ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	"I'M HERE FOR A PURPOSE": LATINA/CHICANA SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICERS' TESTIMONIOS OF RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE
	Molly Francine Morin, Doctor of Philosophy, 2018
Dissertation directed by:	Assistant Professor, Dr. Michelle M. Espino, Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education

The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) in U.S. higher education. Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model served as the conceptual framework for this study and offered a strengths-based lens that recognizes the assets Latina SSAOs bring from their lived experiences, families, and communities to navigate their personal and professional journeys. A *testimonio* research design was used to explore two research questions: (a) What resources and supports have Latinas benefited from in their career pathways to the SSAO role? (b) What strategies have Latina SSAOs employed to navigate challenges in their career pathways? Seven Latina SSAOs participated in the study, which involved participation in a 90-minute initial oral *testimonio* interview, 90-minute virtual focus group via videoconferencing, and a 60-minute follow-up interview. Each participant

could opt-in to each of these data collection pieces based on their interest and availability.

This study adapted Pérez Huber's (2010) three-phase data analysis process to uncover the findings that spanned across the participants' *testimonios.* Through a constant comparative analysis of the data, multiple readings of participant transcripts and *testimonios*, and feedback from the participants, four themes emerged: (a) *Familia* [Family]: Source of Knowledge, Aspirations, and Emotional Support; (b) Signaling Opportunity: Mentors and Guides Fostering Career Advancement; (c) It's All in the Approach: Transforming Experiences of Adversity; and (d) Follow your Purpose: Mission-Driven Leadership Fostering Persistence. Findings revealed the powerful role family and mentors played in the participants' career pathways by providing them with knowledge, skills, and emotional support which promoted their advancement. Findings also illuminated how the participants navigated challenges in their careers by employing resistance strategies and holding steadfast to their social justice commitment. This study contributes to the limited body of research on Latina administrators in higher education and is the first known study to focus explicitly on Latina SSAOs' experiences. Bearing witness to these Latina/Chicana SSAO trailblazers' *testimonios* can inspire Latina leaders and guide institutions, professional associations, and faculty in higher education/student affairs graduate preparation programs in supporting the advancement of current/future Latina SSAOs.

“I’M HERE FOR A PURPOSE”: LATINA/CHICANA SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICERS’ TESTIMONIOS OF RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Roy and Barbara Morin, I could not have been blessed with more loving parents. Dad, thank you for fostering my love of learning since an early age – taking me to libraries, museums, air shows, and more, which taught me that there is always something new to learn and it is important to ask questions! Dad, you not only serve as a role model of strong character, patience, and hard work; but you were there with me every step of the way in my educational journey from signing me up for AVID to driving with me cross-country (more than once!) to pursue graduate studies. Mom, thank you for instilling within me to be proud of who I am, regardless of what others think. You have taught me to always believe in myself and advocate for what I know is right; knowledge that I carry with me today and pass along to the students I serve.

I am a very blessed daughter and always strive to make you proud! Dad and mom thank you for always encouraging me to never give up on my dreams and to know that I can achieve anything I set my mind to! It is your endless love that kept me going during the challenges I have experienced in my educational journey because I knew that you were always there to cheer me on with words of encouragement! Thank you for your love and the sacrifices you both have made so I can pursue an education and career of my dreams. Love you both always!

I also dedicate this dissertation to the seven Latina/Chicana participants who took the time out of their busy schedules to share their *testimonios* with me. Thank you for inspiring me and for your service to the higher education/student affairs profession. Current and future students and professionals, especially Latinas/os, benefit greatly from your service and commitment to social justice. It is because of each of you that Latinas like myself can aspire to pursue senior-level roles! The journey will not be easy, but I know it can be done while embracing my roots!

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In some ways, the dedication and acknowledgments sections of this dissertation are more difficult to write than the dissertation itself. Words cannot fully express the gratitude I feel for so many individuals along my journey, especially during my PhD journey. Although I know that my completion of a doctoral degree is an independent endeavor, I could not have completed this educational and personal achievement without the support and encouragement from many individuals within my network, family, and community. I will do my best to highlight some of the individuals for whom I am forever grateful to for their support and for serving as a source of inspiration and encouragement.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my husband Gerry. Novio, my sunshine, *mi esposo, mi amor* – thank you for being there since day #1 in my Ph.D. process from assembling a desk and chair for me to study for the GRE to all those endless nights at Starbucks when we would shut down the place. Thank you for believing in me more than I believe in myself. In those times when I felt like I could not type one more word or read one more article, you would tell me I'm a rockstar! The truth is you are a rockstar and the real MVP of my Ph.D. journey, thank you for reminding me to laugh and smile during times in this Ph.D. journey when I felt far from it! Your unconditional love and endless words of encouragement and affirmation mean more to me than you'll ever know. Thank you for also being a sounding board as I brainstormed ideas and for keeping me uplifted. While I know that I possessed the drive to complete this Ph.D., I completed this Ph.D. more successfully because of you as I channeled your love, adaptability, and flexibility during this process. *Te amo mucho para siempre* my love. I could write so much more, but words could not fully encapsulate all that you mean to me and the love I have for you. With you by my side, I feel like we can accomplish anything we set our hearts and minds to!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

I think the biggest challenge I have navigated is the perception that a Latina's a vice president…. Even with students, when they come in, they want to talk to the vice president. My office used to be at another corner, and they're like, "Oh vice president?" Like, "Yeah I'm the vice president." So I didn't explore like, "Were you expecting somebody different?" But obviously body language and reaction said it all. I even experienced challenges with community members and students.... A White female student called and said she was very upset and said she wanted to speak to the person who's in charge. And I had at that time a Latina assistant. And so she said, "Maria, this lady is very upset. She wants to speak to whoever is in charge." And I said, "Well put her through." And before she put her through, the student said, "What's her name?" And she said, "Maria [Torres]"…. And the student said, "What? Is she the vice president?…Does she speak English?"…My assistant came and I go, "Put her through." So then the student goes, "Well first of all, I want to hear you speak. And I want to know about your credentials." And I said, "I don't think…*dije* [I said], okay ma'am, with all due respect, I don't think you called here to find out about my credentials. When you are ready to talk to me about a problem that I can help you with, you can call me back." And I hung up on her.

She was furious. So then we have like a red alarm system or red alert system whenever there's a student going to everybody, we connect. And so I told my assistant, "Call the president's office, all the deans, tell them we have a problem student, and she's very upset. She needs to route her back to me. I'm the one in charge." So sure enough, she kept calling and calling. She was livid. And she was finally yelling. She ended up threatening me. She said, "You better tell me about your credentials or else." And I said, "Like I said, I don't need to tell you my credentials…." She said, "You're so disrespectful." I said, "No ma'am. You're the disrespectful one." So…in terms of challenges, the challenge is going against the perception that Latinos don't accomplish and could never achieve at this level…. Even with one of my colleagues at the cabinet level, when I first took the job he said, "Oh my God, Maria, you're so intelligent." What did you think? You think…*una pendeja que porque soy Latina o que?* [I'm stupid because I am Latina or what?] But that's offensive. It's ignorant, but you can only fight against that by demonstrating who you are and what you do. Right? And being respectful, I always tell my students, "You can advocate intelligently but you need to be very strategic and very respectful."

The above excerpt from Maria's *testimonio* illustrates the added challenges Latina/Chicana senior student affairs officers (SSAOs)[1] may contend with in their

[1] The term SSAO will be used interchangeably with chief student affairs officer (CSAO). In citing existing research, I will utilize the identifier used by the author(s). I will also use the identifier utilized by each participant when (re)sharing their *testimonios*. However, I choose to use SSAO given the problematic use of "chief" as a title outside of Tribal/Indigenous/Native American communities. The

career pathways and daily experiences as senior student affairs leaders. The additional challenges Latina/Chicana senior-level administrators can face include misperceptions of their ability and credentials, lowered expectations, stereotypes, and micro- and macro-aggressions due to a Latino/Hispanic surname and/or Latina identity (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Gallegos, 2012; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Muñoz, 2010; Turner, 2007). Although SSAOs are tasked with managing multifaceted student affairs divisions in an ever-changing and political higher education environment (NASPA, 2016), many Latina SSAOs experience unique challenges beyond the traditional challenges that SSAOs experience due to their race/ethnicity and gender.

The CSAO plays a critical and highly visible leadership role in colleges and universities across the U.S. (Sandeen, 1991). CSAOs are not only tasked with supporting and enhancing the student experience, but they also frequently serve as a resource to the college/university president for student-related concerns, crises, and initiatives (Sandeen, 1991). Individuals who serve as a CSAO enter this position from a variety of career pathways; therefore, there is no defined pathway to this position (Sandeen, 1991; Tull & Miller, 2009).

Although men traditionally held the SSAO role, recently "women are reaching the top in student affairs in larger numbers than ever before" (Cook, 2010, p. 20). In the 1960s, 7% of SSAOs were women, which grew to 27% in 1998 (Blackhurst, Brandt, & Kalinowski, 1998). In 2014, 49% of CSAOs were women, showing

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historical use of the title "chief" is viewed as an honor bestowed to tribe leaders through inheritance or tribal selection. Utilizing "chief" as a title for individuals who are not tribal leaders or elders is considered offensive (NAIATN, 2018). Due to the problematic use of the title "chief" outside of Indigenous communities, within the student affairs profession some individuals and sub-groups within professional associations have decided to not utilize the title of CSAO and choose to adopt the use of SSAO (NASPA Region IV-W, 2015).

greater progress made for women over the years (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). While this increase in women SSAOs points to a positive shift from the prior gender gap in senior student affairs leadership, these statistics overlook the fact that White women have made the greatest gains in SSAO representation with inequalities persisting for Women of Color[2] SSAOs, particularly Latina SSAOs (Cook, 2010). For example, of all the female vice presidents of student affairs (VPSAs),[3] 77% are White, 13% are Black, and 6% are Hispanic[4] (NASPA, 2016). The larger share of women VPSAs are White, illustrating the need and opportunity to diversify the representation of Women of Color SSAOs across the country, because institutional leadership does not reflect the current and growing racial/ethnic diversity of college campuses (Sethna, 2011). Increasing structural diversity on college/university campuses not only begins to dismantle past legacies of exclusion; it helps create a positive campus climate for underrepresented populations by bringing new perspectives about how institutions can support a diverse population of faculty, staff, and students (Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012).

One in five women within the U.S. are Latina women, and this number will continue to grow as Latinas will represent one-third of the nation's female population by 2060 (Gándara & WHIEEH, 2015). While Latinas are experiencing an increased presence in the U.S., this does not equate to an increased presence of Latinas in executive-level leadership roles (Gándara & WHIEEH, 2015). The

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[2] The terms 'People of Color,' 'Communities of Color,' and 'Women of Color' are intentionally capitalized throughout to move toward empowerment and social/racial justice by challenging traditional grammatical norms (Pérez Huber, 2009).
[3] VPSA is one of the range of job titles that CSAOs may have on a college/university campus. Job titles of CSAOs vary among colleges and universities (Tull & Freeman, 2008).
[4] The terms Latina/o and Hispanic are frequently used interchangeably (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987) and I will utilize the term employed by the author when describing prior research.

underrepresentation of Latinas in senior-level roles in the higher education sector is a critical issue to explore given the growing representation of Latina/o students on college/university campuses (Silva, 2003). In 2014, 17% of all students enrolled in higher education identified as Hispanic (NCES, 2016). While undergraduate student enrollment grew for all groups between 2000 and 2014, Hispanic enrollment in higher education experienced an 119% growth, compared to a 57% growth for Black students and a 7% growth for White students during this same period (NCES, 2016).

Even though Latina/o student enrollment in higher education has grown overall, Latinas "are less likely to earn college degrees and go on to graduate or professional school" than their non-Latina counterparts (Espinoza, 2010, p. 318). In 2013, nearly 19% of Hispanic women between 25-29 years of age had completed a bachelor's degree compared to White (44%), African American (23%), and Asian American (64%) women (NCES, 2014). Only 4% of Latinas completed a master's degree or higher by 29-years-old, compared with White (11%), African American (5%), and Asian American (22%) women (NCES, 2014). Low degree completion also serves as a barrier to advancement for Latina administrators especially as a graduate degree, and increasingly a doctoral degree, serves as a prerequisite to accessing and attaining senior-level roles (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Lourido-Habib, 2011).

Although Latinas/os have experienced the greatest enrollment growth among all racial/ethnic groups in the U.S. (NCES, 2016), there are few Latino and Latina SSAOs, and especially Latinas among the power elite in colleges/universities (Haro & Lara, 2003; Mena, 2015). Along with their limited presence in higher education

administration, there is a lack of research on the experiences of Latina/o SSAOs and no prior research to-date focusing explicitly on the experiences of Latina SSAOs. As such, the purpose of the study is to provide a deeper understanding of the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs, who are one of the few in their roles across the U.S.

Statement of the Problem

Despite data illustrating that Latinos/as are the fastest-growing population in the U.S. and in the student body on college/university campuses, as well as past efforts to rectify the racial inequities that exist in higher education, Latinos/as remain underrepresented in SSAO roles (Mena, 2015). Although there have been "inroads" for women in the "pathway" to the CSAO role over the years, the pathway needs to expand to include an increased representation of Latina CSAOs (NASPA, 2016; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). As colleges and universities continue to diversify, institutions would benefit from a diverse representation among administrators to provide new perspectives on higher education practices and policies. It is critical that Latinas are part of this diverse representation (Ramos, 2008; Sethna, 2011; Silva, 2003). Due to Latinas' underrepresentation in senior-level roles and a limited scholarly focus on Latina administrator experiences and career pathways, Latinas' stories of success are not well-documented and little is known about what it takes for Latinas to attain senior-level roles to support the next generation of Latina leaders (Gallegos, 2012; Lopez, 2013; Silva, 2003).

To date, only one study has focused on the experiences of Latino/a SSAOs (see Mena, 2015) and no prior research has focused explicitly on the lived experiences of Latina SSAOs. Due to the additional challenges women from

marginalized backgrounds may face in their career pathways and the overrepresentation of White women participants in research focused on the experiences of women SSAOs, scholars recommend that future research explore the diverse experiences of minority women SSAOs, such as Latinas (Griesse, 2006; Herbrand, 2001; Marquez, 2014; Schoenfeld, 2014; Spurlock, 2009). Latina administrators' experiences are also subsumed within existing research on Women of Color administrators which has utilized predominantly Black women samples (Chang, Longman, & Franco, 2014; San Antonio, 2015; Smith, 2012; Vasquez, 2012). Future research in this area can provide an avenue to explore the diverse experiences among Women of Color CSAOs and the impact the intersection of race/ethnicity and gender can have on their experiences, given the larger focus on the impact of gender on women's experiences from prior women-centered scholarship (Griesse, 2006; Herbrand, 2001; Marquez, 2014; Schoenfeld, 2014; Spurlock, 2009; Yakaboski & Donahoo, 2011).

Although the body of literature on Latina administrator experiences is limited, findings from this research illustrated the added challenges Latinas contend with in their career journeys. Some of these challenges include racism, sexism, classism, negative perceptions of their abilities, tokenization, and feelings of isolation due to the underrepresentation of Latina/o colleagues (Cipres, 1999; Muñoz, 2010; Silva, 2003). The distinct challenges and experiences Latina administrators navigate in higher education and the vital role SSAOs play on college/university campuses warrant an exploration of Latina SSAOs' career pathways to capture these experiences. This lack of research on Latina SSAOs leaves their stories untold,

resulting in scholars and institutions overlooking at best, and erasing, at worst, their lived experiences, career pathways, and the assets they bring to their institutions (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). If researchers do not document these untold stories, they disappear from the political, social, and historical consciousness of a community (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

With 49% of senior-level higher education administrators older than age 60, higher education institutions need to ensure that they are cultivating the next generation of higher education leaders (Marshall, 2009). It is not clear who will take on leadership roles when senior-level leaders retire, and without intentional efforts to support Latinas' career pathways, they will continue to remain underrepresented in administration in the coming years (Crespo, 2013; Muñoz, 2010). Given the increasing Latina/o population in the U.S. and in higher education, coupled with a need to fill administrative roles due to future retirements, it is important to assess the experiences of Latinas in the current leadership pipeline (Crespo, 2013). This next generation of leaders needs to include a greater representation of Latinas, which merits a closer examination of current Latina administrators' experiences to guide future Latinas in the leadership pipeline and foster their career aspirations to pursue senior-level positions (Crespo, 2013; Lopez, 2013; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Maes, 2012). By illuminating the untold stories of Latina SSAOs, this study makes visible what is unseen in the literature, providing a point of reference for current and future Latina SSAOs and institutional leaders who can support their pathways.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to provide a deeper understanding of the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs in U.S. higher education. The following research questions were central to the study and guided by the literature:

1. What resources and supports have Latinas benefited from in their career pathways to the SSAO role?
2. What strategies have Latina SSAOs employed to navigate challenges in their career pathways?

Conceptual Framework

Yosso's (2005, 2006) model of community cultural wealth (CCW) offered a unique framework for better understanding the lived experiences of Latina SSAOs in this study by challenging the ways in which valued forms of cultural capital have been utilized to justify the marginalization and underachievement of Communities of Color. The CCW model also provided an assets-based lens to affirm the knowledge and skills Latina SSAOs gained from their families and communities. Yosso (2005) posited that Communities of Color possess unique forms of capital that social institutions, such as education, frequently overlook due to the privileging of the cultural capital of White, upper/middle-class populations. There are at least six forms of capital that comprise the CCW of Communities of Color: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005).

Aspirational capital focuses on resiliency and the ability to pursue one's goals in the face of actual and perceived barriers. *Linguistic capital* includes social skills and knowledge attained by communicating in more than one language or style. *Familial capital* refers to knowledge and skills developed through one's immediate

and extended family. *Social capital* includes social networks and community resources that provide emotional support to pursue higher education and navigate challenges. *Navigational capital* refers to the skills Communities of Color use to navigate through social institutions such as the educational system. *Resistant capital* includes knowledge and skills developed through resistant behavior that challenges inequality and stereotypes (Yosso, 2005).

Through their research, Pérez Huber (2010) and Navarrette García (2014) expanded the CCW model by identifying additional forms of capital that Latinas/Chicanas possess. *Spiritual capital* helps Chicanas transcend current challenges and develop a sense of hope by drawing from their belief in something greater than themselves and in using one's inner resource (Pérez Huber, 2010). *Experiential capital* encompasses an individual's life experiences that do not fit within a pre-existing form of capital from Yosso's (2005) model that can enhance and strengthen an individual's life journey (Navarrette García, 2014). These forms of capital come together to form a type of cultural wealth that can further the advancement of Communities of Color and in this case, Latina SSAOs.

Yosso's (2005) CCW model provided an assets-based and culturally-affirming lens to frame the study and illuminate the strengths participants bring to their role as administrators. While prior CCW research primarily draws from research on Latina/o student populations across the educational pipeline, this study provided an opportunity to utilize a CCW conceptual framework to affirm the cultural wealth of a sub-set of Latina administrators. The CCW framework shaped the interview protocols utilized in this research by seeking to uncover the knowledge, skills, and

networks participants accessed through their home environments, lived experiences, and community contexts.

The participants' *testimonios* illuminated the knowledge, skills, and networks that promoted their educational and career advancement as well as their persistence in the student affairs profession. While Latinas' CCW is nurtured as early as childhood, this research demonstrates how Latinas' CCW can continue to develop over time and serve as a resource throughout their personal and professional journeys beyond their schooling experiences. Although it is a common practice in research drawing from a CCW conceptual framework to present the findings by describing each of the forms of capital participants possess (e.g., *aspirational*, *familial*), this study moved away from this traditional content analysis approach. Throughout the data analysis process, analyzing the data based on the forms of capital the participants possess felt restrictive given the rich participant *testimonios*, since the purpose of this study was not to illuminate the forms of capital Latina SSAOs' utilize in their career pathways. The focus of this research was to better understand the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs.

Rather than segmenting participants' experiences by each of these forms of capital, I sought to uncover the broader themes within and across the participants' *testimonios* to authentically (re)present the findings from this research. Looking beyond the forms of capital participants possess illuminated the diverse resources and navigational strategies participants benefited from throughout their career pathways to the SSAO role and honored participants' personal and professional journeys. Yosso (2005) looked forward to the ways that the CCW model can take on new

dimensions in future discourse and research that serves a larger social justice purpose. Adapting the data analysis process beyond a traditional content analysis approach to uncover the broader themes that emerged across the participant sample provides a new understanding of how drawing from a CCW lens can frame research on Latinas/os.

Methodology Overview

I utilized a *testimonio* research design as the methodology for the study. *Testimonio* was initially developed within the field of Latin American studies to document the social, political, gendered, and cultural experiences that shape an individual's life, particularly individuals who experienced injustice (Beverley, 2008). Over the years, Chicana/Latina feminists have employed *testimonio* as a methodology to illuminate Latinas' lived experiences and the challenges they face in their journeys (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). *Testimonio* as a methodology reassigns agency to the oppressed by repositioning Chicanas' and Latinas' lived experiences as the central source of inquiry (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Education scholars have used *testimonio* as a methodology to expose and validate Latinas' lived experiences and honor their experiential knowledge (Burciaga, 2007; Pérez Huber, 2010). *Testimonio* can also foster social change by transforming Latinas/Chicanas experiences of subordination to empowerment through collective action (Burciaga, 2007; Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Espino, Vega, Rendón, Ranero, & Muñiz, 2012; Pérez Huber, 2009, 2010, 2012). Prior education research provided a strong scholarly foundation to employ a *testimonio* methodology in the study.

Seven individuals participated in the study who met three predetermined criteria: (a) self-identity as a Latina or Hispanic woman, (b) current or former employment as a SSAO at a two-year or four-year college/university in the U.S. (e.g., dean of students, vice president for student affairs, vice president for student services), and (c) work experience of a minimum of 10 years in the field of higher education/student affairs administration. I recruited participants through national professional associations such as American College Personnel Association (ACPA), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), and the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE). I also posted a recruitment flyer on social media to recruit Latina SSAOs who may not be involved in professional associations.

The data collection process for the study involved the completion of a demographic form and participation in a 90-minute individual oral *testimonio* interview, 90-minute virtual focus group via videoconferencing, and a 60-minute follow-up interview. Each participant could opt-in to each of these data collection pieces based on their interest and availability. These data collection elements provided me with the honor and privilege to bear witness to the participants' *testimonios*. For data analysis, I adapted the three-phase data analysis process utilized by Pérez Huber (2010). The three-phases of data analysis include (a) preliminary data analysis, (b) collaborative data analysis, and (c) final data analysis. After I conducted a preliminary analysis of the data, participants were asked to participate in a virtual focus group as a form of collaborative data analysis to gain participant feedback and insight on the preliminary findings. Lastly, I asked participants to

participate in an individual follow-up interview for any remaining questions I had to obtain further context on their experiences and to provide participants with an opportunity to share additional information before conducting a final analysis of the data. To increase the trustworthiness of the study, I employed member checking, engaged in reflexive memoing throughout the research process, documented an audit trail, and participated in peer debriefing.

Summary of the Findings

The findings from this research illuminate the diverse resources that Latinas can benefit from in their career pathways to the SSAO role and how Latina SSAOs navigate challenges in their personal and professional journeys. In seeking to better understand the career pathways and lived experiences of the seven Latina SSAO participants, four themes emerged across the participant sample: (a) *Familia* [Family]: Source of Knowledge, Aspirations, and Emotional Support; (b) Signaling Opportunity: Mentors and Guides Fostering Career Advancement; (c) It's All in the Approach: Transforming Experiences of Adversity; and (d) Follow your Purpose: Mission-Driven Leadership Fostering Persistence.

The participants benefited from a variety of resources and supports in their career pathways to the SSAO role; however, family and mentors served as invaluable sources of social support throughout participants' journeys. The first theme illuminates how immediate and extended family members provided participants with emotional support and fostered participants' self-efficacy and drive to succeed. Family also cultivated participants' value for education, hard work ethic, and social responsibility to serve others. Participants' exposure to overt and covert discrimination stemming from their families' *cuentos* [stories] navigating racism and

xenophobia and siblings' activist efforts contributed to their drive to resist structural barriers in their own journeys and serve the Latina/o community and underserved populations. Given the 24/7 and highly visible nature of the SSAO role, participants who are married also described benefiting from support from spouses who provided a confidential and caring ear to listen.

The second theme highlights how the support participants received from mentors and guides in their journeys supplemented the support they received from families. Mentors provided sustained support to participants over time; while guides provided one-time or limited support. While not all participants reported a presence of mentors in their professional journeys, all participants described the role of guides in their paths who encouraged them to pursue a career in student affairs and/or apply to a particular opportunity (e.g., a new position, doctoral studies) that promoted their career advancement. Mentors and guides sponsored participants' engagement in professional development opportunities, connected them to colleagues in their networks, and provided them with access to valued knowledge and skills to foster their career pathway to the SSAO role (e.g., fundraising, grant writing). Participants benefited from support from cross-race and/or cross-gender peers, however, the presence of Latina/o supports in participants' journeys offered distinct support by sharing common cultural values and experiences contending with structural barriers in their personal and professional pathways. Latina/o role models and mentors especially fostered participants' career aspirations by being able to see themselves in advanced roles through these connections.

The third theme describes how the participants employed a variety of strategies to navigate challenges in their career journeys to senior student affairs leadership. Rather than letting overt and covert discrimination negatively impact their career aspirations and day-to-day experiences in administration, participants transformed experiences of adversity into opportunities to channel their self-efficacy, resilience, navigational skills, and spirituality/faith. Participants addressed challenges and inequities in their journeys in a way that is strategic, diplomatic, assertive, and unapologetic. The participants also employed active measures to resist challenges in their pathways such as locating networks of peer support and allies within and outside of their institutions, especially with Latina/o and Women of Color peers.

All participants possessed a commitment to social justice that they carried with them in their role as an administrator as they implemented equity- and evidence-based approaches to transform their institutions through their leadership. The fourth theme uncovers how the participants' commitment to infusing social justice into all facets of their work contributed to their mission-driven leadership to impact the lives of students, especially underrepresented students. In times when participants may have questioned their desire or willingness to persist throughout their career pathway in higher education/student affairs administration, they never quit or lost sight of their purpose. Due to the underrepresentation of Latina/o administrators' in higher education, the participants understood firsthand how their presence in cabinet-roles has the potential to foster Latina/o administrators' and students' educational and professional aspirations. Participants took pride and responsibility in challenging perceptions of what a SSAO should "look like" since White colleagues frequently

occupy the SSAO role. They also recognized the unique assets they brought to the SSAO role because of their social identities as Latina and/or first-generation college students who are attuned to the importance of equity efforts in the higher education environment. Participants' commitment to social justice not only served as a coping tool to navigate challenges in their career, but it also prompted their employment in the community college setting for participants who serve in this institutional type. The findings that surfaced across the participants' *testimonios* demonstrate the diverse resources and navigation strategies the participants benefited from in their career pathways to the SSAO role.

Significance of the Study and Implications

Latinas are the "linchpin of the next generation" and benefit from support to become leaders in the community and the workforce (Gándara et al., 2013, p. 6). If the U.S. seeks to break the cycle of under-education for the Latino population, it must change the futures of Latina women in both education and the workforce (Gándara et al., 2013). One way to change the futures of Latinas is by supporting their academic and career advancement. To support Latinas' academic and career advancement in higher education, research and practice would benefit from first uncovering and understanding the personal and professional pathways of Latinas who have already navigated their journey to senior leadership (Aschenbrenner, 2006). This dissertation is the first known study to explicitly focus on better understanding the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs who are one of the few in their positions. This study contributes to educational research and practice by: (a) filling a gap in the literature on Latina SSAOs' experiences; (b) uncovering the resources that support Latinas' advancement to the SSAO role; (c) illuminating the assets that

Latinas bring to their role as a SSAO (e.g., commitment to social justice, serving as a role model to Latina/o students and staff); (d) providing insight into Latina SSAOs' experiences to stakeholders who can support the career pathways of current and future Latina SSAOs (e.g., institutional leaders, professional associations); and (e) extending the use of Yosso's (2005, 2006) CCW model and a *testimonio* methodology to a new Latina/o sub-population and new area of research.

A variety of stakeholders can benefit from this research given the need to expand the representation of Latinas in higher education administration as well as Latina voices in research such as faculty in higher education/student affairs graduate preparation programs, professional associations, institutions seeking to diversify their institutional leadership and support the next generation of campus leaders, and current student affairs administrators who aspire to attain a SSAO role. Institutions can benefit from learning about the lived experiences of current Latina leaders since "very few Latinas have broken through the glass ceiling; therefore, it is of value to learn from those who have risen beyond social and political structures that have served as gatekeepers" (Muñoz, 2010, p. 155). While there is not one definitive career pathway to ensure personal and professional success and attain the SSAO role (Biddix, 2011; Tull & Miller, 2009), uncovering the experiences of a sample of Latina SSAOs can provide insight into the types of skills, experiences, knowledge, and networks that support and challenge their career pathways. Leveraging this insight can foster the advancement of future Latina senior-level administrators (Crespo, 2013; Gallegos, 2012; Lopez, 2013).

By bringing Latina SSAO voices to the forefront, this study created a new discourse on their pathways and the resources, supports, and strategies that promote their advancement and persistence in the student affairs profession. Although this study focused on Latinas in SSAO roles, the participants' *testimonios* may also resonate with Latinas in academia as well as Latinas holding leadership roles outside of the higher education environment, adding to the body of literature on Latina leadership. Future scholarship on Latinas in senior student affairs leadership can also expand this research by recruiting participants from additional ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Salvadoran, Dominican), social identities (e.g., LGBTQ), geographic regions (e.g., northwest, east coast), and institutional types (e.g., four-year institutions) to include individuals from additional social, institutional, and geographic contexts. Focusing on Latina SSAOs explicitly also illuminated the assets and social justice lens the participants bring to their institutions and the SSAO role.

Institutional leaders play a vital role in fostering Latinas' career aspirations and advancement to the SSAO role and beyond. Supportive supervisors, mentors, and institutional support networks (e.g., Latina/o/x faculty/staff associations) offer invaluable support, community, and insight to Latinas along their professional journeys. Supervisors and peers of Latina administrators should not underestimate the power they have to promote Latinas' advancement by providing words of encouragement and affirmation to pursue new opportunities, guidance, and sponsoring their participation in professional development opportunities. The participants' *testimonios* demonstrate how many Latina administrators desire to stay geographically close to their families and communities amid rhetoric in the student

affairs profession that values geographic flexibility. As such, institutions should leverage and recruit local talent to promote the advancement of Latinas to mid- and senior-level roles by considering Latinas within the institution and local region for new opportunities that may open.

Professional development experiences play a valuable role in the leadership development and career advancement of Latina SSAOs and professional associations such as NASPA, ACE, and ACPA play a critical role in offering professional development opportunities. Professional associations should strive to continue to offer targeted leadership development initiatives that offer Latinas networking opportunities, valuable knowledge, and a space of reflection and rejuvenation. Student affairs professional associations should continue to collaborate with scholars researching higher education/student affairs administrator populations by offering recruitment support. NASPA and ACPA should also maintain longitudinal demographic data to document demographic changes among SSAOs over time.

Given the valuable role that higher education/student affairs graduate preparation programs play in supporting the next generation of the student affairs profession, there are ways that faculty in these graduate programs can support the career pathways of Latinas to the SSAO role. This support can begin as early as the graduate admissions process by implementing targeted Latina/o/x recruitment efforts that expose undergraduate students to a career in student affairs (e.g., Latina/o/x student organizations, initiatives through professional associations such as NUFP through NASPA or NextGen through ACPA). Graduate preparation program faculty can also market their doctoral programs to institutional, regional, and state-based

Latina/o/x affinity groups to support future Latina PhDs/EdDs. Graduate preparation programs should also strive to make their programs accessible and adaptable to working professionals who make pursuing a doctoral degree a possibility for Latinas who work full-time. Faculty should also provide Latina doctoral students with a strong research foundation to equip them with the skills to complete their dissertations and engage in research throughout their career.

Definition of Terms

This study focuses on the experiences and career pathways of Latina SSAOs serving at colleges and universities across the U.S. Terms associated with this research that I will use throughout this work are defined as follows:

- *Administrator*: an individual who currently holds a position as a student affairs or higher education administrator in any functional area (e.g., housing, student activities), at any level (e.g., president, chancellor, vice president, dean, director, coordinator, advisor) in the college or university setting (Mena, 2015; Silva, 2003).
- *Chicana*: is a racial/ethnic identifier to describe a woman of Mexican, Mexican-American descent that became increasingly used in the 1960s during the peak of the Chicana feminist movement. Utilizing the identifier Chicana calls attention to the gendered, racialized, and classed experiences of Chicanas compared to their White feminist and Chicano male counterparts (Blackwell, 2011; García, 1997). As such, this term is not only adopted as a racial/ethnic identifier but also as a political identifier. When illustrating participant narratives, I will utilize the racial/ethnic identifier employed by the participant.

