexicans in the United States (Bohon et al., 2006; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). The connection between group reception, generational status, and goal formation was not explicitly made by the participants nor entirely evident when interpreting and writing about their stories. One the surface, the participants seemed to struggle with goal formation simply because of personal reasons. Geovany thought he wanted to go into accounting but was not sure that was the career choice for him. Liz went to school to prepare for possibly owning a business one day, but she really just wanted to "cut hair." Laura had an interest in the medical field, but did not know what she specifically wanted to do. Martin had interests but no career in mind coming out of high school. Given the stories they shared, however, about the challenges of their family settling in the United States, it is possible there is a connection between their families' incorporation and the participants' own challenges around goal formation. Whatever the case, the lack of clearly defined educational gals delayed applications and limited choices for the participants, as has been documented as the norm for Latinx students during their college choice process (Alvarez, 2015; Hurtado et al., 1997; Nuñez & Kim, 2012).

Liz admitted her lack of interest in attending college left her "signing up for classes literally the week before" the next semester started. Laura and Martin simply chose the local community college to explore their interests. Having pursued what he thought he wanted to study at a university, Geovany ended up back at the local community college trying to figure out what he wanted to do. Yet, ultimately, they all did find their way to college.

Postmatriculation Experiences and Factors

According to Excelencia in Education (Santiago & Cuozzo, 2018), Latinx students most commonly attend a community or technical college out of high school and are the least likely to choose a 4-year university among all racial/ethnic groups. That tracks with the choice made by Martin, Laura, and Liz to first enroll at a community college. Martin and Laura had since gone on to a university. They had also graduated with a bachelor's degree, aligning with the 52% growth in baccalaureate degree attainment that the Latinx population has seen in the last decade (Excelencia in Education, 2018).

Why the participants chose to attend a local community college as their entry point into higher education was not entirely clear from the photos or the stories they shared. Yet, based on certain experiences that were discussed, cost seemingly played a role in their choice. Liz shared that though she had been accepted to a university after completing her general education courses, she chose not to go because the school was "way too expensive to just do hair for a living." Researchers have found this to be a common mentality for Latinx students, who as a group are financially less likely to be able to afford college without assistance; they see college as expensive, yet do not go in search of assistance, instead deciding to not pursue education or

attend a lower-cost institution (Cerna et al., 2009; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Muñoz & Rincón, 2015). Geovany broke that mold, choosing first to attend an expensive liberal arts institution. He eventually stopped out because he was forced to attend courses online due to COVID-19 disruptions and did not feel the cost of attending the university was worth it any longer; he eventually reenrolled at a local, lower-cost community college. The choice to attend a college with a low sticker price, or in Liz's case to not attend an institution because of a high sticker price, aligns with Muñoz and Rincón's (2015) finding that Latinx students' college choices are most affected by institutions' rising dependency on tuition and increases in the costs of operations.

The college's proximity to home was also presumed to be a factor in the participants' college choices, as they all attended the community college closest to where they lived (as opposed to the less common option of going to a community college out of district). Proximity was never directly spoken about, but it is of note that three of the four participants also transferred at some point during their collegiate careers to an institution that was also near or accessible from their home. Laura transferred to a private university after completing her associate's degree. Though the institution was located in Kentucky, she could complete her course of study online. Martin transferred to one of the major private universities in downtown Chicago after completing his general education requirements at a community college in the suburbs. Geovany did a reverse transfer to the community college nearest to him after completing one term at a private university a few towns over from where he lived. These findings open up the possibility that being near to one's home and support system may be a

significant influencer in college choice and student outcomes for male and female students of

Mexican origin, as opposed to just being a factor in the outcomes of Mexican women as reported

by Cerna et al. (2009).

Though transferring is a common experience for Latinx students, attending a private 4-

year university is not; only 12% of Latinx completers obtain a degree from a private college

(Libassi, 2018). The fact that 75% of this sample (though small) had attended a private university

and 50% had persisted from associate to baccalaureate studies is notable given the previous

performance of the population at hand, potentially marking a shift in college-going attendance

patterns for the population. Then again, these patterns could be a product of the criteria for the

study that required participants to have graduated, transferred, or remained enrolled at a

community college. Alternatively, these patterns could result from the participants' geographic

location—living in a major metropolitan area where the various types of institutions available to

a student are visible.

At any rate, the participants' attainment is also significant because of the responsibilities

the participants had to juggle while pursuing a degree. All four participants worked while

attending school. Martin worked both to fulfill his parents' expectations of employment after

high school and to be able to fulfill his own interests in going to college. He recalled his parents'

stance on going to college:

> You can't really complain that [school] interfered. If you're going to do school, you got
> to do school and work. There's no complaining or saying that it's interfering because you
> have to do both . . . but once you commit to one, you got to follow through with it.

In reverse order of importance, Liz went to school to please her parents and worked to please

herself; she just wanted to do hair. She believed she actually could have reached her goal of

moving to the city sooner if she had not spent time and money on college. Geovany currently worked full time while attending school full time but did not elaborate on why he had such a full plate of responsibilities at his age. Laura, being a mom, said she had to work while attending college because her family did not have the money to manage to send her to school and provide for the children. Feeling pressure to do whatever it takes to succeed in school can be interpreted as a modern-day manifestation of the Mexican value of *marianismo*—a female's responsibility to take care of her family (Ovink, 2014).

According to Torres (2006), having to work and take care of responsibilities at home is a common reality for Latinx students—one that forces them to delay enrollment, enroll part time, stop-out, and elongate their completion timeline. Such was the case for all four of the participants in this study. Laura waited nearly 20 years after high school to start college, having a family of her own to take care of. Laura, Martin, and Liz attended school part time, which meant it took them longer than the expected 150% time to complete their respective degrees (USDE, n.d.). According to the literature, normally the elongated timeline would have led to noncompletion (Shapiro et al., 2017; Torres, 2006). Nevertheless, these participants persisted. Geovany also persisted after feeling "lost" and stopping out following the passing of his grandfather, COVID-19 disruptions, and a lack of a sense of belonging at his first institution.

Representation on campus has been proven to create a stronger sense of belonging and stronger institutional and goal commitment among Latinx students (Conchas & Acevedo, 2020; Crisp et al., 2015; Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Quintana, 2021). Cerna et al. (2009) found that to be the case, particularly for Mexican males, as it was in this study. Martin felt this in his

bachelor's program at the university he attended. There he was enrolled in a Latino studies program—a program often pursued by Latinx students. As shared in an previous chapter, Martin felt his classmates were all "more supportive because [they were] the minority, especially in that academic setting . . . [they] were willing—more open to talking and helping each other out." Because of work, Martin could not engage in co-curricular activities with his peers, which he felt was the traditional college experience. Geovany had more of a traditional college experience, attending a residential 4-year university (even though he commuted). Still, he was not engaged, feeling as though he did not belong because the population at the university was mostly White. He felt much better about the culture and climate of the community college he now attended, as he "feels there [are] different age groups, cultures and everything."

Relative to major choices, the participants mostly chose fields of study that could immediately yield a job. This choice is contrary to the documented tendency of Latinx students to choose a major that requires an advanced degree for gainful employment, as documented by Libassi (2018). Liz attended cosmetology school and was pursuing an associate's degree in business so she could cut hair and eventually own a salon. She still aspired to own a business, but believed she could achieve that without more education. Geovany initially chose to study accounting, but was now undecided. Laura obtained certifications for medical coding that immediately landed her a job. She then worked while pursuing a bachelor's degree in health information management and was now a medical office manager. Martin was the only participant who pursued a degree in a social science field that would have required him to get a master's or a doctorate for field-related employment (e.g., as a professor). Martin, however, leaned on his

work experience at a bank and found a job (one that required a bachelor's degree) in finance after college.

Final Thought on Factors

Each of the factors described in the participants' pre- and postmatriculation experiences contributed to how the participants understood success. However, if looked at independently, it would not be clear how those discrete experiences and factors shaped their understanding of (student) success. To yield a deeper understanding of meaning, the participants' experiences needed to be put in conversation with one another—speaking in terms of bringing together the pre- and postmatriculation experiences of the individual *and* bringing together the collective experiences of the group.

<div align="center">

Meanings and Measures of (Student) Success

</div>

With participant experiences and latent factors considered, I now turn to the overarching meanings of (student) success revealed through this study and the measures that manifest those meanings. Embedded in this section are reflections on how the meanings and measures as described by these previous and current community college students of Mexican origin align with, challenge, or go beyond the traditional understanding and measures of (student) success.

Meaning One: Paving the Way

The first overarching meaning of (student) success derived from the experiences the participants shared was "paving the way." Participants spoke of their parents' experiences migrating to the United States, focusing particularly on their economic motivations. There were limited opportunities available to them in Mexico, and the United States promised more

opportunities—for them and for their families. So they came to the United States, seeking a life that would allow them to provide for their families and pave the way for upward mobility.

Providing as Measure of (Student) Success

The participants talked about providing in the traditional sense as in providing financially for one's family. The participants' parents worked hard to be able to provide food and shelter for their children, and in some cases, for their extended family back in Mexico. Providing in this way was about, as Martin said, "doing whatever it takes" to survive. Today, the participants' families had all moved beyond just surviving and were now focused on thriving. As such, their ideas about what it means to provide were much more abstract. Some aimed to provide an example of what is possible to those who follow, whereas others aimed to provide experiences—for themselves and for their children—that would give them both well-rounded global perspectives. In either case, providing was both a form of success to the participants as well as the foundation for success; they recognized they had only been able to achieve what they achieved (educationally or otherwise) because of what their parents did for them, the examples their parents set, and the expectations the participants' parents now set for their children to do more than they ever thought was possible.

In no way is the notion of being able to provide represented in current measures of (student) success used in academia. Current measures in many ways represent America's individualistic society, as documented by Hofstede (n.d., 2001). That is, they are about the individual's success in school, not the familial or community success experienced as a result of schooling that was described as being one of the key forms of (student) success by the

participants in this study. The exception may be the newer (student) success measure of wage

growth used by the American Association of Community Colleges (n.d.) in its VFA, as it can be

correlated to the financial ability to provide (although that measure seems more aligned with

upward mobility).

Upward Mobility as a Measure of (Student) Success

As the participants shared their experiences, they often used comparisons to explain why

they described (student) success in the way they did. Examples of those comparisons included

their parents pushing for them to have more than they had, their parents not wanting their

children to endure the challenges they had to endure, they themselves not wanting their kids to

make the choices they did, and the participants wanting a more out of life than what a life

without an education could give. In this way, the participants described (student) success as

moving beyond the circumstances of one's past. To the participants, education, in some way, was

but one way to overcome that past and ensure social and economic mobility in the future. As

Geovany put it, education was a "platform for how they [could] improve themselves." In some

contexts described, "themselves" literally meant the participant; they went to school to improve

their situation, to follow their ambitions. In other cases, they spoke more about collective

improvement; decisions were made and actions were taken to improve their families and

communities' situations.

Again highlighting the differences between individualistic and collectivist societies

(Hofstede, n.d., 2001, 2011), the participants measured (student) success not just by what they

accomplished by going to school and by working, but by what the Mexican community has

accomplished as a whole by coming to the United States and making a life for themselves. Being able to support their families here and at home; starting businesses in the United States; being able to reinvest in Mexico—it just shows "how hard [they] have worked to make it out here" and that they are "proud of their roots" in Liz's words. Upward mobility, thus, was not about moving beyond, but about being able to reach back, nearly reflecting a sense of transnationalism as described by A. Chang (2018) as "walking forward, while always looking back" (p. 39). This sort of temporal and spatial boundary spanning as a mark of (student) success is not represented in the largely forward-facing metrics used in the future-focused (Hofstede, 2011) U.S. education system, specifically those used in IPEDS (USDE, 2011).

Meaning Two: Finding Your Own Path

The stories that depicted the success of previous generations in paving the way for others served as a backdrop for the experiences the participants shared about finding their own paths in life. Their paths, particularly in higher education, had not been linear, nor had they proceeded down them with unwavering confidence, free of obstacles. Still, they persisted, walking a path of which they were proud. Though the participants were now at different places in their lives—both in terms of their actual age and in terms of establishment—they each saw independence and work–life balance as markers of (student) success.

Independence as a Measure of (Student) Success

The participants conceived of independence in two ways—financial independence and independent action. Being able to support themselves financially seemed essential to all participants, especially because they had each (at least partially) paid their own way through

college. Yet, the women in the group were most vocal about financial independence as a form of (student) success. They were both uncomfortable with the gender norms of their culture, wanting more than to be a homemaker like their mothers were. Education afforded them the opportunity to break away from culturally-defined gendered pathways by preparing them to enter the workforce and establish themselves as professionals.

Independent action was another form of success for the participants—specifically, having the confidence to pursue the unknown. Demonstrating that the Mexican culture may not be as averse to uncertainty as has been documented by Hofstede (n.d.), most of the participants' parents set the example in this regard, having made a choice to come to the United States without a safety net. Though none of the participants took such monumental-sized leaps in their education or career trajectories, they did figure out how to navigate the U.S. education system on their own, finding their way to and through college without the benefit of having others go before them. Instead of leaning on traditional social capital, the participants leaned into the aspirational, resistant, familial, and linguistic capital that surrounded them to support them in stepping out into the unknown of college (Yosso, 2005).

Independence is by far the most intriguing of the measures discussed because it runs contrary to the collectivist orientation of Mexican society. Independence as a goal may reflect the gradual acculturation of the Mexican people in the United States—a society that structures and regularly measures independence. In the form of (student) success metrics, independence can be said to be demonstrated by employment in that an income can provide for financial independence (although that is not always the case). Independence can also be measured in the

form of persistence, reflecting an individual's ability to navigate circumstances and progress toward a goal. The relative importance of independence is why progress (or through-put) metrics, as recommended by organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges (n.d.) and Achieving the Dream (2018), are critical to measuring students' success, particularly for those with minoritized identities and different perspectives on what is important in life.