- *Latina*: Latina is often used interchangeably for Hispanic women. An individual who identifies as Latina/o or Hispanic is a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American descent, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). I utilize the identifier *Latina* for its inclusivity of the diversity of racial/ethnic heritages. The identifier *Hispanic* is not often the racial/ethnic identifier of choice for individuals within this racial/ethnic group because of its association with colonialism and European bias (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987). However, when illustrating participant narratives, I will utilize the racial/ethnic identifier employed by the participant.

Conclusion

While the responsibilities and titles of a SSAO vary by institution, the participants' *testimonios* demonstrate the positive contributions Latina SSAOs are making to institutions across the U.S. The Latina SSAO participants not only implemented equity-minded and evidence-based practices on their campuses, but they also served as a role model to Latina/o students and staff at their institutions as well as in the larger student affairs profession through their involvement in professional associations. Although there are multiple career pathways to the SSAO role, this study illuminates how Latinas benefit from a variety of resources and supports in their professional journeys to senior student affairs leadership such as family, mentors, guides, resistance strategies, self-efficacy, navigational skills, spirituality, and more. Despite the challenges the participants faced in their career journeys, their desire to transform their institutions into spaces of empowerment that support the

advancement, retention, and success of the students they serve leads them to push through challenges throughout their careers.

The continued growth of Latina/o student enrollment warrants a continued focus on the institutional leaders that will serve an increasingly racially/ethnically diverse student population in the coming years. The continued growth and advancement of Latinas, first as students in undergraduate and graduate education, and later in their careers as deans and vice presidents are important to the future of higher education. This study provides insight into the lived experiences and career pathways of seven current/former Latina SSAO trailblazers. A CCW lens coupled with a *testimonio* methodology centered the knowledge the Latina SSAO participants gained from their lived experiences. Findings from this research can provide insight, affirmation, and inspiration to current and aspiring Latina SSAOs as well to colleges/universities and the student affairs profession broadly to support the next generation of Latina leaders through practice and research.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. In Chapter Two I provide a review of the literature related to the development of and pathways towards the SSAO position as well as findings from the literature on women, Women of Color, and Latina administrator experiences to situate this study on Latina SSAOs. I conclude Chapter Two with an overview of the conceptual framework of the study, CCW. In Chapter Three, I describe the qualitative methodology I employed in the study, *testimonio*. I also include an overview of my positionality and Chicana feminist epistemological lens as well as an overview of the research design, data collection, and data analysis strategies, and measures I employed to ensure

trustworthiness of the data. In Chapter Three, I culminate with a discussion of the limitations of the study followed by an introduction to the participants' personal and professional backgrounds. In Chapter Four, I share the participant *testimonios* in their entirety and an overview of the themes within each participant's *testimonio*. In Chapter Five, I discuss the findings from this research that emerged from the participants' collective story and offer a description of the implications of this study on future research and practice followed by advice to support current and aspiring Latina SSAOs' based on participants' *testimonios*. I close Chapter Five with a *reflexión* [reflection] of how I was transformed personally and professionally by conducting this research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to document the career pathways to the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) position with particular attention to the experiences of Latina administrators in higher education. To provide context for the study, I reviewed literature related to the SSAO role and situated the Latina SSAO experience within prior bodies of literature about women, Women of Color, and Latina administrators. I will then present an overview of the conceptual framework that guides the study, community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005, 2006).

The Senior Student Affairs Officer

The senior student affairs officer (SSAO) serves as the top student affairs administrator at a college/university and plays an important role in retention and student success, given their role in shaping policies and practices that impact student experiences (Cook, 2010). Due to the diverse organizational structures of institutions, individuals in this CSAO role hold a variety of titles such as vice chancellor, vice president, vice provost, or dean in the areas of student affairs, student services, student life, and student development (Sandeen, 1991; Tull & Freeman, 2008). Some of the departments that CSAOs provide leadership to include housing, counseling, and campus activities (Sandeen, 1991; see Appendix A for a full list of departments that a SSAO may oversee).

When exploring the reporting lines of CSAOs, NASPA's Research and Policy Institute (RPI) found that the top three job titles of individuals to whom CSAOs report are (a) president/chancellor, (b) provost/chief academic officer, and (c) executive or senior vice president (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). A majority of CSAOs report to the president or chancellor of the institution (72%) and may serve on the

president's cabinet (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). A CSAO is at the peer-level of other division leaders such as the chief operating officer and chief technology officer (Sandeen, 1991). Regardless of the title that the SSAO holds and the departments they oversee, there is no doubt about the vital role senior student affairs administrators play in proactively identifying solutions to existing challenges, collaborating with various stakeholders, and meeting evolving demands and diverse student needs (Dungy & Ellis, 2011).

History and Background of the SSAO Position

Although there are now SSAOs in colleges/universities across the U.S., it is important to note that this role did not always exist in higher education. While higher education historians have documented the emergence of the CSAO role, Arthur Sandeen (1991) conducted the most comprehensive examination of the CSAO position in his book *The Chief Student Affairs Officer: Leader, Manager, Mediator, Educator*. This seminal text examined the responsibilities of the CSAO, the academic and professional background needed to pursue this role, and the challenges an individual in this role can face, such as contending with criticism and institutional politics (Sandeen, 1991). Given my focus on the experiences of Latina SSAOs, I will provide an overview of the development of the SSAO position and how the dean of women role served as the first career outlet for women to pursue higher education administrative positions.

History of the SSAO role. The CSAO position developed out of a need to support the student experience outside of the classroom environment and address student-related concerns, a role previously inhabited by the college president (Sandeen, 1991). As student enrollment increased, college/university presidents

selected faculty members who exhibited compassion and care for addressing student concerns to manage student discipline and address student needs (Rudolph, 1962; Sandeen, 1991; Thelin, 2004). However, with time, these responsibilities also became an increasing burden on faculty as higher education institutions not only grew in student enrollment, but also became increasingly complex organizations (Rudolph, 1962; Thelin, 2004). *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937), an influential document referred to as the "backbone of the [student affairs] profession" (Herdlein, 2004, p. 346), described the development and purpose of student services administrators as "personnel officers." Personnel officers "were appointed to relieve administrators and faculties of problems of discipline; but their responsibilities grew with considerable rapidity to include a larger number of other duties" (American Council on Education, 1937, paragraph 9).

To shift student discipline-related tasks and student concerns away from the purview of presidents and faculty, Harvard created the dean of the college role in 1890, which addressed student life, student welfare, and registration (Sandeen, 1991). Given that Harvard first served male students exclusively, Harvard administrators and faculty were also men. LeBaron Russell Briggs held this dean of the college role, which later evolved into the first dean of men role (Sandeen, 1991). The dean of men positions later expanded to include dean of women roles when higher education enrollment expanded to include women in the 1870s (Rudolph, 1962; Sandeen, 1991). Deans of men and women managed a variety of responsibilities, such as enforcing campus policies, addressing student conduct, focusing on ways to support student

retention, and developing student services areas (e.g., career center, housing, orientation; Thelin, 2004).

Deans of women. As educational opportunities expanded to female students, colleges and universities hired the first female higher education administrators as deans of women (Schwartz, 1997). The first dean of women, Alice Freeman Palmer, took on this role in 1892 at the University of Chicago (Schwartz, 1997). While a majority of institutions had deans of women by the 1920s, the number of women enrolled and employed in colleges and universities began to decline during the Great Depression in the 1930s (Herdlein, 2004). The representation of women in higher education shifted in the 1940s-1950s as women made gains in representation in administrative roles and student enrollment as their male counterparts entered the military for WWII. However, when men returned from their military service, deans of women were laid off or demoted into lower-level roles such as counselors or assistant/associate deans of students and reported to men with less experience and lower academic credentials (Schwartz, 1997, 2002).

Despite the advancement challenges deans of women faced, the deans of women professionalized the field of student affairs by developing critical student services areas such as admissions, orientation, career services, and residential life (Nidiffer, 2001, 2002; Schwartz, 1997). Deans of women also set the foundation for graduate study, the development of professional associations, and research on college students (Schwartz, 1997). For example, in the early 1900s, deans of women such as Marion Talbot and Lois Mathews published books on the education of women and deans of women. As the number of deans of women grew, many of them expressed a

desire to develop their skills and knowledge base. This interest in developing skills to support their career success led to the development of a graduate program to train deans of women at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1916 (Schwartz, 1997). Then, in 1917, a subdivision of the National Education Association (NEA) emerged called the National Association of Deans of Women (NADW), establishing the first student affairs-related professional association (Schwartz, 1997). While student affairs historical literature does not always acknowledge the work of the first female student affairs administrators, they left their mark on the student affairs profession (Schwartz, 1997).

Pathway to the SSAO Position

There is not one single career pathway to the SSAO role (Tull & Miller, 2009). SSAOs have a variety of educational backgrounds and degrees, but it is important to note that a doctoral degree is increasingly viewed as a prerequisite for a competitive candidate (Cook, 2010). NASPA's RPI reported that six out of ten CSAOs hold a doctoral or terminal degree (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Of the CSAOs who hold a doctoral degree, three out of four hold a graduate degree in education or higher education. Higher education graduate programs began to grow in the 1960s and 1970s as "the student affairs profession established a theoretical base as the framework for its knowledge and practice" and student development theories became a central focus of graduate curricula (Long, 2012, p. 4). In addition to focusing on student development, higher education and student affairs graduate programs included curricula focusing on administrative knowledge and skills such as assessment, counseling, and finance to prepare individuals who aspired to pursue advanced student affairs administrative roles (Sandeen, 1991).

Given their broad range of responsibilities, a CSAO also needs to bring a diverse professional portfolio to their role (Sandeen, 1991). Thus, it is common for aspiring CSAOs to gain professional experiences in specialized functional areas (e.g., housing, admissions, advising, student activities, student conduct) and then serve in a generalist role, such as an assistant or associate dean (Lunsford, 1984; Sandeen, 1991). Diverse professional experiences in fiscal management, assessment, supervision, decision-making, mediation, and ethics provide aspiring CSAOs with the opportunity to develop key skills and competencies needed to pursue CSAO positions (Sandeen, 1991). Knowledge of legal issues, goal setting, mediation skills, and counseling skills are also vital competencies for CSAOs to acquire (Lunsford, 1984). While key skills and competencies are important, qualities such as a sense of humor, patience, and confidence are also vital traits for CSAOs to possess to manage public scrutiny and criticism (Sandeen, 1991). This scrutiny and criticism come from a variety of internal and external stakeholders such as students, faculty, and the media (Sandeen, 1991).

Through a content analysis of résumés from 54 SSAOs from land-grant institutions across the U.S., Tull and Miller (2009) concluded that it took participants an average of 25.53 years, nine full-time positions, a doctoral degree (91% of the participants), and a move between institutions to move into an SSAO role. Some of the SSAO participants from Tull and Miller's (2009) study were also involved in professional associations, conference presentations, and served on editorial boards of academic journals. Findings from Herbrand's (2001) research on the career pathways and experiences of 246 women SSAO NASPA members employed at four-year

institutions also concluded that the average age the participants held their first SSAO role was 40.7. A majority were also married (63%), and the majority were White (81%). These data illustrate the demographics of women SSAOs, demographics that have remained consistent through the years.

Factors Shaping the Career Pathways of Women Administrators

In reviewing the literature on women, Women of Color, and Latina administrators in higher education, several themes emerged regarding the challenges they may face in their daily experiences and pathways to advancement and the resources that can support their career journeys. Some of these challenges include women's experiences contending with sexism and the glass ceiling in their career pathways (Anderson, 1993; Ford, 2014; Spurlock, 2009), challenges obtaining a doctoral degree (Jarmon, 2014; Marquez, 2014), and difficulty balancing career and family responsibilities (Ford, 2014; Marshall, 2009; Spangler, 2011). A closer look at prior research on the experiences of Women of Color and Latina administrators illustrates how, in addition to the challenges above, they may also contend with structural barriers such as the double burden of sexism and racism (Gallegos, 2012; Huang, 2012; Turner, 2007), experiences of tokenization (Huang, 2012; Smith, 2013; Sobers, 2014; Valverde, 2011), and feelings of isolation due to their underrepresentation in institutional leadership (Canul, 2003; Huang, 2012; Scott, 2003; Smith, 2012; Smith, 2013). While many women have successfully navigated challenges in their journeys to the senior ranks, prior research also illustrates the emotional and physical costs of women's career advancement (Hylton, 2012; Spurlock, 2009).

To combat the challenges women administrators face in their career journeys, some women have employed coping strategies to navigate challenges in their career and drew from valuable resources of support such as mentoring (Ford, 2014; Maki, 2015; Schoenfeld, 2014; Valverde, 2011), professional development opportunities (Aala, 2012; Anderson, 1993; Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014), and their personal resilience to promote their success and career advancement (Huang, 2012; Vasquez, 2012). Some Women of Color have also utilized resistance strategies as they battle stereotypes in their career journeys and misperceptions of their abilities. In addition to employing coping strategies and drawing from mentoring support, research on Latina administrators described the valuable role familial support (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Gallegos, 2012; Silva, 2003), self-efficacy (Crespo, 2013; Hansen, 1997; Lopez, 2013; Montas-Hunter, 2012), and culture can play in fostering Latinas' career advancement (Hansen, 1997; Rivera, Anderson, & Middleton, 1999; Silva, 2003); findings that did not surface in women and Women of Color-related literature. Given the valuable role family and culture can play in Latina administrators' career journeys, I seek to better understand the assets that Latinas develop within the context of their families and communities, assets that they draw from to navigate challenges, their life journeys overall, and to resist oppression.

Since a majority of the research on women administrators utilized predominantly White samples, I also reviewed the literature on Women of Color and Latina administrator experiences to better understand their nuanced career pathways given the intersections that gender and race/ethnicity can have on their career journeys. In the current section, I will provide a review of the literature on the

diverse challenges and resources that can shape women administrators' career journeys. As I review each of these factors, I will provide background on how each factor influences women administrators' experiences broadly. Given my goal to better understand the Latina SSAO experience, I will also highlight unique nuances from Women of Color and Latina administrators' experiences based on findings from these bodies of literature.

Advanced Education and Women Administrators' Career Pathways

A primary factor hindering women's career advancement to the SSAO role is the completion of a doctoral degree (Anderson, 1993; Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014; Marquez, 2014; Stirling, 2012). As a doctoral degree is increasingly a prerequisite to securing a SSAO position, it is important that women successfully navigate the challenges they may face in pursuing advanced education (Ford, 2014; Tull & Miller, 2009). While pursuing a doctoral degree is challenging for some Latina administrators, especially given the structural barriers Latinas might face in graduate education, it is important to note the valuable role their parents/family members may play in fostering their educational aspirations to pursue higher education (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Silva, 2003).

Challenges obtaining a doctoral degree. Although women administrators recognize the importance of obtaining a terminal/doctoral degree to advance, this does not overlook the challenges women might face when pursuing this endeavor (Jarmon, 2014; Marquez, 2014). Some of the challenges include difficulties financing the pursuit of a doctoral degree, balancing familial and work responsibilities while pursuing a Ph.D., and delaying doctoral education due to the demands of a new job (Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014). Unfortunately, hiring committees

have utilized a lack of a doctoral degree as a strategy to sort candidates out of the applicant pool without acknowledging the additional challenges women contend with in doctoral degree completion (Jarmon, 2014; Marquez, 2014). While having an excellent reputation and the necessary skills to pursue senior-level roles is important, it is still not enough to advance. Senior-level women administrator participants from Jarmon's (2014) research believed that they need the "letters after my name" to be viewed as a competitive candidate for advanced positions (p. 66). For this reason, many women administrators have compared a doctorate to a "passport" as it is required to access advanced career opportunities, more than in other industries (Jarmon, 2014, p. 76).

However, since Women of Color were not historically provided with opportunities to advance to senior-level roles due to the racism and sexism that pervades the higher education environment, they were also not encouraged to pursue a doctoral degree at the same rate as their White colleagues (Chatman, 1991). Some Women SSAOs, and especially Women of Color, cited a lack of a doctoral degree as a barrier to their career advancement. However, this is not always the case for their White or male colleagues who have been able to access senior-level positions without a doctoral degree (Ford, 2014; Marquez, 2014; Scott, 2003). Even when Women of Color have a doctoral degree, this still might not be enough to promote their advancement given the structural barriers that can hinder their career opportunities (Chatman, 1991). Despite the challenges women and Women of Color can face in pursuing a doctoral degree, they recognize how critical the completion of a doctorate is in closing the gender gap in senior student affairs leadership (Marquez, 2014).

Educational aspirations. Many Latinas are trailblazers throughout their educational and professional journeys (Storlie, Mostade, & Duenyas, 2016). While many Latinas may grow up in predominantly Latina/o communities, they are frequently one of the few Latinas in college and graduate school, and many are the first in their family to go to college (Silva, 2003; Storlie et al., 2016). Latina administrators in Crespo's (2013) study recalled possessing high educational aspirations since childhood given the strong value their families placed on education. Not only did parents and family members foster Latina administrators' aspirations to go to college and serve others, but some Latinas also described their parents as their first role models who fostered their strong work ethic that carried them through their advanced educational experiences (Gallegos, 2012). Despite negative perceptions others may have held of their race/ethnicity, gender, language, accent, and academic abilities throughout their educational experiences; their educational aspirations remained unwavering because of the emotional support many Latinas reported receiving from their families (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Crespo, 2013; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Silva, 2003). For example, although Latina administrators described experiences of being discouraged from going to college by high school counselors because of stereotypes and misperceptions of their academic ability, they pushed through to pursue their educational goals (Crespo, 2013).

Although families may not have firsthand knowledge to help their daughters navigate the college environment, familial support is an asset that can provide critical emotional support and inspiration for Latina students as they experience personal and academic difficulties (Espinoza, 2010; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Melendez &

Melendez, 2010; Orozco, 2003). Familial support in fostering educational aspirations is particularly important for Latina graduate students as the representation of Latinas decreases the further along the educational pipeline (Pérez Huber, 2010). Literature surrounding Latinas' graduate student experiences illuminated challenges that some Latinas face with school/life balance, feelings of self-doubt, and the presence of structural barriers (e.g., racism, feelings of isolation) that pervade academia (Burciaga, 2007; Espino, Muñoz, & Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Espinoza, 2010; González, 2006; González, 2007; Navarrette García, 2014; Pecero, 2016). To navigate these challenges, Latinas can draw from various supports to complete their graduate studies. It is important to understand the challenges Latina graduate students may face as they maintain their educational aspirations given that completing graduate education and, increasingly a doctoral degree, is progressively becoming a pre-requisite to attaining senior-level administrative roles (Dungy & Ellis, 2011).

Overt and covert racism, sexism, and classism in institutional cultures and graduate programs also negatively affect doctoral access and completion for some Latinas (González, 2006). However, rather than remain frustrated and quit their pursuit of their academic and professional goals, many Latinas have utilized and developed resistance strategies to survive and thrive in higher education (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; González, 2007; Espino et al., 2010; Villaseñor, Reyes, & Muñoz, 2013). Viewing Latinas' cultural roots as an asset can help transform the "alienating and often hostile" campus climate that can characterize Latinas' higher education experiences (Cantú, 2014, p. 143). Latinas' undergraduate and graduate experiences help to provide context for the study on Latina SSAOs by focusing on the factors that

advance and hinder their educational pathway and recognizing that their families foster their educational aspirations since childhood (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Silva, 2003).

Glass Ceiling and Intersections of Oppression for Women Administrators

Findings from prior research on women administrators illuminated their experiences contending with sexism, gender inequities, and challenges breaking the glass ceiling (Anderson, 1993; Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014; Maki, 2015; Spurlock, 2009). Women of Color and Latina administrators not only described contending with the aforementioned structural barriers, but some also described navigating the double burden of sexism and racism, experiences of tokenization, challenges battling stereotypes, and feelings of isolation in their career journeys (Gallegos, 2012; Huang, 2012; Turner, 2007). Navigating these structural barriers and striving to dismantle negative perceptions of their abilities have also resulted in feelings of exhaustion for Women of Color and Latina administrators (Montas-Hunter, 2012; Sobers, 2014).

Glass ceiling and contending with structural barriers. The "glass ceiling" is a term used to describe the barriers that work invisibly (e.g., sexism, male privilege, pay inequities) to hinder the advancement of women to senior-level leadership positions (Jarmon, 2014, p. 59). The *glass ceiling* is also perpetuated through inequitable hiring practices when men fill vacant high-level positions with other men, implicitly and explicitly hindering women's advancement (Jarmon, 2014; Johnsrud & Heck, 1994; Spurlock, 2009). Despite the knowledge and skills women bring to higher education, they may contend with negative perceptions of women's leadership in male-dominated leadership circles. Senior-level women leaders in Maki's (2015) study contended with being dismissed or silenced by male colleagues,

unless they were “in a subservient role” upholding patriarchy (p. 86). Women SSAOs have reported witnessing the restructuring of positions on-campus (e.g., from a director-level to a coordinator-level) after a male colleague left the role, resulting in women entering a lower-level position (Ford, 2014). This restructuring can lead to women making more lateral career moves as men advanced to higher-level roles, resulting in the “bottle-necking” of women at mid-level student affairs roles (Ford, 2014, p. 86).

Along with navigating sexism and the *glass ceiling* in their careers, many Women of Color administrators reported dealing with the added layer of the double burden of sexism and racism in their career journeys as they contended with unequal workloads, stereotypes, and microaggressions (Huang, 2012; Hylton, 2012). Several Latina administrators also reported struggling with classism, tokenism, misperceptions of their abilities, and in some cases, discrimination resulting from their use of Spanish or having an accent when they speak (Cipres, 1999; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Muñoz, 2010; Silva, 2003; Turner, 2007). Even when possessing a Ph.D., Latina presidents in Muñoz’s (2010) research experienced being “introduced by first name or by a Spanish term of endearment while men were introduced as Dr. or Mr.” in meeting spaces, illustrating the differential treatment Latinas navigate in their daily experiences (p. 170).

Latina administrators also navigate challenges trying to crack the *glass ceiling* that hinder women’s advancement and have described contending with a metaphorical “adobe ceiling” of systemic barriers that Latina leaders must penetrate to advance in their careers (Ramos, 2008, p. 236). For example, Cecilia Burciaga,

one of the first high-ranking Latina administrators at a top private university in California, theorized that with a *glass ceiling* since glass is clear, you can see the next level of advancement whereas adobe is impenetrable and dense (Gutiérrez y Muhs, 2017; Ramos, 2008). This *adobe ceiling* can manifest in the higher education environment through hiring processes that invite Latinas to apply for positions so search committees can document they had a diverse applicant pool but with no intention of selecting them for the position or viewing them as a viable candidate (Ramos, 2008). The *adobe ceiling* can also surface in experiences of bias that Latinas contend with in their journeys and a lack of role models to foster Latinas' career aspirations (Ramos, 2008). Despite the presence of this *adobe ceiling*, Latinas have persisted through these structural barriers to promote their career advancement (Gutiérrez y Muhs, 2017; Ramos, 2008).

Good ol' boys network. The prevalence of the *good ol' boys network* can also serve as a barrier in women and Women of Color's career pathways (Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014; Maki, 2015; Muñoz, 2010). The *good ol' boys network* is an informal network where men share knowledge, connections, and power, at the exclusion of women, resulting in men's career advancement (Jarmon, 2014; Maki, 2015). The presence of the *good ol' boys network* in women administrators' career pathways resulted in experiences of "devaluation," "exclusion," "hostility," and "blocked opportunities" for the women administrator participants in Maki's (2015) study as they tried to access male-dominated networks to progress in their careers (pp. 84-85). These "blocked opportunities" involved participants' ineffective attempts at career advancement because of misperceptions of their abilities, inability to take on new

roles due to financial concerns, and an inhospitable campus climate devaluing women's leadership (Maki, 2015).

Although gender was not a central focus in Mena's (2015) work, the Latino male SSAOs in his study described the presence of a "good old Chicano boy circle" that excludes Latina SSAOs from access to informal Latino male-dominated career networks (p. 104). Latino men are also more represented in senior student affairs leadership as 59% of Hispanic VPSAs are men in contrast to 41% who are Hispanic women (NASPA, 2016). In addition to challenges breaking into the *good ol' boys network* and *Chicano boy circle*, Latina administrators may also contend with being held to a higher standard than their White male and Latino male colleagues, resulting in an added pressure to not make mistakes (Gallegos, 2012; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Mena, 2015).

Experiences of tokenization. In addition to gender inequities in pay and representation, women CSAOs tend to report to male presidents and describe being tokenized to provide a female perspective, illustrating a hidden workload that women SSAOs can contend with in their daily experiences (Anderson, 1993; Herbrand, 2001; Spurlock, 2009). Along with sexism and racism, Women of Color administrators discussed being tokenized to serve as the representative voice for their entire racial/ethnic communities, encouraged to take on roles in diversity/multicultural affairs, and called upon to serve on committees as a way for institutions to demonstrate there is diverse representation because of their social identities as Women of Color (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Huang, 2012; Smith, 2013; Sobers, 2014; Valverde, 2011).

Similarly, when Black women SSAOs in Sobers (2014) research sought to pursue career opportunities that would make them a competitive candidate for an SSAO role, they described being encouraged by colleagues to pursue career opportunities within multicultural affairs because they are viewed as being best suited to serve Students of Color, despite interests they may have in serving the student population at-large. The participants in this study did not want their identity as a Black woman to dictate their career choices. This tokenization and identity taxation can lead to assumptions and expectations that Women of Color are innately skilled in serving underrepresented student populations, have a desire to pursue work in these functional areas, and do not aspire to senior-level roles where they can have a larger impact on institutional decision-making (Sobers, 2014). Even though some Women of Color administrators may have an affinity to provide insight on issues related to Students of Color, this becomes an example of tokenization when this is not a role they voluntarily pursue. There is also an implicit expectation from their colleagues that they will serve as an expert for their racial/ethnic group (Sobers, 2014). These experiences of tokenization illustrate the added race-related service that Women of Color are frequently called upon to provide; service that is not rewarded and/or might go unacknowledged in the advancement process (Sobers, 2014; Turner, 2007).

Along with being stereotyped into pursuing diversity-related roles, Women of Color may also contend with being perceived as the “token hire” in predominantly White spaces, undermining their credibility (Huang, 2012, p. 210). Then, once Women of Color begin employment in these predominantly White environments, they may struggle with having to manage perceptions of behaving aggressively in the

presence of White colleagues when they are being assertive (Huang, 2012). Women of Color administrators from Huang (2012) and Valverde's (2011) studies described how when they spoke up against the dominant perspective in meeting spaces, they contended with perceptions of being unreasonable and aggressive, in comparison to their White male colleagues who received praise for being vocal and confident.

Feelings of isolation. Feelings of isolation are an additional challenge Women of Color and Latina administrators navigate in their careers. These feelings of isolation can stem from their underrepresentation in higher education and/or from their experiences contending with sexism and racism (Canul, 2003; Huang, 2012; Scott, 2003; Smith, 2012; Smith, 2013; Valverde, 2011). Women of Color administrators in Smith's (2012) study coped with this isolation by reminding themselves how imperative it is to have access to the power structure and a seat at the decision-making table, even if they are the only one. However, access to the power structure does not automatically equate to Women of Colors' perspectives being equally valued (Scott, 2003; Smith, 2012; Smith, 2013). Feelings of isolation have also led some Women of Color administrators to feel like outsiders within their units especially when their perspectives are overlooked or dismissed during policy-related discussions in White-dominated leadership circles (Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002; Gallegos, 2012).

Feelings of isolation and invisibility can manifest into feelings of powerlessness for African American female SSAOs as they unsuccessfully tried to find Black women or Women of Color colleagues who could understand their concerns (Scott, 2003). While Women of Color administrators can locate female

colleagues in the work environment, White women colleagues may not inherently recognize the additional barriers (e.g., racism or intersections of oppression) that Women of Color navigate, unless they recognize the structural barriers present in the higher education environment that can hinder Women of Color's advancement (Cook et al., 2002). One example of a structural barrier of this nature is White privilege (Cook et al., 2002).

Latina administrators, especially at the senior-level (e.g., president, dean, vice president), may also often experience feelings of isolation (Canul, 2003; Lopez, 2013; Maes, 2012). When entering the field of higher education, Latinas are not always aware that there will be no one to turn to for support who shares a similar cultural background (Canul, 2003; Hernández & Morales, 1999). Latina administrator participants in Hernández and Morales' (1999) research on Latinas' career development experiences also described using avoidance as a coping strategy to not think about the isolation they experience which can lead to emotional exhaustion, and in some cases, result in attrition. It is important to note that Latina administrators' feelings of isolation may not be a new experience, as some have described being the only one or one of the few Latinas in their courses during their undergraduate and graduate experiences (Crespo, 2013; Lopez, 2013; Maes, 2012).

Battling stereotypes. Women of Color discussed instances of battling stereotypes that can stem from sexist and racist ideologies as early as their K-12 educational experiences, which continues into their daily experiences as administrators because of structural barriers that pervade higher education (Jordon, 2014; San Antonio, 2015; Scott, 2003). These stereotypes can result in

misperceptions of Women of Color's abilities and aspirations to enroll in and graduate from college (Scott, 2003). Stereotypes such as these only fuel Women of Color's drive to resist stereotypes, pursue their educational goals, and persist in their work, despite a lack of institutional support for their educational and professional aspirations and a limited presence of Women of Color in administrative roles (Scott, 2003; Smith, 2012).

In addition to navigating stereotypes, Women of Color administrators also described contending with White colleagues questioning their credibility (Huang, 2012; Scott, 2003; Smith, 2013). Misperceptions of Women of Color's abilities also led the Black female participants in Smith's (2013) study to feel an added pressure to "work twice as hard to be considered half as good" as their White colleagues (p. 130). This added pressure fueled participants' drive to succeed and led them to invest in their own professional development as they pursued doctoral study and participated in leadership development programs (Smith, 2013). Despite the skills, knowledge, and academic credentials Women of Color bring to their administrative roles, they may contend with inequitable expectations and double standards as institutional leadership is perceived as "much more forgiving to White people and others making mistakes than they are to Latinos and African Americans" (Hylton, 2012, p. 109). Thus, Latina and Black women administrators focus on establishing their credibility as leaders, even if this comes at the cost of emotional and physical exhaustion (Hylton, 2012). These inequitable double standards that can influence Women of Color's career pathways in higher education emphasize how a record of accomplishment of reliability and integrity does not guarantee Women of Color's credibility, leaving

them to face these challenges strategically as they navigate institutional politics (Huang, 2012; Hylton, 2012; Lourido-Habib, 2011).

Even when attaining executive-level administrator roles such as the presidency, the Latina president participants in Muñoz's (2010) research continued to feel pressure to "prove their ability" or "take personal responsibility to dispel myths about their culture" such as the stereotype that Latino families do not value education (p. 169). Racism and sexism are also manifested in negative perceptions from White male colleagues that Latinas "didn't have the ability to speak to people, to write papers or letters, to analyze situations" because of their racial/ethnic and gender identities (Hansen, 1997, p. 140). Latinas' experiences contending with systemic barriers throughout their journeys may also spur their aspirations to become administrators who promote dignity, equity, and respect, and dismantle stereotypes (Ramos, 2008).

Impact of contending with structural barriers. Contending with structural barriers and tokenization in their career journeys can also result in physical and emotional exhaustion for Women of Color administrators (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Hylton, 2012; Scott, 2003, Smith, 2013; Sobers, 2014). One of the African American women SSAOs in Scott's (2003) study described feeling "like there's really no rest or peace" in her career journey as she navigated experiences of being held to a higher standard than her White colleagues (pp. 139-140). Exhaustion not only stems from overt and covert experiences with sexism, racism, and double standards in work expectations, but can also stem from the pressure to self-regulate their physical appearance and attire to align with the White privileged norm (Sobers, 2014;

Valverde, 2011). Examples include being cautioned by colleagues against wearing bright colors or excessive costume jewelry and being encouraged to downplay their cultural roots (Sobers, 2014; Valverde, 2011).

Black women SSAOs from Sobers (2014) study on Black women leaders' resilience also described feeling pressured to conform to White privileged norms in dress and behavior to begin on an even footing with their White student affairs colleagues. Then later "once they have made a name for themselves, they could deviate and express their identity without fear of the judgment [from White colleagues] interfering with their career advancement" (Sobers, 2014, p. 102). While wearing colors such as red, black, and green are common, White colleagues have perceived the wearing of attire in these colors as a way for Black women to show their pride in their assumed African roots (Sobers, 2014). These perceptions illustrate how a Woman of Color's attire can be racialized even when her clothing choices are made unconsciously (Sobers, 2014). This pressure to be mindful of one's appearance does not only include attention to clothing or jewelry, but can extend to hair as well as relaxed, straight, pressed, untextured hair is privileged and "Black natural hair [is] not seen as professional" (Sobers, 2014, p. 110). This pressure is problematic when Women of Color receive overt and covert messages to ascribe to the White privileged norm in hair and attire, which can come at a cost to their individuality, authenticity, and sense of self (Scott, 2003; Sobers, 2014). Women have also left the profession at a higher rate than their male counterparts because of the physical and emotional exhaustion they experience from contending with structural barriers, balancing their

familial/professional responsibilities, and a lack of support from male colleagues (Jarmon, 2014; Spangler, 2011; Spurlock, 2009).

The Role of Family in Women Administrator's Experiences

Family influences the career pathways and lived experiences of women administrators in diverse ways. Literature focused on women administrators' experiences cited *w*ork-life balance as a distinct challenge women navigate in their career journeys (Ford, 2014; Marshall, 2009; Spangler, 2011). Given the difficulty in balancing personal and professional responsibilities, many Women of Color administrators characterized the ability to achieve work-life balance as a myth, an unattainable goal (Smith, 2013). When focusing on Latina administrators' experiences, findings from prior literature explained that Latinas not only balance their multiple worlds of family and work, but they draw incredible strength and support from their family, illustrating the vital role family can play in Latina administrators' journeys (Silva, 2003).

Challenges of balancing career and family. Renn and Hughes (2004) explained that work-life factors such as "partnering or marrying, having and raising children, and, in an increasing number of cases, caring for aging parents – a task that falls disproportionately on female children" adversely impacts women's career pathways to senior-level roles (p. xx). Part of the difficulty in balancing personal and professional responsibilities stems from the demanding nature of student affairs work that can involve working long hours and weekends which has led to both short- and long-term health issues (e.g., chronic fatigue syndrome, anxiety, stress, chronic cough) for some women CSAOs (Spurlock, 2009). Given this dynamic, women SSAOs may often decide not to have children in order to advance or choose to wait to

have children until completing the doctorate or feeling established in their careers (Ford, 2014; Marquez, 2014). Some of the challenges and career sacrifices women administrators have made in their professional journeys as they balance their familial and caregiving responsibilities include pursuing positions that were conducive to their family even if this decreased their earnings, foregoing the pursuit of graduate education, and limiting their professional association involvement due to the time this could take away from their families (Marquez, 2014; Marshall, 2009; Stirling, 2012).

Choosing to uproot one's family in order to advance can also result in feelings of guilt for women and Women of Color SSAOs (Ford, 2014; Scott, 2003; Smith, 2013). Even when women SSAO participants in Ford's (2014) research decided to relocate to pursue advanced career opportunities, they described contending with a societal double standard that critiques women's choices to relocate one's family and partner in contrast to supporting men's decisions to do the same). This double standard has led some women administrators to remain in the same institution, waiting for an opportunity to advance, even if this has a negative impact on their careers (Ford, 2014; Marquez, 2014). Since geographic flexibility is key to pursuing advanced career opportunities, women who had spouses or partners who were willing to leave their current position and pursue a new role upon relocation had greater advancement opportunities (Mockelstrom, 2000; Smith, 2013; Spangler, 2011; Stirling, 2012). However, this is not possible for all women and poses a barrier in women's career pathways to the SSAO role.

Given the challenges Women of Color can experience in balancing their personal and professional lives, disequilibrium might prevail at different points in

their career journeys due to the conflicts that can arise between their family and work responsibilities (Smith, 2013). African American female SSAOs in Scott's (2003) study also described sacrificing friendships, long-term relationships, and/or children because of the challenging nature of balancing their personal and professional responsibilities. Rather than being frustrated about having to navigate this disequilibrium and personal sacrifices, some Women of Color administrators viewed their ability to contend with these challenges as a resource that helped them navigate other challenges that surfaced in their careers (Scott, 2003; Smith, 2012; Smith, 2013; Vasquez, 2012).

Importance of familial support. The presence of supportive partners/spouses was a key theme that emerged from the research on women SSAOs (Marquez, 2014; Spangler, 2011). The literature on Latina administrators' experiences cited both partners as well as family/parents as crucial emotional support systems in Latina administrators' career pathways and experiences (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Gallegos, 2012; Silva, 2003). Mothers and grandmothers, in particular, were cited as role models and mentors who provided them with knowledge, strength, and encouragement to navigate the career challenges they faced (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Cipres, 1999). The commitment that Latina administrators' families have to their success not only inspires them to remain focused on pursuing their personal goals but can also influence the way Latinas lead and serve students (Hansen, 1997; Silva, 2003).

In addition to family support, supportive partners and spouses have provided some Latina administrators with critical emotional support. This support can come in

the form of providing an ear to listen when they are experiencing challenges, possessing a willingness to relocate so they could pursue a career advancement opportunity, and sharing home and caretaking responsibilities so Latina administrators could focus on their career and graduate study (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Cipres, 1999; Crespo, 2013; Gorena, 1996). Continued support from partners and family is key given the multiple roles (e.g., mother, wife, administrator, daughter, and caregiver) that Latina administrators may balance daily, especially since Latinas are traditionally viewed as the primary caretaker of the home, regardless of their professional responsibilities (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Crespo, 2013).

Mentorship and Professional Development to Support Women's Advancement

Prior research on women administrator experiences cited mentoring as a key resource for navigating institutional and structural barriers in their career journeys (Ford, 2014; Maki, 2015; Schoenfeld, 2014). Mentoring can provide Women of Color administrators with a valuable support network to foster their career aspirations as well as access to knowledge and networks to facilitate their advancement (Chatman, 1991). Prior research on women and Women of Color administrators also illustrated the valuable role professional development experiences can play in supporting women's career advancement (Aala, 2012; Anderson, 1993; Baker, 2013; Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014).

Importance of mentoring. Mentoring is a process where a mentee can learn vital knowledge, behaviors, and skills from their mentor, a more seasoned professional (Valverde, 2011). Many women SSAOs found their pathway to the student affairs profession because of the mentoring they received from student affairs administrators during their undergraduate careers (Anderson, 1993; Ford, 2014;

Marquez, 2014; Schoenfeld, 2014). Once women administrators have entered the student affairs profession, mentoring from supervisors can also lead to the development of key skills to facilitate their pathway to the SSAO role such as recruitment and hiring, budgeting, supervision, and crisis response (Marquez, 2014; Schoenfeld, 2014). Mentors not only provide women SSAOs with advice in their career path but can also offer a source of support for addressing critical questions that could impact women's career and personal life (Schoenfeld, 2014). Many Latina administrators cited the important role mentors played in their career pathways by serving as role models, providing guidance on how to navigate the political landscape of higher education, imparting the hidden curriculum of career advancement, and promoting Latinas' participation in career development opportunities such as graduate education and leadership development programs (Cipres, 1999; Hansen, 1997; Lopez, 2013).

A variety of individuals serve as mentors to women, Women of Color, and Latina administrators, such as supervisors, colleagues, past graduate faculty, peers, and connections from professional associations (Baker, 2013; Cipres, 1999; Crespo, 2013; Huang, 2012; Hylton, 2012; Valverde, 2011). Mentors can provide Women of Color administrators with a sense of direction in their career journeys, knowledge of how to navigate existing power structures, and psychosocial support to cope with feelings of isolation (Chang et al., 2014; Chatman, 1991; Huang, 2012; San Antonio, 2015). Unfortunately, not all Women of Color and Latina administrators have mentors and many navigate their career pathway with limited support

(Aschenbrenner, 2006; Hansen, 1997; Maes, 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2002; Smith, 2012).

In addition to the emotional support, advice, and guidance that women can receive from effective mentorship, many women and Women of Color administrators also benefit from sponsorship (Maki, 2015; Valverde, 2011). Sponsorship pushes mentoring a step further by intentionally providing women with access to key professional development opportunities and power brokers to promote their career advancement, receive critical feedback, and leverage their circles of influence to promote women's visibility in the profession (Maki, 2015). Sponsorship is especially key for Women of Color administrators because many Women of Color report being excluded from White and male-dominated networks, which can hinder their advancement (Valverde, 2011). While women have connected with sponsors and mentors through formal means such as professional associations and mentoring programs, participants in Maki's (2015) research explained how mentors "often come in when they are not expected and develop more by happenstance than planning" (p. 107).

Cross-gender and cross-race mentoring. While some women described the benefits gained from female mentors, given the limited representation of women in senior-level roles, women often engage in cross-gender mentoring relationships (Aala, 2012; Blackhurst et al., 1998; Marquez, 2014; Stirling, 2012). Male mentors, in particular, can provide women SSAOs with advice on how to navigate a male-dominated world, anticipate a male colleagues' approach to decision-making and hiring processes, and access their connections within male-dominated networks

(Marquez, 2014). Some of the benefits women can gain from cross-gender mentoring include advice on how to advance in their careers and how to crack the *glass ceiling* (Jarmon, 2014; Marquez, 2014; Schoenfeld, 2014).

Given the underrepresentation of Women of Color administrators in higher education, Women of Color can experience challenges locating mentors who understand firsthand the challenges they might face in their journeys such as feelings of isolation and experiences of racism, sexism, and tokenization (Chang et al., 2014; Patitu & Hinton, 2002). This limited presence of Women of Color role models and mentors has led some Black and Latina women administrators to receive support from cross-gender and/or cross-race mentors in their careers (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Baker, 2013; Gorena, 1996; Hansen, 1997; Hernández & Morales, 1999; Lopez, 2013; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Muñoz, 2010; Smith, 2013). Cross-race and cross-gender mentoring can provide mentees with advice on how to navigate institutional politics in a White-dominated leadership context as well as access to experiences that can expand their skill sets (Baker, 2013; Smith, 2013). Black and Latina women student affairs administrators recognize that not all mentors need to share their racial/ethnic identity, emphasizing the benefits of cross-race mentoring connections when mentors are genuinely committed to their success (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Baker, 2013). The participants in Baker's (2013) research on the professional socialization of Black women in student affairs emphasized how Women of Color should have "a White male mentor in their corner because of the power and privilege White men possess in the profession" who can provide access to knowledge, networks, and power structures (p. 148).

Cross-race and cross-gender mentoring relationships can provide Latinas with knowledge and connections to pursue opportunities to promote their career advancement, especially for Latina administrators who are first-generation college students (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Ramos, 2008). Given the positive role mentors play in women and Latina administrators' career pathways; it is beneficial for them to identify multiple mentors for support to promote their advancement (Lopez, 2013; Schoenfeld, 2014). However, even when Women of Color and Latinas take the initiative to locate mentors, it is key that cross-race and cross-gender colleagues also reach out to support them in their career journeys, especially since Women of Color are frequently excluded from White male-dominated networks (Chang et al., 2014; Gorena, 1996; Hernández & Morales, 1999; Valverde, 2003). Even when Women of Color are overlooked for mentoring opportunities, many Women of Color administrators seek out networks of support that can facilitate their advancement such as connections with supportive peers at their institution and through professional organizations (Valverde, 2003).

Professional development. In addition to mentoring, professional development opportunities can provide women with a means to fill knowledge gaps from graduate school, stay up-to-date on current trends, and network with colleagues in the field (Aala, 2012; Anderson, 1993; Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014). With the range of professional development opportunities available to pursue, many women and Women of Color administrators cited participation in professional associations, attendance at conferences, reading professional journals, and involvement in college/university governance as valuable resources supporting their career

advancement (Aala, 2012; Anderson, 1993; Ford 2014; Sobers, 2014). Unfortunately, attending conferences and training to develop new skills are not always possible due to time and financial constraints (Jarmon, 2014).

Building a strong network of support through professional association involvement can help women mitigate challenges in their career journeys and provide an outlet to access career advice from fellow women administrators to support their career mobility (Aala, 2012; Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014). Professional development experiences and professional association involvement not only provided Black women administrators with the important knowledge they need to advance but it can also offer them access to Black women and administrators of color peer networks (Baker, 2013; Hylton, 2012; Sobers, 2014). These connections with other professionals of color "sustained" and "supported" the Black women midlevel student affairs administrator participants from Clayborne and Hamrick's (2007) research throughout their career journeys. These connections were especially key as they coped with feelings of invisibility and isolation, especially since they had "very few professionally supportive and invested relationships on their campuses" (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007, p. 139). In addition to providing Black women administrators with a "safe zone to escape from the prevailing racial hostility" on their campuses, professional association involvement can provide Black women VPSAs with knowledge on current trends in student affairs (Hylton, 2012, p. 102). Professional associations not only provide Women of Color administrators with valuable knowledge, but they also serve as a counterspace in Women of Color administrators'

journeys by offering critical support and a retreat from the microaggressions they navigate in their career experiences (Pratt-Clarke & Maes, 2017).

The NASPA Alice Manicur Symposium is one example of a professional development opportunity that seeks to support mid-level women administrators' advancement to SSAO roles with a focus on building self-efficacy (Aala, 2012). This symposium is a 5-day conference that provides aspiring women SSAOs a space to reflect on their professional aspirations and personal goals through networking with fellow aspiring SSAOs, developing mentoring relationships with symposium faculty, and learning the skillset needed to attain an SSAO role (Aala, 2012). The Alice Manicur Symposium and other diverse professional development opportunities and experiences help aspiring women SSAOs identify their career goals, discuss frustrations, learn about competencies and skills needed to advance such as supervision skills, and receive advice from different perspectives (Aala, 2012; Ford, 2014; Jarmon 2014). While professional development opportunities should not serve as a substitute for institutional support needed to advance professionally, they can provide women administrators access to vital support networks as they contend with unique structural challenges throughout their career (Aala, 2012).

Attendance at regional and national conferences can also serve as vital experiences to support Black women SSAOs' professional development by providing them with access to connections that can inspire them to advance in student affairs, pursue advanced degrees, and persist in the field despite the racism and sexism they may contend with in their career journeys (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Hylton, 2012; Sobers, 2014). Participating and volunteering at national conferences can also

increase Black and Latina women's visibility in the student affairs profession, helping them to access important contacts that could connect them with career advancement opportunities and engage them in the student affairs profession on a national level (Mena, 2015; Sobers, 2014). Latino/a SSAOs described NASPA and ACPA as the two most beneficial professional associations to promote their advancement to senior-level student affairs leadership and believed that these organizations are committed to fostering the leadership development and advancement of Latino/a administrators in higher education (Mena, 2015).

Women Administrator's Coping Strategies, Personal Resilience, and Assets

Because of the challenges women administrators may face in their career journeys, they employ a variety of coping and resistance strategies to navigate difficulties that arise in their careers (Jarmon, 2014; Valverde, 2011). These coping strategies, personal resilience, and external sources of support can serve as assets that women and Women of Color have leveraged in their careers (Vasquez, 2012). A review of the literature on Latina administrators also illuminated how family, culture, and self-efficacy served as critical resources in Latinas' career pathways and experiences, nuanced assets that did not surface in the literature on women and Women of Color administrators (Hansen, 1997; Ramos, 2008).

Coping and resistance strategies. Women administrators draw from a range of diverse coping strategies to navigate challenges in their career pathways. For example, some women have navigated the *glass ceiling* of sexism and patriarchy by advocating for themselves, developing professional connections with male leaders, and identifying mentors to promote their career advancement (Ford, 2014; Jarmon, 2014). Given the sexism and patriarchy women can contend with in higher education

and society, one must "have enormous strength, but coupled with enormous sense of humor" to break the *glass ceiling* (Jarmon, 2014, p. 73). Maintaining a positive outlook, patience, and adaptability are additional assets that some women administrators draw from within as they move through their career (Anderson, 1993; Jarmon, 2014). Despite the wealth of knowledge and professional experiences women can bring to their positions, they may contend with male colleagues who dismiss their ideas solely because they are women (Jarmon, 2014). Rather than being discouraged, some women and Women of Color channel their self-confidence and resilience to navigate gender and racial inequities and locate communities of support (Jarmon, 2014; Huang, 2012).

To mitigate the challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities, women SSAO participants in Spangler's (2011) study described how they learned to blend their work and family life since neither of these roles is mutually exclusive. This blending is described as essential to their personal and professional success and can include bringing their family to events on-campus, which can increase the family's awareness of the nature of women SSAOs' work while also getting to spend time with their children (Spangler, 2011). To cope with work-life balance challenges in their career journeys, some women administrators have sought out support from role models, employed time management strategies, and became involved in professional associations to connect with other women in the field (Spangler, 2011; Stirling, 2012). Although many Women of Color administrators describe work-life balance as a myth (Smith, 2013; Vasquez, 2012), they can alleviate the stress associated with this perceived imbalance by having a "village" of support (Vasquez,

2012, p. 101). The support Women of Color administrators receive from their "village" of family, colleagues, role models, mentors, and supervisors can provide them with confidence and encouragement to challenge traditional societal expectations that women must be caregivers. This support can also help Women of Color cope with feelings of guilt and stress associated with feeling forced to choose between their family and work responsibilities (Vasquez, 2012).

Women of Color leaders can transform the oppressive structures that pervade the higher education environment through their strategies of resistance so that higher education institutions can become spaces of empowerment (Valverde, 2011). While sexism and racism can contribute to the experiences of marginalization of Women of Color, they may also draw strength from their intersecting identities as Women of Color as they resist oppressive structures that privilege White male leadership through their resilience, self-determination, and support from mentors and fellow administrators of color (Chatman, 1991; Huang, 2012; San Antonio, 2015; Valverde, 2011). Although Women of Colors' resilience and resistance strategies are assets they bring to the higher education environment, this places the onus on Women of Color to uplift themselves and resist systemic oppression, without challenging or acknowledging the structural barriers that hinder their advancement (Jordon, 2014; Valverde, 2011). Dismantling misperceptions of their capabilities by White colleagues is one way Black women administrators are challenging oppressive structural barriers. However, the burden should not solely be placed on Women of Color's resilience to cope with structural barriers (Chatman, 1991; Valverde, 2011). Nonetheless, this resilience has led many Black and Latina women administrators to

resist stereotypes and feel confident in confronting and transforming overt acts of discrimination in their careers (Jordon, 2014; Lourido-Habib, 2011).

Latinas' families provided instrumental emotional support and strength to resist stereotypes and challenges in their journeys and played key roles in developing Latina leaders' self-efficacy (Montas-Hunter, 2012). Even though some Latinas' parents may not understand firsthand the nature of Latina administrators' work in higher education if they did not have the opportunity to attend a college/university, the Latina administrators in Montas-Hunter's (2012) research described how their parents "have been there every step of the way," contributing to their self-efficacy (p. 329). Not only have Latinas benefited from emotional support from family, but many Latina administrators also learned resistance strategies to cope with structural barriers from their parents who have resisted discrimination in their lived experiences (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Crespo, 2013; Ramos, 2008; Silva, 2003). For example, the Latina presidents in Ramos' (2008) research described how they have "watched their families battle poverty, racism, segregation and White-Only bathrooms and schools" (p. 191). Learning from their families' resistance strategies not only provided the participants with role models who could impart advice on navigating systemic barriers throughout their journeys, but also taught them to feel empowered to navigate these oppressive structures (Ramos, 2008).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is also cited as a beneficial resource that can support Latina administrators' career pathways and experiences, because high levels of self-efficacy can promote their perseverance, resilience, and career advancement (Montas-Hunter, 2012; Ramos, 2008; Suárez-McCrink, 2011). Self-efficacy is

defined as possessing confidence in one's abilities and a strong sense of identity that can contribute to Latinas' career progression (Montas-Hunter, 2012). In Montas-Hunter's (2012) study that sought to better understand the self-efficacy of eight Latina higher education leaders at four-year institutions, findings suggested there are four sources of Latina administrators' self-efficacy (Montas-Hunter, 2012). The first source is Latinas' prior experiences holding leadership roles and serving as role models to others. The second source involves Latinas' ability to identify role models in higher education, a challenging task given the underrepresentation of Latina administrators on college/university campuses. The presence of strong familial and social support systems encouraging Latinas to advance in their career is the third source of Latinas' self-efficacy. The final source of Latinas' self-efficacy stems from their ability to transform challenges they experience in their careers into learning opportunities.

Self-efficacy can also serve as a central resource in helping Latinas navigate racism and sexism in their career and contributes to their desire to advocate on behalf of the Latina/o community (Crespo, 2013; Hansen, 1997; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Ramos, 2008; Rivera et al., 1999). High levels of self-efficacy were essential in Latina administrators' abilities to navigate challenges in their careers and this self-efficacy developed through their experiences coping with traumatic events and adversity throughout their lifetimes (Crespo, 2013; Ramos, 2008). Some of these traumatic events include the loss of a parent at an early age and/or contending with experiences of discrimination since childhood (Ramos, 2008).

High levels of self-efficacy for the Mexican American female participants in Lopez's (2013) study not only involved the participants having confidence in their own abilities, but also in being, comfortable in their own skin and proud of who they are in their role as an administrator despite challenges they face. Self-efficacy can also provide Latinas with strength to navigate the politics in higher education (Crespo, 2013). Although oppressive structures, institutional politics, and discriminatory colleagues may hinder Latinas' advancement, Latinas persevere and exhibit resilience through challenges they navigate in their journeys (Crespo, 2013). While Latinas' self-efficacy is a resource that they can draw from in their career journeys, Crespo emphasized, "confidence is not enough; opportunity must exist" to support Latinas' career pathways to senior leadership (p. 14).

Role of culture. A review of the literature on Latina administrator experiences highlighted the important role culture can play in Latina administrators' career pathways and life journeys (Hansen, 1997; Rivera et al., 1999; Silva, 2003). Even though Latina administrators may experience pressure to assimilate to the norms and values of the dominant culture (e.g., White, male, upper-class), they draw strength from their Latina/Hispanic culture and the knowledge they gained from their families (Canul, 2003; Gallegos, 2012; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Ramos, 2008; Silva, 2003). Rather than assimilating into the dominant culture, the Latina president participants from Ramos' (2008) research on the factors contributing to Latinas' advancement to executive-level roles described how they leveraged the dominant institutional culture, policies, and procedures to advance in their careers and advocate for student needs while embracing their Latino cultural roots and traditions. Latina

administrators frequently sought to ensure that they did not hide or stray away from their cultural roots in order to be successful. Instead, they leveraged the assets they brought as Latinas to offer a different perspective because of their bicultural identity (Hansen, 1997; Muñoz, 2010; Ramos, 2008).

Some Latinas utilize their bicultural identity as a resource to navigate the White-dominated culture of higher education, contend with contradictions and conflicts that arise between dominant cultural values and their Latina/o cultural values, and resist experiences of racism, sexism, and classism (Hansen, 1997; Ramos, 2008). Part of this bicultural identity can stem from Latinas' pride in their ethnic background since they recognize the strengths and unique perspective they may bring as Latinas compared to their White counterparts (Hansen, 1997). For example, Canul (2003), a Latina administrator in California, explained how being raised with the cultural values of *familismo* (emphasizing interconnectedness of family and collaboration), *personalismo* (emphasizing the importance of building and maintaining relationships), *respeto* (emphasizing respect and dutifulness in all interactions), and *fatalismo* (the belief that everything happens for a reason) helps many Latina administrators navigate structural barriers and other challenges in their career as she reflected upon her own career experiences. These cultural values learned within the context of one's family also influences many Latina administrators' leadership style to utilize a collaborative and person-centered approach to meet the needs of their institution (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Canul, 2003; Lopez, 2013). Subsequently, they can draw from their bicultural perspective to transform their institutions by challenging structural barriers, inequitable policies, and

advocating for the needs of underrepresented student populations (Hansen, 1997; Ramos, 2008). Although biculturalism and pride in one's culture did not surface as a theme in the literature on women and Women of Color administrators, it is an invaluable resource and asset Latina administrators draw from in their career pathways.

Summary of the Literature on Latina Administrators

Future research on Latina SSAOs can contribute to the small body of research focusing on Latina administrator experiences. This prior research on Latina administrators in higher education focused on: their personal and professional journeys (Aschenbrenner, 2006; Cipres, 1999; Gallegos, 2012; Muñoz, 2010; Silva, 2003), factors positively influencing their career advancement such as professional development opportunities and mentoring (Crespo, 2013; Gorena, 1996; Hansen, 1997), their leadership style and strategies they employ as higher education administrators (Lopez, 2013; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Maes, 2012), the barriers they face in their journeys (Hernández & Morales, 1999; Ramos, 2008), and the role of self-efficacy in their career pathways (Montas-Hunter, 2012; Rivera et al., 1999; Suárez-McCrink, 2011). The majority of this research utilized participant samples from four-year colleges/universities, particularly in Texas and California where there are high concentrations of Latinas/os.

Although the focus of this existing research is not explicitly on Latina administrator experiences as a senior-level student affairs leader, it provides great context for the present study by providing insight on Latina administrators' experiences. While prior scholarship has illuminated the critical role culture and pride in one's gender and race/ethnicity play in the career pathways and daily

experiences of Latina administrators, this study has the potential to uncover the resources, assets, and cultural wealth Latina SSAOs draw from in their career pathways. As such, a CCW (Yosso, 2005, 2006) perspective guided the research design of this study to better understand the lived experiences of Latina SSAOs through a culturally affirming and assets-based lens.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual or theoretical framework can serve a variety of purposes throughout the research process. The framework a researcher selects to guide their study provides a blueprint that can anchor the literature review, shape the research design, structure the research questions, and/or influence the data analysis process (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Although a theoretical framework is derived from existing theories/theory, Grant and Osanloo (2014) explain that a conceptual framework also offers a guide for the research design and reflects a researcher's beliefs of how knowledge is constructed and how a problem is best explored. Yosso's (2005, 2006) model of CCW served as the conceptual framework for this study which provided an assets-based lens to shape the research design by validating the assets Latinas and Chicanas develop from their families, communities, and lived experiences.

Yosso's CCW model (2005, 2006) in research and practice illuminates the cultural wealth present within Communities of Color, especially in Latina/o communities. Social institutions such as the educational environment often overlook the knowledge and networks that Communities of Color possess and utilize. Yosso's (2005) model offers an assets-based lens that can transform educational research and practice by reshaping discourse that devalues and overlooks the strengths present in

Latina/o communities. Rather than operating under deficit assumptions that Latinas/os lack the necessary knowledge, skills, and networks needed to succeed, Yosso (2005) affirms the capital that Latinas/os (and other Communities of Color) bring with them to the educational environment. Before providing an overview of Yosso's CCW framework, I will describe how Bourdieu's model of cultural capital has been misappropriated to privilege the capital of White, upper/middle class in the education environment. I will then provide a brief discussion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) to provide context for the impetus of Yosso's model.

Cultural Capital, Critical Race Theory, and Latina/o Critical Race Theory

Pierre Bourdieu's work began in the 1970s-1980s in France to explain how privilege and opportunity are social reproductions and the ways in which cultural skills, abilities, knowledge, and contacts are unequally rewarded in society (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). He referred to cultural capital as valued knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and education credentials that are used to navigate social systems. Social capital referred to valued networks and social connections (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) emphasized that cultural and social capital are transmitted hereditarily to one's offspring and/or acquired through formal schooling experiences. Bourdieu did not intend for his concept of cultural capital to interpret the cultural capital of "high status" society (White, upper/middle class) as the valued form of capital (Winkle-Wagner, 2010).

However, scholars in the U.S. have frequently adopted a "highbrow" interpretation of cultural capital in educational research, inferring that only individuals from the "high status" group possess cultural capital (Lareau &

Weininger, 2003, p. 567). This "highbrow" interpretation of cultural capital within K-12 research stems from DiMaggio's (1982) work on 11th-grade school success. In this study, DiMaggio (1982) referred to cultural capital as involvement in "highbrow" activities (e.g., involvement in the arts, music, poetry, literature) rather than "middlebrow" activities (e.g., drawing, sewing, woodworking, crafts; p. 193). DiMaggio (1982) asserted that cultural capital correlated with increased academic achievement. While students can accrue cultural capital through formal schooling and/or family practices (Bourdieu, 1986), this "highbrow" interpretation overlooks the cultural capital inherent within Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005, 2006; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Thus, researchers have misappropriated Bourdieu's work to position the culture, knowledge, and skills that Latinas/os bring as deficient (Irizarry & Nieto, 2010). Due to "(mis)interpretations of cultural capital in educational research," future research needs to explore how these devalued and excluded forms of capital impact Latina/o success in higher education (Espino, 2014, p. 547).

As a way to challenge deficit-centered perceptions of Latina/o students and families, several scholars within the field of education adapted theoretical models and concepts from other disciplines to affirm the wealth, knowledge, and networks of Latinas/os (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Irizarry & Nieto, 2010; Vélez-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005, 2006) drew from two theoretical lenses, CRT and LatCrit as the foundation for the CCW model. CRT developed out of critical legal studies (CLS; Delgado, 1988) that placed race at the center of legal discussions by questioning how the legal system perpetuated oppressive social structures such as racism (Yosso, 2005). By placing race as central, CRT as a

theoretical lens recognizes that racism is an inherent component of the challenges faced by Latinas/os in the U.S. (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001).

As CRT scholarship began to emerge, critiques surfaced that oppression tended to be viewed within a White/Black binary, overlooking the intersecting forms of oppression faced by other People of Color, such as Latinas/os, who have unique histories and also resist oppression and discrimination in their journeys (Espinoza & Harris, 1998; Yosso, 2005). These critiques led to the development of LatCrit out of CRT scholarship to recognize that the intersections of language, immigration status, gender, culture, and class contribute to Latinas/os experiences of oppression (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valdes, 1997; Yosso, 2005). LatCrit provides a lens to better understand the racialized experiences of Latinas/os (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Education scholars have utilized both CRT and LatCrit in education research to provide a deeper understanding of Latinas/os' unique experiences and challenges dominant perspectives and discourse on race, gender, and class by viewing the experiential knowledge People of Color possess as assets (Solórzano, 1998). For Yosso (2005), viewing Latina/o experiences through a CRT lens means to challenge deficit views of People of Color in education and move away from stereotypes and assumptions that People of Color do not possess the cultural and social capital that can promote their social advancement.

Community Cultural Wealth

Due to this misappropriation of cultural capital, Yosso (2005) sought to challenge deficit views that Students of Color enter the classroom environment with cultural deficiencies simply because they do not possess the valued forms of cultural and social capital. This drive to transform education and highlight the under-utilized

assets of Students of Color led Yosso (2005, 2006) to develop this model of CCW from decades of research on Latina/o educational experiences and her ethnographic fieldwork experiences. These fieldwork experiences took place at a local community center in the Southwest region of the U.S. where Chicana/o parents discussed the high aspirations they held for their children's future as well as the inequities their children contended with within the school system.

CCW is described as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Yosso (2005) believes that Communities of Color utilize this CCW to promote social mobility. Although the term *culture* is frequently used interchangeably with race, Yosso (2005) views culture as a broader element that includes "behaviors and values that are learned, shared, and exhibited by a group of people" (p. 75). Yosso (2005) also recognizes that for Students of Color "culture is frequently represented symbolically through language and can encompass identities around immigration status, gender, phenotype, sexuality, and region, as well as race and ethnicity" (p. 76). Culture in this sense is tangible, intangible, fluid, and ever-changing (Yosso, 2005). By viewing culture through a CRT lens, Yosso (2005, 2006) explained that there are at least six forms of capital that encompass the CCW of Communities of Color: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant capital.

Aspirational capital focuses on resiliency and the ability to pursue one's goals in the face of actual and perceived barriers. For example, the Chicana/o parents in Yosso's (2006) research hoped their children would maintain and pursue their dreams

despite the challenges they faced in their journeys. *Linguistic capital* includes social skills and knowledge attained by communicating in more than one language or style. While translation skills can foster an individual's social networks, cross-cultural skills, maturity, and navigation skills, it is important to add that linguistic capital involves the use of storytelling, *cuentos* [stories], *dichos* [sayings], and oral histories to impart life lessons within the family (Yosso, 2006). *Familial capital* refers to knowledge and skills developed through one's immediate and extended family. Families provide critical emotional support (e.g., care, empathy) within and across families and Yosso (2006) encourages scholars to look beyond traditional views of the nuclear family and recognize the wealth that individuals who are part of one's broader kinship and *familia* [family] impart. *Social capital* includes social networks, peer groups, church, sports, and other community networks and community resources that provide emotional support, information, and resources to navigate challenges and social institutions like the school system. *Navigational capital* refers to the skills Communities of Color use to navigate through social institutions such as the educational system. This navigational capital develops out of individual resilience and experiences "struggling through really stressful conditions and events" (Yosso, 2006, p. 43). *Resistant capital* includes knowledge and skills developed through resistant behavior that challenges inequality and stereotypes. Rather than enacting self-defeating behaviors or striving to fit in, Yosso (2006) found that Communities of Color possess knowledge and skills to prove others wrong and resist inequalities. These forms of capital come together to comprise the cultural wealth present within Communities of Color (Yosso, 2005, 2006).