Work–Life Balance as a Measure of (Student) Success

Though most of the participants pursued an education in some part to ensure financial stability, there was a general acknowledgment that money does not buy happiness and work is not everything. Having seen their parents work hours on end away from their homes and their families, the participants wanted more of a work–life balance—they wanted time with their families. Martin captured this sentiment and the Mexican value of *familismo* by saying that "being together is just success in its own right." Education was seen by most to be central to achieving togetherness, affording them employment opportunities that allowed them to work during the day and be more present when they were home. Work–life balance was also conceived of as having "a healthy lifestyle," in Liz's words. The participants saw work as a part of their life, contrary to the tendency of the masculine-oriented Mexican culture to position work at the center of life (Hofstede, n.d., 2001). The participants wanted the ability to have hobbies, the ability to travel, and the ability to live where they wanted. More than that, they wanted to be able to do what they loved. They wanted a career.

Beyond being employed and having income, traditional (student) success metrics do not consider quality of life after college. Environmental quality, physical and mental health, leisure time, belonging, security—these are not easily measurable in any circumstance, but particularly so after the student leaves the institution. Though not by itself a measure of (student) success in higher education, student satisfaction is considered an important contributor to (student) success (Bryant, 2020; Wach et al., 2016). In some ways, satisfaction was captured in what the participants meant by work–life balance—being satisfied with their life circumstances as they had stemmed from education—but that is not student satisfaction—which has more to do with an educational experience. Notwithstanding, these findings indicate a need to consider how we might measure, or at the very least, pay attention to, students' quality of life as an exercise in supporting (student) success.

Meaning Three: Crossing a Finish Line

Traditional measures of (student) success in the United States were not the focal point of this study (exactly the opposite actually), but they did surface in their own ways when talking with the participants. Graduating and finding a job were all described as being forms of (student) success. For the participants, these figurative finish lines reflected parental expectations as much as they did their personal aspirations and intentions for their educational and professional pursuits.

Graduation as a Measure of (Student) Success

Participants largely saw graduation as a part of (student) success. It was the literal definition of (student) success to one participant. Be it from high school or college, graduating

was a clear and present expectation of the participants' parents. As so many of them came to the United States to provide for a better life, which in part included access to a better education, graduation was the goal they collectively were working toward. In their parents' eyes, achieving that goal inherently meant their children were successful (whether that was true or not). For others, graduation was more symbolic. It represented the success the participants had experienced while in school—the work they put into completing their course of study and the obstacles they had overcome along the way (e.g., stopping out). It also symbolized the successes the participants saw or could see as a result of having gone to college—not the least of which was employment. As Geovany put it, graduation, in this way, was both an end and a beginning.

Graduation or, more broadly completion, as a measure of (student) success is more strictly conceived of as an end in U.S. society. Both measures signify the act of finishing something without concern for what stems from finishing it. Further, the measures do not reflect the actions that lead to finishing, except when it comes to the time it takes to finish them (e.g., standard timeframes for completion). If it were not for the access to education provided by the participants' parents, graduation would never have been possible, and the type of success the participants experienced after graduation would have never been conceivable. This more than anything signifies the relationship between access, attainment and post-education outcomes (like employment)—a relationship that has not been explored with enough attention.

Employment as a Measure of (Student) Success

The participants portrayed getting a job as the natural next step after graduation, not necessarily because they thought it to be the case, but because, for the large part, their parents

did; they believed you went to school so you could get a job. For some, that meant any job that could be obtained with the credential they had earned; to them, any job of that nature would be an improvement over the jobs the participants' parents held. For others, there was more of a concern for what type of job they could get. Those participants reflected on the pressure and judgment they felt when asked what they would do career-wise and how much money they could make. They were less interested in answering that question and more interested in exploring new opportunities—in "taking different routes" as Liz put it.

Whatever route the participants took, they each understood the importance of work and valued a good work ethic. Some even considered the work ethic instilled by their parents to be a gift—something that had been instrumental to getting them to where they were today. Because of the hard work they put into school, they could get into the field they wanted, get the title they wanted, and get the promotion they wanted. Employment, thus, was positioned by the participants as a manifestation of personal interests more than anything. Sure, a job could provide an income, but gainful employment, an increasingly common measure of an institution's success (Weiss et al., 2021), was not as much of a concern for the participants. Instead, they wanted to do what they loved (or at the very least, not be forced to do what they had no love for). Workforce and economic measures like those in the VFA (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.), unfortunately, will never suffice to capture passion and, thus, for the participants at hand, will never truly measure (student) success.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study, I aimed to answer the questions of what "student success" means to community college students of Mexican origin and how the meaning ascribed to student success is reflective of their lived experiences. In attempting to answer these questions (which I recognize in the tradition of phenomenology are not entirely answerable), I discovered the term "student success" may mean more to those in the academy and to those to whom we are accountable (e.g., USDE, accreditors) than it does to the students themselves—at least for this group of students. For them, success is the more commonly understood phenomenon, encapsulating achievements that reflect the entirety of their life experiences—pre- and postmatriculation—rather than just those that transpired while they were a student.

Overall, the prematriculation experiences of the participants highlighted the role of relational and individual factors in shaping their meaning of (student) success. They spoke of the influences of immigration status, parental education and occupations, familial socioeconomic status, and parental and personal aspirations and expectations on how they came to understand (student) success. Contrary to what is represented in literature, structural factors such as the quality of education offered in elementary and secondary schools, the resource bases at those schools, available curricular tracks, and the influence of institutional agents did not emerge in this study. That is perhaps with the exception of Geovany, who noted he felt his high school coursework did not prepare him for university-level courses. That is not to say these factors did

not in some way influence the participants' understanding of (student) success. It either means they did not recognize them as significant or they were not conscious of their influence at the time or even now, some years later.

The participants' postmatriculation experiences mostly reflected individual factors that influenced their choices and outcomes, further depicting how college was something they had to do on their own, given their families' unfamiliarity with postsecondary education. Factors like cost, balancing work and school, and ever-present home responsibilities each played a role in determining the path the participants took in school and, in many ways, in life. In addition, relational factors surfaced as they related to a seemingly intentional but nonconscious choice to attend college close to home and, for some, the need to see themselves in the institutions they were attending. Structural factors in college were once again largely absent from the discussion. Particularly of note is the absence of any mention of challenges posed by attending a community college, where Latinx students are known to struggle to graduate, transfer, or remain enrolled (Baldwin et al., 2011; Carales & Lopez, 2020; Juszkiewicz, 2020; O'Connor, 2009).

Generally, the factors that shaped the participants' understanding of (student) success were already known to be factors in determining the broader Latinx population's educational outcomes. Yet, the unique influences derived from their context of origin, present in both their pre- and postmatriculation experiences, seemed to be most influential in shaping how the participants understood (student) success. This finding begins to answer the secondary research question around the influence of identity on the meaning of (student) success; the participants understood (student) success the way they did in part because of their Mexican origin. Their

parents' migration and incorporation experiences were heavily influenced by the push of the economic conditions of Mexico, the pull of the economic needs of the United States, and the limited legal forms of migration to bridge the two. Their dedication to work as a means to a secure and stable future in the United States reflected the Mexican culture's masculine tendency to place work at the center of life, instilling a strong work ethic in the participants. The expectations held by the participants' parents were set in relation to the trials and tribulations of their life in Mexico and in the United States. They wanted better for their families—they wanted more for their families and education was the way to achieve that goal.

The expectation that the participants would go to school so they could provide a better life for themselves and for others reflects the collectivist tendency of the Mexican culture as depicted by Hofstede (n.d.). Collectivism also surfaced in the participants' personal intentions for their education—wanting a job that afforded them time with their families and the ability to be a role model for those around them. Some participants, acculturating faster than their parents, seemed to have begun to internalize the individualistic and masculine mindset of the U.S. culture. They now saw independence as a form of (student) success and working as a way to get ahead, compared to how their parents and culture saw work—as a way to provide security for one's family. Still, the family (however they defined it) was what was in focus throughout the study. Family presented itself in the photos they shared, in the stories they told, in the reflections they had, and in the meanings they uncovered.

The meanings and measures presented in the previous chapter are not entirely new. Answering the final secondary research question, in many ways they can be said to reflect the

ways in which student success has traditionally been conceived and measured in the United States. Phenomenology, however, is the study of life as it is lived, not as it is measured. The lived experience of (student) success for the participants of this study demonstrates that meaning is more culturally nuanced than we previously understood and more complex than we are prepared to respond to. With that fact as a sort of call to action, I now turn to this study's implications for theory, policy, and practice in higher education.

Theoretical Implications

As mentioned in Chapter 3, theory is inherently constraining for the study of phenomena. A theoretical framework limits a researcher's way of seeing and interpreting, potentially yielding incomplete or inaccurate understandings of the phenomenon in question. For this reason, I used CRT/LatCrit as a lens when designing the study, but not when interpreting the data. The study was, in its entirety, an act of challenging the dominant ideology of what constitutes (student) success. In the end, the meanings revealed challenged the idea that traditional measures of student success can have but one meaning. This study demonstrates that sociohistorical and cultural contexts can yield different experiences and, therefore, different understandings of (student) success measures.

Particularly of note is the influence of national origin on how the participants had come to understand (student) success. Experience at the intersection of race, gender, and class has long been at the center of CRT studies. LatCrit adds to that "experiences unique to Latina/o community such as immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture" (Huber, 2010, p. 77). Ethnicity and culture, however, in many ways, still serve to aggregate experience across pan-

ethnic lines, overlooking differences in the unique histories and experiences of the people who

hail from the various nations that make up the Latinx community. Therefore, it is recommended

that future LatCrit studies incorporate national origin as a factor that influences lived experience.

Additionally, immigration status may need to be expanded upon in LatCrit theory. Though it is

important to consider whether a person (or in some cases, their parent) is a citizen, resident, or

undocumented, as such dictates in many ways the rights and privileges they are afforded in the

United States, such does not tell us the distance the person has from the act of migration. This

study demonstrates what Portes and Rumbaut (2001) posited—differences in generational status

can result in qualitatively different experiences, expectations, and outcomes. As such,

generational status should be considered in future LatCrit studies.

Implications for Policy

The outcomes or measures that were discussed as being representative of (student)

success for the participants were in some way all forms of personal goals. Student intention has

recently surfaced as an important consideration when measuring (student) success (HLC, 2018;

Jankowski, 2017; Kinzie & Kuh, 2016); a student should be considered successful if they do

what they set out to do. However, federal policy inadvertently prohibits tracking student

intention; a student must be "enrolled or accepted for enrollment as a regular student in an

eligible degree or certificate program" in order to be eligible for federal financial student aid

(USDE, 2022, para. 1). Declaration of intent other than to obtain a recognized credential would

mean a student is no longer eligible for financial aid. For this reason, many institutions in the

United States do not ask students to declare intent, thereby limiting the institution's capacity to

tell a complete story of student success at their institution. With this study adding to the literature on the importance of understanding and tracking intent, it would be advisable for leaders in the USDE to explore how eligibility requirements may be revised to account for a wider range of educational intentions and pathways, inclusive of considering the rising prevalence of goals that represent collective rather than individual interests.

Furthermore, the USDE and state agencies should consider longer timeframes and reverse transfers when measuring student outcomes. Currently, federal and most state graduation rates are based on the number of first-time, full-time undergraduates students who graduate from an institution within 150% of normal completion time—3 years for an associate's and 5 years for a bachelor's (National Conference of State Legislators, 2015; USDE, n.d.). Most of the participants in this study attended part time; all took or were on track to take longer than the average to complete, and one stopped out and re-enrolled at a "lesser" institution. Yet, they all graduated. Despite this, their success is not captured in the current federal calculation of graduate rate—a rate leaned on by institutional accreditors for determining the quality of an institution. For those who obtained a degree, their achievements are represented in completion rates, but not if they transfer from a university to a community college. Reverse transfers are not presently considered forward progress and therefore are largely not considered a success for students. The parameters of IPEDS measures thus need to be expanded to capture the ways in which students *achieve* success. Institutional practices need to be adapted to reflect the ways in which students *experience* success.

Implications for Practice

As a practitioner who works with other practitioners on supporting (student) success, I think one of the most important findings of this study is how difficult it may be for a student to understand "student success." You would not know that to be the case if you do a quick internet search for "student success in college." You will quickly come across many pages from institutions and education non-profits alike touting video clips and interview excerpts of students answering the seemingly simple question of, "What does student success mean to you?" This trend is likely a response to previous research that has called for the student's voice in the conversation about how to measure (student) success (Hatfield & Denton, 2018; HLC, 2018; Jankowski, 2017; Kinzie & Kuh, 2016; Weatherton & Schussler, 2021). What they are actually asking students, however, is to *define* (student) success (or at least, that is how the students understand the question given the nature of their responses). At any rate, asking students about (student) success is an important shift in higher education toward being more "student-centered." Yet, a definition has limited power to inform practice. As the study of phenomenology dictates, meaning cannot truly be understood without considering the experiences and conditions that have shaped it. Said another way, we cannot support students' definition of success unless we understand *why* they define it in the way they do.

Though, this study demonstrates that we cannot simply ask students to explain their meaning-making process either. Doing so would assume (a) that all students have had the same time, space, and resources to come to terms with their experiences; and (b) that all students are able to reveal the richness of their experiences and the meaning derived from them with mere

words; in this inequitable society in which we live, we know they have not and we know they are not. Therefore, in support of a more equitable and socially just educational environment, we in higher education, together with our colleagues in K–12, must work to actively provide time, space, resources, and mediums for expression. We must work together to intentionally design a lifecycle of culturally-responsive activities that span elementary, secondary, *and* postsecondary education that support aspiration development (or goal formation) prior to college *and* refinement during college. Similarly, we must work together to create inclusive spaces and explicit opportunities—inside and outside the classroom—for students to contemplate and decode the whole of their life experiences in relation to what they want from their education and what they believe their family and culture expect of education (Freire, 2000). We must also work together to develop resources—student and institutional-agent facing—that help students and their families understand their options, set their intentions, and determine their pathways for their postsecondary studies.

Additionally, we collectively must recognize that written and verbal communication are limited mediums of expression and that if we want to understand the student experience, we must allow students to tell their story in their own way. Academics have begun to recognize this need when it comes to assessment, giving students a choice in how they demonstrate what they have learned (Montenegro & Jankowski, 2017), but we have not caught up in terms of research methods. Largely, the academy still privileges traditional data and data collection methods. This study demonstrates the need to consider alternative art-based methods, particularly when trying to connotate meaning. It was through photos, not conversations or written narrative, that

participants were empowered to "reflect and make meaning of their own thoughts, memories, and experiences" around the phenomenon of (student) success (Kelly & Kortegast, 2017, p. 20).