CCW is not developed in just one period of an individual's life; rather it is cultivated and sustained over time to resist oppression (Yosso, 2005, 2006). The six forms of capital are also fluid and not mutually exclusive, as an individual's experience may encompass more than one form of capital (Yosso, 2005; Pérez, 2014). For example, a Latina's experience navigating the college admissions process may involve drawing from social capital to gather information about colleges and then drawing from navigational capital as she completes admissions and financial aid applications, writes personal statements, and gathers recommendation letters (Luna & Martinez, 2013). For this reason, Yosso (2005) emphasizes that these forms of capital can build upon and overlap with one another to make Latina/o students' goals become a reality.

Community Cultural Wealth Research Contributions

Scholars have utilized Yosso's (2005, 2006) model of CCW to illuminate the cultural wealth of Latina/o high school students (Liou, Antrop-González, & Cooper, 2009; Martinez, 2012), Latina/o undergraduate students (Kouyoumdjian, Guzman, Garcia, & Talavera-Bustillos, 2015; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Pérez, 2012, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010), undocumented Latina/o undergraduate students (Hernandez, 2016; Pérez Huber, 2009), and Latina/o graduate students (Espino, 2014; Navarrette García, 2014; Percero, 2016; Zell, 2014). While prior CCW scholarship has primarily illuminated Latina/o student experiences and assets, recent scholarship explored the CCW of Mexican-American male principals (Horak, 2012) and Chicana/Latina community college board of trustee members (Acosta-Salazar, 2014). There is now an opportunity to use the CCW model to illuminate the assets of Latina SSAOs and

employ a strengths-based research design in scholarship on Latina administrator sub-populations.

When seeking to use a CCW lens, Hernandez (2016) explained that prior research has utilized CCW as: a theoretical/conceptual framework, a lens to shape research questions, a way to code and analyze data, and a means to organize and present findings to illuminate the various forms of capital present within Latina/o communities. There are five unique contributions and uses made by this prior research that inform my understanding of the CCW model. I will describe below each of these contributions that guide my use the CCW model as the conceptual framework for the study.

First, scholars drawing from the CCW model have described how different forms of capital are interconnected. For example, familial capital and aspirational capital are interconnected as Latina/o parents foster the educational aspirations of their children despite the challenges they face in their educational experiences (Hernandez, 2016; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Navarrette García, 2014; Zell, 2014). Given the interconnected nature of these forms of capital, Hernandez (2016) explained how these intersections between forms of capital "created a domino effect" among the forms of capital (p. 275). These intersections facilitated participants' access and persistence in their undergraduate experiences and Hernandez (2016) suggested that these intersections can be viewed as overlapping spheres. For instance, a participant's peer network encouraged her to share her undocumented status with institutional agents to gain access to financial resources. In this case, her social capital intersected with her navigational capital to access financial support to

fund her education. Because of the fluid and overlapping nature of CCW, this model is best suited for qualitative research as it is difficult to measure quantitatively. While Liou et al.'s (2009) mixed methods research on Latina/o high school students' college-going information networks sought to measure their forms of capital through survey responses, it was the qualitative data that described how these forms of capital serve as assets to Latina/o students, how their CCW developed, and how they utilized their CCW to navigate their lives and educational experiences. Due to the unique contexts of individual's life experiences, Hernandez (2016) also encourages researchers to consider contexts such as federal, state, and higher education policy, that may shape participants' experiences and CCW.

Zell (2014) also explained how CCW could be "converted" into academic, occupational, and civic engagement outcomes for Latina/o students in graduate health care programs (p. 1). Zell (2014) asserted that the conversion process involves participants setting realistic goals and leveraging their personal attributes. However, prior CCW literature would challenge this assertion that one can consciously leverage one's CCW because an individual's CCW frequently goes unrecognized and is often developed and utilized unconsciously. Although prior research illustrated how the forms of capital in the CCW model are interconnected (e.g., *familial* capital fostering *resistant* capital) and can be converted to produce outcomes, it is also important to recognize that not all forms of capital are salient to all participants' experiences (Luna & Martinez, 2012; Pérez, 2012). Prior research suggests that the absence of a form of capital does not thwart Latinas/os' success, advancement, or achievement since

Latinas/os draw from diverse sources of CCW to navigate higher education, social institutions, and resist oppression (Luna & Martinez, 2012; Pérez, 2012).

Second, scholars who have utilized CCW as a conceptual framework for their research have also added to the six forms of capital in Yosso's (2005, 2006) model to highlight additional forms of capital Latinas/os possess (see Figure 1 on p. 344 for the expanded CCW model guiding the research design of this study). Yosso (2005) was open to expanding and augmenting the CCW model, as she shared, "I look forward to the ways that cultural wealth will take on new dimensions as others also 'run with it'" (p. 83). For example, in Pérez Huber's (2010) research on undocumented and U.S. born Chicana students, *spiritual capital* surfaced as an additional form of capital in the CCW model. This *spiritual capital* helped Chicana students transcend current challenges and develop a sense of hope by drawing from their belief in something greater than themselves and in using one's inner resource (Pérez Huber, 2010).

After re-analyzing the data and re-reading the literature, Navarrette García (2014) also identified a new form of capital to add to the CCW model through her research on Mexicana graduate students. This new form of capital was labeled *experiential capital*, to encompass an individual's life experiences that do not fit within a pre-existing form of capital from Yosso's (2005) model that enhance and strengthen an individual's personal and professional journeys. For instance, participants from Navarrette García's (2014) study described experiences working on the farm with their families growing up, which taught them humility and strength. Navarrette García (2014) contends that all experiences, regardless of whether they are

negative or positive, can enhance and strengthen an individual's life journey, providing them with *experiential capital*.

Third, scholars have utilized CCW in combination with other theoretical frameworks to offer a deeper understanding of Latina/o student experiences and outcomes. Pérez (2012) used CCW and resiliency theory as a theoretical framework to explore the extent to which academic resilience facilitates the academic achievement of *logradores* [Latino male college student achievers]. By utilizing these two frameworks in tandem, Pérez (2012) explained that the participants' CCW contributed to positive outcomes (e.g., involvement in the campus community, a strong Latino identity, an ability to overcome microaggressions) and their resiliency fostered adaptability and persistence despite challenging life circumstances. Pérez Huber (2010) drew from LatCrit racist nativism as the theoretical framework for her study to challenge dominant racialized perceptions of Chicanas as non-native to the U.S. She then utilized CCW as a theoretical lens to explore the forms of capital the Chicana participants utilized to persist and transform oppressive structures and institutions in their life journeys to improve the livelihood of themselves, their families, and communities (Pérez Huber, 2010). Although CCW was not a framework Pérez Huber initially utilized when developing her study, it emerged as a powerful and fitting theoretical lens to describe the ways the Chicana participants navigated and contended with subordination in their journeys and educational experiences. When analyzing qualitative data, scholars may find that a supplementary lens can be added to offer a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences as was the case for Pérez Huber (2010).

Fourth, prior studies that have utilized the CCW framework for Latina/o sub-populations other than high school and college/university students provide an opportunity to understand the extent to which Latinas/os continue to utilize their CCW throughout their life journeys. For example, although the Mexican American PhD participants in Espino's (2014) study utilized their CCW to navigate their secondary education and undergraduate experiences, this CCW did not hold currency in their graduate education experiences "because elitism and power is even more pronounced within graduate socialization processes" (p. 568). While the participants in Espino's (2014) research did not necessarily possess the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to persist in graduate education, they frequently activated the CCW they already possessed to resist stereotypes and challenges in their journeys.

Horak's (2012) research on Mexican American male school principals is also informative. Horak (2012) described how the participants' CCW developed as early as childhood. Participants then drew from their CCW throughout their educational and professional journeys to the principalship. All participants in Horak's (2012) study benefited from the presence of a strong male role model(s) within their home when growing up, which fostered their educational aspirations and provided them with emotional support when facing obstacles in their journeys. They also had a male role model or mentor in their social network which inspired them and supported them in their career path to the principalship (Horak, 2012). While bilingual participants reported being unsure of whether their bilingual abilities helped them personally during their career, they recognized their linguistic capital provided them with an advantage when communicating with Spanish-speaking parents. Bilingualism also

provided participants with access to opportunities (e.g., training, certifications) that prepared them for the principalship because of an institutional need for a bilingual administrator (Horak, 2012). Since few studies explore the CCW of educational leaders, Horak (2012) suggests that future research in this area can utilize and inspire the next generation of Latina/o leaders by uncovering the CCW they draw from throughout their career path.

Fifth, utilizing CCW as the conceptual framework in *testimonio* research positioned within a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) lens provides researchers with an opportunity to align their framework, epistemology, and methodology. A CFE served as the impetus for Acosta-Salazar's (2014) *testimonio* methodology due to her desire to place the participants' experiences at the center of the study and utilizing CCW as the conceptual framework provided a lens to validate the experiential knowledge Chicana/Latina board of trustee members bring from their families and communities. Utilizing CCW from a CFE lens offers a way to understand the historical challenges of race, gender, and class that Latinas may contend with especially if they are the first Latina to hold a position such as was the case for the participants in Acosta-Salazar's (2014) study. For example, the raced, classed, and gendered experiences the participants navigated in their personal, educational, and professional journeys fostered their desire to have a seat at the decision-making table as a trustee member (Acosta-Salazar, 2014).

Navarrette García (2014) added that when Chicana/Latina researchers draw from a CFE stance in CCW research, this moves away from a deficit view of Chicana/Latina experiences by highlighting their successes. A CFE lens helped

Navarrette García (2014) recognize that Chicanas/Latinas may navigate unique experiences compared to their White women or other Women of Color counterparts in her research on Mexicana graduate students and offers a race-gendered perspective to their CCW. While the CCW model provides researchers with an assets-based theoretical and analytical lens, setting a study within a CFE allows for a nuanced, rich, and gendered perspective to Chicana/Latina stories. Positioning a study within a CFE also embraces the cultural intuition a Chicana/Latina researcher brings to the study which can influence the way a study is designed (Acosta-Salazar, 2014).

Summary of the challenges, benefits, and opportunities in using CCW. The contributions above made by prior CCW research inform my understanding of the CCW model and will guide the way I utilize CCW as the conceptual framework for the study. The forms of capital in Yosso's (2005) model of CCW "are not mutually exclusive or static" (p. 77). Given the interconnected and fluid nature of the forms of capital, I may find that particular forms of capital are interconnected in the Latina SSAO participants' journeys when analyzing the data for the study. Rather than coding transcripts for each form of capital separately, researchers must recognize that a participant's experiences may align with multiple forms of capital in the CCW model and one form of capital can activate another form of capital given the interconnected nature of CCW (Hernandez, 2016; Navarrette García, 2014). The interconnected nature of the forms of capital will be key to keep in mind when I analyze the data for the study as well as the applicability of the CCW model during the data analysis process for this research. I also recognize that the two additional forms of capital, *spiritual capital* and *experiential capital*, identified by Pérez Huber

(2010) and Navarrette García (2014) respectively may be salient for the participants in the study and/or new nuanced forms of capital may also emerge from the *testimonios* of the Latina SSAO participants.

There are many benefits to utilizing CCW as a conceptual lens in education research since CCW provides an assets-based approach to the research process that moves away from deficit views of Latinas/os underachievement by understanding how CCW can enhance Latina/o experiences in higher education (Pérez, 2014). Utilizing a CCW lens to better understand the career pathways of Latina SSAOs can illuminate the forms of capital they draw from to navigate their career journeys and daily experiences. When carrying out the study, I was mindful that there might be supplemental lenses or frameworks that can enrich my understanding of Latina SSAO experiences and career pathways once the study is conducted such as was the case for Pérez Huber (2010). I was also aware that drawing from CCW as the conceptual framework for this study may pose challenges and limitations during the analysis process and how there may also be particular historical and personal contexts that have shaped the Latina SSAO participants' career pathways and/or CCW.

The CCW framework also offers a lens to highlight the experiences and assets of individuals or groups whose stories remain untold in research (Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Hernandez, 2016). The study will add to prior bodies of literature by using the CCW model in research on a new Latina/o sub-population, Latina SSAOs. While much of the existing CCW research focuses on Latina/o student experiences, using this framework on a new group provides an opportunity to explore its applicability to a group of advanced women who have potentially developed CCW since childhood

and have potentially drawn from their CCW for decades. Utilizing a CCW framework will help me to understand the extent to which this model is applicable to administrator populations and a new Latina/o sub-group. The study will be the first to utilize this framework on Latina/o higher education administrators and will build upon Horak's (2012) use of CCW to a new group of Latina/o educational leaders.

Given my focus on Latina SSAOs and use of a *testimonio* research design, Acosta-Salazar's (2014) and Navarrette García's (2014) *testimonio* research were beneficial resources for me as I framed the study. Acosta-Salazar's (2014) study, in particular, provides a strong foundation for my research due to her focus on Chicana/Latina board of trustee members, use of a CCW conceptual framework, *testimonio* methodology, and by affirming the Chicana feminist epistemological lens she brings with her to the research process. Employing a *testimonio* research design validates Chicanas/Latinas lived experiences as a source of inquiry and using CCW from a CFE lens offers me an opportunity to apply a race-gendered lens to the CCW model which may illuminate nuanced forms of capital that Chicanas/Latinas possess that have not previously surfaced in prior CCW research. Utilizing a CCW lens and a *testimonio* research design in tandem embraces a researcher's CFE, viewing a CFE as an asset the researcher brings to the research process (Navarrette García, 2014). I seek to extend prior CCW scholarship by involving the Latina SSAO participants throughout the data collection and analysis processes to provide an authentic representation of the CCW they possess and draw from in their career pathways. I recognize that my positionality and epistemological lens as a Chicana/Latina feminist

scholar and administrator guides me in my research process and offers a way to understand CCW through a CFE lens that I will describe in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

A review of the literature on women administrator experiences illuminated the challenges that women may face in their career pathways including: challenges obtaining a doctoral degree, contending with sexism, and difficulties balancing family and career responsibilities. To navigate these challenges, many women draw support from valuable resources such as professional development opportunities and mentoring relationships to advance in their career to the SSAO role. When reviewing the literature on the experiences of Women of Color administrators, the additional challenges of navigating the double burden of racism and sexism and experiences of tokenization and isolation emerged as barriers to their career advancement. Women of Color also benefit from the support gained through professional development opportunities, which can help them navigate the racial hostility at their institution and cope with feelings of isolation by connecting with other administrators of color.

Prior research on Latina administrator experiences illuminated that not only are Latinas contending with sexism and racism in their career journeys, but many Latina administrators are also navigating the additional challenges of classism, tokenization, and discrimination based on their intersecting identities. Given the underrepresentation of Women of Color administrators, Latinas and Women of Color overall are utilizing support from cross-race and/or cross-gender mentoring relationships to help them navigate White, male-dominated spaces to advance in their careers. However, it is vital that cross-gender and/or cross-race mentoring relationships provide them with access to valued knowledge and networks and affirm

their identities as Women of Color rather than encouraging them to assimilate to norms that privilege the networks and knowledge of the White, male, upper/middle class. Findings from the literature on Latina administrators also highlighted the critical role that family, culture, and self-efficacy can play in Latinas' career pathways and lived experiences, nuanced findings when taking an explicit focus on Latina administrators.

Latina administrators make unique contributions to an institution, such as their commitment to equitable policies and practices that benefit all students and mentoring students and future higher education leaders, especially students and staff who are People of Color (Cipres, 1999; Crespo, 2013; Lopez, 2013; Ramos, 2008). As a mentor, Latina administrators also recognize the importance in providing their mentees with knowledge and resources on how to navigate the political nature of higher education (Hansen, 1997; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Silva, 2003). Future research can further explore Latinas' unique experiences to better understand the structural barriers they contend with and assets they derive from their families, culture, and communities that contribute to their persistence and career advancement. It is important to raise awareness about Latinas' experiences and assets, so Latinas themselves and institutional leadership can leverage these assets when developing programs, practices, and hiring processes to promote their advancement. Although the student affairs profession purports valuing equity and inclusion, these values are not enacted when Women of Color are excluded from accessing valuable networks and contend with structural barriers in their career pathways (Sobers, 2014). Institutional leaders need to take responsibility and begin to dismantle oppressive

hiring practices, policies, and organizational structures that hinder Latinas' advancement, rather than placing the burden on Latinas to cope with these discriminatory experiences through their own resilience and resistance strategies (Silva, 2003).

Since culture and family serve as vital resources of support that Latina administrators draw from in their career pathways and daily experiences, drawing from CCW as the conceptual framework for the study further validated the experiential knowledge and CCW of Latina SSAOs and the systemic barriers that Latinas contend with in their journeys. Utilizing this framework provided a powerful tool to affirm the experiences and assets of Latina SSAOs by challenging mainstream perceptions of valued knowledge and calling attention to the oppressive power structures that overlook their cultural assets as a source of wealth to leverage in their career journeys. This conceptual framework, along with existing literature about the pathways to the SSAO role and knowledge of women, Women of Color, and Latina administrator experiences in higher education informed my use of *testimonio* as a methodology to better understand the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs, which I will describe in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This chapter provides an overview of the methodology that I utilized to better understand the lived experiences and career pathways of Latina senior student affairs officers (SSAOs). This chapter begins with the research questions guiding the study, followed by my positionality, epistemological lens, and an overview of the use of *testimonio* as a methodology that allowed me to offer a rich description of Latinas' journeys to senior student affairs leadership. I will then conclude with a review of the data collection and analysis processes, techniques I employed to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations of the study.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to provide a deeper understanding of the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs in U.S. higher education. The following research questions are guided by the literature and from a community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005, 2006) perspective to better understand Latina SSAOs' personal and professional journeys:

1. What resources and supports have Latinas benefited from in their career pathways to the SSAO role?
2. What strategies have Latina SSAOs employed to navigate challenges in their career pathways?

My *Testimonio*

Before the *testimonios* of Latina SSAOs are shared, I first share my own *testimonio* to provide context for what led to my interest in conducting this research and my positionality as a Latina scholar. A researcher's positionality "describes the relationship between the researcher and his or her participants and the researcher and

his or her topic" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 26). My passion for this research stems from my lived experiences contending with systemic barriers in my educational journey such as discrimination and a lack of Latina role models. Drawing from the spirit and energy of The Latina Feminist Group (2001), I seek to tell, "the stories often held from public view," which include my own lived experiences, challenges, and joys (p. 20). Despite some of the experiences of challenge and pain that I have navigated in my personal and professional journey thus far, it is these experiences that have pushed me to resist stereotypes, strengthened my commitment to serve marginalized communities, affirmed my desire to dismantle negative perceptions of Communities of Color through research, and call attention to the systemic barriers that are hindering the advancement of talented Latina/o students and administrators.

Early Educational Experiences

Chicana/Latina/third-generation Mexican-American. First-generation college student. Low-income/working class. Daughter of Vietnam Veteran. These identities are salient for me in my everyday experiences and are the same identities that have brought me both great pride and pain throughout my educational journey. Although I have contended with experiences of discrimination in my educational journey, I feel privileged to have been raised by parents who instilled within me that I can do anything I set my mind to and to always believe in myself despite others' perceptions of my abilities. I was born and raised in Southern California to a hardworking father who is willing to do anything in his power to ensure that I am afforded the opportunity to pursue the education he always dreamed of for himself. An education that he knew would provide me with the opportunity for social and economic

mobility. My mother is a pillar of strength and always empowered me to pursue my dreams, no matter how big they seem or what others think. My mother was raised with traditional gender norms that uphold patriarchy and sexist ideologies (e.g., encouraging women to live at their parents' home until they are married, take responsibility for all household duties, stay at home while the male serves as the breadwinner). But, it is my mother who taught me to resist these traditional gender roles and to advocate for myself. She wanted me to learn to drive, get an education, and become independent.

Even though my parents provide me with limitless words of encouragement, support, and love – I cannot overlook the feelings of pain I experienced in my educational pathways, specifically in secondary school. Throughout my elementary school experiences, I was described as *smart*, *gifted*, and *talented* by teachers and by my grandfather who told everyone he knew "*mi nieta más joven es muy inteligente*" [my youngest granddaughter is very intelligent]. As a child, I was taught that the world is my oyster, there was nothing I could not do, and education would be my ticket to a better life. I thrived academically and developed my love for learning in elementary school. However, during my middle and high school years, I experienced great challenges. During middle school, the value of going to college was not emphasized and a lack of resources (e.g., updated textbooks, pre-college counseling) did not prepare me to enroll in honors courses when entering high school. In middle school, I recall being in a pre-algebra course where textbooks were distributed by last name and I was left without one for the entire school year. However, at the time I did not know that I should advocate for myself as I was raised with the mentality that

those in authority know best. It was not until college that I truly learned the importance of advocating for myself in a professional manner, thanks to the support of mentors.

While in middle school, I also strived to exceed my teachers' expectations of me and this continued in high school as I advocated to enroll in honors and advanced placement courses, despite my counselor questioning my academic ability. To this day, I vividly recall sitting in my high school counselor's office during a parent-counselor meeting that was required for all sophomore students. As my counselor asked me what my plans were after high school, I responded: "I am going to a university" with joy and excitement. I glanced at my father who instilled in me since I was a child that I was going to a university even though he did not have the knowledge or tools to help me get there. My counselor responded, "Are you sure?" As I think of this memory tears of anger and pain fill my eyes. My 15-year old self responded, "What do you mean?" She went on to explain, "Are you sure you want to go to a four-year college or university? What about a vocational or trade school? Or maybe start at a community college first?" I was speechless. I could not understand why this White woman did not want to support me in my academic goals. I was always a student who earned good grades and never got into trouble. Why was she pushing me away from going to a university?

After the meeting my father apologized and told me to "ignore what that counselor said, you ARE going to college." The next day at school, I consulted with one of my best friends who was Chinese-American about what her meeting was like and after consulting with several peers, I realized the trend. This counselor was

providing scholarship information and college application guidance to non-Latino students, and her racism against Latina/o students only fueled my passion further to exceed her expectations of me. It was in this instance that I realized no matter how smart I was, how hard I worked, or how confident I was in myself; systemic barriers such as these keep students like me, Latina, low-income, first-generation, from going to college and advancing in life. I realized then that the educational system was not built for me, it was not built to foster my success, and I needed to take it into my own hands to ensure that I am afforded equal opportunity because I could not trust that those in authority would advocate for me. This anger and resistance led me to become one of our class valedictorians. I wrote that counselor a note upon my graduation thanking her "for pushing me more than she will ever know" and this anger I felt in high school pushed my desire to be a counselor and an administrator so that no other students would have to contend with the discrimination that I faced. Thanks to my family and my Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) teacher, Ms. Jamie Witt, and Mrs. Bolen and Ms. Erdos who served as coaches for the Academic Decathlon team, my college aspirations remained unwavering. I am thankful every day that my father signed me up for AVID, as this program provided me with the knowledge and skills I needed to go to college and successfully navigate the college transition process.

Undergraduate Experiences

As I think back on my early educational experiences, I realize that I did not have the opportunity to learn from or receive support from educators who looked like me and could relate to my cultural background as a self-identified Latina. After

graduating from high school, I attended the University of La Verne (ULV), a private Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). It was not until my new student orientation at ULV that I had my first interaction with a Latina educator. Her name was Ruby, a mid-level administrator, and I still recall Ruby greeting me and our conversation about how her experiences as a first-generation college student from a Mexican household shaped her. I felt validated knowing that she, who had also grown up in a Latina/o low-income household and had felt nervous about navigating college, now served as a key administrator in the student affairs division. I recall telling my parents about how excited I was to meet Ruby, and they told me how relieved they were knowing that there was someone who worked at the university with whom I could relate.

My experiences during my undergraduate years blessed me not only with one Latina mentor but with two, because of my participation in a first-generation support program. Maria, a mid-level administrator, directed this program and was responsible for matching students in the program with a faculty or staff mentor on campus. At the last minute, my assigned mentor could no longer remain involved in the program, and Maria stepped in to serve as my mentor. Since I did not grow up with role models who went to a university, I did not know the purpose of mentoring. All I knew was that a mentor had a potential to be a source of support, an antithesis to the lack of support and macroaggressions I received from my high school counselor. The first time I met with Maria I could see the passion she had supporting first-generation college students just like herself and focusing on equity efforts to benefit all students. These passions stemmed from her own lived experiences coming from another

country, where her family still resides, and her passion for giving back and helping others. When meeting with Maria, I felt like I could be myself and ask questions without fear of judgment.

While I had several mentors who encouraged me to pursue a career in student affairs, Maria was the one who truly guided me through this process. She encouraged me to apply to the McNair Scholars Program, which facilitated my access to graduate education. She also guided me through the graduate school application process and above all coached me on how to talk with my parents about the frightening yet exciting possibility of moving across the country to pursue graduate studies. Maria was, and still is, someone I know I can lean on for support and she remains a role model of the type of administrator I aspire to become. Maria is compassionate, innovative, never afraid to take risks, an advocate, and so much more. It was through my interactions with Maria, Ruby, and other mentors, that I became committed to pursuing a career as a student affairs administrator.

As I now reflect on my undergraduate years, I recognize the small representation of Latina administrators across all administrative levels, especially at the senior-level, where they could have the greatest impact on institutional decision-making and student services. All the senior-level leaders, the president, deans, associate deans that I can recall were White men or White women. White men and women who may not understand what it means to grow up low-income and do not understand the intersections of sexism and racism that I navigate as a Latina woman. Are these White leaders using their positions of power to advocate for all students, especially underrepresented students who contend with a broken educational

pathway? Who is helping to advance administrators of color if they are underrepresented in top leadership? Thinking about these questions inspired me to pursue a career as an administrator.

I remember how the few Latina/o administrators I saw at ULV and later in my own professional work, were frequently called upon to serve as mentors and club advisors for Latina/o students and other students of color and to participate in diversity/equity-related initiatives. While I knew both Ruby and Maria took great pride in this work and brought great passion, I now think to myself, why are there so few Latina administrators? What was it like being the only Latina administrator in many instances? Why are these women who bring such assets to the campus not in senior-level administrative roles? Was it tiring or taxing to always be called upon to support Latina/o and diversity-related initiatives?

Graduate School Experiences

As I began my master's degree, my mentoring relationship with Maria continued to grow as she started to more openly share some of the challenges and structural barriers she faced as a Latina administrator, challenges that I was not aware of as an undergraduate student. She shared her experiences of sexism and racism, microaggressions experienced in meetings with colleagues across campus and within her own department, challenges in navigating institutional politics, and feelings of isolation in being one of the few if not the only Latina administrator or Person of Color in meetings. Despite these difficulties, she continued to have an unwavering passion for serving students and advancing in her career. While I appreciated her commitment, it upsets me to know that she is expected to channel her own self-

efficacy and resilience to thrive and advance in her career, dismissing the role institutional leadership plays in dismantling and addressing systemic barriers. Maria shared her experiences not to deter me from becoming an administrator, but to be transparent and increase my awareness of some of the barriers I may contend with as a future Latina administrator. She always hoped that I would not experience these same challenges, but also wanted to prepare me to handle any challenges that came my way.

While I left home to pursue my master's degree in College Student Personnel at the University of Maryland (UMD), I always knew that I wanted to return to California and carry out my passion for serving students, just as Maria and Ruby did in their roles on-campus. My experiences at UMD were the first time I entered a space where I was the only Latina in the room. I felt very alone. This was also the first time I experienced feeling tokenized in the classroom environment to provide a Hispanic/Latina perspective and pressured to speak up when the needs of Latina/o students were discussed out of fear that if I did not speak up, no one would. For the first time in my life, I also felt empowered to correct colleagues and peers in how my last name was pronounced. Up to this point, I found it easier to let others pronounce my name however they liked, however, at UMD I felt moved to teach others to pronounce my name correctly regardless of whether this made them feel uncomfortable. Why did I have to continue giving up this aspect of my identity? Why did I accommodate others' preferences while ignoring my own? As the only Latina in my master's program, I also felt privileged yet disempowered as I contended with stereotype threat, questioning why I was there in this predominantly

White environment, believing they must have admitted me only because I was Latina. Although there were few Latina/o administrators to look up to, advanced Latina graduate students such as Rebecca, Dora, and Pamela served as my role models and reminded me that I was not only beyond qualified to be here but was deserving to be here. They affirmed for me how vital it was to increase Latina/o representation in graduate education to make systemic change. Connections with peers of color and supportive mentors helped me thrive and cope in this new environment.

Professional Work Experiences

After completing my master's degree, I accepted my first full-time position as an academic advisor back home in California, which also provided me with the opportunity to direct a first-generation college student support program. I felt very proud to provide support to these students, many of whom were Latina/o, in the same way I had received support. Many students said that they felt like I could understand their experiences and always knew they could talk to me about any struggles they faced, including experiences of discrimination that they contended with on-campus. This was the most rewarding part of my job, but as a young, Latina administrator I had my share of unique and challenging experiences. I was the youngest staff member in my office. While my age was a strength when working with students, as a program director in meetings with more senior administrators, my age as well as my lack of a terminal degree seemed to be a disadvantage and left me with little opportunity to influence large-scale institutional decisions. My supervisors and the Chancellor praised me for doing good work, but I still felt that my voice was not valued by the White male president at the time who had no concept of the work that I

did and believed that when coming to the university environment all students had an equal opportunity to succeed. Although I felt inspired in my work each day to make a difference in the lives of students, it was emotionally exhausting to know that not everyone saw the importance of my work and did not recognize the structural barriers that influenced my own and my students' experiences. What this executive leader did not understand was that the structural barriers pervading society, also pervade the academic environment and impact students' experiences and opportunity structures especially for first-generation college students. There were instances when my students shared that they did not have money for food or transportation or were discriminated against for speaking Spanish. While I felt honored to provide support to the first-generation college students I served, it was also emotionally taxing being one of the few administrators that the students could reach out to for authentic support. It was equally rewarding and exhausting to educate others about the needs of first-generation college students and dismantle stereotypes held of this group. I believe that there need to be more role models who students can relate to, who can serve as advocates and educated allies.

During my professional experiences, I was also fortunate to develop relationships with colleagues across campus who shared my passion for fostering first-generation college student success. I developed a mentoring relationship with my Latino male supervisor, Roberto, who understood the value of my work. During my time at this institution, I also connected with a more senior Latina administrator, Marisol, who was the director of another unit on campus. I enjoyed the time I spent with Marisol and our continued connection. I especially appreciated her advice about

the importance of developing a support network of other Latinas, even if they were not at my institution, in order to thrive in the hostile education environment. Marisol also stressed the importance and challenges of pursuing a Ph.D. as a Latina and the unique experiences she faced balancing her familial and professional responsibilities. I learned through my conversations with her and my professional experiences that to access a seat at the decision-making table I needed a Ph.D. However, this was not the case for White males whose leadership is privileged. Through this, I also learned the frustration that having a seat at the table does not equate to Latinas' voices being valued equally. After working full-time for four years as an administrator, I decided to pursue doctoral studies to continue my professional and academic journey, just as I encouraged my students to do. I viewed pursuing a Ph.D. as a tool of resistance, a tool that would provide me with the knowledge and experiences needed to advance in my career. Knowledge that I could use to access predominantly White spaces in order to advocate on behalf of all students and especially students of color. I wanted to serve as a role model for other Latina students, to show them that if I can do it, you can too! However, I knew that the journey to the Ph.D. would also come with its share of challenges.

Connection to My Topic

As I began my doctoral studies and relocated across the country back to UMD, away from my family, friends, and fiancé – I once again found myself as the only Latina doctoral student. However, rather than feeling isolated and tokenized, this time I felt empowered to build a space of validation and resistance among peers of color and felt affirmed by having an advisor who is Latina/Chicana. An advisor who is not afraid to challenge the status quo and systemic barriers. It was my advisor

who introduced me to Chicana feminism, which helped me to recognize that Chicanas/Latinas contend with different opportunity structures and how my challenges in my educational journey are the byproduct of systemic barriers that pervade society. Beginning my doctoral studies at UMD was the first time in my life that I had a Latina professor and I feel empowered by her presence and her scholarship to take a critical approach to my work and use research as a tool of resistance to dismantle deficit views of Communities of Color, especially Latinas.

In summer 2015, I had the opportunity to intern with and shadow a Latino SSAO, John, to learn more about the responsibilities of this role, which opened my eyes to the world of senior student affairs leadership. This internship not only affirmed my desire to be a scholar-practitioner but also provided an opportunity to learn about the responsibilities of a SSAO and schedule informational interviews with administrators across campus to better understand what it is like to work at a community college. These informational interviews connected me to several Latina academic affairs and student affairs administrators and I was inspired when hearing about their respective journeys as faculty, and senior-level and mid-level administrators. I felt inspired learning about their family backgrounds and upbringing and how these experiences informed the way they lead and have influenced their desire to give back. These conversations and specifically my conversations with the two Latina senior academic affairs administrators at this institution led to my interest in learning more about Latina senior student affairs administrators' career journeys who engage in high-level decision making regarding the success and retention of students while also serving as role models to future Latina/o administrators.

As a doctoral student, I have also had the privilege to connect with aspiring Latina SSAOs through my experiences as part of a research team focused on the lived experiences, career pathways, and aspirations of mid-level Latina/o student affairs professionals who aspire to senior-level student affairs roles. This experience further increased my interest and passion in learning more about how Latinas found their way to the SSAO role despite obstacles or challenges they faced in their journeys. My own lived experiences as a Latina administrator guided my passion to learn about their lived experiences and uncover the cultural wealth of Latina SSAOS who have made it to the senior-ranks. I sought to validate their lived experiences as truth and a source of inquiry. Latina SSAOs bring a diversity of experiences, strengths, and challenges to higher education and I truly believe that in order to expand the pathway of Latina administrators from entry-level to senior-level student affairs roles, research needs to illuminate the challenges they have faced in their journeys as they navigate structural barriers. In the study, Latina SSAOs had the opportunity to reflect upon their own career pathways as I bore witness to their experiences of challenge and success; experiences that they may not actively think about in their everyday lives and career journeys.

While my social identities as a Latina/Chicana woman may lead to perceptions as an insider, I also recognize the differences with regard to my identities as a third-generation Mexican-American, first-generation college student, from a low-income/working-class background, and not fluent in Spanish that could have led some of the participants to view me as an outsider in addition to my professional identities as a Ph.D. student and mid-level administrator. As Hidalgo (1998) described, “I

bring the overlapping insider/outsider perspective to the research" (p. 115). This insider/outsider status afforded me strengths in building rapport with the participants as I shared common cultural understandings and experiences, but I also challenged myself not to overlook the position and power I had to listen and provide an authentic representation of these Latinas' *testimonios*. Although I shared common experiences and social identities with the participants, as a researcher I strived to dismantle any assumptions I had that their lived experiences are similar to my own, by focusing on the participants' lived experiences and realities (Jones et al., 2014).

Building rapport with the participants was essential as I sought to provide an authentic representation of their experiences and career pathways. I built rapport by listening attentively as the participants shared their personal and professional journeys with me. Even though I developed semi-structured interview questions, it was important to me that the participant guided the interview and shaped the focus of the conversation. Bringing a shared vulnerability to the research process was also critical to building rapport. While my focus was on the participants' experiences, when a participant prompted me to share about my personal background or interest in this research it was also important to disclose background on my experiences and interests with the participant. Even though I fostered trust and respect with the participants and maintained confidentiality to protect the participants' identities, I recognize that given the public nature of their roles and the underrepresentation of Latinas in senior student affairs leadership participants may still have had concerns about being identifiable. I also honored instances when participants shared something with me "off script" to limit their identifiability and respect what they discussed with me.

As a doctoral student with scholar-practitioner career aspirations, I frequently reflect upon the joys and challenges of being an administrator. While in many instances I remain the only Latina in the room, I am reminded of the honor I have to pursue a career in higher education and the commitment I have to supporting the next generation of college graduates, administrators, and scholars. I have an interest in learning more about the role of a SSAO as a potential career path and looked forward to uncovering the lived experiences of Latina SSAOs who are underrepresented in the student affairs profession.

Epistemological Lens: Chicana Feminist Epistemology

Incorporating a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) to *testimonio* and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) research allowed for a deeper understanding of Latina SSAOs' career pathways by validating their lived experiences as truth, recognizing the structural barriers that impact their educational experiences and career journeys, and affirming how their resistance to oppression serves as a navigation tool. Utilizing a CFE in educational research challenges "whose history, community, and knowledge is legitimated" by recognizing Chicanas/Latinas' experiential knowledge as a source of inquiry (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 574). While critical feminist epistemologies addressed the experiences of women and critical race feminist theory addressed the experiences of Women of Color, Delgado Bernal (1998) argued that the opportunity structures and experiences of Chicana women are distinct from that of other women, particularly White women. Although Chicana feminism has a strong historical context centering on the experiences and struggles of Chicanas who are of Mexican and Mexican-American descent, Chicana feminism in educational research is applicable to Latinas broadly due to the raced and gendered

experiences and disparities they contend with in education (Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, & Elenes, 2006).

Delgado Bernal's (1998) proposal to use a CFE within educational research was inspired by the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and other Chicana feminist writers and scholars. She described this epistemology as being "concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas-about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 560). Delgado Bernal (1998) also described how Chicana/Latina scholars bring unique perspectives to the research process called *cultural intuition*. Delgado Bernal (1998) explained that four sources contribute to Chicana/Latina researchers' *cultural intuition*: personal experiences, knowledge of existing literature as it relates to the topic she is exploring, professional experiences, and the analytical process itself as the researcher interacts with the data. As such, a CFE supports Chicana/Latina researchers in using *all* their ways of knowing and sources of knowledge when engaging in the research process.

A CFE lens shapes the way I look at the world, leads me to affirm Chicanas/Latinas' lived experiences as a source of knowledge, and guides my daily experiences as a Chicana/Latina working within higher education environments that privilege the networks and knowledge of White, male, and upper-middle class populations. This epistemological lens also shaped the way I designed the study by seeking to involve the Latina SSAO participants throughout the research process, particularly the data analysis process, to provide an authentic (re)presentation of their career pathways and experiences. I centered the participants' voices and experiences

and embraced the cultural intuition that both the participants and I brought to this research.

Overview of the Four Sources of Cultural Intuition

The first source, personal experience, recognizes the strengths that Chicanas/Latinas bring from their personal background and life experiences to the research process. This personal experience can provide the Chicana/Latina researcher with knowledge of how to interpret and analyze the data. Delgado Bernal (1998) added that the researcher does not have to possess this personal experience firsthand as one's personal experience also extends “to include collective experience and community memory, and points to the importance of participants' engaging in the analysis of data” (pp. 563-564). Cultural and historical elements, such as the sharing of oral traditions and stories across generations serves as a form of community memory and shapes an individual's identity and personal values which are brought to the research process. The researcher can then leverage this ancestral wisdom and personal experience as an inherent tool in the research process.

The second source, existing literature, provides the researcher with knowledge about the topic of interest and ways to best approach the research process. While other scholars would argue that knowledge of existing literature may bias the research process, Delgado Bernal (1998) recognized that her knowledge of existing literature “offered [her] a particular cultural intuition into the phenomenon [she] was studying by providing possible ways of approaching and interpreting data” (p. 565). This knowledge and exposure to existing literature strengthen the researcher's cultural intuition by increasing their sensitivity to the research process such as when

developing interview questions or knowing what to pick up on in the data analysis process.

The third source, professional experience, encourages the researcher to draw from what they have seen or experienced out in the field or workplace. Similar to personal experience, having professional experience helps the researcher understand the inner workings of a particular setting, which in the case of this study, is the higher education environment to gain insight about the population of individuals they seek to research and have a better understanding of the challenges they might face (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

The fourth source, the analytical research process, is the final source of cultural intuition that "comes from making comparisons, asking additional questions, thinking about what you are hearing and seeing, sorting data, developing a coding scheme, and engaging in concept formation" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 566). This analytical research process draws from the assets of the researcher's experiences and knowledge to develop ideas and make sense of the data. Delgado Bernal (1998) proposed that this analytical research process should be interactive and collaborative with participants, such as a focus group. A collaborative data analysis approach provides the researcher with an opportunity to leverage the cultural intuition of the participants and their own as the researcher. This interactive process creates a venue for shared vulnerability and can urge the researcher to think about how they are representing participants' stories.

Calderón, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagón, and Vélez (2012) also posited that a shared vulnerability serves as an additional source of cultural intuition

that "allows us to enter each other's lives in the research process and become motivated to overcome pain, trauma, or grief; it engenders a solidarity that moves us toward a collective effort of healing, empowerment, and resistance" (p. 529). Calderón et al. (2012) also emphasized that adopting a CFE is not something that is inherent but is rather accomplished when a Chicana/Latina researcher draws from her cultural intuition and uncovers ways that gender, race, and other social identities impact Chicanas/Latinas' lives and experiences. While Chicanas/Latinas' cultural intuition serves as an asset in the research process, it is also vital that researchers recognize that the personal and professional experiences of their participants do not mirror their own (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

These ways of knowing and a shared vulnerability cultivate an interactive and collaborative relationship because Chicana/Latina participants also bring cultural intuition to the research process. Drawing from my cultural intuition as a Chicana/Latina researcher who is immersed in the literature on Latina experiences in higher education and the cultural intuition of the participants throughout the research process provided a way to validate Chicana/Latina experiences in all their varying forms especially because their access to opportunity structures and to professional experiences are distinct from that of other women, particularly White women (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Incorporating a CFE provided a way to affirm the diverse assets that Latina SSAOs possess and allowed for a rich race-gendered perspective.

Methodology: *Testimonio*

In order to understand my rationale for employing a *testimonio* methodology for this study, I will first provide an overview of the development of *testimonio* as a methodological tool for Chicana feminists. Next, I will discuss the use of *testimonio*

in the field of education followed by a discussion of how past research has employed *testimonio* as a methodology. I will conclude with a discussion of how I used *testimonio* to better understand the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs.

Development of *Testimonio* as a Methodology for Chicana Feminists

According to Beverley (2004) *testimonio* "carries the connotation of an act of truth telling in a religious or legal sense – *dar testimonio* which means to testify, to bear truthful witness" (p. 3). Testimonial narrative serves as the closest English translation to *testimonio*, though this translation cannot fully embody what *testimonio* can accomplish as a methodology and way of telling and recording lived experiences from historically marginalized and oppressed groups (Beverley, 2004). *Testimonio* was initially developed within the field of Latin American studies to document the social, political, gendered, and cultural experiences that shape an individual's life, particularly individuals who experienced injustice (Beverley, 2008). While *testimonio* has traditionally documented struggles for human rights in Latin America, over the years *testimonio* has become a methodological tool for Chicana/Latina feminists (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). *Testimonio* "is often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere" (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 13). Bearing witness, in this context, means to show by one's lived experiences that something is true (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). This adds to a long-standing history of women participating in *testimonio* writing both as informants and transcribers of testimonials in Latin America since the early

1900s (Barstow, 2005). Latin American feminists utilized *testimonio* to dismantle and expose oppressive hierarchies such as patriarchy, and challenge their continued existence (Barstow, 2005).

The Latina Feminist Group's (2001) text *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios* provided a foundation for the use of *testimonio* as a method and methodology for Chicana/Latina feminists. *Telling to Live* opened with the Latina Feminist Group reflecting upon their *papelitos guardados* [protected papers]. These *papelitos guardados* are both abstract and concrete in nature and represent personal experiences of both joy and pain at different points in one's life. *Papelitos guardados* may remain hidden or shared with others. Sharing these *papelitos* may evoke a process of empowerment for Latinas as they break away from the privileging of Eurocentric and male-dominated ideologies (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

The Latina Feminist Group (2001) provided discursive space for 18 Latina interdisciplinary scholars to share their *testimonios* with one another over the course of a seven-year period. As Latinas in academia they "had never made [their] own life experiences a source of inquiry" until this text (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2). The Latina Feminist Group (2001), comprised of Latina scholars in academia from diverse backgrounds, describes *testimonios* as "stories of our lives, to reveal our own complex identities as Latinas" (p. 1). As they reflected on their experiences sharing their *testimonios* with one another, they realized,

> Many of us, in one way or another, are professional *testimoniadoras* (producers of *testimonios*)…. From our different personal, political, ethnic, and academic trajectories, we arrived at the importance of *testimonio* as a crucial means of bearing witness and inscribing into history those lived realities that would otherwise succumb to the alchemy of erasure. (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 2)

This act of bearing witness involves speaking one's truth even if this truth involves sharing experiences of pain, sacrifice, and challenges (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The act of remembering and recounting structural barriers Latinas navigate in their journeys and calling out oppressive structures can lead to a process of healing through reflection and community (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Sánchez & Ek, 2013; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Testimonio as a methodology reassigns agency to the oppressed by repositioning Chicanas/Latinas' lived experiences as the central source of inquiry and creating knowledge from Latinas/Chicanas' own lived experiences (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Scholars adopting a *testimonio* methodology also recognize the power within a participant's individual *testimonio* and how these lived experiences and stories contribute to the collective (Pérez Huber, 2010). The power of these collective stories in *testimonio* research

> …challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance…[and] have resulted in new understandings about how marginalized communities build solidarity and respond to dominant culture, law, and policies that perpetuate inequity. (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363)

Capturing these lived experiences and collective stories reclaims discursive space for Chicanas/Latinas whose voices and stories frequently go unheard in various settings, such as education and academia (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Pérez Huber, 2010; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The Latina feminist scholars in *Telling to Live* provided a foundation for collaboration among Latinas in higher education and academia and are the first feminist group within a Western academic context to utilize

testimonio as a method and methodology to share the stories of their lives. In addition, while *testimonio* historically captured Latinas' oppression and acts of resistance, Latina feminists have also used and reshaped *testimonio* to capture the complexity of Latinas' lives, experiences, and challenges in their journeys as they contend with structural barriers (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Employing *Testimonio* in the Field of Education

Academic disciplines such as anthropology, literature, humanities, ethnic studies, women's studies, and psychology have utilized *testimonio* to focus on an individual's life experiences, foster agency, and affirm the life experiences of those sharing their *testimonio* who come from a marginalized group (Behar, 1993; Benmayor, 1988, 2008; Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983; Cruz, 2006; Irizarry, 2005; Yúdice, 1991; Zimmerman, 1991). Chicana/Latina feminists have employed *testimonio* as a methodology in the field of education to illuminate the experiences and challenges of Chicana/Latina undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and board of trustee members. These scholars' use of *testimonio* uncovered the race, class, and gendered experiences of Chicanas/Latinas in the educational environment (Acosta-Salazar, 2014), as well as how Latinas/Chicanas negotiate conflict as they pursue their educational and professional aspirations (Burciaga, 2007; Navarrette García, 2014), resist systemic oppression such as sexism and racism (Pérez Huber, 2010; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012), and navigate chilly environments and structural barriers in academia through support from fellow Chicana/Latina scholars (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Espino et al., 2012; Saldaña, Castro-Villarreal, & Sosa, 2013; Sánchez & Ek, 2013).

A common theme across this prior research was the oppressive structures and challenges Latinas contend with along their educational and professional journeys and how they utilize strategies of resistance to navigate these challenges in their higher education experiences. Pérez Huber (2009) explained that scholars have used *testimonio* as a methodology to "document and/or theorize their own experiences of struggle, survival, and resistance, as well as that of others" (p. 644). Chicana/Latina feminism and a CFE stance have also guided scholars to the use of *testimonio* as a methodology in education research due to its focus on validating Chicana/Latina lived experiences as a source of inquiry (Delgado Bernal, 1998; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Drawing from a CFE perspective in the research process not only brings *testimonio* to life in educational research "but changes the process of *testimonio* from method to methodology by allowing for the co-construction of knowledge" between researcher and participants (Pérez Huber, 2010, pp. 71-72). *Testimonio* also allows for a critical race-gendered lens to qualitative research and challenges dominant ways of knowing by bringing stories that are silenced or remain untold to the forefront (Burciaga, 2007; Saldaña et al., 2013). Involving Chicana/Latina participants throughout the data collection and analysis processes provides an outlet for the co-construction of knowledge and a way to affirm Chicanas/Latinas as holders and producers of knowledge so they can shape how their *testimonios* are shared (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

While there are diverse methodologies that can be employed in educational research "*testimonio* continues to develop as a powerful methodological approach that uncovers systemic subordination of Chicanas/Latinas" (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012,

p. 392). In educational research, *testimonio* can expose both the oppression that persists in educational institutions as well as the powerful efforts Communities of Color draw from to challenge and transform oppressive environments (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). Using *testimonio* also recognizes that Latinas encompass multiple roles and multiple identities as Women of Color as they navigate, in this instance, the exclusionary environment of higher education (Sánchez & Ek, 2013). Employing *testimonio* in education research also involves recognizing that Latinas navigate, challenge, and negotiate traditional gender norms in higher education as they strive to carve out their rightful place as scholars and leaders while maintaining a sense of *compromiso* [commitment] to their families and communities (Saldaña et al., 2013).

Utilizing *testimonio* in particular strives to "avoid essentializing a Latina experience" by affirming how Latinas' diverse social identities, roles, and lived realities can shape their experiences and provides a way to privilege the voices of those who are historically marginalized (Espino et al., 2012, p. 445). *Testimonio* captures these lived experiences of oppressed and marginalized communities as a way to resist and challenge oppression in order to transform inequalities (Pérez Huber, 2010). While employing *testimonio* as a methodology is not limited to Chicana/Latina researchers' use alone, most of the growth in *testimonio* scholarship in the field of education is a result of research produced by Chicana/Latina scholars. I will now describe how *testimonio* has been employed as a methodology in educational research, as this prior scholarship has guided me in the way I employed *testimonio* in this study.

Employing *testimonio* as a methodology. Utilizing a *testimonio* methodology provides an outlet to validate and illuminate the experiential knowledge of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os and promote social justice (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Prior research utilizing a *testimonio* methodology to uncover the lived experiences and systemic oppression of Latinas in higher education has employed a variety of methods and strategies. While *testimonios* are frequently oral accounts such as interviews and dialogues, Chicana/Latina feminists have also rendered *testimonios* through short stories, poetry, autobiographical narratives, and/or written reflection (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The most common method that is used during the data collection process is semi-structured individual interviews to gather and bear witness to the *testimonio* of the participant (e.g., Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Burciaga, 2007; Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010). Employing a *testimonio* methodology also provides space for both the researcher and the participants to reflect upon what *testimonio* has meant to the group throughout the data collection and analysis process (Pérez Huber, 2010).

Although having a semi-structured interview protocol is a helpful resource, it is important that participants guide the conversation, so they can openly share their personal lived experiences and elicit natural responses throughout the research process (Burciaga, 2007; Navarrette García, 2014). For the researcher, this involves affirming what the participant chooses to share as truth, and not feeling the need to address all the semi-structured interview questions (Navarrette García, 2014). As such, individual interviews should resemble more of a *plática* [conversation] rather than a formal interview as the participant narrates her *testimonio* (Navarrette García,

2014). *Plática* involves having an open dialogue among participants while recognizing the multiple realities that are present as Chicanas/Latinas uncover their multiple identities and lived experiences (Espino et al., 2010).

Employing *testimonio* as a methodology urges researchers to provide participants with an opportunity to share their experiences to break past silence, recognizing that every word that they share is purposeful and important (Navarrette García, 2014). On the other hand, what the participants choose not to share is also purposeful and intentional, as all silences may not be broken. It is important to *dar respeto* [give respect] to the participants and what they choose to share with the researcher (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). The role of the researcher is not to determine truth or authenticity of all the events that the participant shares, but rather to explore and better understand the lived experiences and realities that participants are choosing to share (Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010).

By encouraging the participant to narrate her *testimonio* freely and guide the conversation, *testimonio* places the participant at the center of the research "in an effort to capture what *is* for the participant rather than what *seems to be* for the researcher" (Burciaga, 2007, p. 66). This is especially important since *testimonio* in its purest form involves an individual narrating their own *testimonio* (Beverley, 2008; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). One way to support Chicanas/Latinas in narrating their *testimonios* freely and authentically is to validate their use of code-switching, when applicable (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). When rendering *testimonios* in written form or describing the themes and findings that emerge from the participants' collective story, it is also important to use the language(s) used by the *testimoniadora*

[producer of the *testimonio*] to provide an authentic representation of her lived experiences, rather than privileging standard English (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

In terms of interview data collection procedures, participants can be interviewed between one and three times, depending on the focus of the research at hand as well as the demands and responsibilities the participants balance (Navarrette García, 2014). It is important to be mindful of the time commitment a researcher's data collection process calls for since participants will also be involved throughout the data analysis phase (Pérez Huber, 2010). A collaborative data analysis approach that is manageable while also providing a space of healing and empowerment for participants to come together with one another and share their *testimonios* is recommended (Pérez Huber, 2010). Collaborative data analysis also illustrates how employing *testimonio* as a methodology provides an outlet to present collective understandings of similar life experiences, including experiences contending with structural barriers (Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Navarrette García, 2014).

Collaborative data analysis in *testimonio* research often utilizes focus groups. For example, after individual *testimonio* interviews were completed, Acosta-Salazar (2014), Navarrette García (2014), and Pérez Huber (2010) provided a copy of the transcripts to their respective participants for editing, encouraged participants to reflect on their *testimonios*, and shared a summary of preliminary themes that emerged across their individual *testimonios*. These summaries included representative quotes and excerpts to illustrate preliminary findings. They then scheduled a focus group that resembled a *plática* to provide space for participants to

talk about their lived experiences in a communal setting (Navarrette García, 2014). In addition to sharing their *testimonios* with one another, a focus group also provided participants with an opportunity to share feedback on the extent to which the preliminary findings offered an authentic representation of their lived experiences (Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010). The researcher serves as a moderator rather than interviewer in this focus group *plática* by fostering direct interactions among the participants (Navarrette García, 2014).

When employing a *testimonio* methodology in education research, it is also important to reflect upon how the findings are reported since *testimonio* in its purest application involves an individual narrating their own *testimonio* in first-person through oral accounts or written form (Beverley, 2008). Scholars utilizing a *testimonio* methodology should strive to share about others' experiences in a way that is accessible and understood beyond the academy (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Saldaña et al., 2013). Before describing the findings from a study, some scholars offer a brief introduction of each participant's personal, educational, and professional backgrounds; weaving a narrative together with representative quotes from the participant's *testimonio* (Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Burciaga, 2007; Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010). While both first- and third-person writing have been utilized in *testimonio* research, Beverley (2004) adds that the use of "I" statements can help remind the reader that participants have a voice despite the struggles and challenges they face in their lives. Another way of employing a *testimonio* methodology involves participants rendering their *testimonio* in writing for a dialogue partner to read and respond to through a process of *reflexion* [reflection], as was the

case in Espino et al.'s (2012) research. In this study, emerging Chicana/Latina scholars shared their *testimonio* with a senior Chicana/Latina scholar in writing who would then read their *testimonio,* provide a response and share their own *testimonio* as well as words of affirmation and encouragement. This adds to the multitude of ways for Chicanas/Latinas to bear witness to a fellow Chicana/Latina's *testimonio* and provide a space for reflection and healing.

***Testimonio* Research Design**

I employed a *testimonio* research design that linked my methodology and Chicana feminist epistemology. Utilizing a *testimonio* research design ensured that I could use a collaborative approach, recognize Latinas' race-gendered experiences, and focus on affirming Latinas' lived experiences as a source of inquiry. Data collection for this study included completion of a demographic form and participation in an initial individual interview, virtual focus group, and follow-up interview. The initial interview provided me with an opportunity to bear witness to the participants' *testimonios*. The virtual focus group held via videoconferencing took place after the initial interview to build community among participants and provide a venue for collaborative data analysis, a core element of a *testimonio* research design. The follow-up interview was held after the virtual focus group to gather added context on participants' experiences in order to authentically (re)present their *testimonios*. Participants could opt-in to each of these different data collection pieces based on their interest and availability. Employing a *testimonio* research design offered a powerful tool to bear witness to participants' experiences of struggle and success beyond our personal realities (Pérez Huber, 2010).

I sought to honor the historical intent of *testimonio* research which involved individuals narrating their own *testimonio* with others (Beverley, 2008; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) by sharing each participant's *testimonio* in its entirety, preserving the spirit of each *testimonio* I had the privilege to hear. It was not my intent to speak on behalf of these women, but to authentically represent their personal and professional journeys. At the end of this chapter I discuss the participant sample and introduce each of the seven participants who engaged in this research (see pp. 137-146). Full participant *testimonios* are shared in Chapter Four and were developed directly from the transcripts as a way to honor the personal truths and lived experiences that participants shared with me.

Participant Criteria and Recruitment Procedures

I utilized purposeful sampling techniques to identify and recruit seven current or former Latina SSAOs. Purposeful sampling involves drawing from information-rich cases to provide in-depth information about an issue or topic that is central to the purpose of a study (Patton, 2002). I employed two forms of purposeful sampling strategies to recruit participants: (a) criterion sampling and (b) snowball sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). *Criterion sampling* involves selecting participants based on predetermined criteria (e.g., age, race). Participant criteria for this study consisted of racial/ethnic and gender identities, employment status, and number of years of professional experience. First, the participants should self-identify as Latina or Hispanic women. Second, they must hold current or former employment as a SSAO at a two-year or four-year college/university in the U.S. (e.g., dean of students, vice president for student affairs, vice president for student services). Third, participants should have worked a minimum of 10 years in the field of higher education/student

affairs administration, which would provide them with considerable experience in the profession (Hart, 2009). There were no criteria set for age, geographic location, institutional type, or any other identifiers as I sought to gather the *testimonios* of a diverse sample of Latina SSAOs.

Upon applying for and receiving approval from the University of Maryland Institutional Review Board (IRB), I proceeded to e-mail the chairs, co-chairs, and past chairs of Latina/o and women-related networks and knowledge communities from several professional associations including: the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the American Association for Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE; see Appendix B). NASPA's (2016) VPSA Census reported that there are 24 Hispanic women VPSAs in the U.S. registered as NASPA members and there are 12 Latina/Hispanic women SSAOs registered as ACPA members (A. Ponda, personal communication, January 18, 2017). Although not all Latina SSAOs may be members of NASPA or ACPA, these data illustrate the small pool from which I drew my sample.

Utilizing the above criteria, I had already identified one Latina SSAO who could serve as a potential participant through my involvement on the NASPA Escaleras Institute Assessment Team in 2015.[5] While a growing number of community college administrators are involved in ACPA and NASPA, I recognized that these associations have historically served as professional homes for

[5] The NASPA Escaleras Institute is a three-day institute designed for Latina/o student affairs professionals who aspire to senior-level student affairs officer roles by providing them with information about the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to advance. Current Latina/o SSAOs serve as Institute faculty to provide guidance and mentorship to participants.

administrators from four-year colleges/universities. Most Latina/o VPSAs are likely to work at community colleges, as 39% of VPSAs who identify as Hispanic serve in associate's degree-granting institutions (NASPA, 2016). As such, I also e-mailed members of the board of directors of the National Community College Hispanic Council (NCCHC) through the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC).

In addition to *criterion sampling*, this study benefited from employing *snowball sampling* techniques. *Snowball sampling* involves participants and colleagues from my social network referring other individuals to participate in the study (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016; Miles & Huberman, 1994). A snowball sampling strategy is beneficial to employ when the group under study is not readily identifiable and/or benefits from referrals for participants from key informants (Jones et al., 2014). A Latino male SSAO in my network connected me with a colleague in his network who was able to send out the call for participants to a statewide chief student services officer (CSSO) listserv. Participants were also recruited through social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn using a recruitment flyer similar to the letter that I sent to the leadership of these professional associations (see Appendix C). Since not all Latina SSAOs are involved in professional associations, utilizing snowball sampling and social media as additional recruitment techniques assisted me in diversifying the potential sample.

The recruitment letter and flyer for prospective participants included a description of the study, eligibility criteria, time commitment, and my contact information. Jones et al. (2014) emphasize that being clear about the expectations for

participation at the beginning of a study is a key element to building trust and rapport with participants. As such, I was transparent about the time commitment involved in participating in this research during the participant recruitment phase. When a potential participant contacted me to express interest in participating in the study, I sent them a link generated through Qualtrics that included a secure informed consent form that participants could sign electronically (see Appendix D). This secure informed consent form included an overview of the purpose and procedures of the study as well as potential risks, benefits, and information regarding confidentiality.

Throughout the recruitment process, I logged my points of contact with prospective participants who met the eligibility criteria in an electronic Excel database with their demographic information that I referred to throughout the research process. In follow-up communication with prospective participants, I also addressed any questions or concerns prospective participants had about participating. Nine individuals expressed interest in participating and seven of these individuals consented to participate.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study involved participants' completion of a demographic form and participation in an individual interview, virtual focus group, and follow-up interview throughout the data collection and analysis process. Participants had the opportunity to opt-in to each of these data collection pieces based on their availability and interest when completing the online consent form. Given the busy lives of SSAOs, I recognized early on that there may be participants that would like to participate in the study but could only participate in the first initial interview. I

did not want to deter participants from participating in the study because they could not commit to all the data collection pieces and wanted to affirm the level to which they were able to participate. A total of 13 hours of data was collected over the course of the study.

After the informed consent form was signed electronically and participants agreed to participate, they were then directed to provide their demographic information (see Appendix E). The purpose of collecting this demographic information was to learn more about the participants' backgrounds before conducting the individual interview and to ensure that they met the study criteria. This demographic form contained the following information: name, e-mail, preferred contact phone number, pseudonym, age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual identity, parent/guardian education levels, language(s) spoken, names of the professional associations they may be involved with, highest degree earned, a self-report of the number of years they have worked in higher education/student affairs, and a self-report of the number of years they have served as a SSAO.

This demographic form also asked participants to self-report their current relationship/marital status and if they have any children or other care-giving responsibilities because women SSAOs tend to experience challenges balancing familial and professional responsibilities (Renn & Hughes, 2004). This form provided participants with an opportunity to add any other social identities that are salient to them or information they would like to share. Some of the identities that participants disclosed included the following: Catholic, Christian, first-generation

college student, head of household, first born, daughter of undocumented immigrants, U.S. Marine veteran, and an introvert.

Given the busy lives Latina SSAOs lead, scheduling was the only challenge I experienced in my data collection and data analysis process. I tried to be adaptable and flexible throughout this process, centering on what was manageable for the participants even if it took a while to schedule individual interviews or the virtual focus group. Due to the busy schedules of Latina SSAOs, I also recruited participants for six weeks to allow more time for interested participants to follow-up and complete the consent form. A full timeline of the data collection and analysis processes are illustrated in Figure 2 (see p. 345).

Individual *testimonio* interview. After both the secure informed consent form and demographic form were completed, I then scheduled a 90-minute individual in-person interview or phone interview, depending on their geographic location. I scheduled interviews directly with the participants or with their support staff, depending on what they reported in the demographic form, and sent an interview confirmation e-mail to participants (see Appendix F). I conducted initial in-person interviews with three participants and four interviews were conducted by phone utilizing freeconferencecall.com, a secure password-protected free conference call service. An advantage of using freeconferencecall.com is the service's ability to digitally record calls as a mp3 audio file. While I sought to conduct as many interviews as possible in-person, interviewing via telephone helps overcome geographic constraints (Lechuga, 2012). I gathered information-rich data with participants during in-person and phone interviews by building rapport through an

empathetic approach and eliciting verbal cues (Lechuga, 2012). Qualitative phone interviews are especially useful when researching difficult to reach populations and/or populations who benefit from relative anonymity (Lechuga, 2012), such as Latina SSAOs. I intended to conduct two individual interviews with each participant: (a) an initial individual interview where they shared their *testimonio* with me, which I will describe below and (b) a follow-up individual interview after the virtual focus group, which I will discuss as part of the final data analysis phase later in this chapter. Initial individual interviews ranged from 56-97 minutes.

Before the start of each interview, I offered an overview of the study and procedures, informed the participant of confidentiality, and addressed any concerns or questions she had. During the initial individual interview, I utilized a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix G) to guide the sharing of participants' *testimonios* and thus the interview resembled more of a *plática* [conversation]. I did not ask participants to disclose any identifying information (e.g., names, title, institution) during the interviews. Questions from the interview protocol were generated from the literature review, conceptual framework, and prior *testimonio* research (Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Aschenbrenner, 2006; Burciaga, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Espino, 2008; Lopez, 2013; Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010; Yosso, 2005, 2006). The semi-structured interview protocol focused on better understanding Latina SSAOs' experiences by seeking to learn more about their personal and professional journeys, what led them to pursue a career in student affairs, what resources supported their pathways to the SSAO role, and what challenges and/or structural barriers, if any, they faced in their journeys. Through these questions, I sought to

uncover the knowledge, skills, and networks participants drew from in their careers that facilitated their journeys to senior student affairs leadership as well as in their daily experiences as a SSAO.

I piloted this semi-structured interview protocol with one aspiring Latina SSAO who served as an assistant dean of students in January 2017. After the pilot interview had concluded, I debriefed with the participant to get her feedback on the questions that I asked and about the flow of the questions. Based on the feedback I received, I edited, combined, moved around, added, and deleted questions to ensure that the questions were clear, and to determine flow and the approximate time needed for each interview.

Although I had a semi-structured interview protocol prepared to use in these individual *testimonio* interviews, I intended to have the participants guide the interview so they could openly share their lived experiences with me (Burciaga, 2007). During the interview, I asked participants follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, perceptions, and thoughts about their career journeys and lived experiences as senior-level student affairs leaders. While I planned to probe further for additional elaboration and context, I maintained sensitivity to what the participants shared with me to ensure that no harm was done during data collection since the discussion of certain topics may cause distress to participants as they reflected upon their present, past, and future experiences (Corbin & Morse, 2003). At the end of the interview, I asked each participant if there was anything she would like to share that she has not shared already.