Participants did ultimately chose to submit existing photos rather than generate new photos that represented their life, straying from the traditional application of photovoice and potentially jeopardizing the ability of the method to empower. Yet, the ability to visually display and speak about the significance of moments in their past represented in old family photos turned out to be equally empowering for the participants. Such highlights the opportunity to adapt the photovoice method to further center marginalized voices, bringing in elements of the method of photo elicitation—namely, to use existing photos or mediums to generate conversation as opposed to requiring the participant to take new photos. Photos provided by (rather than generated by) the participants, not the researcher (as customary in photo elicitation) promotes a reflective consciousness around their life experiences and the way they have come to understand a phenomenon (Kelly & Kortegast, 2017). It important to be open to adapting the methods in this way as it is only through *interpretation* of this type of consciousness that we in higher education will be able to create equitable support structures that address the conditions around the student experience and finally develop culturally sensitive and inclusive measures of (student) success.

Limitations

A core premise of this study was that students' relationship to (student) success is contextually derived. The experiences of one group of students at one type of institution can be fundamentally different than those of students from other backgrounds pursuing their education in a different setting. Though the academy should be interested in understanding what (student)

success means to all students and how that meaning came to be for each one of them, the inquiry had to start somewhere. For this study, I chose to focus on the experiences of community college students of Mexican origin, believing that attention to their journey and outcomes, as the fastest-growing group in the country least well-positioned for upward mobility, should be a national priority. I recognize this as a limitation of the study, as the findings are not representative of all students. Then again, in positing that a universal definition of (student) success is detrimental to the advancement of quality and outcomes in higher education, perhaps such is not a limitation after all.

A second limitation relates to the choice of setting. According to the USDE (2020), 5.7 million students were enrolled in a 2-year college as of 2020, comprising over 35% of the undergraduate population in the United States. Overall enrollment for community colleges has dropped in the past decade (made worse by COVID disruptions), exacerbating the retention issues the sector faces (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2021, 2022). Latinx students, however, remain overrepresented at 2-year institutions, which has been associated with their ethnic groups' low attainment rates. Though attainment *rates* (specifically completion) were not the center of this study, they are, as I have said, one of the necessary measures of success to consider. For this reason, community college was the chosen setting. That said, Latinx students are enrolling at 4-year institutions at a higher rate than in decades past, so a future study of what (student) success means for the group or its subgroups at that degree level could be a worthy endeavor.

A third limitation was the focus placed on students who were attending or had attended a community college in the Chicagoland area. Though vast and representative of various institutional types, I recognize that the urban/suburban setting can affect a student's experience and could have played a role in the participants' meaning-making process. Furthermore, as immigrant populations in a metro area often bring with them regional distinctions from their homeland, the choice of one metropolitan area over another can affect how success is defined by students; Mexicans who reside in the Chicagoland area often hail from more rural parts of Mexico, distinguishing their values and beliefs from those who immigrated from a city center. If this study was conducted with students of Mexican origin from Los Angeles or a border town in Texas, the experiences recorded, pictures taken, and meaning associated with (student) success could be very different.

Finally, researcher subjectivity is a limitation by the very nature of the methodology chosen. All researchers have conscious and unconscious biases, which can be particularly challenging in a phenomenological study where interpretation is central to the methodology. Van Manen (2016) encouraged phenomenological researchers to demonstrate richness, depth, and rigor in their inquiry as a way to remain open to the phenomenon as it is lived. I took up this act of bridling by keeping researcher's notes throughout the process. To address validity, I used note-taking as a way of giving myself the time and space to discern meaning from the participants' experiences as well as a way of reflecting on my own knowledge, experiences, and understanding in the process.

Opportunities for Future Research

Three areas for potential further inquiry stem from the limitations of this study. First and most obvious would be to replicate this study with students of Mexican origin from different contexts—meaning those who have attended a different institutional type or in a different locale. Though the experiences described by the participants shed light on why they chose to attend a community college, the influence of attending a community college on how the participants understood (student) success was not clear from this study alone. Comparison of experiences and meanings across contexts could serve to deepen our collective understanding of (student) success. In that vein, replicating this study with students with other national origins could similarly heighten understanding.

Second, exploring the role of social capital in expectation setting could prove useful for understanding how students make meaning of (student) success. Social capital is largely considered in the college choice and access literature as a factor that influences aspirations to attend college and as a factor that affects a student's ability to navigate college (Acevedo-Gil, 2017), but not as something that shapes personal or parental expectations for college. Finally, picking up on where Portes and Rumbaut (2001) left off, future researchers may want to bring to the foreground the role of generation (era of coming of age) and generational status (distance from act of migration) in college aspiration development and (student) success—distinct from age and immigration status. Growing up in different sociohistorical contexts with different relationships to the act of migration that established their family in the United States has now been shown, if only indirectly, to have an impact on values, experiences, and the meaning

derived from them. Researching these factors could offer additional insights into how students come to perceive and measure (student) success in the way they do.

Conclusion

At its core, phenomenology is the study of how we experience the world. Experience is a conscious activity—one that is easily described on the surface, but not always understood. A lack of understanding stems from a lack of interpretation more than anything else; it is rare that we sit and reflect on the meaning of our experiences. That was one of the reasons it was so difficult for the participants to describe what (student) success meant to them. They had never truly thought about it. To be fair, no one had ever asked them to do so.

The other reason it was difficult for the participants to talk about (student) success was that it can be challenging to put into words that which is felt, that which is perceived. For this reason, I chose to use photovoice as a method for this study—to give the participants an alternative form of expression. Through photos, participants were able to begin to make sense of their experience—they were able to explore their intentionality toward (student) success—their perception of it. With photos in hand that depicted images of the people, places, and things they loved, the participants described their lived experiences and the factors that evoked those experiences, including crisis withdrawal, immigration status, familial socioeconomic status, parental education and occupation, relative optimism, parental and personal expectations, collectivist orientation, culturally-defined gender norms, generational differences, personal obligations, and work. As they narrated, they naturally interpreted the meaning of those experiences, arriving at measures of (student) success, such as being able to provide,

supporting/achieving upward mobility, becoming independent, finding a work–life balance, graduating, and finding employment. These were how the phenomenon manifested in their lives. They reflect comprehensible measures of an otherwise incomprehensible experience.

The participants' perceptions of (student) success—the incomprehensible—required further and constant circular interpretation. Through that interpretation of the whole and parts of their experiences, the true meaning of (student) success for these participants was revealed. For the participants, (student) success meant paving the way for others to succeed—doing what it takes to ensure those you call *familia* are taken care of now so they may take care of themselves in the future. (Student) success meant finding your own path—making choices that reflect your interests and support your goals. Finally, it meant crossing a finish line—achieving a life milestone that opens the door to achieve the next.

Taken together, these meanings portray the phenomenon of (student) success not as an end, but as a journey—one steeped in cultural influence, familial relevance, and personal significance. It is a state of becoming that started long before the participants were born and that will continue to evolve long after they are gone. It is a metaphorical and literal movement from one place to another—from where you were to where you will be. That sort of (student) success can never truly be measured. Yet, calls for accountability will never stop. Therefore, it is imperative that we try to challenge dominant ideologies of what constitutes (student) success, try to honor the lived experiences of our unique student populations, and try to measure what they value.

APPENDIX A

INITIAL OUTREACH EMAIL

Hello [Student's Name],

As you may know, I am finishing up my doctoral degree at Loyola University Chicago in Higher Education. At present I am searching for potential participants for my dissertation study. Entitled "Measuring What They Value," my study aims to explore the phenomenon of student success as it is conceptualized and experienced by students, rather than how it has been traditionally defined and measured by the academy. Specifically, I am interested in understanding how the meaning of student success reveals itself to students of Mexican origin, inquiring about the sociohistorical and cultural influences that shaped their meaning making process.

Presently, I am recruiting participants for the study that fit the following criteria:

- Identify as being of Mexican origin*
- Began their collegiate career at a community college in the Chicagoland area
- Completed at least one year of collegiate level coursework prior to the start of the study (August 2021)
- Fit into one of the following enrollment status categories:
  - o Graduated – completed an associate's degree from the community college
  - o Transferred – attended a community college in Chicago and then transferred to another two or four year institution (in Chicago or elsewhere), with or without having earning a credential before transferring
  - o Still Enrolled – presently enrolled in any capacity (e.g. dual enrollment, course taker, part-time, full-time)
  - o Other – attended a community college for professional development, certification, language learning, or another reason)
- Are of age and fit into one of the following generational categories:
  - o Gen Z – ages 18-24
  - o Gen Y.1 – ages 25-29
  - o Gen Y.2 or the Oregon Trail Generation – ages 30-39
  - o Gen X – ages 40-56

*Note: for the purposes of this study, "Mexican origin" can represent Latinx/a/o, Hispanic, Mexican, other self-defined way a descendant of Mexico remains connected to their ancestral and/or literal homeland and culture.

Participants will be awarded a $50 Visa Gift card for completing the following:
- Attend an informational webinar
- Take/submit photos of what student success means to them as well as what they believe it to mean to their family and within their culture
- Maintain/submit a logbook of their thoughts and observations of the photos taken
- Complete/submit photo release forms
- Participate in one 45-60 minute personal interview

- Participate in one 60-90 minute focus group
- Provide feedback on the interview and focus group transcript as well as analysis of findings written at the conclusion of the study to verify the accuracy of what was captured and affirm they are ok with how their experiences are represented

If you do in fact meet the aforementioned criteria and would like to learn more about the study, please complete this participant interest form: [Link]. The form contains some additional questions about your collegiate pathway that will factor into my determination as to whether you are eligible for this study or not. Should you be eligible and selected to participate, I will send you another email with a link to an informational webinar that I will host where I will share more about the study and your role as a participant. Thereafter, should you remain interested in participating, you will be asked to sign an informed consent form ahead of beginning the study.

I look forward to the possibility of working with you on this project.
Destiny M. Quintero
Doctoral Candidate - Loyola University Chicago
dquintero1@luc.edu

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT INTEREST FORM

Interested participants will need to provide the following information to be considered for the study. This form will be available online using SurveyMonkey.

Name: [Single line text box]
Email: [Single line text box]
What is your age range: [Radio button, single select]
- Younger than 17 *(logic will direct them out of the form; not eligible)*
- 18-24
- 25-29
- 30-39
- 40-56
- Older than 56 *(logic will direct them out of the form; not eligible)*

How do you identify (select all that apply): [Radio button, multiple choice]
- Mexican
- Mexican-American
- Chicano
- Tejano
- Latinx/a/o, but of Mexican origin
- Hispanic, but of Mexican origin
- Of mixed heritage, including being of Mexican origin
- Other:
- Not of Mexican origin *(logic will direct them out of the form; not eligible)*

When did you first begin your postsecondary (college level) studies: [Radio button, single select]
- The fall semester following my senior year of high school
- Within one year of graduating high school
- Two or more years after graduating high school
- I have not yet started college (*(logic will direct them out of the form; not eligible)*

What type of institution did you first attend: [Radio button, single select]
- Career/technical/vocational school (e.g. for certification in HVAC, as a mechanic, as a medical assistant, as a hair stylist etc.)
- Community college (traditional, public, two-year institution)
- Public, baccalaureate college (four-year college)
- Private non-profit, baccalaureate college (four-year college)
- Private for-profit, baccalaureate college (four-year college)

How did you first attend college:
- Full-time, on-campus
- Part-time, on-campus

- Full-time, online
- Part-time, online
- Full-time, hybrid (some courses on-campus, some online)
- Part-time, hybrid (some courses on-campus, some online)

Have you completed at least one year of collegiate studies?
- Yes
- No *(logic will direct them out of the form; not eligible)*

What institution(s) do you or have you attended (please list name and city): [Open ended text box]

What is your enrollment status AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: [Check box]
- Still Enrolled– presently enrolled in any capacity (e.g. course taker, part-time, full-time, dual enrollment) at the same community college you started at
- Graduated – completed an associate's degree at the same community college you started at
- Transferred – attended a community college in the Chicago area and then transferred to another two or four year institution (in Chicago or elsewhere), with or without having earning a credential before transferring; still enrolled or graduated from the new institution *(logic will direct them to a final question about their transfer)*
- Other – attended the community college to take a course, for professional development, for language learning, to earn a certificate or badge, or another personal pursuit
- None of the above *(logic will direct them out of the form; not eligible)*

What type of institution did you transfer to: [Check box]
- Career/technical/vocational school (e.g. for certification in HVAC, as a mechanic, as a medical assistant, as a hair stylist etc.)
- Community college (traditional, public, two-year institution)
- Public, baccalaureate college (four-year college)
- Private non-profit, baccalaureate college (four-year college)
- Private for-profit, baccalaureate college (four-year college)

What type of institution did you transfer to: [Check box]
- Career/technical/vocational school (e.g. for certification in HVAC, as a mechanic, as a medical assistant, as a hair stylist etc.)
- Community college (traditional, public, two-year institution)
- Public, baccalaureate college (four-year college)
- Private non-profit, baccalaureate college (four-year college)
- Private for-profit, baccalaureate college (four-year college)

What is your enrollment status AT THE INSTITUTION YOU TRANSFERRED TO: [Check box]

- Still Enrolled– presently enrolled in any capacity (e.g. course taker, part-time, full-time, dual enrollment)
- Graduated – completed a bachelor's degree and exited school (e.g. entered workforce)
- Advanced – graduated with a bachelor's degree and went on to graduate school
- Transferred – to another institution and are presently still enrolled at that institution
- Stopped out – not currently taking courses, but intend on returning and completing a credential
- Withdrawn – not currently taking courses and do not plan to return

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT INFORMATION SHEET

Loyola University Chicago
CONSENT TO PARTICIPANT IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Measuring what they value: Exploring the meaning of student success for
                         community college students of Mexican origin
Researcher: Destiny M. Quintero
Faculty Sponsor: Blanca Torres-Olave

Introduction
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Destiny M. Quintero for
a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Blanca Torres-Olave in the Department Higher
Education at Loyola University of Chicago. You are being asked to participate because you are a
current or past community college student of Mexican origin who attended an institution in the
Chicagoland area. You will be joined in this study by three other participants who fit the same
criteria, but who may differ from you in age or enrollment status. This form details the study in
question so that you, as the participant, may be made aware of the nature of the research and the
extent of your participation before the study commences.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between student and success. Specifically,
the study will focus on what "student success" means for community college students of
Mexican origin, the origins of that meaning, and the way that meaning revealed itself to you.