Following the conclusion of each interview, I downloaded the mp3 audio file, saved each audio recording utilizing the participant's pseudonym, and stored the file using Box, an online storage cloud available to University of Maryland students, faculty, and staff, that is secure and password-protected. I then sent the audio file to rev.com, a transcription service, so that the recording was transcribed verbatim. Once the audio file was fully transcribed, I verified the transcript for accuracy to ensure reliability (Glesne, 2016). Five participants engaged in code-switching between English and Spanish as they shared their *testimonio* with me. Spanish translations were verified by a bilingual Latina doctoral graduate during this transcript verification phase. I then saved the final verified version of the transcript with the participant's pseudonym. This final verified version of the transcript was emailed to the participant for member checking to ensure accuracy (see Appendix H).

In this study, pseudonyms are used for people's names, cities, states, geographic location, colleges, and universities to protect the confidentiality of the participants. I also refrained from including personally identifying information about the participant's leadership position or specific professional involvement given the small number of Latina SSAOs in the U.S. I kept a running Excel document of the names and institutions I changed to pseudonyms to ensure that I did not use duplicate pseudonyms.

Building rapport. Since a *testimonio* research design calls for collaboration between the researcher and participants, building trust and rapport throughout the data collection and data analysis processes was especially important. *Testimonio* research seeks to break down the binary of researcher/researched and subject/object by

fostering trust and including the *testimoniadora* [producer of the *testimonio*] in how her lived experiences are represented (Blackwell, 2011). I intended to foster *confianza* [trust], *respeto* [respect], and *colaboración* [collaboration] throughout the research process, which the Latina Feminist Group (2001) described as key elements when bearing witness to the *testimonio* of a fellow Latina. It was also important to adopt a pedagogy of *convivencia* [of relating and co-existing] when listening to the *historias* [stories] and *testimonios* of Chicanas/Latinas, and affirming their ways of being (Villenas et al., 2006). Building rapport while drawing from a Chicana/Latina feminist epistemological lens also involved listening attentively as participants narrated their lived experiences of truth even if participants did not address the question(s) at hand (Navarrette García, 2014). Listening openly, fostering *confianza*, and being flexible not only showed my *respeto* for the participants' *testimonios*, but also allowed the interview itself to flow more conversationally (Navarrette García, 2014).

Building rapport in *testimonio* research also calls for the researcher to share information about her own lived experiences if it is prompted by the participant to elicit a shared vulnerability (Navarrette García, 2014). For example, during the interviews together, it was not uncommon for participants to ask me if I was interested in pursuing a career as a SSAO, how I came to select this research as my dissertation topic, or about my personal or academic background. A shared vulnerability "allows us to enter each other's lives in the research process and become motivated to overcome pain, trauma, or guilt; it engenders a solidarity that moves toward a collective effort of healing, empowerment, and resistance" (Calderón et al.,

2012, p. 529). I brought a shared vulnerability into the conversation, when appropriate, and ensured that my focus remained on the participants' experiences. I also maintained eye contact during in-person interviews (if applicable) and conveyed a genuine interest in learning more about their career pathways and experiences through the cadence and tone of my voice and by eliciting verbal affirmations (e.g., "mmhmm," "yes") for both in-person and phone interviews.

Data Analysis

In alignment with a CFE and my use of *testimonio* as a methodology, I included the participants throughout the data analysis process to gain insight on how their *testimonios* were shared and represented. Including participants in data analysis provides an opportunity for "Chicana [and Latina] participants…to be speaking subjects who take part in producing and validating knowledge" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 575). Since *testimonio* research can utilize a variety of data analysis approaches, I adapted the three-phase data analysis process utilized by Pérez Huber (2010), whose study was also positioned within a CFE, drew from CCW as a theoretical lens, and employed a *testimonio* methodological approach (see Figure 3 (p. 346). The three-phases of data analysis included (a) preliminary data analysis, (b) collaborative data analysis, and (c) final data analysis.

Preliminary data analysis. During the preliminary data analysis phase, Pérez Huber (2010) read through transcripts of the oral *testimonios* of her participants and began to create themes using a constant comparative approach (Malagon, Pérez Huber, & Velez, 2009). These themes were then utilized to develop reflection points to discuss in the collaborative data analysis phase. Preliminary analysis of the data in this study began after all initial interviews were conducted and all transcripts were

verified. Prior to beginning the coding process, I read each transcript in its entirety and developed a codebook on a Word document that included *a priori* codes derived from the conceptual framework and research questions guiding the study (Glesne, 2016). These *a priori* codes included the six forms of capital from Yosso's CCW model, *spiritual* capital (Pérez Huber, 2010), *experiential* capital (Navarrette García, 2014), resources supporting participants' career pathway, and challenges participants navigated. *A priori* codes help researchers make connections between findings from the study at hand and prior literature (Saldaña, 2009).

For this study, I conducted a preliminary analysis of the data by coding all verified transcripts line-by-line by hand to identify emerging themes across the participant sample. Line-by-line coding by hand is recommended for small-scale qualitative projects or any time researchers want to get closer to the data by circling, highlighting, or underlining text and adding notes in the margins (Saldaña, 2009). As I conducted this preliminary analysis I also documented *in vivo* codes that surfaced from the participants' *testimonios* as I read each transcript (Glesne, 2016). *In vivo* coding helps researchers utilize an inductive approach to coding and honor participants' voices by using their direct words and themes emerging from their *testimonios* to generate new codes (Saldaña, 2009). Some *in vivo* codes that were added throughout this preliminary data analysis phase include the role of siblings, self-efficacy, social justice commitment, resistance strategies, mentors, and Latina/o support networks.

After coding all transcripts by hand, I then utilized Google Sheets to document the forms of capital and themes that surfaced within each participant's

testimonio as a way to better understand Latina SSAOs' experiences and the resources and challenges that Latina SSAOs navigate. This assisted me in collapsing the codes into themes to illuminate and (re)present the different themes that surfaced across participants' *testimonios* (Josselson, 2011). Identifying preliminary themes involved conducting multiple readings of each transcript and these spreadsheets using a constant comparative approach to understand how the participants' *testimonios* connect to one another while affirming the diverse lived experiences that shape Latina SSAOs' career pathways.

Employing a constant comparative approach in research that draws from a framework influenced by Critical Race Theory (CRT) encourages a systematic yet flexible approach to ground the findings in the data itself while maintaining a commitment to dismantling oppressive conditions and empowering Communities of Color (Malagon et al., 2009). While employing a constant comparative approach is a key element of the data analysis process in grounded theory research, other types of qualitative methodologies can benefit from this approach by identifying themes that surface within and across participants' interviews and re-reading transcripts throughout the data analysis process to uncover themes (Fram, 2013). As a result of this constant comparative approach, seven preliminary themes were identified. I then used seven different color highlighters to highlight context and quotes within the transcripts that were connected to each preliminary theme. Through a constant comparative approach, I also drew from my cultural intuition as I engaged with the data and identified connections between newly analyzed data and previously analyzed data (Malagon et al., 2009).

Collaborative data analysis. In the collaborative data analysis phase Pérez Huber (2010) held two in-person focus groups where she provided the participants an opportunity to reflect upon the themes that emerged from her preliminary analysis of the data. Collaborative data analysis in this study involved gaining participant feedback on the preliminary themes through a virtual focus group via videoconferencing given the geographic diversity of the participants. Once I completed all individual *testimonio* interviews, verified all transcripts, and I began analyzing transcripts, I scheduled a 90-minute virtual focus group which took place in August 2017 with the five participants who consented to participate in this focus group. Two participants did not consent to participate in the focus group due to their busy schedules.

Once I conducted a preliminary analysis of all transcripts and identified preliminary themes, I created a document describing these emerging themes in preparation for the virtual focus group. These themes were illustrated through a description of each theme and a representative quote utilizing participant pseudonyms to represent each theme. To make this reader-friendly for participants, this document was made utilizing Microsoft PowerPoint, converted to an Adobe PDF document, and emailed to participants. All participants received an electronic copy of this document of preliminary themes two weeks before the videoconferencing focus group session (see Appendix I). I also sent a reminder e-mail to participants with the date/time and log-on information three days before the scheduled virtual focus group, encouraging them to review this document of preliminary themes (see Appendix J).

When scheduling the focus group, I knew there was the possibility that some of the participants may know one another, which is why maintaining confidentiality was important in this collaborative data analysis phase. Two participants had previous interactions with one another through their mutual involvement in NASPA and ended up collaborating on a NASPA proposal as a result of the session. Another two participants also had previous interactions with one another due to geographic proximity, while one participant had not previously met anyone in the group.

The collaborative data analysis phase was critical to better understanding the participants' collective story and identifying the themes that surfaced across the participant sample. The collaborative data analysis phase took place through a virtual focus group for 81-minutes utilizing Zoom, a free videoconferencing tool. Since I could not fully maintain participant anonymity during this focus group session, I communicated to all the participants at the start of the focus group how vital it is that anything discussed or shared during this session remain in confidence (Sullivan, 2012). During the focus group, I began by thanking the participants for their involvement in the study, described the purpose of this focus group as a form of collaborative data analysis, and reminded the participants that I would audio-record this session as outlined in the consent form (see Appendix K).

I opened the session by asking the participants to think about what they shared with me during our interview together and take a minute or two to introduce themselves and share a story or memory that resonated with them from their interview with the group. After everyone had the opportunity to share, I then asked the group, "Listening to the stories and memories of your *colegas* [colleagues] here,

what thoughts, feelings, or reactions come to mind?" This led to a great conversation among the participants as they shared common experiences such as serving as a role model and mentor to Latina/o professionals and students and the benefits they gained from fellow Latinas/os in their own journeys, especially Latina/o mentors and colleagues.

After the group had the opportunity to respond, I shared how I intend to present the findings and will be (re)storying their *testimonios* for the reader utilizing their transcripts to provide a rich, thick description of their personal and professional journeys. I explained to the participants that I plan to present their *testimonios* in a chronological way by sharing their: personal and family background, education experiences, pathway to student affairs, and experiences working in higher education/student affairs. I then provided a brief overview of each of the themes identified in my preliminary analysis of the data while showing the participants these themes on screen.

Next, I opened the space for personal reactions and feedback by asking the participants, "To what extent do these preliminary findings align with your own professional and personal pathways as a Latina SSAO?" I reminded the group that my intent was to provide an authentic representation of their lived experiences and asked them to share anything that came to mind, describe anything that called out to them, or add additional context that was important for me to consider. The participants' feedback and reactions helped to determine the themes that most resonated with their lived experiences both individually and as a collective (Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010). The small focus group size also

helped to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to share her reflections on her *testimonio* and the preliminary themes (Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010).

The participants agreed that these seven themes resonated with their lived experiences. Their conversations with one another and reactions helped me to understand the extent to which each theme was salient to these participants. The theme that sparked the most dialogue among participants was how they contended with structural barriers. They described a shared exhaustion at navigating these structural barriers throughout their careers and the importance of pushing through to resist these challenges to serve all students, especially underrepresented students. Additional themes that resonated among participants during the focus group session included the important role of family, the power of mentorship, a commitment to social justice and implementing transformative practices at their institutions, how they navigated structural barriers in their career paths, and the benefits they gained from a presence of Latinas/os in their professional journeys. The conversations during the focus group also flowed smoothly among participants with laughter, verbal affirmations, and words of encouragement. It was clear to me that the participants felt at home with one another and enjoyed the powerful and meaningful conversations, even if this was their first-time meeting anyone in the group.

While the collaborative data analysis phase was a valuable form of member checking to shape the findings from this research, it also offered an opportunity to foster a space of community and empowerment among five of the participants who consented to participate in this phase. It was my goal that the participants felt and

recognized that they are co-constructors of knowledge in this process, not only subjects whose *testimonios* I seek to collect. The participants felt comforted and inspired to know that "I'm not alone" (Connie), even though they are one of the few Latina SSAOs across the country. Valerie commented, "There's power in that collective experience," and this collaborative data analysis phase provided a venue for participants to share the experiences and memories that were most salient in their career pathways. Since participants received a copy of the preliminary themes before the virtual focus group, Selma shared, "I felt comfortable right away" knowing that they had common experiences and navigated similar challenges in their journeys. To close the focus group I asked the participants, "What was it like to connect with one another in this way?" The responses were overwhelmingly positive as participants shared:

> When I was reading about our family and about being an activist and the microaggressions and all the different topics that were covered here, I'm like, "Oh." I didn't feel so alone. It felt good to hear other women and knowing that we could all kind of share this (Connie).

> It's a lot of fun to meet people from outside the state across other higher education systems, and to know that we share these similar backgrounds or similar experiences, and that even though you know, like you just said, cognitively, we're not alone, and there's others, it's nice to hear from others and what those experiences have been and sharing that (Julia).

> It's pretty validating to hear other women from other states and institutions to reaffirm that what I'm experiencing over here is not something that's unique, you know. It's unfortunate, but it's also validating to know that we're all facing these challenges, but then we have that grit to work through it (Catherine).

> I liked knowing that there's others out there; we're not unicorns, you know? There are other Latinas in these roles, and one thing that I really appreciated learning about Molly's study is that we all identify as Mexicana, Chicana, we have those roots, because the narrative tends to be about, well, you know, the Mexican or Mexican-American population is the biggest in the U.S., and they're the least successful in higher ed, and now we can all say, "Really? Are you sure about that?" (Valerie)

> I heard lots of themes that Molly has captured that are part of our lived experience…I felt very comfortable right away, just being able to speak and to learn and listen. It's been fun. Thank you (Selma).

Immediately following the completion of the virtual focus group, I sent the audio file in for transcription and engaged in reflexive memoing of what was shared and my reactions and reflections to guide the final data analysis of the *testimonios*.

Final data analysis. In the final data analysis phase Pérez Huber (2010) combined findings and feedback from the preliminary and collaborative data analysis phases to inform her final analysis of the data. The final data analysis for this study drew from: the insight gained from the collaborative data analysis phase on the preliminary themes; the cultural intuition that both I and the participants brought throughout the research process; multiple readings of the transcripts and participant *testimonios*; and the additional context gained from individual follow-up interviews. Once the virtual focus group date/time was solidified, I scheduled four 60-minute individual follow-up interviews for September 2017 with the participants who consented to this phase within the two-week window following the focus group so that this experience would be fresh in participants' memories (see Appendix L). The purpose of this follow-up interview was to provide an opportunity for participants to share additional reactions or feedback on the preliminary findings and address any clarifying questions that I had from the initial individual interview (see Appendix M). Three follow-up interviews were conducted by phone and ranged from 44 to 54 minutes. One participant who consented to this phase was no longer able to participate in the follow-up due to time constraints as she needed to focus on the negative impact the overhaul of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) would have on the undocumented students at her institution.

After each follow-up interview, I added to the memo I created for each participant from the initial interview to document additional thoughts and reactions to the reflections and points of clarification the participants shared with me. I then revisited these memos, the transcripts, and participant *testimonios* during the final data analysis phase to determine the findings of this research and the themes that spanned across the participant sample. During this final data analysis phase I also began (re)storying participant *testimonios* utilizing transcripts collected across the three data collection phases to authentically illuminate each participant's lived experiences and personal realities (Navarrette García, 2014).

My act of (re)storying participant transcripts in this way was inspired by my desire to honor the historical intent of *testimonio* research of Chicanas/Latinas narrating their own *testimonios* (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Acosta-Salazar (2014) and Navarrette García (2014) also employed this approach as well in *testimonio* research in education to preserve the essence and power of each participant's journey. Since everything that a participant shares is purposeful (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001), I sought to share the participants' *testimonios* in their entirety to preserve their personal truths and lived experiences that I had the honor to bear witness to throughout the data collection process. After drafting each participant's *testimonio*, I then drafted a response to each *testimonio* to uplift salient themes within each individual *testimonio*. Before drafting responses to all participant *testimonios*, I drafted a pilot response and analysis of one participant *testimonio* in a way that highlighted the findings according to the CCW framework, inspired by Navarrette García (2014) and Horak's (2012) research that also utilized a CCW

framework. However, after drafting this pilot response I recognized that a thematic content analysis approach imposed a rigid structure to my analysis as I highlighted the forms of capital in Yosso's (2006) CCW model that were present in the participants' *testimonios* (e.g., *familial* capital, *social* capital) rather than the broader themes that were salient in each participant's personal and professional pathway.

As such, I revisited prior *testimonio* research in education to reflect upon how I could offer a stronger, authentic analysis of each *testimonio* as well as (re)present the findings that emerged across the participant collective. It was then that I recognized that the CCW model served as a foundation for my research design but did not need to serve as the organizing structure for how I (re)presented participants' *testimonios* and the findings from this research. Although all forms of capital were present within the participants' experiences, the segmenting of participants' experiences based on the forms of capital got in the way of (re)telling their stories. I sought to look beyond the forms of capital the participants possessed to fully understand the resources they benefited from in their career pathways and how they navigated challenges in their journeys to the SSAO role. I then decided to offer an analysis of each participant's *testimonio* written in third-person as a response to provide readers with an opportunity to understand the salient themes within each participant's *testimonio* before uncovering the themes that surfaced across the collective participant sample. Crafting the analysis in this way offered me an opportunity to uplift and honor the participants' individual *testimonios* and highlight the salient themes within each participant's distinct *testimonio*.

Before drafting each analysis response, I revisited my memos from throughout the data collection and analysis processes and read/re-read the participant *testimonios* multiple times while reflecting upon: (a) what experiences were salient for each participant when reading their *testimonio*, (b) what made each participant unique, and (c) what resources contributed to each participant's career pathway to the SSAO role. I drew from my cultural intuition when writing these responses (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and sought to avoid essentializing a Latina SSAO experience by illuminating the diversity of participants' journeys.

Through a constant comparative approach and multiple readings of participant *testimonios*, responses to each *testimonio*, transcripts, and memos from throughout all three data analysis phases, four central themes surfaced across the participant sample which are described in Chapter Five. A constant comparative approach also led me to recognize that the findings from this study centered around *how* Latina SSAOs navigated challenges in their career, not *what* the challenges are themselves that Latina SSAOs navigated which was already identified in existing research on Women of Color and Latina administrators. Figure 4 demonstrates how the findings and themes evolved throughout the three data analysis phases (see p. 347).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research involves taking measures to ensure credibility throughout the research process so that there is "confidence in the research findings" (Jones et al., 2014, p. 36). There were four different strategies that I employed to provide an authentic representation of Latina SSAOs' journeys. First, I employed member checking which involved gaining participant feedback to improve the validity and accuracy of the research (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016). I engaged

in two forms of member checking with the participants by: (a) having each participant review and edit their verified interview transcript and (b) facilitating a focus group where participants could share their insight and reactions to the preliminary findings. During the follow-up interview, participants provided added context on particular experiences and/or individuals in their journey to further contextualize their *testimonios* and had the opportunity to offer further feedback on the preliminary findings to ensure that their personal and professional journeys are presented authentically. Although participants did not offer additional feedback on the preliminary findings, this added context was helping in better understanding their experiences.

Second, to address concerns of validity, I engaged in reflexive memoing throughout the data collection and analysis processes as an outlet to write down my reflections and immediate reactions throughout the research process (Creswell, 2013; Jones et al., 2014). As I coded the transcripts, I created a memo for each participant's *testimonio* to complement the reflexive memoing that I conducted throughout the research process. These memos documented my reflections, reactions, biases, and anything that comes to mind relating to the research study and the participants' experiences as I analyzed the data (Glesne, 2016; Jones et al., 2014). Memoing also helped me to document connections that I saw between participants' *testimonios* and my coding process and coding choices (Saldaña, 2009).

Third, I documented every aspect of the research process as a form of an audit trail, which involves saving all documents related to one's research (Glesne, 2016). This audit trail included my participant contact log, memos, and other records so

others could replicate or adapt this study (Glesne, 2016). Finally, in addition to member checking and reflexive memoing, I engaged in peer debriefing with a current Latina administrator who now serves in a SSAO role to obtain external feedback on my work (Glesne, 2016). This is the same individual with whom I tested my interview protocol in January 2017. While I engaged in collaborative data analysis with the participants, I recognized the value in gaining additional insight and input about my research process from an individual who is familiar with Latina SSAOs' experiences and journeys but is not actively involved and invested in the research.

Introduction to the Participants

Describing individual participants' demographic information in great detail could potentially reveal the identity of one or more of the participants in this study. Subsequently, select demographic information about the seven Latina SSAOs in this study are provided in frequency or ranges to protect participant confidentiality (see Table 1 on p. 342). According to Tull and Miller (2009), the pathway to the SSAO position takes an average of 25.52 years, nine full-time positions, a doctoral degree, and at least one move between colleges/universities. However, it took the participants in this study an average of 21.42 years, four full-time positions, a doctoral degree, and one to four moves between colleges/universities before attaining a SSAO role, illustrating the diverse paths to senior student affairs leadership. Four of the participants currently serve as SSAOs and three formerly held this role. Participants held a range of titles such as vice president of student affairs, vice president of student services, vice president of student development services, and dean of students. Participants had a range of 22-36 years of experience working in the field of higher education/student affairs, with an average of 27 years. The

combined higher education and student affairs work experience for this group of participants is 190 years!

All participants worked within the same state throughout their higher education careers, in NASPA regions III, IV-east, IV-west, and VI (see Figure 5 on p. 348). One participant serves at a four-year college/university and six participants serve at a community college. Participants held an average number of four positions in higher education/student affairs before serving as a SSAO with a range of 3-7 positions. Most SSAOs started their career in student affairs in residence life (Tull & Miller, 2009), which was not the case for the participants in this study. Only one participant began her student affairs career in residence life and she was also the only participant to work in this area of student affairs/student services. Participants began their higher education careers in the areas of: admissions, academic program support, financial aid, residence life, student services, and the professoriate. Three participants also pursued careers outside of the college/university environment before finding their way to a career in student affairs. Once working in the higher education setting, participants then attained additional roles across student and academic affairs throughout their career pathways (e.g., admissions, academic advising, academic support centers, first-generation student support programs, grant-funded programs), holding the title of assistant/associate dean of students or dean of students before attaining a SSAO role.

While 78% of the SSAO participants in Tull and Miller's (2009) study completed their doctorate part-time, all but one participant in the study completed her doctorate part-time. Additionally, 75% of CSAO participants who completed a

doctorate in Wesaw and Sponsler's (2014) research completed their Ph.D./Ed.D. in education or higher education compared to all participants in this study who completed their Ph.D./Ed.D. in the education field. Congruent with Tull and Miller's (2009) findings, participants' levels of involvement in professional associations also varied with one participant reporting not being involved in any associations to most participants being actively involved (e.g., taking on a leadership role, presenting at conferences). Twenty-two percent of CSAO participants in Wesaw and Sponsler's (2014) research also reported a desire to serve as a college/university president. Three of the seven participants in this study described possessing this aspiration, an aspiration fostered by their drive to make a difference in students' lives and the presence of Latina president role models in their journey.

The seven participants in this study range in age between 44- and 64 years old and the average age of the participants is 53 years old. All participants identified as female, heterosexual, and described their hometown as within the U.S. All participants are also of Mexican descent, two of whom were born in Mexico and came to the U.S. as children. Six of the participants also identified as first-generation college students with parental education levels ranging from a 1st-grade education to a bachelor's degree across the sample. Below is a brief description of each participant's background that were written based on participants' demographic information and interview transcripts. These participant profiles offer a glimpse into each participant's background before their full *testimonios* are shared in Chapter Four.

Catherine

Catherine was raised by a single mother and is the oldest of four daughters. She identifies as Chicana, grew up low-income, and is a first-generation college student. All her sisters attended college, and her mother later completed her bachelor's degree. When Catherine worked in admissions, her second full-time role in student affairs, she supported her mother's bachelor's degree completion by reviewing her community college transcript to determine how many courses she would have remaining to complete a bachelor's degree. Catherine was very involved on-campus as an undergraduate student. She was employed as a work-study student in the outreach office, participated in a summer bridge program, was involved in a sorority, and became involved in Latina/o activism after serving as a facilitator for a Latino Youth Institute that promotes the leadership development and college access of middle and high school youth. Catherine completed her bachelor's degree in psychology and was unsure of what to do after graduation. Through her connection with an assistant vice president, she secured an entry-level position in residence life at her alma mater and then secured a role in admissions and outreach so she could pursue a master's degree in counseling.

Catherine's master's degree experiences confirmed her desire to remain in higher education rather than become a high school counselor. Catherine had a natural inclination towards research, and one of her mentors encouraged her to pursue a Ph.D. As Catherine was finishing her Ph.D. in education, she obtained a new role as an associate dean at a community college given the larger presence of Latina/o students in this setting and her commitment to supporting Latinas/os. After five years, Catherine became the associate vice president, and then a new president

opened the chief student services officer role. Catherine applied and was then selected to become the vice president. She enjoys her role as VP and plans to become a college president.

Connie

Connie described growing up middle class in the presence of strong, passionate women, her mother, grandmother, and aunts. Her uncle, her mother's brother, played a critical role in her educational pathway and gave her advice on how to navigate structural barriers. Connie began her college journey at a community college, and thanks to the support of mentors and a drive to succeed, she transferred and completed her bachelor's degree in sociology. Connie then worked part-time as an academic advisor at her undergraduate alma mater while pursuing a master's degree in sociology to achieve her goal of entering the professoriate. However, as Connie was completing her master's degree, a friend contacted her about a role as an admissions counselor/coordinator for multicultural recruitment. Connie's friend encouraged her to apply for this position out of a desire and need to have underrepresented minority candidates for this role. Although she was heavily involved on-campus as an undergraduate student: working on-campus, serving as a chapter founder of a new Latina sorority, and involved in Latina/o efforts and student organizations, it was her full-time role in admissions that led Connie to pursue a career in higher education and student affairs.

This first work experience in higher education led her to pursue other positions as well as a doctorate in community college leadership, nurturing her aspirations to serve as a CSAO. While serving as dean of students, a new president was selected who did not see the value in a dean of students role and eliminated her

role as CSAO along with several other roles. Connie then became an associate dean of academic affairs and teaches as an adjunct faculty member in sociology. However, given her passion and commitment to serving students, she is currently looking to return to a senior-level role in student affairs. Once her children are in college, she plans to pursue a community college presidency.

Coureck

Coureck's father immigrated from Mexico to the U.S. and completed a first-grade education while her mother was born in the U.S. and dropped out of high school in the 9th grade. Education was a high priority in Coureck's family and was viewed as a way to positively impact life outcomes. Coureck has eight siblings and her older sisters provided her with valuable knowledge about applying to college and financial aid. While in college, Coureck took over her sisters' leadership roles in MEChA, a Chicana/o student organization, and completed a bachelor's degree in business. She also completed her master's degree in education. Coureck's background in education led her to begin her career journey as an administrator with Head Start and community nonprofits, focusing her efforts on early childhood education, parent engagement, and community empowerment programming.

Through these non-profit work experiences, Coureck gained valuable training, teaching, and programming skills. Her experiences in training and teaching led her to pursue a role as a faculty member in education at a community college and later as department chair. After serving as the department chair for six years, Coureck was released from her duties part-time to develop an off-site dual enrollment program and engage in grant writing to promote college access in the local community. As a result of her experiences developing and implementing student programs, Coureck was

encouraged to apply for the dean of students position, and after serving a year and a half in that position, she then applied for and was selected as the chief student services officer (CSSO). Although Coureck has had a challenging experience as the CSSO, her commitment to equity and access keeps her motivated. She believes that she can make a difference in students' lives.

Julia

Julia's parents were born in Mexico and she is the sixth of eight children. Her parents moved to the U.S. after her three eldest siblings were born. Julia described growing up low-income and how financial aid made college a reality for her. Julia began her higher education journey in a community college, following in her sister's footsteps, and then transferred to pursue a bachelor's degree in speech communications because of her desire to help her sister who is deaf. Although her sister did not complete her degree, Julia completed her degree, and because of her strong academic performance she was invited to the president and vice president of student affairs homes for receptions. These visits connected her to administrators who exposed her to a career in student affairs. Although she pursued a master's degree in communication so she could go on to teach the deaf, as she was finishing her master's degree she realized she wanted to make a shift and pursue a career in higher education.

Julia's connection with Chicana/o doctoral students in higher education administration also exposed her to a career in student affairs. While she intended to pursue a Ph.D. in communications so she could become a faculty member, she pursued a doctorate in higher education. Julia's doctoral research experiences also contributed to her desire to work in the community college setting since this is where

many Latina/o student begin their higher education journeys. Upon completing her Ph.D., the president offered her an administrative internship role in the president's office to provide her with higher education work experience. During this time, Julia also took a course in the law school which led her to pursue a JD, which later served as an asset when she was a VP. Although it took her nine years to obtain a role in the community college setting, she never gave up. Through the support of her dissertation chair, Julia secured a director-level role which then transitioned into a dean of students role which she stayed in for 20 years before changing positions to pursue a vice presidency at another institution. Julia recently retired and plans to continue her involvement in professional associations. Julia has made an impact on the profession through her leadership, service, and mentorship, especially to Latina/o professionals.

Maria

Maria's parents were born in Mexico and came to the U.S. when she was eight years old to provide her and her sister with better life opportunities. After graduating from high school, Maria held a variety of roles to support her family such as waitress, nurse's assistant, receptionist, and phlebotomist. Maria found her way to a career in student affairs when she took on a temporary role in undergraduate admissions that led to a permanent role at a new university that was opening. When she was not able to advance, Maria decided to attend community college. She then transferred to the university where she was employed to complete a bachelor's degree in English.

Maria also completed a master's in educational counseling that provided her with the credentials needed to secure a counseling position, and a master's in business administration with an emphasis in management that she pursued when beginning her

first supervisory role. She also completed her Ph.D. in leadership studies while working full-time in academic affairs. Maria was always open to taking on new career opportunities and interim roles. For example, she served as interim associate vice president (AVP) of student academic support, followed by AVP of enrollment management, and was later nominated for the interim vice president role which led her to a permanent VP position. Maria is not sure about her future career trajectory, but she loves her role as VP and supporting students.

Selma

Selma was born in Mexico and her mom brought her and her younger sister to the U.S. as toddlers. Due to financial constraints, Selma and her younger sister went back to Mexico. After completing through third-grade in Mexico, Selma's mother was in a better place financially and Selma and her sister returned to the U.S. Once back in the U.S., Selma picked up English quickly. After high school, Selma attended the local university. Although she had interests in studying psychology, she declared a major in biology because her stepfather advised her to pursue a career as a doctor. While Selma did well academically her first year in college, her second year was challenging, and she was dismissed from the university. However, Selma's commitment to complete her degree remained unwavering. After being dismissed, Selma joined the Marines.

During her time in the Marines, Selma was able to pursue a bachelor's degree in psychology. Although Selma planned to stay in the Marines for 20 years and retire, she chose to leave the Marines upon receiving a notice to serve in Japan on unaccompanied orders rather than risk losing custody of her son. She completed her bachelor's degree shortly after leaving the Marines while working full-time in higher

education. Given her psychology interests, Selma intended to pursue a career as a therapist until she interned with a Latino student support program when completing her master's degree in counseling. This internship experience sparked her interest in serving in the community college setting and solidified her commitment to work in higher education/student affairs. Selma's passion for serving underrepresented students led her to pursue roles in counseling and student services where she should support Latina/o, first-generation, and low-income students. These positions also prepared her to pursue the dean of students role and later the CSSO role. A year after serving as the dean of students, Selma pursued a doctorate in community college leadership from the same institution where she was once academically dismissed from as a sophomore. While Selma currently serves as the CSSO, she aspires to pursue a community college presidency.

Valerie

Valerie has two younger sisters and is close to her family. She lived in several states throughout her childhood as her family relocated so her father could pursue diverse career opportunities in education. Valerie began her college journey at one university and then transferred after her parents' suggestion to stay geographically close to them. Valerie completed her bachelor's degree in psychology after exploring communication, elementary education, and nutrition. During her undergraduate years, Valerie worked in financial aid as a work-study student and served as an orientation leader and peer advisor. These undergraduate experiences led her to connect with student affairs professionals who guided her to a career in student affairs. Valerie secured her first full-time role in higher education/student affairs as a

financial aid counselor at her alma mater 18 months after graduation, which led her to other positions along the way in TRiO and student/academic affairs.

When Valerie was no longer able to attain advanced roles, she pursued a master's degree in education supervision, administration, and curriculum development from the institution where she worked full-time. Valerie later went on to pursue her doctorate in education and changed positions to pursue a research-based role with her dissertation advisor/chair serving as her supervisor. Although she is a second-generation college student, she is the first in her immediate family to complete a Ph.D. Before serving as a CSAO, Valerie served as a dean providing leadership to the areas of outreach, student success, and recruitment. Valerie recently left her role as a CSAO to pursue a role as a campus vice president, which allows her to utilize her skills in both student and academic affairs while harnessing her entrepreneurial, creative, and collaborative interests.