Procedures:
This study is being conducted using a method known as photovoice. Photovoice encourages
participants "to take photographs of persons, contexts, or situations that they consider
representative of particular aspects of their individual and/or social life" – certain phenomenon
(Ciolan & Manasia, 2017, p. 3). The phenomenon of interest in this study is student success.
Kelly & Kortegast (2017) find that "through the process of taking, selecting, and explaining
participant-generated photographs, individuals are able to reflect and make meaning of their own
thoughts, memories, and experiences" (p. 20).

If you agree to be in the study, you will take part in the following photovoice steps:

- *Photo capture:* You will be asked to take photographs of people, places, or things that
  encapsulate what student success means to you as well as what you believe student
  success means to your family and within your culture. For this activity you are
  encouraged to take as many photos as you wish, but asked to only submit one photo per
  category (three photos in total). You will have roughly two weeks to take and submit the
  photos from the time you receive the instructions. You will submit the photos as well as
  the accompanying logbook, photo release, and subject waiver forms via Dropbox to a
  private folder. The photos will be the basis for conversation in the subsequent focus

group as well as visual representations of what student success means to the group of participants during the study's defense. This activity should take no more than 1-2 hours in total.

- *Logbook:* You are asked to maintain a logbook of your thoughts and observations about the subject of the photos you take. Specifically, you are asked to write down where the photo was taken, when it was taken, the subject(s) of the photo, the meaning of the image to you at that time the photo is taken, and any other reactions you have that you wish to reflect on. The log should be completed as you take the photos. Reviewing the logbook to determine which photos to submit should take less than an hour.

- *Interview:* All participants will take part in one 45-60 minute personal interview via Zoom to discuss the meaning of student success from the various vantage points identified for the study. During the interview, you will be asked to explain the subject of your photos and how the photos represent what student success means to you, your family, and your culture. You can expect follow-up questions regarding sociohistorical influences on your conceptualization of success and on information provided in your logbook. The information gathered from the personal interview will be used to shape some of the questions asked during the focus group. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for review at a later time.

- *Focus group:* All participants will take part in a group discussion about the meaning of student success. Each participant will be asked to share their photos and reflect on the photos' meaning verbally with the group. The researcher will ask a standard set of questions to each participant to facilitate adequate dialogue. All participants will be encourage to ask questions and/or comment on what is being shared by others as well as share what, if anything, about others' conceptions of student success resonate with them. The focus group will be held via Zoom and is expected to take 90 minutes. It will be recorded and transcribed for review at a later time.

- *Member-checking:* To affirm that what the researcher has captured is an accurate and complete record of the interview and focus group discussion, and to validate the researcher's synopsis of the findings, you will be asked to review and provide feedback on both your interview and focus group transcript and the analysis narrative. This is expected to take 1-2 hours.

Risks/Benefits

There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study beyond those encountered in everyday life. The topics discussed, however, may be difficult for you to talk about given you relation to your past and cultural ties. The researcher acknowledges this and will make every effort to give you and the other participants space to process in the way they need to. Additionally, the researcher will make resources available for all participants (e.g. referral to a counselor), should any of you wish to seek help.

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study; an indirect benefit is centering their lived experience in the national dialogue about what constitutes success in higher education.

The researcher recognizes, however, that not all participants will be interested in carrying the burden of representing a shared experience amongst students of Mexican origin. Because you may not realize that you do not want that responsibility, you can opt out of the study at any time.

As an extended benefit to society at large, the hope is that the findings inform policy and practice relative to the way higher education institutions and governmental agencies document and work to improve student success.

Compensation
You will be awarded a $50 Visa gift card for your contributions to the study should you complete all aforementioned activities. The e-gift card will be emailed to you within one week of completing the member-checking activity. Should you want/have to leave the study prior to completing the activities, you will be ineligible to receive the gift card.

Confidentiality
Every effort will be made by the principal researcher to protect the confidentiality of all participants. It must be understood, however, that you will be taking part in a focus group as part of this study, which by nature, requires a certain level of disclosure of personal information to an otherwise unfamiliar group. The principal researcher cannot guarantee that other participants will maintain confidentiality, but the principal researcher will request that what is shared in the focus group for purposes of the study is not shared outside of the group setting.

Still, you may wish to use a pseudonym (alternative name) as way of concealing your full identity and protecting your privacy. If you wish to do so, please indicate your intent and desired pseudonym at the beginning of the interview. Chosen pseudonyms will be kept in a separate Excel file and stored in the principal researcher's institution-granted OneDrive folder, separate from other documentation which will be kept in Dropbox.

You will submit your photos, logbook and forms via a private Dropbox folder specifically for you. As the logbook and forms have personally identifiable information on them (e.g. your name), they will ultimately be kept separate from the photos themselves, stored on the principal researcher's institutionally provided OneDrive, but for now, you will upload them to Dropbox. With the exception of the focus group transcript, which will be made available to all participants in Dropbox, no one other than the principal researcher will have access to your specific files. Photos will not be used or shared without prior authorization through the photo release forms provided.

It is the intention of the principal researcher to record all interviews and focus group sessions. The researcher will use the recording feature of Zoom for this with the add-on transcription service from Otter.ai. The recording/transcript will be used by the research for reference, as well as to serve as a record of informed consent; participants will be asked to verbally provide consent to participate in the study and be recorded at the beginning of both the interview and focus group

sessions. Should someone wish to participate but not be recorded, the recording will stop after consent to participate is given. Thereafter, handwritten or typed notes will be taken by the researcher to document what is shared. All recordings will be kept in a password protected Dropbox folder that is only accessible to the researcher.

As consent will be given verbally during the Zoom sessions, the recordings of those sessions will be kept indefinitely, along with the photo release and photo waiver forms, per the guidelines of Loyola University Chicago. All other files associated with this study will be kept for a period of five years for reference by the principal researcher. Should the principal researcher wish to use any data collected from this study for any future study, additional consent from the participant(s) would be required.

Finally, the researchers notes and transcripts will also be kept in a password protected Dropbox folder that is only accessible to the researcher.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to agree to participate simply because you were invited. Once you have confirmed your participation, both in email and at the beginning of the interview, you retain the right to withdraw with written notice to the researcher at any time.

You can also opt to not answer a question during the interview or focus group sessions and still be considered an active participant, eligible for the gift card. If you opt out of the interview or focus group session altogether, however, you will no longer be able to continue in the study.

You retain ownership of your pictures; you will choose which photos to share and display. However, should you fail to submit your photos, logbook, AND photo waivers and/or not wish to share your photos with others during the focus group, you will be ineligible to continue, as the photos are an integral part to the study.

Contacts and Questions
If you have questions about this research study please feel free to contact Destiny M. Quintero, the principal researcher, at dquintero1@luc.edu or Blanca Torres-Olave, the faculty sponsor, at btorresolave@luc.edu. Additionally, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Loyola University Office of Research Services at (773) 508-2689.

APPENDIX D

PHOTO CAPTURE INSTRUCTION SHEET

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between student and success. Specifically, the study will focus on <u>what "student success" means for students of Mexican origin</u> that have attended a community college and how that meaning reflects their life experiences. Of particular interest are the <u>social, historical, and cultural factors</u> that play a role in the development of the your understanding of success.

As the first component of this study you are asked to think about what student success means to you, your family, and in your culture. Then you are asked to take photographs of people, places, or things that represent what student success means from the three distinct viewpoints (yours, your family's, and your culture's). The photo that is to represent what student success <u>means to you</u> should be inherently <u>personal</u> – reflecting your social identities (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, immigration status, religious affiliation) and life experiences. The photos that you take <u>representing what student success means to your family*</u> <u>and within your culture</u> are meant to be <u>interpretations</u> – how you <u>understand others to define</u> student success. You should not and need not ask your family or community members to define student success. Instead, consider *their* values, norms, and *their* unique life experiences, and how those may have influenced how *they* conceive of student success. As you consider the meaning of student success and what to photograph to depict that meaning, you may also wish to consider how your version of success may differ from how American culture defines student success – namely success as degree completion.

Photos can be taken using a phone or digital camera capable of producing files that can be shared electronically. For this activity you are encouraged to take as many photos as you wish as a means of exploring what student success means to you (this should be a reflective exercise for you), but you are asked to only <u>submit one photo per category</u> (three photos in total). Know that you may be asked to explain why you chose the photos that you did during the interview and focus group. Because of this and the time lapse between the photo capture segment of the study, the interview, and the focus group, you are asked to keep track of your thoughts and observations about the photos you take in your logbook (see template).

What is of interest to the me as the researcher is not the photo itself, but rather the <u>story behind</u> <u>the photo</u>. You are encouraged to think of the photo as somewhat like a tool, meant to facilitate conversation in the subsequent interview and focus group about what student success means to you and others participating in the study. The photos will also serve as visual representations of what student success means to the group of participants during the study's oral defense. Please note that it is your prerogative to decide not to share your photos with the group, but such action will disqualify you from participation as the photos are integral to the study itself.

Because of my intent to publicly display the photos with the group and/or with those who attend my dissertation defense, you will need to submit the following forms with your photos in order to proceed as a study participant and remain eligible for the gift card:

- Participant Photo Release Form - this form grants me the ability to use your photos for purposes related to the study. You will fill out one form inclusive of a list of the photos you are granting me permission to use.
- Subject Photo Waiver - this form gives you permission to use a photo taken of people or persons for purposes you specify (in this case, for this study). You will need to submit one waiver for every subject photographed. If the subject is a minor, you must get their signature (if over 12) and the signature of their guardian. If the subject is under 12, the signature of the guardian is all that is necessary.**

Please submit the chosen photos, the accompanying logbook, and a photo release/wavier forms by December 1, 2022. An email was sent on Nov 14 to you with a link to your personal folder on Dropbox; only you and I will have access to this folder. Please follow that link to the Dropbox site to upload your files.

A separate email was sent giving you access to the general folder for the study. Here you can find the templates for the photo release, waiver, and logbook. You will also be able to access the informed consent statement in that folder.

Note 1: For purposes of this study, family is a self-defined boundary and could include your immediate or extended family. Similarly, your culture is as you define it (e.g. Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Tejano).

**Note 2: If the subject of the photo is a minor under the age of 12 their face will need to be blurred out <u>before</u> you submit the photo to Dropbox. Below are some options and instructions for blurring photos.

Blurring a photo using Google's Snapseed app:

1. Download the app from the <u>Apple</u> or <u>Google Play</u> store.
2. Once downloaded, open the app.
3. Choose the photo you wish to edit (you may have to give the app permission to access your photos)
4. Select Tools and scroll down to Lens Blur.
5. Drag the circle that appears on the screen over to the area (face) you wish to blur. You can pinch or widen the circle with your finger.
6. When you have the area you wish to blur within the circle, tap the checkmark in the lower corner.
7. Select Export and choose Save to library.

Blurring a photo using Adobe's Photoshop Express app:

1. Download the app from the <u>Apple</u> or <u>Google store</u>.
2. Once downloaded, open the app.
3. Choose the photo you wish to edit (you may have to give the app permission to access your photos)
4. Select Adjustments from the bottom navigation menu.
5. Scroll through the Adjustments menu and tap Blur
6. Drag the circle that appears on the screen over to the subject you wish to blur. You can increase or decrease the diameter of the blur by using the slider located on the bottom half of the screen.
7. When you are finished, hit the upload icon at the top of the screen to save the photo to your library.

APPENDIX E

PHOTO LOGBOOK

Participant's Name (or Pseudonym): _____

Instructions: Complete this logbook for all photos taken, as they are taken (as opposed to filling out this log sometime after you take the photos). Once completed, review the photos alongside your notes in the logbook and determine which three photos you wish to submit for the study. Be prepared to discuss why the photos were chosen in your interview and in the focus group as well as how, to you, they represents student success and the experiences that may have influenced that meaning. When submitting your photos, please make sure the title that you have given the photo here in the logbook matches the title of the photo file so that it is easy to associate your notes with the photos submitted.

Photo Title	Where was this photo taken?	When was it taken? (date, time)	What or who do you consider the subject of the photo?*	Category (you, your family, your culture)	Briefly describe how this photo represents what student success means to the you or them	Other notes	Submit for the study? (Y/N)
1.							
2.							
3.							
4.							
5.							
6.							
7.							
8.							
9.							
10.							

*Note: If the photo is of a person, please have them sign a photo waiver form at the time the photo is taken. That way, should you chose to want to submit that photo for the study, you have their expressed permission to use their likeness ahead of time.

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT PHOTO RELEASE FORM

I, _____, am the sole owner of the following photo(s):

1.
2.
3.

I hereby grant <u>Destiny M. Quintero</u> the right of possession of the above-described photos shot by me. She has my permission to use any or all of the photos in digital or printed format to (check all that apply):

- ❒ Facilitate interview and focus group discussions *(required to be an eligible participant; private forum)*
- ❒ Provide an example of how "student success" was captured by a participant (me) in the researcher's written analysis (*public document*)
- ❒ Add a visual element to the researcher's oral defense of the study (*public forum*)

I understand that in providing permission for public use of my photos that there is a risk that someone will recognize me and my identity will not be confidential. Through providing this release, I understand that I cannot hold the researcher (Destiny Quintero), or Loyola University Chicago liable for any adverse events or consequences that may arise from allowing permission to use your photo in a public document or forum.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX G

SUBJECT PHOTO WAIVER

Photographer (Name): _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____   *Email*:_____

To be completed by the photographer:
Photo Number or Title (in logbook): _____

Date of Photo: _____   *Location of Photo*: _____

Intended Use for Photo: Potential submittal to a study being conducted by a doctoral candidate (Destiny Quintero) at Loyola University Chicago. Image could be used in an interview and focus group discussion and/or for a visual display during the doctoral candidate's dissertation defense.

To be completed by the subject or subject's guardian:
Subject's Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____   *Email*:_____

I, the subject of this photo, grant you, the photographer, and the affiliated researcher, Destiny M. Quintero, use of the photo for the study for which it was taken, subject to the following conditions:

- I understand that the photographs taken of me during this session can be used wholly or in part in any publication (commercial or otherwise), portfolio, or public display for the study it was intended. Use beyond the study and its publication are not permitted without additional notice and my written consent.
- Neither the photographer or the researcher can sell the photograph for monetary gain.
- I, as the subject of the photo, will not be identified by name during any portion of this study unless I give expressed permission to do so. At this time:

  - ❒ I give the photographer permission to use my name in naming the photo (if desired)
  - ❒ I give the photographer permission to use my name when discussing the photo with the researcher
  - ❒ I give the photographer permission to use my name when discussing the photo with other participants in the study

I acknowledge that by signing this form, subject to the restrictions above, the photographer has all rights to copyright and may give permission for the photo to be used in a public forum or public research document. I also acknowledge that an audience member or reader of such documents might recognize me. Through providing this release, I waive any right to hold the photographer, researcher (Destiny Quintero) or Loyola University Chicago liable for any adverse events or consequences that may arise from allowing permission to use my image in a public

document or forum.

Subject's signature: _____ *Date:* _____

If the subject is a minor, please indicate what category the subject falls into and have the guardian of the subject sign below:
- ☐ Subject is a minor under 12 (face will be blurred out)
- ☐ Subject is a minor is 13-17 years old

Subject's Guardian's signature: _____ *Date:* _____

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW PROCEDURAL OVERVIEW

Successful submittal of selected photos, logbook, and the photo release/waiver form(s) to Dropbox will determine which participants are eligible to move forward to the interview segment of the study. Once the aforementioned files have been received, I will send an email to the participants informing them of my intent to move to the next segment of the study. That email will include a brief overview of the purpose of the interview (as previously discussed) and a link to a Doodle poll, which will be used to determine availability. I will then schedule the individual interviews in Zoom and send the link out to the individual meeting invites out to the participants via Outlook with an abbreviated form of this procedural document.

Below is a sample agenda for an interview:

1. Pre-meeting preparation

    I will join the meeting approximately 15 minutes prior to the start time to assure that the technology is working.

2. Welcome & Overview

    Once the participant is logged into Zoom, I will welcome them, reiterating the purpose of the study and situating the interview within the study's objectives. I will inform them that the session is being recorded, intended for transcription use only, and request their verbal affirmation that they are ok with me proceeding. I will then review my plans for the interview, namely how the photos will be used to begin a semi-structured conversation. At that time I will also name my commitments to them and ask that they affirm the commitments themselves. The commitments are as follows:

Comfort	Participants have the right to request a break, pass on a question, and/or stop participating in the session altogether without judgement from the researcher. Should a participant need help with processing and/or handling the emotional toll of discussing some of the intended topics, they have the right to ask the researcher for a referral for help.
Confidentiality	Participants' identities need to be protected to support an open and honest dialogue. What is shared in the interview will not be shared outside the bounds of the study, as agreed upon between participant and researcher. Any direct quotes from a participant used in the narrative or dissertation defense will be either attributed to a pseudonym or listed as anonymous.
Respect	All participants will have the opportunity to address questions posed for whatever length of time they deem necessary. The

interview is meant to be 45-60 minutes to respect the time of the participants, but if a participant wishes to discuss matters in greater detail, they can indicate such to the researchers. Additionally, everyone's ideas, thoughts, and feelings will be treated by the researcher as valid.

3. Reflection

The official interview will begin with a discussion about the photo capture process. Informally, participants will be asked to reflect on their experience addressing the prompt. They will be asked to consider what thought they gave to the task ahead of time, how they felt about the photos they took and/or how they came to determine which photos they put forth for discussion. Once that background information is shared, we will turn to a discussion about the photos themselves and what they represent.

4. Showcase

I will pull up the three photos that the participant submitted, sharing them on the screen with the participant so they can see what I am looking at as we are having our discussion. I will begin by asking them to explain the photo they have identified as representing their conceptualization of student success. As a semi-structured interview, I will begin with specific questions and then let the conversation organically develop. Starter questions include:
- What/who is it of?
- What does the photo represent?
- How does that relate to the way in which you conceive of student success?
- How did you come to see success in this way?

I will then ask them to answer similar questions for the photos they submitted that are to represent how they believe their family and culture define student success.

After the photo description portion of the interview concludes, I will invite the participant to share general thoughts (unrelated to the photos) and ask any questions they have of me.

5. Conclusion
I will thank the participant for their time and contributions to the study. I will inform them that my summary notes and transcript of the interview will be available for review in the coming weeks, along with a preliminary write up of the analysis section, following the completion of the focus group. I will end by giving a brief overview of the focus group and by informing them that I will be sending them an email with more information in the coming weeks.

APPENDIX I

FOCUS GROUP PROCEDURAL OVERVIEW

Completion of the personal interview will determine which participants are eligible to move forward to the focus group segment of the study. Once all interviews have been completed, I will send an email to the participants informing them of my intent to move to the next segment of the study. That email will include a brief overview of the purpose of the focus group (as previously discussed) and a link to a Doodle poll, which will be used to determine availability. I will then schedule the focus group in Zoom and send the link out in a meeting invite via Outlook with an abbreviated form of this procedural document.

Below is a sample agenda for the meeting:

1. Pre-meeting preparation

   I will join the meeting approximately 15 minutes prior to the start time to assure that the technology is working. I will welcome the participants individually as they join the call and explain that we will officially begin when all participants are on the line.

2. Welcome & Overview

   Once the participants are on the line, I will welcome them, reiterating the purpose of the study and situating the focus group within the study's objectives. I will inform them that the session is being recorded, intended for transcription use only, and request their verbal affirmation that they are ok with me proceeding. I will then review the agenda with them and introduce the group's commitments, asking them to verbally agree to upholding them before proceeding. The commitments will include:

Comfort	Participants have the right to request a break, pass on a question, opt to not engage in dialogue on a particular topic, and/or stop participating in the session altogether without judgement from the group or the researcher. Should a participant need help with processing and/or handling the emotional toll of discussing some of the intended topics, they have the right to ask the researcher for a referral for help.
Confidentiality	Participants' identities need to be protected to support an open and honest dialogue. What is shared in the group is not meant to be shared outside of the group except in relation to the study and as agreed upon between participant and researcher. The researcher agrees that any direct quotes from a participant will be either attributed to a pseudonym or listed as anonymous.
Respect	All participants will have the opportunity to speak. Participants will refrain from talking over one another, waiting instead until it

is their turn to speak. Everyone's ideas, thoughts, and feelings will be treated as valid.

3. Introductions

I will ask each participant to introduce themselves to the group by identifying their name (or pseudonym), preferred pronouns, the community college they attend(ed), and what they are doing now (e.g. still enrolled, working, other).

4. Showcase

In a round-robin fashion, I will ask each of the participants to discuss their photos and the meaning behind them. I, as the facilitator, will display the pictures by sharing my screen with the participants. The participant whose photos are visible to the group will have five minutes to share how each picture represents student success from the vantage point it was taken (i.e. them, their family, their culture). Thereafter, as a semi-structured focus group, I will ask some basic questions of each participant:

- How did you come to understand student success in the manner you describe? How have your life experiences shaped your understanding of student success?
- What contextual factors influenced those experiences? What role, if any, has your identity as a person of Mexican origin played in your experiences? What of your other identities (e.g. gender, SES, familial and personal immigration status, language, ethnicity)?
- What has shaped your perception of how others (i.e. family, those that share your culture, Americans) perceive student success?

After each participant answers their questions, I will open up the conversation up to the group, asking what, if anything, about what the person shared resonates with them – their experiences and/or their understanding of student success. From there, follow-up questions will be based on what is shared, in an organic fashion, rather than scripted.

5. Open Dialogue
Reflecting on what was shared on the whole, I will try to identify some similarities and some tensions between notions of success that were identified by the group. I will open the floor to a dialogue about why those may exist and how might the academy better recognize their versions of success. While most of this segment will be unscripted, two follow-up questions that I will ask of the group will be:

- Do you think you define student success differently now than in the past? Than you will in the future?

- To what extent, if any, do you associate with traditional measures of student success such as persistence and completion?

6. Conclusion

I will thank the participants for their time and contributions to the study. I will inform them that my summary notes and transcript will be available for review in the coming weeks, along with a preliminary write up of the analysis section. I will explain the function of member-checking and ask that they provide feedback within two weeks of receiving access to the files.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Acevedo-Gil, N. (2017). College-*conocimiento*: Toward an interdisciplinary college choice framework for Latinx students. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *20*(6), 829–850. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2017.1343294

Achieving the Dream. (2018). *Measuring what matters: Examining the success of Achieving the Dream network college graduates in work and life*. https://www.achievingthedream.org/resource/17278/measuring-what-matters-examining-the-success-of-achieving-the-dream-network-college-graduates-in-work-and-life

Achinstein, B., Curry, M. W., & Ogawa, R. T. (2015). (Re)labeling social status: Promises and tensions in developing a college-going culture for Latina/o youth in an urban high school. *American Journal of Education*, *121*(3), 311–346. https://doi.org/10.1086/680407

Ahn, T., & Dominguez-Villegas, R. (2022). *A change of plans: How the pandemic affected students of color and their plans for higher education*. UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative. https://latino.ucla.edu/research/fact-sheet-education-covid/

Alfaro, E. C., Weimer, A. A., & Castillo, E. (2018). Who helps build Mexican-origin female college students' self-efficacy? The role of important others in student success. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *40*(4), 431–447. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986318802588

Alojhani, O. (2016). A comprehensive review of the major studies and theoretical models of student retention in higher education. *Higher Education Studies*, *6*(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v6n2p1

Alvarez, C. (2015). A model for understanding the Latina/o student and parent college-going negotiation process. In P. A. Perez & M. Ceja (Eds.), *Higher education access and choice for Latino students: Critical findings and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 55–68). Routledge.

American Association of Community Colleges. (n.d.). *About VFA*. https://vfa.aacc.nche.edu/about-vfa/

American Association of Community Colleges. (2021, December 2). *Data points: Enrollment by race/ethnicity*. https://www.aacc.nche.edu/2021/12/02/datapoints-enrollment-by-race-ethnicity/

Anzaldua, G. (1999). *Borderlands: La frontera*. Aunt Lute Books.

Asante-Muhammad, D., Perez, A., & Buell, J. (2021). *Racial wealth snapshot: Latino Americans*. National Community Reinvestment Coalition. https://ncrc.org/racial-wealth-snapshot-latino-americans/

Astin, A. W. (1999). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Development*, *40*(5), 518–529.

Ayala, M. I., & Chalupa, D. (2016). Beyond the Latino essentialist experience: Racial and ethnic self-identifications, gender, and college attainment. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *38*(3), 378–394. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986316642841

Baldwin, C., Bensimon, E. M., Dowd, A. C., & Kleiman, L. (2011). Measuring student success. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *153*, 75–88. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.438

Barlett, L., & Jones Brayboy, B. M. (2005). Race and schooling: Theories and ethnographies. *The Urban Review*, *37*(5), 361–374. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-005-0021-3

Basilio, C. D., Knight, G. P., O'Donnell, M., Rossa, M. W., Gonzales, N. A., Umana-Taylor, A. J., & Torres, M. (2014). The Mexican American Biculturalism Scale: Bicultural comfort, facility and advantages for adolescents and adults. *Psychological Assessment*, *26*(2), 539–554. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035951

Bean, J. P. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: The synthesis and test of a casual model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, *12*, 155–187. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00976194

Bean, J. P. (1982). Conceptual models of student attrition: How theory can help the institutional researcher. *New Directions in Institutional Research*, *1982*(36), 17–33. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.37019823604

Bean, J. P., & Metzner, B. S. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, *55*(4), 485–540. https://doi.org/10.2307/1170245

Bergerson, A. A. (2009). College choice and access to college: Moving policy, research, and practice to the 21st century. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, *35*(4), 1–141. https://doi.org/10.1002/aehe.3504

Bers, T. H., & Galowich, P. M. (2002). Using survey and focus group research to learn about parents' roles in the community college choice process. *Community College Review*, *29*(4), 67–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/009155210202900404

Boerner, H. (2015). On their terms: In the drive for accountability, community college leaders define their own measures of success. *Community College Journal*, *85*(4), 18–20. https://www.aacc.nche.edu/publications-news/community-college-journal/

Bohon, S. A., Kirkpatrick Johnson, M., & Gorman, B. K. (2006). College aspirations and expectations among Latino adolescents in the United States. *Social Problems*, *53*(2), 207–225. https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2006.53.2.207

Bourdieu, P. (2015). The forms of capital. In A. R. Sadovnik & R. W. Coughlan (Eds.), *Sociology of education* (pp. 83–96). Routledge.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction of education, society and culture*. Sage Publications.

Bransberger, P., Falkenstern, C., & Lane, P. (2020, December). *Knocking at the college door: Projections of high school graduates*. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. https://www.wiche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Knocking-pdf-for-website.pdf

Brint, S. (2017). *Schools and societies* (3rd ed.). Stanford University Press.

Bryant, J. (2020, October 14). *Assessing student satisfaction is more important than ever*. Ruffalo Noel Levitz. https://www.ruffalonl.com/blog/student-success/assessing-student-satisfaction-is-more-important-than-ever/

Burns, S., Wang, X., & Henning, A. (Eds.). (2011). *NCES handbook of survey methods* (NCES 2011-609). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/2011609.pdf

Cabrera, A., Nora, A., & Castaneda, M. (1993). College persistence: Structural equations modeling test of an integrated model of student retention. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *64*(2), 123–139. https://doi.org/10.2307/2960026

Calaff, K. P. (2009). Latino students' journeys toward college. *Bilingual Research Journal*, *31*(1-2), 201–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235880802640680

Campa, B. (2010). Critical resilience, schooling processes, and the academic success of Mexican Americans in community college. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *32*(3), 429–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986310369322

Campa, B. (2013). Pedagogies of survival: Cultural resources to foster resilience among Mexican-American community college students. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, *37*(6), 433–452. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668921003609350

Carales, V. D. (2020). Examining educational attainment outcomes: A focus on Latina/o community college students. *Community College Review*, *48*(2), 195–219. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552120903087

Carales, V. D., & Lopez, R. M. (2020). Challenging deficit views of Latinx students: A strength-based perspective. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2020*(190), 103–112. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20390

Carolan-Silva, A., & Reyes, R. (2013). Navigating the path to college: Latino students' social networks and access to college. *Educational Studies*, *49*(4), 334–359. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2013.808199

Cerna, O. S., Perez, P. A., & Saenz, V. (2009). Examining the precollege attributes and values of Latina/o bachelor's degree attainers. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *8*(2), 130–157. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192708330239

Chang, A. (2018). *The struggles of identity, education, and agency in the lives of undocumented students: The burden of hyperdocumentation*. Palgrave MacMillan.