Conclusion

In addition to discussing the use of *testimonio* as the methodology for this study, in Chapter Three I described the data collection process that I employed. I conducted a 90-minute individual oral *testimonio* interview with seven participants, a follow-up 90-minute videoconferencing focus group to provide a venue for five participants to share feedback on my preliminary analysis of the data, and a follow-up 60-minute individual interview with three participants. I employed a three-phase data analysis process to collaborate with the Latina SSAO participants and foster community among the group as I (re)presented their *testimonios*. To ensure trustworthiness of the data I also engaged in member checking, memoing, peer debriefing, and maintained an audit trail.

I utilized *testimonio* as a methodology to uncover the lived experiences of Latina SSAOs by drawing from our collective cultural intuition as Latinas/Chicanas and calling attention to the structural barriers that can impact Latina leaders' experiences in higher education. Through employing a *testimonio* methodology I provided a rich description of Latinas' journeys to senior student affairs leadership by affirming their lived experiences as truth, recognizing the impact systemic oppression such as racism and sexism can have on their journeys, and uncovering their untold stories (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Pérez Huber, 2010). While I drew from prior education research as a guide for how a *testimonio* methodology can illuminate the experiences of Latinas in educational settings, this study was the first to apply this methodology to understand the experiences of Latina administrators in higher education and serves as the first study to focus explicitly on Latina SSAOs' experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANT TESTIMONIOS

The purpose of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) in U.S. higher education. As such, the focus of this chapter is to share the *testimonios* of the seven participants and discuss the salient themes that emerged from their individual *testimonios* before discussing the findings that emerged across the participant sample in Chapter Five. Participant *testimonios* are presented in this chapter in chronological sequence by (a) personal and family background, (b) educational journey, (c) pathway to student affairs, (d) professional experiences in student affairs/higher education, and (e) closing thoughts and advice. Given the participants' diverse pathways, each participant *testimonio* will vary based on what she shared and may not include context on all five of these areas. Unique sub-headings are also included based on what participants shared. I sought to offer a rich, thick description of participants' personal and professional pathways by (re)telling their *testimonios* in first person using their own words from the transcripts to maintain authenticity and honor the voices and experiences of these current/former Latina SSAOs. Everything a participant shared was intentional just as what she chose not to share was also purposeful (Beverley, 2004; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Thus, I sought to (re)share participants' *testimonios* in their entirety to preserve the power and authenticity of the lived experiences that were shared, rather than select excerpts or portions of their *testimonios*. Providing complete *testimonios* offers a holistic view of the participants' experiences exposing their challenges, successes, and journeys.

Slight adjustments were made to these *testimonios* to provide a concise description of their experiences along their personal and professional pathways.

Some words have been added or removed to ensure the flow of writing, increase clarity, and reduce repetition. Pseudonyms are indicated in brackets throughout the *testimonios* to limit identifying information. After each participant's pseudonym, I also provide a quote from the participant's *testimonio* that can serve as advice to aspiring Latina SSAOs. Following each participant's *testimonio*, I offer my response to uplift the participants' individual journeys and highlight the salient themes that surfaced within each participant's *testimonio*. Participant *testimonios* are written in single-spaced text, while my response and analysis is double-spaced to indicate a distinction between the participant's voice and the analysis of each *testimonio*. The participant *testimonios* and my responses are ordered based on the number of years participants have worked in higher education and student affairs from least to most using the self-reported data participants disclosed in their demographic form.

Throughout the *testimonios*, participants described a range of experiences such as how their family upbringing shaped their educational aspirations and contributed to their commitment to social justice in their personal and professional journeys. The intersectionality of class, race, gender, and age was also evident in the participants' *testimonios* as they discussed their experiences navigating structural barriers along their career pathways. These *testimonios* and my response to each *testimonio* offer a foundation for the four overarching themes that surfaced across the participant sample that I will describe in Chapter Five.

Catherine

"When you feel nurtured, you're a better servant to the students."

Personal and Family Background

I consider myself Chicana because I'm historically aware and politically active. I was raised by a single mom. I'm the eldest of four girls. I'm first in my family to go to college although not the last one. All my sisters went, earned their degrees and my mom also returned to college. I think my mom finished college maybe 12 years ago. This is when she was being rehabilitated to take a different kind of job because she was injured at her previous employer. So in the process, I noticed that her rehabilitation counselor was providing her with an opportunity to get a minimum wage job. I knew my mom went to a community college when I was in high school. So I just said, "Mom, give me your transcripts so I can review them and let you know how close you are to getting a bachelor's degree." I invited her to move in with me because I live right by [Autumn University] and so she could go to school and just finish her degree and use her rehab money towards that rather than being a medical biller. So now, my mom is an admissions counselor for student veterans which is better suited for her and her talents. She guided us all through college to make sure we went.

I didn't really think it was possible to go college because we struggled so much financially, I mean just for bare necessities, food, electricity, I could feel the strain of poverty on my family. When my mom was like, "You're going to go to college," in my head I always thought, "No, we can't afford it." However, my mom's counselor from a support program for underrepresented and first-generation students told my mom what I needed to do in order to go to college. This counselor said, "Catherine, there's going to be a representative from [Autumn University] coming, you should sign up to see that person." I did. I signed up and it seemed like everything that I mentioned to that representative they helped me with. I didn't have the application fee. I was missing the right math class. My GPA and my SAT score didn't match. I failed my second semester of lab science. So I was just telling the woman, "Here's all the reasons why I can't go." Then she had a form to fill out for every reason that I gave. I didn't have the money, there was a fee waiver. I didn't have all of the requirements, she showed me a program at [Autumn] that I could apply to be a part of. I just needed to fill out four forms for that and get two letters of recommendation and be interviewed.

So my mom's counselor told her, "Well, just have Catherine do all of those things and follow through." My mom made sure I followed through and I did that. I remember even my grandma saying in Spanish, "*Mija, porque vas tan lejos*? [My girl, why are you going so far?]" I lived about an hour away from the university. My family was too far because I was the first one out of the 10 brothers and sisters my mom had and all of my cousins to go away for college. Myself and my cousin were the ones starting college. My grandma said, "*Porque no puedes quedar aqui como tu prima*? [Why can't you stay here like your cousin?]" I remember, I said, "Grandma, talk to my mom. She's forcing me to go. I have no choice." It really felt like I had no choice. My mom said, "If you want to have a different life, a better life where you don't have to struggle, then you have to go." I remember saying, "Mom, I'm just going to help you with the girls." She said, "You know what you'll help me more in

the long run by going now than staying and helping me every day." I was like, "Maybe." It was true. I went and it was great.

Educational Journey

In college I was very active in a traditional sorority. I mean, I didn't see people in my own family go to college but I did see what people did when they went to college on television. I remember a TV show that was popular at that time called *Beverly Hills 90210*. The characters in that show went away to college, what they said they did is joined a sorority or fraternity. I was like, "Well." I was a joiner and a leader. In high school, I was captain of the cheerleading squad for four years, in mock trial for two years. You know, I was an associated student body officer. I was involved in plays in my ninth-grade year. In my senior year I was definitely somebody who liked to be involved in school activities. When I went to [Autumn University], the [First-Generation Support Program (FGSP)] has a summer bridge program and they tell you all these things like, "People who live in the residence halls have a higher GPA and are more likely to complete. If you join clubs and organizations, you're more likely to like college." Our particular orientation leader, she was involved in a sorority. So me and my friends from high school, we checked it out and then we liked a different sorority. So we all pledged to that sorority, all five of us from my town.

I would say I was involved with the sorority for four years and during the summer, I would always work as a work-study student in the summer in outreach services doing student tours or helping with the kids that were signing up for college. One day during the summer after my fourth year at [Autumn], my friend [Roberto] said, "Hey Catherine, I'm really shorthanded for this [Latino Youth Institute]." He's like, "If you could come up, that would really help me out. We're in a bind. We need a group leader for a group of 10 kids." I said, "If you ask our boss if I could work there and she could pay me my hours if I go work there instead of being in the office then yeah, I'll do it." He did. He went and asked her and she said, "Sure, that's not a problem." He just told me, "Show up at the museum, look for a man in a wheelchair, his name is Dr. [Lozano] and they'll tell you who your *familia* [family] is." [Roberto] would already be up there and I was like, "Okay." It was at that institute that I heard a speaker. His name was [Juan Diaz]. [Juan] was a counselor and a history teacher here in a neighboring county.

Becoming an activist for the Latina/o community. [Juan] talked about the injustices for Chicanos and Latinos in our country and how much we have contributed throughout history but how it's never in our courses and not in our textbooks. It's kind of this hidden information. It was really thought-provoking, empowering and emotional. I remember, I went up to him afterwards and I said, "Excuse me [Mr. Diaz], would you happen to have a bibliography or a reference sheet for any of the information you mentioned in your speech?" He said, "Yes *senorita* [Miss]. I do." He pulled out…a folder of materials for himself as the speaker, but he pulled it out and he gave it to me. It was three pages full of citations of books and

articles. I immediately started crying because I've gone through 12 years of K-12 and four years of undergrad. I could have graduated without ever knowing any of that information about our people and our community. I was about to head into my fifth year as an undergrad. I was extending because I didn't know what I was going to do after I finished my bachelor's in psychology. So I thought that fifth year, I needed to add a minor so I had more time to figure out what I was going to do.

I stayed involved with the [Latino Youth Institute] since that one summer I was involved as an undergrad. I remember Dr. [Lozano] asked me, "Are you enjoying yourself, Catherine? I know you're [Roberto's] friend, are you having fun?" I said, "I am," and he said, "What do you think? Do you have feedback about the program? You're new here." Like I said, I was already an activist at that time, and I remember telling him, "There's one thing I noticed. The majority of the participants are female yet all of the workshop presenters, the keynote speaker, they're all male." So I think that impacts the young women and not in a good way. I said, "No actually, when the speakers asked for volunteers to raise their hand and give answers to questions, usually it's the young boys that are called on." He said, "No, that's not true." I said, "No, it is true." I was taking little checkmarks. I was just marking down who answered questions, how many girls and how many boys eventually were called on. I showed him my notebook and the whole day is full of workshops, that's the program. He was like, "I didn't know." So he told me back at campus, he said, "If you want to help change things, we're going to need you to be involved and help plan and be a speaker." I was like, "Okay." I did.

I was a changed person immediately after that experience. I just knew I had to try and help and because to me, it felt like there was some kind of systemic agenda where basically our country wanted to prevent us from knowing this specific information about our community. Because if we know it then we're going to feel that pride for our specific culture and heritage and the whole intention of our country was this melting pot where you buy into one community's agenda. After attending this institute, I said, "I'm going to change the focus of my leadership." So I returned to the campus. I remember the spring prior to that summer, I was awarded the Greek Woman of the Year award for being on the Panhellenic Council which is this body of all the sorority representatives. I was already an activist at the time. The reason I got that award is because I led a petition against this fraternity who had a t-shirt of this woman who was straddling a keg of beer. I was already an aware person and somebody who did something when I saw an injustice. I would say that the [Juan Diaz] experience awakened my activism towards our community. So I returned to the campus. I let my sorority know that I was going to play a supporting role and not lead recruitment that year.

I remember I just was like, "You know what, I could call all the Latino fraternity and sororities," and by that time we had them, "and clubs and organizations to a meeting so we could just see what we can do together." At the time, there were three propositions in the state aimed at our community. One proposition would deny basic medical, health and education rights to undocumented people, but it was really

directed at all Latinos. Another proposition was abolishing affirmative action. The third proposition was abolishing bilingual education. So I knew if we had these issues to focus on, you just put out a call to MEChA[6] and to a Latina sorority on-campus. I knew some people in the Latina sorority because of my cousin who transferred from the community college to [Autumn University] and she needed a place to live. I let her live with us. Anyways, I just called the Latino Business Student Association, the Latina/o Greek organizations, the Hispanic Women's Council, the Spanish Club and MEChA and just said, "We should try and organize something because this is wrong, these propositions." So we formed the Chicano Coalition and we created a charter and our first activity was a march against the proposition aimed at denying basic medical, health and education rights to undocumented people. We marched from a local park to city hall and did a demonstration and because I had made a lot of connections as a sorority leader, the associate vice president (AVP) at [Autumn University] knew me.

So when the AVP found out about the march and he learned I was organizing it, he called me in as an ally rather than a scared administrator of this you know rogue group that can create a lot of problems for the university. He said how could he be supportive of this effort. I said, "We need t-shirts. We want to host an open mic at [Autumn University]." I went back to the group and said, "What else should we get?" They're all like, "We should have security." The university contacted the local PD and got them to provide escort service. So he became a great supporter to the effort which helped me trust him even more. When I wanted to attend a [Chicano-Latino-related conference] that I learned about that happened once a year, I needed money to go. I went to the AVP and said, "It would really be awesome if I could find funding to go to this," and he said, "Yeah, I'll pay for that. You just have to come back afterwards and let me know what you learned and how it went." So I did that. I can't remember who told me about it. I think when I was extending for that one year I took Chicano poetry, Chicano literature and one of those professors told me about the conference.

Pathway to Student Affairs

I would say that my path to work in student affairs was not intentional. After I returned from the conference, the AVP said, "What are you doing after you graduate?" I said, "I really don't know. I'm praying about it right now. I might stay and get a teaching credential but I'm not sure." He said, "Have you considered going into student affairs?" I said, "No, what is that?" He said, "It's like the job I do." I said, "I never thought about that." He said, "Why don't you do a couple of interviews of people in roles here at [Autumn University]. They're going to be leaving. They recently told me they took other jobs and so I'll have two vacancies and it would be great to have you onboard." He said, "You could pick between the two jobs." I said, "Which jobs?" It was a coordinator of Greek life or coordinator of residence life, the residence halls. I did what he said, I went and did some research, interviewed the

[6] Movimiento Estudiantil Chicanx de Aztlán (MEChA) is a student-led organization on college/university campuses that promotes Chicana/o/x culture, empowerment, history, political and community engagement (MEChA, 2017).

women in the roles. I thought, I've already done four years of the Greek system there and there's a lot of drama that happens in fraternities and sororities so I thought maybe I'll try housing. I had never been an RA, it would be totally brand new for me.

The woman in the role, her name was [Elizabeth]. When I interviewed her I learned she was a woman of God, she had a lot of faith. She used God to direct her decision-making and to just be this really strong leader. That appealed to me a lot because God also has informed my leadership, praying and surrendering, having faith. I know a lot of times when people, especially in higher ed, when you're surrounded by intellectuals, sometimes they intellectualize faith…and then religion can be confining. So sometimes you don't find that in higher ed. I found that in her. I thought yeah, I could do this job. She said she was going to be leaving to go lead another program on campus so she would be around to provide mentoring and she did.

Pursuing graduate education. So I did that job for three years and then I would say after one of my residents, there were a few incidents but one of my residents, she attempted suicide twice. One young man I remember, he was in such pain coming out as a gay man, and he was being bullied by some of the residents. I remember listening to him as he was you know coming to terms with his own sexual identity and how painful that was. He even said, "Why would God create me like this if I'm being created just to go straight to hell after?" There were so many issues coming at me, suicide, sexual identity, crisis, bullying, intolerance and I felt like I needed skills to be able to really effectively serve students in that way. So I started looking into a master's degree of counseling. I realized that in order to do this program which was 72 units and several hundred hours of field work, I couldn't continue to work in housing because it takes over your life. So I started to look for other jobs on campus and I found one as a recruiter in outreach services. That's where I had done my work study. I applied and I got that job and it was really great. It worked out well with my program because I would get out of work at 5 p.m. and the classes didn't start until 6 p.m., 6 to 10 p.m., two or three nights a week. So that's how I got into student services and stayed with it because I was in housing for three years and then I was in admissions and outreach for 10 years. I moved up at [Autumn University]. I was a recruiter, enrollment coordinator then coordinator of first-time freshmen admissions and recruitment, and then associate director of admissions and recruitment.

Do you know what changed my mind about my counseling degree and going to be a counselor after? I was doing my fieldwork and to do fieldwork hours while you're working 50 hours a week, it was hard. I would sometimes ask my counselor contacts at the high schools, "Hey, could I take the transcripts and evaluate them?" I took all the junior transcripts from a local high school and there were like 700 juniors. I said, "I'll evaluate every single one and I'll let you know who's close to getting transfer requirements completed for [Autumn University] and who could you change their schedule to help them make those requirements and then which ones could make it with [FGSP]." I remember the counselor was like, "Yeah. That would be great." As

I was reviewing these transcripts at home at 10:00 at night, I was like, "Dang, all of the Latino kids are placed in courses that don't lead them to complete college requirements." I started keeping track of how many African-American and Latino students compared to their White counterparts were placed in college prep courses. I was so angry and I thought, "Catherine, if you become a counselor, you're basically a cog in that wheel and you're just producing the same results." So I remember telling my mentor at the time, Dr. [Lozano], and he said, "What you're doing is research. You're identifying patterns in data." He said, "You should really get your PhD."

I was all, "Really? That's what I'm doing?" I started researching programs and then I remember he said, "You need to apply for this scholarship with USDA. It's like six weeks in DC." I said, "We're not an ag school, we're not going to apply for a USDA scholarship." He said, "*Ay no seas tan tapada* [Oh don't be so naïve]. You need to get out of the state, experience another place and DC is the decision-making capital of our country." I was like, "Okay, he called me *tapada* [naïve]." I thought that's why I'd better just do it, right? I did it and then when I went, I was stunned. I felt like there were many Latinos in the city where [Autumn University] was located and so I was stunned when I went to the nation's capital and saw we're not represented. We don't have museums, we don't have anything that's just distinctly Latino. I just thought I have to get a doctorate because this is ridiculous. Our stories need to be heard. I came back from that fellowship really just focused in researching doctoral programs. My friend did his PhD and he's an activist in the African-American community. He's now a president of a community college. I was like, "I'll do that one." I applied to that doctoral program he graduated from to see if I could get in. Fortunately, I did get in and it was great.

My dissertation was on the [Latino Youth Institute]. I did four independent studies. One was on undocumented students and I thought that would be my dissertation focus. One was on the transfer rates between the community college and the university. One was a conference presentation at a higher ed trip to a university, like an outreach conference and then the [Latino Youth Institute]. My dissertation topic panel, they said, "We know your heart is set on undocumented students, Catherine, but there is not enough research for you to do a lit review on that topic," at the time. Now there is, but back then, I was kind of heartbroken. I wanted to do undocumented students because to me, they're the most tenacious students ever. Right? They were like, "We really think you're on to something with this [Latino Youth Institute] because if you can help highlight what they do that helps produce such successful results, that's what needs to be learned so you can incorporate that in other places." So they also encouraged me to look at that program through the theory called social capital formation theory. The reason I think these types of programs are so powerful is that combination of culturally relevant pedagogy and content.

Professional Experiences in Student Affairs/Higher Education

I would say that I am constantly going to professional learning, conferences, regional, statewide, national conferences and I bring back the things that I learn and share it with others. I promote my folks to also go and then come back and share

because I think professional learning is one way to nurture the people that work here and ourselves. When you feel nurtured, you're a better servant to the students. I would say that. There was also a period of time where I was going to lots of different conferences about Latinos in higher education. One of the conferences was hosted by a [Latino/Chicano Studies Center]. They would host a once-a-year symposium and then an [interdisciplinary policy institute]. They would always do an annual conference of their research and then one specifically on helping young men of color. So those two events were always in my rotation and the [Chicano-Latino-related conference] for as long as it lasted that I attended in undergrad. I also made sure we're a paid member of HACU [Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities]. We're a HSI [Hispanic-Serving Institution].[7]

Aspirations to work in the community college setting. I think I went to three conferences, but I would say I always heard a calling at those conferences that if you are inclined to serve as a leader, an administrator, that we were needed in community colleges because that's where the majority of Latinos enroll. What the data shows is that although we enroll, we were not represented equally in completion. So they said we need our people to go and do the work there so you can help figure out what's going on. I kept hearing it over and over. As much as I loved [Autumn University] because I mean, I went there as a first-time freshman and then made it all the way to becoming an administrator. I was almost finished with my PhD when I decided to leave. It was really hard because they were like a family to me, but I just knew in order to diversify my experience and then potentially serve our community, coming to a community college would be better for us as Latinos and for me.

So I think just being a leader, working at [Autumn University], we worked closely with community colleges already, I fit. Also, a part of my research in my doctoral program was on how to increase transfer from the local community college to [Autumn University]. It was called dual enrollment like a two-plus-two program. It was in that paper, I remember, I found out the per pupil investment from the state in K-12, community college, and public colleges/universities. It shouldn't be a surprise, community colleges get less per student than all three other systems. The state wasn't investing in community college students. When you don't adequately resource community colleges to serve, sometimes the most neediest students, it's not going to work, you know? That paper helped me to be interested and to direct my leadership towards community colleges. I would also say my mentors have come from within the Latino community and outside of the Latino community, but here, specifically, there was this Latino gentleman in the community, Dr. [José Rios], who reached out and found a vice president of a community college to mentor me. She had been a vice president for like 25 years, she mentored and coached me. I found it to be really helpful. That was my preparation and I will start my ninth year at this college. I started in 2008 as the associate dean and then I became the associate vice president I think after five years. A new president started and said, "Catherine, you really are the chief student services officer and we should have you be vice president." He opened

[7] A Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) is defined as a college/university that has a full-time Hispanic student enrollment of at least 25% (HACU, 2017).

up that position and I applied and interviewed and was able to get the job. I connect a lot with community college students although I did not go to community college because of my personal background being a first-generation college student, Latina, and growing up low-income. I went straight to [Autumn University] but I do understand having to navigate those circumstances that are really challenging. I think the reason why they opened up that position is because I relate a lot to the students.

When I first got here, my first week on the job, my boss at the time…sent me to a training for new community college administrators hosted by the [state-wide associations for community college administrators]. It's a one-week intensive training on funding models, human resources, the background of community college, kind of the nuts and bolts of the broad scope of community colleges, not just student services. That helped me. I'm really thankful to my boss at the time because she recognized that I was coming in with no community college experience and wanted to ward off any of the naysayers at the time when I was hired which I didn't know about until after I got here. There were people who weren't supportive of me being hired. One, because I was young and two, because I didn't work in a community college. I came in, I said hi and then I had my suitcase ready to go to this training about the community college specifically. That's my training for here. My boss at the time was really helpful in that regard.

Being the only one and contending with structural barriers. At the time, I was also the only Latina administrator. I remember when I got back from that first week, a Latina staff member stopped me in the hallway and she said, "You know you're the only one." I was like, "I'm the only one what?" I really didn't know what she was talking about. She said, "You're the only Latina and Latino in the whole administration." I was like, "Oh." Later on, the same woman brought me an article and it was just face down on my chair. I don't know that she knew she was doing anything controversial, but the article was about how light skinned Latinas advance at a more rapid rate than darker skinned Latinas. I was just like, "Wow, people think about these things?" I guess at the time this institution's administration or the faculty wasn't diverse. It leaves people feeling marginalized. This staff member is a darker skin Latina too. I got to know her a little bit better. She experienced blatant, overt-racism. She told me about a burning cross in their yard. I just thought, "Wow, that's why this person is in so much pain and pointed out to me my first two weeks how I'm the only one and then gave me this article because it's been such a pronounced racialized experience for her."

As the dean, I was called associate dean but really how this campus is structured is if you weren't in instruction like English, math, history, science, then you're called associate dean. Only the leaders of those instructional areas were called deans, a full dean. I was dean and I was on the dean's council. So at the time I was 36 years old and every other dean was probably 55 and up and White. Maybe there was one African-American dean, he was in business but that was it. I think maybe the dean of languages, he was half Mexican but he spoke Portuguese more than Spanish because he did his research in Brazil. There wasn't anybody who was just Mexican-

American or Chicano or young. I was the only one so because of the generational difference, I would say I experienced ageism and combined with probably some racism too. Just things that White middle class or upper middle-class Eurocentric people would know. They would say things like, “What Catherine doesn’t know.” It was a common saying, “What Catherine doesn’t know.” Of most of the things I didn’t know were references to old White television shows, old White people you know. I remember going to the academic senate breakfast, which culminates the year, and this is where all the hundreds of faculty come and it’s a big deal. The man who was the entertainment, he was like this 70-year old White man who did a piano medley from some television show they all knew about.

I was like, “Am I in the fucking twilight zone?” Here I thought I was coming to a progressive place and I was like time-warped. It was strange. Dealing with microaggressions is exhausting. I kind of feel like I have to suck it up a lot so that I can continue in the role in order to make the changes that our students need us to make. Nevertheless, it's frustrating and painful and it's, you know, unnecessary, and I always just have more empathy for students, what they're experiencing if I'm experiencing it at my level, at my age, in my role. Fortunately, my boss at the time, [Ellen], I think she noticed halfway into my year the added workload I experienced and challenges I faced. She called me one time, it was 10:00 at night and I was just getting home. That first year I commuted from home to here because you never know how things are going to go. She said, “I just wanted to check in and see how you’re doing. I know you’re putting in a lot of hours.” What it was is I was being invited to many community events, community programs, community ceremonies. It wasn’t until she helped me see that I was physically exhausted and she’s like, “Are you feeling a bit tokenized?” I didn’t even know that’s what I was feeling. I never compare myself to how many hours I’m putting in versus other people. I’m just doing my job. I would say that was another part of my role here for the past nine years. It is that I put in more hours and I’m called to do more work and I think it’s because I’m somebody who the community trusts simply because of my lived experience and because I am approachable. So you know, these are added things my co-VPs, they don’t have. There’s no Italian-American scholarship or parade. Do you know what I’m saying? They don’t have to do anything outside of their specific role. I also go by Catherine, I do. I do get people now who say, “You’re [Dr. Sanchez]. You worked hard. You need to be Dr. [Sanchez].” Some people around students, they’ll say Dr. [Sanchez]. I go by Catherine. After my boss left then I had another boss, Dr. [Porter] and he goes by Dr. [Porter]. He doesn’t go by [Robert] and he’s an older African-American gentleman. I imagine the kind of racism he’s experienced in his lifetime leads him to this discernment where he knows he has to just be Dr. [Porter]. I have experienced racism, sexism, ageism, all of it but I’m just most comfortable being Catherine. I don’t feel like I want to hide behind that title or haven’t had to do that just yet.

I also remember when I first started here and people would say, “Dr. [Sanchez], can you repeat the question?” Then it became, “Where did you get your doctorate?” I was like, “Are you kidding me?” There have been those things. But now

as the VP, you should see my team. Out of my 16 managers, I would say 14 are people of color. They are either Latino or African-American or they have overcome some life experience that mirrors those of our students in our community college, whether it's going back to school as an adult or being first in their family to go to college, immigrants. It's still as important to hire people who can have empathy that informs why they do their work. It'll just create transformational work for our students. It's completely changed now. Since I stepped foot on this campus, I've always been called to do more specifically for our people. I also mentor and coach many young professionals. Fortunately, that aligns with my personal drive to help our community. So when I didn't feel that and that added responsibility was placed on me then I realized, as a leader, I have to figure out a way to get more Latinos engaged in this work. Then it's my responsibility not to be the only one. I have to make a way so that there's more people like us in roles and positions of authority and decision-making. I knew I wasn't the only Latina who worked here, yea maybe I was the only dean and above me, there wasn't any Latinos in administration but there was Latino faculty and staff. If we all came together, we could do a lot. So I started to work on that.

I found the group that's called La Raza Association, a Latino faculty/staff group that existed. So then I went to one of their meetings and five people showed up. I was like, "That's it?" I went to another one, six people showed up. I would see all these people during their daily work, I'm like, "How come you didn't go to the La Raza meeting?" I was like, "Come on [Sonia], we need to be all on one page." [Sonia] said, "That group is divisive." "Come on, hey [Ernie], why didn't I see you at that meeting?" [Ernie] responded, "No, they like to cause problems," and I was like, "What do you mean?" Well they apparently would go to the board meetings prior to when I was hired. Their agenda was to get more Latinos hired into higher level roles and faculty roles. There was never a board meeting where somebody didn't speak on behalf of Latinos and it was people from the La Raza Association. They made a rotation. It kind of worked, right? I mean, I got my job but then I was like, it seems like we need to figure out how to get another association going. I called together the members of La Raza and I just said, "Listen, no disrespect but I've asked around to five or six other people and they want to be involved but not necessarily in the manner you've all been doing it." So if we can get another organization going, perhaps we could come together and help. Because they knew I was their dean and they did see me doing a lot of extra work as the only Latina in administration, they said, "Okay." So we formed the [Latino Employees Association]. It's a really strong association on campus, very active and we've been together for six years.

It's really great, a very unifying organization. We didn't disband La Raza Association because when we need that militant, no holds barred organizing, we'll just pull them back together. Organizing with my community has definitely been a help to get through navigating racism, sexism and ageism on this campus. For the [Latino Employees Association] we also raise money every year for Latino scholarships and we just make sure that the communication is flowing from the community to the college and vice versa because there's a large Latino population

here. Of the K-12 students, 64% of the school children are Latino and here at this institution, 51% of our students are Latino. I just make sure through the [Latino Employees Association] we, for example this year, we held the celebration so I kept watching the numbers. Last year we were at 49% and I was like, "Okay, in '16 and '17 we should get to 50-51% and when we do we need to have a big party," and we did have a huge party with live music, free food for students and it was really amazing. There were so many students who showed up. The student newspaper covered it and said it's like a day in history for the college because now, we're majority Latino. The students that covered it were also non-Latino and they were just like there were so many students from every background celebrating this. I try and ensure that we're seen as assets, reverse from a deficit framework. The other piece is that when I got here, we had the President's Latino Advisory Committee. The president has advisory committees for the African-American, Asian and Pacific Islander and Latino communities. I was placed on that right away. I mean, all of these things and my boss was like, "Are you okay? I know you're doing a lot of extra work." I made friends with the community members on that group and just cultivated those relationships over the years.

I have used spirituality to navigate through challenges. I would say it helps there's a church right across the street and right at Noon there's Mass and it's like a 30-minute Mass because there's no singing and no pastor announcements, it's just quiet. The priests, they do one reading, one homily and then the eucharist. Sometimes when I'm really stressed out or I'm feeling like the politics gets so heated and I just need that rest, I would go out to Mass in the middle of the day. I'm also really good about ensuring that my spirituality does not seep into my daily work in regards to putting that on people because we can't. We have to separate our business from our faith. I would say most people who are close to me know that I am a woman of faith. I remember having to talk to one of my staff members because she hadn't learned that at the time and she was teaching a class. I was reading the student evaluations and a Muslim student was like, "This teacher was trying to have us pray." I called her in and I was like, "I know you're a woman of faith. I know you know I am too but you have to remember in your class, you have people from multiple faiths in one classroom." While you want to say praying to Christ is a strategy, you have to remember the students might believe in Allah or Jehovah. I think that's also a responsibility we have as people who do believe. Also, we have to be ready to be friends and work closely with people who are truly atheists and who are scientologists.

Transforming institutional practices. I would say my role as associate vice president and vice president the past three years involves leading student equity. It's been a huge collaboration with the academic senate and the academic areas of the college. I've been personally leading it and finally I hired somebody, I'm so excited about her. When I attended the [Latino/Chicano Studies Center] conference I saw data that shows how many Latinos go to community college and how many actually make it out, the person who was behind that research, this is one of his students that I am hiring. For the past three years I've been able to really emphasize the importance

in each of us taking personal responsibility to change our practices. I brought in a faculty member in urban education from a local university and conducted faculty retreats for the English division, math division, ESL division, and then the 42 senators from the academic senate.

Last year, we also hosted our professional development day. The theme was making the college student-ready. Instead of making the student college-ready, it's us; we're the ones that need to be remediating our practices, not the students. This September, I've been working on an event for the local assemblymen, and it's on the status of Latinos in higher education. And one of the outcomes that we're asking for after this event is for all board of trustee members to go through cultural competence training. And I pulled data that shows the demographics of all of the schools in the district; the majority population are Latino, but when you look at the demographics of the elected board members, they're predominantly White, and so, we need to ensure that these people, these elected officials are culturally competent to make decisions that are sound and that serve our students in our schools. It's not about the students that need the changing, students are coming to us perfectly right, we're the ones that need to change. It's just the matter of fact that most institutions were created to serve a majority White population. Now, it's a matter of changing our practices for the new student population that's here with us. We're in these roles and we have to help bridge for our communities because, when you look at achievement gap data, Latinos are not performing at the same rate as the other populations like White and Asian students. But it's not because we as Latinos are not capable, it's because colleges have to change our practices. So it's been going really great. It's been hard, but it's been going great.