Chang, E., London, R. A., & Foster, S. S. (2019). Reimagining student success: Equity-oriented responses to traditional notions of success. *Innovative Higher Education*, *44*, 481–496. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-019-09473-x

Chapman, R. G. (1981). Toward a theory of college selection: A model of college search and choice behavior. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *13*, 246–250.

Chávez, A. F., & Longerbeam, S. D. (2016). *Teaching across cultural strengths: A guide to balancing integrated and individuated cultural frameworks in college teaching*. Stylus.

Ciolan, L., & Manasia, L. (2017). Reframing photovoice to boost its potential for learning research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917702909

Clotfelter, C. T., Ladd, H. F., Muschkin, C. G., & Vigdor, J. L. (2013). Success in community college: Do institutions differ? *Research in Higher Education*, *54*(7), 805–824. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24571746

Cohen, P. (2015, August 16). Racial wealth gap persists despite degree, study says. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/17/business/racial-wealth-gap-persists-despite-degree-study-says.html

Coleman, J. S. (2015). Social capital in the creation of human capital. In A. R. Sadovnik & R. W. Coughlan (Eds.), *Sociology of education* (pp. 97–114). Routledge.

Collins, R. (2015). Functional and conflict theories of educational stratification. In A. R. Sadovnik & R. W. Coughlan (Eds.), *Sociology of education* (pp. 37–52). Routledge.

Conchas, G. Q. (2001). Structuring failure and success: Understanding the variability in Latino school engagement. *Harvard Educational Review*, *71*(3), 475–504. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.71.3.280w814v1603473k

Conchas, G. Q., & Acevedo, N. (2020). *The Chicana/o/x dream: Hope, resistance, and educational success*. Harvard Education Press.

Cooper, C. R. (2011). *Bridging multiple worlds: Cultures, identities, and pathways to college*. Oxford University Press.

Cornelius, W. A. (1989). Impacts of the 1986 US immigration law on emigration from rural Mexican sending communities. *Population and Development Review*, *15*(4), 689–705. https://doi.org/10.2307/1972595

Cortez, E., & Castro, E. L. (2017). Mexican and Mexican American student reflections on transfer: Institutional agents and the continued role of community college. *Association of Mexican American Educators Journal*, *11*(2), 155–176. https://doi.org/10.24974/amae.11.2.354

Cortina, K. S., Arel, S., & Smith-Darden, J. P. (2017). School belonging in different cultures: The effects of individualism and power distance. *Frontiers in Education*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00056

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage Publications.

Crisp, G., Taggart, A., & Nora, A. (2015). Undergraduate Latina/o students: A systematic review of research identifying factors contributing to academic success outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, *85*(2), 249–274. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24434257

Curran, S. R., & Rivera-Fuentes, E. (2003). Engendering migrant networks: The case of Mexican migration. *Demography*, *40*(2), 289–307. https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.2003.0011

Dahlberg, K. (2009). The essence of essences – The search for meaning structures in phenomenological analysis of lifeworld phenomena. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Wellbeing*, *1*(1), 11–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482620500478405

de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., Branstetter, C., & Wang, X. (2019). *Status and trends in the education of racial and*

ethnic groups 2018 (NCES 2019038). National Center for Education Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019038

DeJaeghere, J. G., & McCleary, K. S. (2010). The making of Mexican migrant youth civic identities: Transnational spaces and imaginaries. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *41*(3), 228–244. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40890867

DesJardins, S. L., Ahlburg, D. A., & McCall, B. P. (2006). An integrated model of application, admission, enrollment and financial aid. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *77*(3), 381–429. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2006.11778932

Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: Critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 7–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000340971

Donato, K. M. (1994). U.S. policy and Mexican migration to the United States, 1942-92. *Social Science Quarterly*, *75*(4), 705–729.

Donato, K. M. (2017). A dynamic view of Mexican migration to the United States. In R. J. Simons (Ed.), *Immigrant women* (pp. 151–174). Routledge.

Donato, K. M., Durand, J., & Massey, D. S. (1992). Stemming the tide? Assessing the deterrent effects of the Immigration Reform and Control Act. *Demography*, *29*(2), 139–157. https://doi.org/10.2307/2061724

Donato, K. M., & Massey, D. S. (1993). Effect of Immigration Reform and Control Act on the wages of Mexican migrants. *Social Science Quarterly*, *74*(3), 523–541.

Douglas-Gabriel, D., Natanson, H., & Harden, J. D. (2021, January 31). A steady stream of Latino students was arriving on college campuses. Then the pandemic hit. *Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/01/31/latino-college-enrollment-pandemic/

Duffin, E. (2022). *College enrollment in public and private institutions in the U.S. 1965-2030*. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/183995/us-college-enrollment-and-projections-in-public-and-private-institutions/

Dunkin, E. (2021). *College enrollment in public and private institutions in the U.S. 1965-2029*. Statistia. https://www.statista.com/statistics/183995/us-college-enrollment-and-projections-in-public-and-private-institutions/

Duran, A. (2019). A photovoice phenomenological study exploring campus belonging for queer students of color. *Journal of Student Affairs Research & Practice*, *56*(2), 153–167. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2018.1490308

The Education Trust. (n.d.). *Access*. https://edtrust.org/issue/access/

The Education Trust. (2018, June 14). *National & state trends in degree attainment for Latino adults*. https://edtrust.org/resource/national-state-trends-in-degree-attainment-latino-adults/

El-Amin, A., Seider, S., Graves, D., Tamerat, J., Clark, S., Soutter, M., Johannsen, J., & Malhotra, S. (2017, February 14). Critical consciousness: A key to student achievement. *Phi Delta Kappan*. https://kappanonline.org/critical-consciousness-key-student-achievement/

Espino, M. (2016). The value of education and *educación*: Nurturing Mexican American children's educational aspirations to the doctorate. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *15*(2), 73–90. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2015.1066250

Excelencia in Education. (2018). *Closing the equity gap in educational attainment for Latinos*. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/issue-briefs/closing-equity-gap-educational-attainment-latinos

Fain, P. (2017, December 18). *Negative findings on performance based funding*. Inside Higher Ed. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.**https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2017/12/18/negative-findings-performance-based-funding

Feliciano, C., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2018). Varieties of ethnic self-identities: Children of immigrants in middle adulthood. *Journal of Social Science*, *4*(5), 26–46. https://doi.org/10.7758/rsf.2018.4.5.02

Fingerson, L., & Troutman, D. R. (2020). Measuring and enhancing student success. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *2019*(184), 33–46. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.20320

Foster, K. M. (2004). Coming to terms: A discussion of John Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority academic achievement. *Intercultural Education*, *15*(4), 369–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/1467598042000313403

Freeman, K. (1999). The race factor in African Americans' college choice. *Urban Education*, *34*(1), 4–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085999341002

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.

Fry, R. (2017, January 18). *U.S. still has a ways to go in meeting Obama's goal of producing more college graduates*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/18/u-s-still-has-a-ways-to-go-in-meeting-obamas-goal-of-producing-more-college-grads/

Fussell, E. (2004). Sources of Mexico's migration system: Rural, urban, and border migrants to the United States. *Social Forces*, *82*(3), 937–967. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3598362

Fussell, E., & Massey, D. S. (2004). The limits of cumulative causation: International migration from Mexican urban areas. *Demography*, *41*(1), 151–171. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1515217

Gandara, P., O'Hara, S., & Gutierrez, D. (2004). The changing shape of aspirations: Peer influence on achievement behavior. In W. G. Tierney, Z. B. Corwin, & J. E. Coyler (Eds.), *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach* (pp. 39–59). State University of New York Press.

Gao, F., & Chi Kit Ng, J. (2017). Studying parental involvement and university access and choice: An 'interacting multiple capitals' model. *British Educational Research Journal*, *43*(6), 1206–1224. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3298

Garcia, L. M., & Bayer, A. E. (2005). Variations between Latino groups in US post-secondary educational attainment. *Research in Higher Education*, *46*(5), 511–533. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-3363-5

Garsip, F., & Asad, A. L. (2016). Network effects in Mexico-U.S. migration: Disentangling the underlying social mechanisms. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *60*(10), 1168–1193. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764216643131

Geertz Gonzalez, R., & Morrison, J. (2016). Culture or no culture? A Latino critical research analysis of Latino persistence research. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *15*(1), 87–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192715579460

Gildersleeve, R. E. (2010). Access between and beyond borders. *Journal of College Admissions*, *206*, 3–10.

Gildersleeve, R. E., Cruz, C., Madriz, D., & Melendrez-Florez, C. (2015). Introduction: What do we know about Latino/a college access and choice? In P. A. Pérez & M. Ceja (Eds.), *Higher education access and choice for Latino students: Critical findings and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 69–83). Routledge.

Gloria, A. M. (1999). *Comunidad: Promoting the educational persistence and success of Chicana/o college students* (JSRI Occasional Paper No. 48). Julian Samora Research Institute.

Gloria, A. M., Castellanos, J., Lopez, A. G., & Rosales, R. (2005). An examination of academic non-persistence decisions of Latino undergraduates. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, *27*(2), 202–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986305275098

González, K. P., Stoner, C., & Jovel, J. E. (2003). Examining the role of social capital in access to college for Latinas: Toward a college opportunity framework. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *2*(1), 146–170. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192702250620

Gonzalez, L. M. (2015). Barriers to college access for Latino/a adolescents: A comparison of theoretical frameworks. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *14*(4), 320–335. https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2015.1091315

Gonzalez, M. T., Matambanadzo, S., & Valez Martinez, S. I. (2021). Latina and Latina critical legal theory: LatCrit theory, praxis, and community. *Rivista Direito e Praxis*, *12*(2). https://doi.org/10.1590/2179-8966/2021/59628

Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2021, July 9). *Before COVID-19, more Mexicans came to the U.S. than left for Mexico for the first time in years*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/07/09/before-covid-19-more-mexicans-came-to-the-u-s-than-left-for-mexico-for-the-first-time-in-years/

Grava, D. (2017). *Why do so many Mexican immigrants come to the United States*. Northwestern Medill School of Law. https://immigrantconnect.medill.northwestern.edu/blog/2017/03/16/why-do-so-many-mexican-immigrants-come-to-the-united-states/

Greenfield, P. M., & Quiroz, B. (2013). Context and culture in the socialization and development of personal achievement values: Comparing Latino immigrant families, European American families, and elementary school teachers. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, *34*(2), 108–118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2012.11.002

Guerra, P. L., & Nelson, S. W. (2013). Latino parent involvement: Seeing what has always been there. *Journal of School Leadership*, *23*(3), 424–455. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461302300301

Hahn Tapper, A. J. (2013). A pedagogy of social justice education: Social identity theory, intersectionality and empowerment. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, *30*(4), 411–445. https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21072

Hao, L., & Bonstead-Burns, M. (1998). Parent-child differences in educational expectations and the academic achievement of immigrant and native students. *Sociology of Education*, *71*(3), 175–198. https://doi.org/10.2307/2673201

Hartley, M., & Morphew, C. C. (2008). What's being sold and to what end? A content analysis of college viewbooks. *Journal of Higher Education*, *79*(6), 671–691. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25144703

Hatfield, S. R., & Denton, J. (2018). *Perceptions of student success* [Conference session]. Student Success Academy Data and Initiatives Roundtable, Higher Learning Commission, Chicago, IL.

Hernandez, J. C., & Lopez, M. A. (2004). Leaking pipeline: Issues impacting Latino/a college student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention*, *6*(1), 37–60. https://doi.org/10.2190/FBLY-0UAF-EE7W-QJD2

Higher Learning Commission. (2018, December). *Defining student success data: Recommendations for changing the conversation*. https://download.hlcommission.org /initiatives/StudentSuccessConversation.pdf

Higher Learning Commission. (2019a). *Defining student success data: Recommendations for differentiation for disaggregation*. https://download.hlcommission.org/initiatives /StudentSuccessDifferentiation.pdf

Higher Learning Commission. (2019b). *Defining student success data: Recommendations for a glossary of terms*. https://download.hlcommission.org /initiatives/StudentSuccessGlossaryofTerms_2019.pdf

Hillman, N. (2016, May 25). *Why performance-based college funding doesn't work*. The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/why-performance-based-college-funding-doesnt-work

Hillman, N., & Corral, D. (2018). The equity implications of paying for performance in higher education. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *61*(14), 1757–1772. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764217744834

Hofstede, G. (n.d.). *The 6-D model of national culture*. http://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-gert-janhofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/

Hofstede, G. (1991). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. McGraw Hill.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing cultures: The Hofstede model in context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, *2*(1). https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw Hill.

Hossler, D., & Bontrager, B. (2015). *Handbook of strategic enrollment management*. Jossey-Bass.

Hossler, D., Braxton, J., & Coopersmith, G. (1989). Understanding student college choice. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory & research* (pp. 231–288). Agathon Press.

Hossler, D., & Gallagher, K. S. (1987). Studying student college choice: A three-phase model and the implications for policymakers. *College and University*, *62*(2), 207–221.

Hoyt, C. L., & Murphy, S. E. (2016). Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat, women, and leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *27*(3), 387–399. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.11.002

Huber, L. P. (2010). Using Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) and racist nativism to explore intersectionality in the educational experiences of undocumented Chicana students. *Educational Foundations*, *24*(1-2), 77–96.

Hurtado, S., & Carter, D. F. (1997). Effects of college transition and perceptions of the campus racial climate on college students' sense of belonging. *Sociology of Education*, *70*(4), 324–345. https://doi.org/10.2307/2673270

Hurtado, S., Kurotsuchi Inkelas, K., Briggs, C., & Rhee, B. S. (1997). Differences in college access and choice among racial/ethnic groups: Identifying continuing barriers. *Research in Higher Education*, *38*(1), 43–75. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1024948728792

Hussar, B., Zhang, J., Hein, S., Wang, K., Roberts, A., Cui, J., Smith, M., Bullock Mann, F., Barmer, A., & Dilig, R. (2020). *The condition of education 2020* (NCES 2020144). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2020144

Ibarra, R. A. (2004). Chapter six: Academic success and the Latino family. *Counterpoints*, *253*, 113–132. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42979576

Iloh, C. (2018). Toward a new model of college "choice" for a twenty-first century context. *Harvard Educational Review*, *88*(2), 227–244. https://doi.org/10.17763/1943-5045-88.2.227

Ireland, S. M-Y. (2015). Fostering success or stratification? A macroapproach to understanding "success" in the community college context. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *39*(2), 150–162. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2013.775087

Irizarry, J. G. (2012). Los caminos: Latino/a youth forging pathways in pursuit of higher education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *11*(3), 291–309. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192712446322

Irizarry, J. G., & Antrop-Gonzalez, R. (2007). RicanStructuring the discourse and promoting school success: Extending a theory of culturally responsive pedagogy for DiaspoRicans. *CENTRO Journal*, *19*(2), 37–59. https://doi.org/10.1891/1540-4153.6.4.172

Israel, E., & Batalova, J. (2020, November 5). *Mexican immigrants in the United States*. Migration Policy Institute. https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/mexican-immigrants-united-states-2019

Iverson, S. V. (2007). Camouflaging power and privilege: A critical race analysis of university diversity policies. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *43*(5), 586–611. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X07307794

Jankowski, N. A. (2017). *Unpacking relationships: Instruction and student outcomes*. American Council on Education.

Jonas, S. (1996). Rethinking immigration policy and citizenship in the Americas: A regional framework. *Social Justice*, *23*(3), 68–85. https://www.jstor.org/stable/29766953

Juszkiewicz, J. (2020, July). *Trends in community college enrollment and completion data*. American Association of Community Colleges. https://www.aacc.nche.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Final_CC-Enrollment-2020_730_1.pdf

Kandel, W., & Kao, G. (2000). Shifting orientations: How U.S. labor migration affects children's aspirations in Mexican migrant communities. *Social Science Quarterly*, *81*(1), 16–32. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42864365

Kearney, M., & Beserra, B. (2004). Introduction: Migration and identities: A class-based approach. *Latin American Perspectives*, *31*(5), 3–14. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3185113

Kelly, B. T., & Kortegast, C. A. (2017). *Engaging images for research, pedagogy, and practice*. Stylus Publishing.

Kerby, M. B. (2015). Toward a new predictive model of student retention in higher education: An application of classical sociological theory. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *17*(2), 138–161. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115578229

Kinzie, J., & Kuh, G. (2016, November). *Report prepared for the Lumina Foundation – Review of student success frameworks to mobilize higher education*. Indiana University, Center for Postsecondary Research.

Kinzie, J., Palmer, M., Hayek, J., Hossler, D., Jacob, S. A., & Cummings, H. (2004). *Fifty years of college choice: Social, political, and institutional influences on the decision-making process*. Lumina Foundation For Education.

Kley, S. (2011). Explaining the stages of migration within a life-course framework. *European Sociological Review*, *27*(4), 469–486. https://www.jstor.org/stable/41236609

Krogstad, J. M. (2016). *5 facts about Latinos and education*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Buckley, J. A., Bridges, B. K., & Hayek, J. C. (2006, July). *What matters to student success: A review of the literature*. National Symposium on Postsecondary Student Success. https://nces.ed.gov/npec/pdf/Kuh_Team_Report.pdf

Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. H., Whitt, E. J., & Associates. (2010). *Student success in college: Creating conditions that matter*. Jossey-Bass.

Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. F. (1995). Toward a critical race theory of education. *Teachers College Record*, *97*(1), 47–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700104

Landry, C. C. (2003). Retention of women and people of color: Unique challenges and institutional responses. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *4*(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.2190/5HV3-BWM2-7D0U-7XBT

Langenkamp, A. G. (2019). Latino/a immigrant parents' educational aspirations for their children. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, *22*(2), 231–249. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2017.1365054

Larabee, D. F. (2010). *Someone has to fail: The zero-sum game of public schooling*. Harvard University Press.

Latz, A. O. (2017). *Photovoice research in education and beyond: A practical guide from theory to exhibition*. Routledge.

Laverty, S. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *2*(3), 21–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690300200303

Ledesma, M. C., & Calderón, D. (2015). Critical race theory in education: A review of past literature and a look to the future. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 206–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557825

Libassi, C. J. (2018, May 23). *The neglected college race gap: Racial disparities amongst college completers*. Center for American Progress. https://www.americanprogress.org /article/neglected-college-race-gap-racial-disparities-among-college-completers/

Lipka, S. (2019). *The truth about student success: Myths, realities and 30 practices that are working*. The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Litten, L. H. (1982). Different strokes in the applicant pool: Some refinements in a model of student choice. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *53*(4), 383–402. https://doi.org/10.2307/1981605

Liu, L., McNeice-Stallard, B., Tamashiro, D., Barkman, J., & Hao, L. (2015). The behavioral typology of first-time Latina/o students: The application in these Hispanic serving community colleges. In P. A. Pérez & M. Ceja (Eds.), *Higher education access and choice for Latino students: Critical findings and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 94–110). Routledge.

Luciak, M. (2004). Minority status and schooling - John U. Ogbu's theory and the schooling of ethnic minorities in Europe. *Intercultural Education*, *15*(4), 359–368. https://doi.org/10.1080/1467598042000313395

Lumina Foundation. (2022). *Racial equity report: A stronger nation*. https://luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/#/progress/racial_equity

Machida, M., & Schaubroeck, J. (2011). The role of self-efficacy beliefs in leadership. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *18*(4), 459–468. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051811404419

MacMillian Dictionary. (n.d.). Phenomenon. In *MacMillian Dictionary Blog*. https://www.macmillandictionaryblog.com/phenomenon

Martin, P. (2003). *Promise unfulfilled: Unions, immigration, and farm workers*. Cornell University Press.

Martinez, I. (2009). What's age gotta do with it? Understanding the age-identities and school-going practices of Mexican immigrant youth in New York City. *The High School Journal*, *92*(4), 34–48. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40364004

Massé, J. C., Perez, R. J., & Posselt, J. R. (2010). Revisiting college predisposition: Integrating sociological and psychological perspectives on inequality. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *43*(3), 279–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2010.492271

Masuoka, N. (2008). Defining the group: Latino identity and political participation. *American Politics Research*, *36*(1), 33–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X07303936

McCall, J., Zarate, M. E., & Perez, W. Y. (2015). Sixth-grade teachers' perceptions of the college-bound student. In P. A. Pérez & M. Ceja (Eds.), *Higher education access and choice for Latino students: Critical findings and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 11–25). Routledge.

McCoy, D. L., & Rodricks, D. J. (2015). Critical race theory in higher education: 20 years of theoretical research and innovations. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, *41*(3).

McDonough, P. M., Antonio, A. L., & Horvat, E. M. (1996, August). *College choice as capital conversion and investment: A new model*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Sociological Association, New York, NY.

Means, D. R., & Pyne, K. B. (2016). After access: Underrepresented students' post-matriculation perceptions of college access capital. *Journal of College Student Retention*, *17*(4), 390–412. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025115579247

Melidona, D., Taylor, M., & McNamee, T. C. (2022). *2021fall term pulse point survey of college and university presidents*. American Council on Education. https://www.acenet.edu/Research-Insights/Pages/Senior-Leaders/Presidents-Survey-Fall-2021.aspx

Mendoza, P., Malcom, Z., & Parish, N. (2014). The ecology of student retention: Undergraduate students and the Great Recession. *Journal of College Student Retention*, *16*(4), 461–485. https://doi.org/10.2190/CS.16.4.a

Miller Dyce, C., Albold, C., & Long, D. (2013). Moving from college aspiration to attainment: Learning from one college access program. *The High School Journal*, *96*(2), 152–165. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23351967

Mindnich, J. D. (2007). *School adjustment among low-income Latino adolescents: Building upon Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory of minority school performance* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of California, Berkley.

Molesky-Poz, J. (1997). A course on contemporary U.S. immigration: Myths, histories, and realities: Pedagogies for engagement and transformation. *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, *8*(2), 1–17. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43587603

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*, *32*(2), 132–141. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1476399

Monkman, K. (1997). *Transnational or immigrant learners: Re-drawing the boundaries of socio-cultural context in understanding adult learning*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society. Mexico City, Mexico.

Montenegro, E., & Jankowski, N. (2017). *Equity and assessment: Moving towards culturally responsive assessment*. National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/OccasionalPaper29.pdf

Mora, M. T., & Davila, A. (2018, July 2). *The Hispanic-white wage gap has remained wide and steady: Examining Hispanic-white gaps in wages, unemployment, labor force participation, and education by gender, immigration status, and subpopulations*. Economic Policy Institute. https://epi.org/147311

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage.

Mullin, C. M. (2012). Student success: Institutional and individual perspectives. *Community College Review*, *40*(2), 126–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091552112441501

Muñoz, J., & Rincón, B. (2015). Unpacking the layers: Financial aid and Latino high school students' postsecondary plans. In P. A. Pérez & M. Ceja (Eds.), *Higher education access and choice for Latino students: Critical findings and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 38–54). Routledge.

National Conference of State Legislators. (2015). *Performance based funding*. http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/performance-funding.aspx

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2021, November 18). *Stay informed with the latest enrollment information*. https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. (2022, January 13). *Current term enrollment estimates*. https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/

Nawrotzki, R. J., & DeWaard, J. (2016). Climate shocks and the timing of migration from Mexico. *Population and Environment*, *38*, 72–100. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11111-016-0255-x

Nederveen Pieterse, J. (2003). Social capital and migration: Beyond ethnic economies. *Ethnicities*, *3*(1), 29–58. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796803003001785

Noe-Bustamante, L. (2020, April 7). *Educational levels of recent Latino immigrants in the U.S. reached new high as of 2018*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/07/education-levels-of-recent-latino-immigrants-in-the-u-s-reached-new-highs-as-of-2018/

Noe-Bustamante, L., Flores, A., & Shah, S. (2019, September 16). *Facts on Hispanics of Mexican origin in the United States, 2017*. Pew Research Center.

https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/fact-sheet/u-s-hispanics-facts-on-mexican-origin-latinos/

Nuñez, A-M. (2014). Employing multilevel intersectionality in educational research: Latino identities, contexts, and college access. *Educational Researcher*, *43*(2), 85–92. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X14522320

Nuñez, A-M., & Crisp, G. (2012). Ethnic diversity and Latino/a college access: A comparison of Mexican American and Puerto Rican beginning college students. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *5*(2), 78–95. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026810

Nuñez, A-M., & Kim, D. (2012). Building a multi-contextual model of Latino college enrollment; Student, school and state-level effects. *The Review of Higher Education*, *35*(2), 237–263. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2012.0004

O'Connor, L., & Faas, D. (2012). The impact of migration on national identity in a globalized world: A comparison of civic education curricula in England, France and Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies*, *31*(1), 51–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2011.579479

O'Connor, N. (2009). Hispanic origin, socio-economic status, and community college enrollment. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *80*(2), 121–145. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2009.11772136

Ogbu, J. U. (1983). Minority status and schooling in plural societies. *Comprehensive Education Review*, *27*(2), 168–190. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1187907

Ogbu, J. U., & Simons, H. D. (1998). Voluntary and involuntary minorities; A cultural-ecological theory of school performance with some implications for education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, *29*(2), 155–188. https://doi.org/10.1525/aeq.1998.29.2.155

Ogunyemi, B. (2017). Cultural-ecological theory of academic disengagement used to explain a story of race, culture, and education. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, *109*(1), 21–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnma.2016.12.001

Oliva, M. (2004). Reluctant partners, problem definition and legislative intent: K-16 policy for Latino college success. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *3*(2), 209–230. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192704263574

Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development. (2021). *Population with tertiary education* [Data set]. https://data.oecd.org/eduatt/population-with-tertiary-education.htm

Ovink, S. M. (2014). "They always call me an investment": Gendered familism and Latina/o college pathways. *Gender & Society*, *28*(2), 265–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243213508308

Padilla, A. M., & Gonzalez, R. (2001). Academic performance of immigrant and U.S.-born Mexican heritage students: Effects of schooling in Mexico and bilingual/English language instruction. *American Educational Research Journal*, *38*(3), 727–742. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3202497

Parker, L. (2015). Critical race theory in education and qualitative inquiry: What each has to offer each other now? *Qualitative Inquiry*, *21*(3), 199–205. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800414557828

Pascarella, E. T., & Terenzini, P. T. (1980). Predicting freshman persistence and voluntary dropout decisions from a theoretical model. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *51*(1), 60–75. https://doi.org/10.2307/1981125

Passel, J. S., Lopez, M. H., & Cohn, D. (2022, February 3). *U.S. Hispanic population continued its geographic spread in the 2010s*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/02/03/u-s-hispanic-population-continued-its-geographic-spread-in-the-2010s/

Pedraza, S. (2000). Beyond Black and White: Latinos and social science research on immigration, race, and ethnicity in America. *Social Science History*, *24*(4), 697–726. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0145553200012049

Perea, A., & Slater, M. D. (1999). Power distance and collectivist/individualist strategies in alcohol warnings: Effects by gender and ethnicity. *Journal of Health Communication*, *4*(4), 293–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/108107399126832

Pérez, P. A., & Ceja, M. (2015). Introduction: What do we know about Latino/a college access and choice? In P. A. Pérez & M. Ceja (Eds.), *Higher education access and choice for Latino students: Critical findings and theoretical perspectives* (pp. 1–10). Routledge.

Pérez, P. A., & McDonough, P. M. (2008). Understanding Latina and Latino college choice: A social capital and chain migration analysis. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *7*(3), 249–265. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192708317620

Perna, L. W. (2000). Differences in the decision to attend college among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *71*(2), 117–141. https://doi.org/10.2307/2649245

Perna, L. W. (2006). Studying college access and choice: A proposed conceptual model. In J. C. Smart (Ed.), *Higher education: Handbook of theory and research* (pp. 99–157). Springer Press.

Perna, L. W., & Kurban, E. R. (2013). Improving college access and choice. In L. W. Perna & A. P. Jones (Eds.), *The state of college access and completion: Improving college success for students from underrepresented groups* (pp. 10–33). Routledge.

Perna, L. W., Rowen-Keynon, H. T., Thomas, S. L., & Bell, A. (2008). The role of college counseling in shaping educational opportunity: Variations across high schools. *The Review of Higher Education*, *31*(2), 131–159. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2007.0073

Perna, L. W., & Titus, M. A. (2005). The relationship between parent involvement as social capital and college enrollment: An examination of racial/ethnic group differences. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *76*(5), 485–518. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2005.11772296

Person, A. E., & Rosenbaum, J. E. (2006). Chain enrollment and college enclaves: Benefits and drawbacks of Latino college students' enrollment decisions. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2006*(133), 51–60. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.227

Phinney, J. S. (1993). A three-stage model of ethnic identity development in adolescence. In M. E. Bernal & G. P. Knight (Eds.), *Ethnic identity: Formation and transmission among Hispanics and other minorities* (pp. 61–79). SUNY Press.

Plunkett, R., Leipert, B. D., & Ray, S. L. (2012). Unspoken phenomena: Using the photovoice method to enrich phenomenological inquiry. *Nursing Inquiry*, *20*(2), 156–164. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1440-1800.2012.00594.x

Portes, A., & Rumbaut, R. G. (2001). *Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation*. University of California Press.

Quintana, C. (2021, September 30). More Latino students than ever are trying to get their degree, but it's fraught and costly. *USA Today*. https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/nation/2020/01/06/more-hispanic-students-than-ever-go-college-but-cost-high/2520646001/

Rendon, L. I. (1994). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *Innovative Higher Education*, *19*(1), 33–51. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01191156

Rienties, B., & Tempelaar, D. (2013). The role of cultural dimensions of international and Dutch students on academic and social integration and academic performance in the

Netherlands. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *37*(2), 188–201. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2012.11.004

Rinderle, S., & Montoya, D. (2008). Hispanic/Latino identity labels: An examination of cultural values and personal experiences. *The Howard Journal of Communications*, *19*(2), 144–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/10646170801990953

Rudolph, B., Chavez, M., Quintana, F., & Salinas, G. (2011). Filial responsibility expectations among Mexican American undergraduates: Gender and biculturalism. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *10*(3), 168–182. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192710397732

Sacks, P. (2007). *Tearing down the gates: Confronting the class divide in American education*. University of California Press.

Saenz, V. B., & Ponjuan, L. (2009). The vanishing Latino male in higher education. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *8*(1), 54–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192708326995

Salinas, C., Jr., Doran, E. E., & Swingle, E. C. (2020). Community colleges' use of the term "Latinx." *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2020*(190), 9–20. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20383

Salinas, C., Jr., & Nahra Friedel, J. (2016). Challenges and opportunities for state systems of community colleges: A document analysis. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *40*(11), 968–971. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2016.1142484

Sallo, M. (2011). *School-to-prison pipeline: Zero tolerance for Latino youth*. The National Council of La Raza. https://www.unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ZeroTolerance_FactSheet22011.pdf

Sánchez, B., Reyes, O., & Singh, J. (2005). Makin' it in college: The value of significant individuals in the lives of Mexican American adolescents. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *5*(1), 48–67. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192705282570

Santiago, D. A., & Calderón Galdeano, E. (2015, March). *Helping or hindering? State policies & Latino college completion*. Excelencia in Education. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/publications/helping-or-hindering-state-policies-latino-college-completion

Santiago, D. A., & Cuozzo, M. (2018, April). *College completion through a Latino lens*. Excelencia in Education. https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/issue-briefs/college-completion-through-latino-lens

Sass, D. A., Castro-Villarreal, F., Wilkerson, S., Guerra, N., & Sullivan, J. (2018). A structural model for predicting student retention. *The Review of Higher Education*, *42*(1), 103–135. https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2018.0035

Schak, J. O., & Nichols, A. H. (2016). *Degree attainment for Latino adults: National and state trends*. The Education Trust. https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Latino-Degree-Attainment_FINAL_4-1.pdf

Seidman, A. (2005). Minority student retention: Resources for practitioners. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *2005*(125), 7–24. https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.136

Shapiro, D., Dundar, A., Huie, F., Wakhungu, P., Yuan, X., Nathan, A., & Hwang, Y. A. (2017). *Completing college: A national view of student attainment rates by race and ethnicity – Fall 2010 cohort*. National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.

Shkodriani, G. M., & Gibbons, J. L. (1995). Individualism and collectivism among university students in Mexico and the United States. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, *135*(6), 765–772. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1995.9713979

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretive phenomenological research*. Sage Publications.

Solorzano, D. G. (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. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085901363002

Solorzano, D. G., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2001). Examining transformational resistance through a critical race and LatCrit theory framework: Chicano and Chicano students in an urban context. *Urban Education*, *36*(3), 308–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085901363002

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001a). Critical race and LatCrit theory and method: Counter-storytelling. *Qualitive Studies in Education*, *14*(4), 471–495. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390110063365

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001b). Maintaining social justice hopes within academic realities: A Frieirean approach to critical race/LatCrit pedagogy. *Denver University Law Review*, *78*, 595–621.

Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 23–44. https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040200800103

Spady, W. G. (1970). Dropouts from higher education: An interdisciplinary review and synthesis. *Interchange*, *1*, 64–85. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02214313

Spears, N., Lin, X., & Mowen, J. C. (2001). Time orientation in the United States, China, and Mexico: Measurements and insights for promotional strategy. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *13*(1), 57–75. https://doi.org/10.1300/J046v13n01_05

St. Amour, M. (2020, October 15). *Report: Enrollment continues to trend downward*. Inside Higher Ed. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/15/worrying-enrollment-trends-continue-clearinghouse-report-shows

Stamps, K., & Bohon, S. A. (2006). Educational attainment in new and established Latino metropolitan destinations. *Social Science Quarterly*, *87*(5), 1225–1240. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42956604

Stanton-Salazar, R. D., & Dornbush, S. M. (1995). Social capital and the reproduction of inequality: Information networks among Mexican origin high school students. *Sociology of Education*, *68*(2), 116–135. https://doi.org/10.2307/2112778

State Higher Education Executive Officers. (2021). *State higher education finance: FY 2020*. https://shef.sheeo.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/SHEEO_SHEF_FY20_Report.pdf

Tate, W. F. (1997). Critical race theory and education: History, theory, implications. *Review of Research in Education*, *22*, 195–247. https://doi.org/10.2307/1167376

Telles, E. (2018). Latinos, race and the U.S. Census. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *677*(1), 153–164. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218766463

Tierney, W. G. (1997). Organizational socialization in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *68*(1), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.2307/2959934

Tierney, W. G. (1999). Models of minority college-going and retention: Cultural integrity versus cultural suicide. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *68*(1), 80–91. https://doi.org/10.2307/2668211

Tierney, W. G. (2006). Chapter one: Framing social capital. *Counterpoints*, *308*, 21–40. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42979673

Tierney, W. G., Corwin, Z. B., & Coyler, J. E. (2005). *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach*. State University of New York Press.

Tierney, W. G., & Venegas, K. M. (2009). Finding money on the table: Information, financial aid, and access to college. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *80*(4), 363–388. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2009.11779021

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: A theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, *45*(1), 89–125. https://doi.org/10.2307/1170024

Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: Rethinking institutional action*. University of Chicago Press.

Torres, V. (2003). Hispanic American students' cultural orientation: Does geographic location, institutional type or level of stress have an effect? *NASPA Journal*, *40*(2), 153–172.

Torres, V. (2006). A mixed method study testing data-model fit of a retention model for Latino-a students at urban universities. *Journal of College Student Development*, *47*(3), 299–318. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0037

Torres, V., & Baxter Magolda, M. B. (2004). Reconstructing Latino identity: The influence of cognitive development on the ethnic identity process of Latino students. *Journal of College Student Development*, *45*(3), 333–347. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2004.0043

Torres, V., Jones, S. R., & Renn, K. A. (2009). Identity development theories in student affairs: Origins, current status, and new approaches. *Journal of College Student Development*, *50*(6), 577–596. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0102

Tsang, K. K. (2020). Photovoice data analysis: Critical approach, phenomenological approach, and beyond. *Beijing International Review of Education*, *2*(1), 136–152. https://doi.org/10.1163/25902539-00201009

Turner, R. H., & Kielcot, K. J. (1994). Responses to uncertainty and risk: Mexican-American, Black, and Anglo beliefs about the manageability of the future. *Social Science Quarterly*, *65*(2), 665–679. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42861671

U.S. Census Bureau. (2021a, February 24). *Educational attainment in the United States: 2021*. https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2021/demo/educational-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html

U.S. Census Bureau. (2021b, October 8). *Hispanic population to reach 111 million by 2060*. https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2018/comm/hispanic-projected-pop.html

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Undergraduate enrollment*. National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cha.asp

U.S. Department of Education. (2011, December). *Committee on Measures of Student Success*. https://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/cmss-committee-report-final.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2018a). *Dropout rates*. National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16

U.S. Department of Education. (2018b). *Undergraduate retention and graduation rates*. National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_ctr.asp

U.S. Department of Education. (2019). *Indicator 23: Postsecondary graduation rates*. National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs /raceindicators/indicator_red.asp

U.S. Department of Education. (2020). *Indicator 20: Undergraduate enrollment*. National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/raceindicators/indicator_REB.asp

U.S. Department of Education. (2021). *Digest of educational statistics*. National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/

U.S. Department of Education. (2022). *Basic eligibility criteria. Federal student aid*. https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/eligibility/requirements

Vagle, M. D. (2018). *Crafting phenomenological research*. Routledge.

Valdes, F. (2005). Legal reform and social justice: An introduction to LatCrit theory, praxis and community. *Griffith Law Review*, *14*, 148–173.

Valdes, F. (2012). Coming up: New foundations in LatCrit theory, community, and praxis. *University of Miami School of Law Institutional Repository*, *48*, 508–556.

Valencia, A. A. (1997). Anglo-American and Mexican American university students' estimation of value placed on higher educational attainments by significant persons in their lives. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development*, *25*(4), 269–280. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.1997.tb00348.x

van Manen, M. (2016). *Phenomenology in practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Routledge.

Varela, O. E., & Premeaux, S. F. (2008). Do cross-cultural values affect multisource feedback dynamics? The case of high power distance and collectivism into Latin American countries. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, *16*(2), 134–142. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2389.2008.00418.x

Vasquez, J. M. (2013). Mexican migration and Mexican American identities. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, *32*(3), 78–82. https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerethnhist.32.3.0078

Vega, D. (2018). Navigating postsecondary pathways: The college choice experiences of first-generation Latina/o transfer students. *Community College Journal of Research & Practice*, *42*(12), 848–860. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2017.1360219

Vertovec, S. (2011). The cultural politics of nation and migration. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, *40*, 241–256. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-081309-145837

Villalpando, O. (2004). Practical considerations of critical race theory and Latino critical race theory for Latino college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, *2004*(105), 41–50. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.115

Wach, F. S., Karbach, J., Ruffing, S., Brunken, R., & Spinath, F. M. (2016). University students' satisfaction with their academic studies: Personality and motivation matter. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *7*(55). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00055

Waldinger, R. (1982). The occupational and economic integration of the new immigrants. *Law and Contemporary Problems*, *45*(2), 197–222.

Waldinger, R., & Catron, P. (2015). Modes of incorporation: A conceptual and empirical critique. *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies*, *42*(1), 23–53. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1113742

Walker, D. A., & Schultz, A. M. (2000). Reaching for diversity: Recruiting and retaining Mexican-American students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *2*(4), 313–325. https://doi.org/10.2190/U6LB-ELJV-2G91-A78H

Warikoo, N., & Carter, P. (2009). Cultural explanations for racial and ethnic stratification in academic achievement: A call for new and improved theory. *Review of Educational Research*, *79*(1), 366–394. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40071169

Weatherton, M., & Schussler, E. E. (2021). Success for all? A call to re-examine how student success is defined in higher education. *CBE Life Science Education*, *20*(1). https://doi.org/10.1187%2Fcbe.20-09-0223

Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *21*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.2307/2391875

Weiss, M., Southern, K., & Tromble, K. (2021, December). *Accountability that works: Restoring gainful employment and strengthening higher education accountability measures*. Institute for College Access & Success. https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Accountability-That-Works.pdf

Wendel-Wolf, L., Ward, K., & Kinzie, J. (2009). A tangled web of terms: The overlap and unique contribution of involvement, engagement, and integration to understanding college student success. *Journal of College Student Development*, *50*(4), 407–428. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.0.0077

Yoo, B., Donthu, N., & Lenartowitz, T. (2011). Measuring Hofstede's five dimensions of cultural values at the individual level: Development and validation of CVSCALE. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, *23*, 193–210. https://doi.org/10.1080/08961530.2011.578059

Yosso, T. J. (2005). What culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332052000341006

Yosso, T. J., & Solorzano, D. G. (2005). *Leaks in the Chicano and Chicana education pipeline* (Latino Policies & Issues Brief No. 13). UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

VITA

Destiny M. Quintero is a White, cisgender woman of mixed ethnic descent. Her research interests stem from her experience as a first-generation college student and her interest in the qualitative differences between her own collegiate experiences and those of her husband, Michael—a first-generation Mexican college student. Dr. Quintero attended college right out of high school, choosing a small liberal arts school in Michigan as her entry into postsecondary studies. After one semester, she stopped out, finding the school to be a mismatch for her personal values. Dr. Quintero resumed her studies at a local community college in the Western suburbs of Chicago the next summer and then transferred to North Central College in Naperville, IL, where she earned her BA in philosophy. She went on to earn an MA in educational leadership from Northeastern Illinois University and a PhD in higher education from Loyola University Chicago.

Dr. Quintero has worked in higher education for nearly 20 years, holding positions in career services, community outreach, student life, student affairs, and the faculty. She currently serves as the Vice President of Education & Training for the Higher Learning Commission. In that role, she focuses on applying theory to practice in supporting institutions of higher education as they advance the quality of education. As a scholar-practitioner, her research focuses on connecting pre- and postmatriculation experiences and understanding their impact on student outcomes, using that knowledge to develop programs that support institutions in creating culturally responsive, equity-minded policies, procedures, and practices.

Dr. Quintero and her husband live in Chicago with their son, Mateó and their dog, Mundo. They enjoy nature walks, eating out, and exploring new cities and cultures.