In practice, it's also always important to read…research articles and to really collaborate, that's extremely beneficial. I think that's a part of our background and our culture, the ability to collaborate effectively with others and cultivating those skills is definitely beneficial. Then also, as a leader, if you have people that you're supervising, make sure they know how to collaborate. Because oftentimes, in higher ed, we love staying in our silos in our departments and just doing what we're responsible for and not figuring out how to work with others. Students don't experience college in compartments like we do. Students experience college fluidly as one thing. We have to figure out always from the student perspective how can we do our work so it's easier for them not just always do the work the way we've always done it because that's how it works best for us individually or as a department.

Future career aspirations. Who knows what other environments are in my future since I have interests in being a college president. I know I have to work 20 more years but I think that is in my future. People have encouraged me to get there faster than what I want to do. I would be fine if I became president at age 50. My president now, he's like, when he got here in July, that October, he said, "You need to be a president. I'm going to support you to be one." Last summer, he supported me to

do the Harvard Institute on Higher Education.[8] It's like a 10-day program. It was really good. I think that was good because he wants me to see myself as presidential material. It's not that I don't see myself as presidential material, I just feel that in a role supporting the president, I can really make a lot of changes and I have led a lot of changes. Not that I did the changing for everyone, I just create the conditions for the team that we have to make those changes. Sometimes when you're the president, you get so bogged down with facilities and construction and fundraising and union contracts and the board, that you can't get to the fundamental pieces to change anything. I also just got accepted to a fellowship program for aspiring college presidents. It's like an all-day thing like Harvard from eight in the morning until late at night with a focus on creating effective community college leadership strategies. I'm looking forward to that and I think it's good professional learning for me as I prepare for that role.

I did interview for a presidency in May. The chancellor there heard from my friend that I would be a great candidate so I was invited to apply. I did not look forward to leaving this geographic area to pursue a presidency when my sister's here and my mom. I think I did a little bit of self-sabotaging because the HR guy said, "Your answers were spot on. Such great content but the committee felt like they didn't feel your warmth or your personality." When my president heard that, he said, "Catherine, you're very warm. You have an awesome personality." In my head I was like, "I don't want to live away from my family. I don't want to come here." I was looking at them like, "Are you nice people? Are you going to be available to go to dinner with me? Who are you?" That was in my head. Although the questions, I was ready for them. How do you lead college rate transformation? How do you ensure your faculty and staff hiring reflects the student demographics? These are all things I worked on and it's very exciting to consider providing that kind of environment as a president, but I don't want to move far away from my family. There are four of us girls. My mom raised us to be very independent women. She always would tell me, "*Mija* [my girl], when you grow up, have your career, that way you find a man because you want him not because you need him." My niece is one year old and the one of us daughters who has kids is close by and I get to see her all the time and it's so great. A lot of times you'll find this closeness to family for Latinas.

Latinas tend to shy away from these senior-level roles in large part, I think, because we see the way it occupies a lot of time and energy in our life, which may interfere with our values, family. So, I think we really have to help our Latina rising stars see that we have a lot of interaction and involvement with our *familias* [families], and still serve in these roles. It doesn't have to be so that it's occupying every second of our day. I think we have to help our Latinas understand that. And if there's more people who are driven by this passion to transform our colleges, then it's less of a burden on one person to have to carry that load. You know what I'm saying? So, I think we can help our Latinas in that way, and then just send them to

[8] The Harvard Institute on Higher Education is offered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) supports the leadership development of educators who aspire to advance in their careers. The Institute utilizes a research-based and experiential learning approach (HGSE, 2017).

professional conferences, fellowships, really intentionally for the development needed. People don't understand that about Latinos, that for us, it's not all about title. Even when I was associate dean, people were like, "You need to leave that place. You need to be called a dean." I would say, "I don't care." It's not about that to me. I've never really been that strategic, going after things at a certain time. To me, things will happen the way they are supposed to happen. That particular opportunity. To me, I feel like God calls us where we're meant to serve and when it is in His hands things happen so effortlessly. You don't have to worry about things, it's just where you're supposed to be.

A Response to Catherine: A *Testimonio* of Social Capital and Faith

Three key themes surfaced from Catherine's *testimonio*: (a) the vital role social capital played in connecting her to professional development and advancement opportunities throughout her career pathway in student affairs, (b) how her activist orientation and commitment to social justice serve as sources of motivation in her career, and (c) her ability to navigate challenges in her career journey through coalition building, social support, and faith.

Catherine's social connections and networks served as invaluable resources in her career pathway to the VP role by opening doors to positions in student affairs, sponsoring her participation in professional development opportunities, and encouraging her to pursue doctoral studies. Catherine benefited from the support of diverse social contacts who encouraged her to pursue opportunities that she may not have considered otherwise, not because of a lack of interest, but rather because of a lack of exposure. These social contacts (e.g., peers, supervisors, mentors) are trusted connections who are in a position of power to create opportunities for Latinas (e.g., creating a position, providing funding for participation in professional development experiences). Although Catherine benefited from multiple sources of support in her career journey (e.g., family, mentors), she also benefited from cross-race and cross-

gender guides in her career pathway. These guides provided her with access to experiences, positions, and networks that are preparing her to pursue a presidency in the future when the time and position are right. Catherine desires to stay close to family because of the support and sustenance they provide.

While Catherine's lived experiences as a low-income, first-generation, Chicana student, contributed to her commitment to social justice throughout her career, her participation as a facilitator for the Latino Youth Institute (LYI) sparked her activist efforts. The culturally relevant approach and curriculum employed by LYI leadership was life-changing for Catherine, illustrating the transformative role community-engagement experiences can play in fostering Latinas' activist orientation. Although Catherine was already a self-prescribed "activist," this pivotal facilitation experience ignited her coalition-building and community-organizing efforts on behalf of the Latina/o community. Catherine's commitment to social justice is not only an asset she brings to her institution by employing a strengths-based approach to her work, but Catherine's *testimonio* demonstrates how Latina administrators' commitment to social justice can also serve as a source of motivation to navigate challenges in their career out of a desire to transform inequitable practices. Catherine's research and professional experiences, coupled with her desire to serve Latina/o students, led her to the community college environment. As early as her undergraduate years, Catherine understood that in order to foster social change, remaining silent and complacent was not an option. She now leverages her voice and position within the power structure to implement transformational, assets- and

evidence-based practices to meet the needs of Latina/o and underrepresented students and staff.

Catherine navigated a variety of challenges in her career pathway such as raced, gendered, and classed experiences especially among cabinet-level colleagues. Being the sole Latina in administration, Catherine also navigated an added race-related service to represent and support the Latina/o community by serving as a mentor to Latina/o staff and coordinating Latina/o student focused initiatives. Even though Catherine possessed an intrinsic desire to advocate on behalf of and serve the Latina/o community, these instances of tokenism should not be ignored. Although these negative encounters were exhausting and frustrating at times for Catherine, they never impacted her career aspirations or drive to continue in her work. Catherine frequently drew from her own resilience and self-efficacy when navigating challenges, however, she should not have to resist challenging experiences through her own fortitude. Catherine benefited from the support of a Woman of Color supervisor who called attention to the added race-related service she balanced, an added service that White colleagues are not called upon to provide. Connections with Latina/o colleagues also served as a counterspace of support for Catherine to combat tokenization, isolation, and discrimination. While many institutions have an existing Latina/o faculty/staff association, Catherine took it upon herself to create the infrastructure for a new association of this nature. Regardless of the challenges Catherine faced and will continue to face, her faith in God gives her peace because she knows it is all in His hands. Catherine's *testimonio* documented how spirituality and faith can serve as valuable resources to cope with stressors and challenges.

Connie

"My whole purpose is to make sure that more of us get through the pipeline."

Personal and Family Background

Growing up, it was middle class, but kind of unique as well. I lived with my mom, my grandma, and then my two aunts were in and out of the house, depending upon their marriages. My mom worked in a factory, which afforded her enough money for us to live in a house. My grandma who was with us all the time, she was always there. She still worked up until I was like 14. I went to a predominantly White school district. So, I was very aware of my heritage very early. It was very clear that I was different, as early as kindergarten. So I was very aware of my identity early on. I did typical things with my friends. My friends were either Black or White. Why, of course, I had a large Mexican-American family, I saw them mostly on the weekends. I spent a lot of time with my cousins, but they were older than me. So I wasn't with them every single day.

My family was very passionate to make sure that I got as much education as possible. My family and community both laid out a subliminal expectation of going to college right away. My mom specifically bought the house in this particular school district so I would go to this particular high school. It had and it still has a long history of being middle class to upper middle class, historically always one of the top 25 high schools in the state, so she was very intentional in making sure that I went to a school in that school district. Being in that school district, the conversation was always, "Where are you going to go to college?" Not, "Are you going to go to college?" Not, "What do you want to do when you grow up? Where are you gonna go to college?" A very different expectation was set out very early on. I never really thought of anything besides college. That was just kind of the expectation from my mom. It was always very much, "Do whatever you want, whatever you're passionate about, just do it." It was never a question of like, "Oh no, don't do this or do that." Very much supportive. As long as I went to school and did whatever I liked, I was gonna be supported no matter what. My mom was very supportive and she's like, "Just do your best whatever that is."

You know, it's funny because...I'm sorry, talking about my mom, it's still hard. She's passed away now, so it's still a little tough for me. My mom was a hard worker, like I said, she worked at a factory. But never did she miss any one of my events. Anytime I did anything for school she would take a personal day, take a vacation day, she made sure that I understood that my events were her priority and her work came second. Yes, work is important, you have to have a good work ethic, you have to go and do your best every single time you show up for work. You know, there's a time to goof around and there's a time to have fun, but you always gotta work hard, you gotta show up and give your best. But there's a bigger priority, and that's your children. She made that very clear. You know, I didn't really understand it until I became a mom. That's when I understood what she was doing. I took it for granted that my mom was gonna be at the school play. I remember very specifically in fourth-grade, she took

the day off, came to the school play for the daytime performance. There was a little boy and his name was Derek, and his mom couldn't get off work and he was crying in the corner, and even though we were all comforting him, I didn't understand that until later when I'm like putting in all my days and doing all my planning to make sure I can go to all the school events that I need to be at. My mom did get to see my bachelor's and master's graduation, she did not get to see my doctorate. I actually just found the pictures of her at my master's graduation so I framed that and I put that in my office.

My uncle who, it's very bizarre because he never completed his degree, but he retired as an associate professor because at that time a lot of value was put in experience, and he's deceased now. He was a labor organizer from very early on. He was an activist, he actually worked a lot with Cesar Chavez and brought a lot of that to this city. He worked with the unions and even when he worked in factory jobs, they put him in the White section but he would go to the colored section because he didn't identify as White because we're Mexican. We're Mexican-American. He was very much an activist and he actually had the opportunity to move my aunt and my cousins into that neighborhood so then he made sure that my mom moved me into the neighborhood as well. We actually were only three blocks apart. My uncle was very instrumental in my path with higher education and navigating experiences of discrimination. He was like, "You've got to work hard, you've got to understand the dynamics." He's like, "You need to understand that you're Latina." He goes, "I know you know that." He's like, "You have to understand that it's not gonna be easy, you gotta make sure that you're ready to fight when you need to." You know I didn't really understand it at first especially coming right out of high school because everything was, "we're all friends." When you get to college, it's like, "Oh, we're not all friends." I didn't understand that at first but he was the one like, "You have to understand the dynamics and you have to have respect for everybody, but you have to be ready to fight." I'm like, "I know Pa." He's like, "*Mija* [my girl], I'm serious." I'm like, "I know Pa. I got this." He was just there yelling at me with his finger and I'm like, "Pa, I got this." He like broke down everything I had in class. Like I've already been lectured in class, and here I was getting lectured all over again over power theory.

Educational Journey

I remember one of the Latino fraternities on campus pushing us to bring this Latina sorority to the school when I was in college. I was close with them and there were some other women at Casa Latina, the Latina/o cultural center, who wanted to join. The existing Latina sorority was just not an option. We really need to do something different. So we're like okay, we got in touch with a chapter close to us, and they gave us an informational. We all drove down there and it was just an amazing experience. I was always involved and I was not skeptical of joining a sorority per se, but I loved the idea of being in a Latina sorority. So I went with just kind of a like well, let's see what this is all about. And we had a great weekend out of it. It was an amazing experience and to this day I remember every sister I met at that informational. We met some of the actual founding mothers of the sorority. And it was just incredible for me and I was a little bit older, I was already in my junior year

of college. So we were the same age, myself and the founding mothers. They were like a year ahead of me. So to be with a true peer group of other Latina women that's what really sealed it for me. And that's what I needed and it gave me the support and the strength I needed. And there were sometimes I made some bad choices and bad relationships and they were there. My pledge sister and my pledge daughter got me through that and here we are. And it's exactly what I needed at that time and to this day I'm still involved.

Being involved in a Latina sorority gave me a lot of access to student affairs professionals and I was a pretty involved student regardless. I was part of the Latin American Student Organization, the Hispanic Leadership Team. I was pretty involved regardless, but my involvement was really centered with the Latino community. So I really only interacted with the director of Casa Latina, the grad assistants, the couple of faculty members who would come in and talk to us at Casa. But once I joined the sorority then I interacted with the office of student activities, and we're meeting all of the staff in student affairs. And then there were some tensions on campus, so I was part of the protests that they wanted to demolish Casa Latina. And actually now fast-forward 20 some odd years later, we now have a multicultural center. So Casa Latina is gone, so is the [Black cultural center], so is the women's center. They're all in this multicultural center building. Through the protests I got to meet the vice president of student services and the associate vice presidents and all of those people. And being that I was the opposition, here I was with these protest students. It really taught me a lot about how to engage with these, in my opinion, racist, old, White men. And really kind of how to engage them, and work with them, and help them understand, “I'm not trying to take anything away from you, dude.” I'm just trying to make it better for us. I really learned a lot about negotiation skills, how to protest without being in danger per se. That was a really good experience, but really getting to know all of the administrators who were there, and really falling in love with student affairs besides Latino student affairs, besides just Casa Latina. It was great to interact with everybody else.

Pathway to Student Affairs

I had no intention of going into student affairs. I have a bachelor’s and a master’s in sociology, my intent was to be community college faculty. My freshman year of college, I started at a community college. I started at [Skyline State] and my academic advisor wanted me to work the front desk of the fitness center that he was now managing, which is under student services. I'm like, “Oh, I get paid to like do my homework, cool!” He trusted me, he started giving me projects and then the dean of students, she was phenomenal and she really took me under her wing. She wanted to make sure that I did all my work and did everything I was supposed to. They actually negotiated to let me work there even when I was in grad school. So for my master’s program, I would take my classes and do my graduate assistantship Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. I would leave campus on Thursdays, work Thursday evenings, Fridays, and Saturdays at [Skyline State] and then go back on Sundays. They let me work as a part-time academic advisor to athletes because I had a baccalaureate degree and that's how I started in student affairs, because my advisor

liked me. The dean of students thought I had great potential and it just went from there.

The dean of students was an African American woman and her thing was she wanted to make sure that women of color got through, right? In community colleges, we don't always get through. So she wanted to make sure that I finished and that I transferred. I had a transfer advisor but she made sure that I would meet with my transfer advisor and she made sure that everything was gonna be good and she taught me little things like, you don't go to your boss's office without a pen and paper to take notes. You don't go anywhere without being ready to take notes because you never know what's gonna happen. Things that I didn't know and I didn't know I had to know. She was phenomenal. You know like I said, I fell into student affairs. I wasn't as intentional as maybe I should have been and maybe not as purposeful. But then again, who is intentional and purposeful at 22? I think I've been very very lucky, very fortunate to have great people along my pathway. I want to be that person to someone else. I want to make sure that everyone I touch gets the same level of commitment that I received from all the people that touched me. That's very important to me. Like I said I'm very religious, I'm very spiritual, so every day I also pray that I exude peace and love to everyone I encounter. That I am their comfort. I am their clarity. I am what they need from me. That's really important to me. If you aren't lucky enough to have mentors fall into your lap, find them. They are so important. I never would have made it this far without the people who believed in me, and that's really important. There's no shame in asking someone to mentor you. There's no shame in that. I always encourage people to do that, because not everyone gets one thrown in their pathway. Sometimes you gotta seek them out. I think that's important, mentors are really important. Being committed is really important.

I worked at [Skyline State] because that was the job that I did during grad school. Then my friend called from [Secure University] and he said, “Hey, there's a position opening in admissions.” He was so funny, he's like, “Look, we just need a Latina to apply.” I'm like, “I am not moving back there, I just left.” He goes, “Just apply girl, we just need somebody, nobody of color's applying for this multicultural position.” He's like, “We just need you to apply.” I'm like, “Okay.” I applied and then I got the job. I'm like, “Oh crap. I'm moving back.” So I did go back to the university, I started as an admissions counselor, coordinator of multicultural recruitment, got promoted to assistant director of the office, of the entire office. They still had me keep multicultural recruitment because I was the only person of color in the office still. I still kept that. There was one time when I had already become the assistant director by that point and one of the admissions counselors reached out to me for help. There was a student who wanted to come to [Secure University] because we're a big law enforcement school, so she wanted to come for law enforcement. The family was very traditional like, “You're my baby girl, you're not going.” The admissions counselor calls and she's like, “Connie, this girl her parents said that I need to find them a bilingual Mexican person on staff that is going to help their baby girl.” I said, “Well, send them on down.” And she's like, “You'll do it?” I'm like, “Yes, I'll meet with them, I will put them on my calendar, I won't even put them on the admissions

calendar." And she's like okay, so we arranged it and so the student ended up coming to this school, she graduated early even, she was a super bright student. But I remember that, I had just become assistant director and I remember that she's like no, because the parents thought, "You're never going to find me a bilingual Mexican who's going to be able to help me," and I'm like, "Yes, I'm right here," pick me.

Professional Experiences in Student Affairs/Higher Education

Then I got married, I had a baby and I realized I was too far from home to manage this. We were too far from home because he was from the same hometown as well, we met in grad school. We moved back home, I took a job at [Advance College] as an academic advisor. Go with what you know, right? That was under student services. I interviewed with the purpose and the premise that taking on an advisor position, I'd be able to adjunct. Again, my original purpose was to be faculty. I'm like, "Oh, here's my chance, I can actually go and be faculty now." I was an advisor and reported to the assistant dean but then her boss, the dean of students, he went to [Secure University] and he was very fond of me so he started to trust me with a lot of things, giving me extra projects because again he kind of had an affinity, since both of us graduated from [Secure University]. That's actually what got me the interview he was like, "Oh wow someone from [Secure University] that's great." And then I did well, I got the job, and he doesn't remember me, but I remember him. Because when he described what car he drove on campus, nobody had cars on campus, especially not people of color. So when he told me what he drove I'm like oh I remember him. He was a Black male, and he was phenomenal.

Pursuing new career opportunities on the path to CSAO. But for projects, here I was a former middle management administrator coming in as an advisor. And as an advisor at [Advance College] it's a very difficult role to navigate. It can become a dead-end position because it's not an academic position per se, it's a student affairs position. So a lot of people get stuck there, and they either find their way to get onto the faculty side, or they find their way into the administrator side. Which again, this position was union at [Advance College], so to leave a union job to go to an administrator job where administrator jobs are very, very precarious positions at [Advance College] are pretty rare. So it can very easily become a dead-end position. But I was determined, I was a middle management administrator, I wanted to grow into a leadership role. And so he and the assistant dean they groomed me, they were really great.

I remember the dean was at a conference and the assistant dean had to be in two different places, but there was a very important meeting between [Advance College] and the public-school representatives. And this was going to be deans of student services, or their representatives, meeting with senior administration for the local public schools. And they both came to my office, they didn't call me over. They both walked over to my office and both of them were in my doorway. I'm like, "Oh God, I'm being fired." They closed the door, which at that point my heart was racing and they asked me to be their representative at this big deal meeting. And it was at the district office where union employees are not allowed, I mean it's not that we're not

allowed, but it's very culturally unacceptable for a union employee to be at the district office. I'm like, “Oh my God,” like I was shaking. I'm like, “Okay, I got this.” So I went, took notes, and it was great because I had been a recruiter before and I ended up knowing most of the public-schools people anyway. So it really worked out and I knew all the staff and it was great to be able to connect with them. And so because of that, the dean and assistant dean started trusting me more. So then they're like, “Oh let's work on this retention initiative, let's have Connie work on this recruitment initiative.” And then the president asked me to work on the website initiative. And then the president had me come in and work on connecting our students with a [Latino leadership initiative]. So because they trusted me with this public-schools meeting, then the president started trusting me and I started doing all of these great projects.

Then I got pregnant and had my son, and when I came back from maternity leave, actually they called me while I was on maternity leave. They were like we're hiring another assistant dean when my assistant dean took a dean position at [Advance College]. The thing is you can't apply while you're on FMLA,[9] you have to be working to apply. They told me, “We're going to wait and post it right around the time you come back just so you know.” They wanted me to be the assistant dean. I'm like, “Okay, sure, why not? Okay.” By that point I was even debating going back to work at all. Because I was in an advisor role and I felt, not that it was beneath me but it wasn't challenging. And I'm like wow, if I'm just going to sit and wait for special projects I might as well just stay home with my babies. But then they called to tell me they would be posting the assistant dean position and I'm like okay, I'm going to go to work. I went to work to apply, I didn't necessarily threaten them but I was very honest that I'm coming back because I want a shot at this position. And then I got it, so I'm like okay I guess I'm meant to be here. I got the assistant dean position, then I realized how much I loved it.

I always loved working with students, but being an assistant dean I got to work with TRiO programs, I got to work with disability access, with student activities and I got to do student leadership stuff through the sorority because I was on the national board. I was the VP of alumni for two terms. I was the national president for two terms. I assisted with regional directorships for a few years. To this day I’m still involved. I pay my dues every year, I serve on committees. Whenever they do an all call for alumni committees I do that. I'm not on the national board anymore. It was a lot, but I'm still very committed, not as active per se as I used to be but still very committed. Still get all my updates, still very active in making sure that we're doing what we're supposed to be doing. And now it's fun to see how we have evolved. So now we're not a Latina sorority, we're a historically Latina sorority with a multicultural membership. Nationally, there's a lot of us struggling with that identity but to me I think it's wonderful. If women could have the experience I had and that level of support, and that level of commitment, and that *ganas* [desire and drive] to

[9] Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) is a federal labor law that allows eligible employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for certain medical and family reasons (e.g., birth and/or care of a newborn child; U.S. Department of Labor, 2017).

finish school just because of this sorority, by all means come and join the party. This was the best experience ever. So I'm very, very proud that we have Black sisters, Arab sisters, and we have I think at last count like 83 ethnicities represented. And to me that's amazing and I love it.

At [Advance College], I eventually got promoted to associate dean from assistant dean. I was lucky because in the position I had as associate dean, I worked a little bit later. I started work at 10 and I got off at seven at night which helped me balance a full-time job, doctoral coursework, and a dissertation. I did a doctorate of education in community college leadership, so higher ed. So in the morning, I would get the kids up, I would make them breakfast, I would drop them off at school, I would go to work. I'd come back in the evening. By that point, they were already done with homework. By the time I got home, because it was a 45-minute drive home, I would give them baths, tuck them in, put them to sleep and then I would study until about midnight. It was very long days, a lot of Coca Cola because I don't drink coffee, but I drink coke for my caffeine and sugar. Every morning I would get a large Coke, no ice, from McDonald's. That's how I would start my day. I would drop the kids off and on my commute to work I would get my large coke and that's how I would start the day and just keep going from there. My doctoral experience was very structured. During my dissertation phase, I also prayed to *La Virgen* [the Virgin of Guadalupe] every day. She helped get me through.

Desire to pursue a CSAO role. I knew I wanted to be a dean, I had been an associate dean at that point for five years and I finished my doctorate. I knew that my dean wasn't going anywhere. None of the dean of students out of the seven community colleges were moving in my system. Nobody was leaving those jobs. I'm like, "You know what? I need to start looking for dean positions." I actually applied for a couple, made it to be a finalist but never got an offer. I just kept trudging away. Eventually I'm gonna get a dean position, this is what I want to do. I want to be a chief student affairs officer at a community college. For me working at a community college, we don't get a lot of resources so it's a lot of doing more with less. But as long as the commitment is there and you got a good team, you can do it and you can make a big impact and really get these students where they need to be. I got the interview at [Cloud College] and I just like knew right away, like I just felt it. I'm like, "I nailed that interview. This job is mine, I'm claiming it. It's mine." I had to leave the district and I took the dean position at [Cloud College]. That was the chief student affairs officer position that I had. Then I was there for three and a half years. I was in charge of admissions, records, financial aid, student activities, student leadership programs, testing and placement, career planning and services, student judicial programs, and the ombuds services. As a CSAO you do miss the student contact. However, you can make the intentional space of going out to meet the students. That's what I did. I would go to every student government meeting. I would go to every event just because I missed the students. I mean here I am writing policy and doing all this stuff but I missed the students. They're the reason I'm doing all this.

[Cloud College] was also 80% Latino, so that was one of the main reasons why I applied to that college because I wanted to be at an HSI. I really wanted to work with Latino students, but it's in a town where it's still very dominated by a White population. Even though [Cloud College] is 80% Latino, the community surrounding the college were still hoping that it's not gonna be Latino soon. I'm not gonna lie, it was a treacherous environment where I had to learn pretty quickly to guard my steps and to make sure that every decision I made was backed up with data because when I first got there it was really clear that I was the brown girl there to fix the brown problem. [Cloud College] was in big trouble with the accreditation board for the region, they were on notice. We were getting audited by the feds, by the Department of Education, there was a lot of problems per se. The thing is that it was still run predominantly by White males, and the board was completely White except for one token Latino, but he was so politically connected that he enjoyed the privilege of a White male, even though he was the token Latino on the board. Again, I was the only woman and the only person of color on the administration. So here I am in strategic planning meetings or cabinet meetings and I'm it. I was very aware of my identity and not always for great reasons. I really felt like we weren't actually serious, we know that we're an HSI, and we take pride in being an HSI when it conveniences us, not because we actually want to do something. There were a lot of times that I really just felt like I was a brown girl there to make the brown problem go away.

Navigating diverse experiences with college presidents. But it was a great three and a half years, it was a great run. The reason I left my role as dean of students was not by choice. The new president came in and he was very clear he didn't want any of us. Change in presidency tends to mean change in the rest of us. He didn't see the value in a dean of students, figured that the directors could do the job on their own. He also eliminated the marketing department, thought that that wasn't a good spending of money and then outsourced the business office. So he got rid of all of us and we were all women of color. We were all Latinas except for one who was African American. So we were all women of color, but they all lived there so they were afraid to speak up. Whereas I'm like, "I got 25 years and a doctorate degree, I'll be A-OK." So it was very difficult, you could feel the racial tension on that campus, which is sad because here we are 80% Latino student enrollment and this should be a place that we're embraced as women of color leaders and we should feel comfortable and we should be doing everything possible to help each other succeed. But I think because these women were from that community that had already been treating them so poorly since grade school, they didn't see anything wrong with the way the faculty and the administration were treating them.

There were a lot of students, don't get me wrong, who were very intuitive and very attentive to what was going on. Those few students, they are only supposed to be there two years, three years max. So you cycle out those few students and everyone stays complacent and complicit. And that's just kind of where it's at. So it was particularly hard, you could feel the tension, you could feel the lack of commitment to the Latino community. It was hard to swallow, but you also know working in a community college, positions like that are political. You serve at the pleasure of the

president or the pleasure of the board. The president had me fooled. I thought the president and I had a good relationship for the first couple of months but in retrospect, when I think back, I think I pinpointed what happened. I was asked to be on television, on a local TV channel. This channel asked me to be the token Latina and give my take on the primary results for the election. I was very clear that I did not appreciate the state of Republican rhetoric and I didn't really get spoken to after that. About three weeks after my television appearance is when I got my notice that my position would be finishing at the end of June. I may not agree with a Trumper, but I get where they're coming from, right? I can at least understand how they got there. I don't like it, I don't agree with it and I'm gonna fight you every step of the way but I at least understand. As a sociologist, you understand, you get it. You understand the White supremacy, you get it. You don't have to like it but you get it. I think a lot of it just comes down to being committed to your purpose, whatever that purpose may be, and really just understanding.

Before this experience I was always very lucky and had supportive presidents. So it was shocking. I didn't expect it. I mean I'm glad it happened, everything happens for a reason, but I didn't see it coming. When first taking on the dean of students role, I got hired by a Latina president. Then she had transitioned and they brought in an interim White male President. And he was really cool, but he only intended to be there a couple months until the search. He was a real good guy. The permanent official president that was selected was a White male and he was phenomenal. He was a strict academic. He was full-time faculty, moved up to dean, became a vice president, then got a presidency. Full academic, but he also knew that if he didn't have good student affairs, the students aren't gonna have a good experience. He really valued student affairs, so I met with him a lot and he was phenomenal. For a lot of times it felt like it was the president and I versus the rest of the administration. He was very committed to honoring our HSI identity. We got money to build an addition to one of our buildings, to add three new floors to one of our buildings and he wanted to make sure that the core was connected to Latino identity. And he wanted to have space dedicated for Puerto Rican identity, Dominican identity, Mexican-American identity, he understood that Latino was an umbrella term, we all weren't Mexicans. He was phenomenal and we got a lot of resistance. And then I don't know what the actual straw was between he and the board, but then he was gone and the provost became the interim president. And immediately, even though he and I had historically had a great relationship, once he became interim president I felt myself being iced out. And I'm like, “Oh, I see the writing on the wall here.”

My president at [Secure University], since I was in admissions and because it was a high-profile position because it was a multicultural recruitment role, my president was very supportive. He knew who I was and he had me testify before the State Latino Caucus. He had me testify before the Black Caucus, on behalf of the school because I had a high-profile position. Again, he was very supportive of student services. Oddly enough, since I've been through presidential transitions so many times, I did not see it coming at [Cloud College] because I'd been through presidential transitions at every institution and I've never had a problem.

Then my president at [Advance College] where I was associate dean, she was phenomenal. Because again, she was Latina and she came up the student affairs ranks. She was very specific, very intentional with me. Even when I was hired as an academic advisor, she was very intentional in telling me, “You gotta get your doctorate.” I'm like, “Ah, but I have a master’s, I'm good.” She’s like, “No, you have to get your doctorate. You gotta learn all these things. You can't stay stuck in advising. You have to learn all these things. You have to grow.” She was also very intentional in telling me to make sure that I was balanced and she would always give me advice. Her lines that stick with me are, “You need to understand the politics of every situation.” Then the other line was, “When you're the most afraid, channel your inner actress and you go and perform your role.” Those are always the two pieces of advice that she made sure stuck with me.

After my time at [Cloud College] I went back to [Advance College], serving as an associate dean in academic affairs. I’m currently looking to go back to the student affairs side. I’m interviewing. I've been very blessed, very fortunate, but I earned this. I worked hard to get where I'm at. Don't get me wrong I love academic affairs, I do. I float between academia and student affairs. But I really miss the interaction with the students. And even at the chief student affairs officer level, I still got to interact with students. Even if it was hearing their complaints or hearing them cry or whatever, even if it was all negative I still got to impact students. Whereas in academic affairs, working with faculty was great, I loved the faculty that I worked with, and I got to observe faculty and give feedback and work on their tenure packets and it was a great experience. But I didn't see any students, I think I saw one student and that was by accident, or two students by accident. I really miss it, I'm like I need to go back to where I belong. I still have students who find me and reach out to me on Twitter, or they haven't and they're like, “I don't know if this is still your cell phone, but...” And so, I make a point to reach out to my mentors, to those people who impacted me and tell them, “You know, I know it's been all these years, but I need you to know how much you meant to me,” because I get that from my students and I want my mentors to know how much they mean to me.

I had a lot of good mentors. A lot of strong support networks. I've also always been very fortunate to have a lot of people show me the way and also you know yank my chain when I needed to. It's not perfect. I always had those people who would be like, “Uh uh, come back. You went too far.” You know, we need those too. The vice president of student services at [Secure University], he gave me a lot of latitude. Again, I was the only person in charge of multicultural recruitment at [Secure University]. I was very active with Greek affairs as well. I was very active on-campus before I had the baby. Very high-profile position just because of all the activities I did, but he would be like, “Kiddo.” He would call me kiddo. He's like, “Kiddo.” I go, “Yeah.” He goes, “You need to slow down.” I'm like, “But, but, but.” He's like, “No, no, no, no.” He's like, “You can't attack every racial problem on campus.” I'm like, “But you don't understand.” He's like, “No, no, no. You can't. It's too big.” He goes, “You can't fight everybody.”

Contending with structural barriers and microaggressions. I think because I was so aware of my identity at such a young age, it served me well, but it also didn't prepare me either. It served me well in that in retrospect I had a great education, I learned a lot of things but also in retrospect, you start to see the indoctrination, right? The American exceptionalism, the ultra-patriotism, the, “Oh we're all friends, everything is so perfect, we live in this idyllic community where everyone gets along.” I could navigate between the different spaces, I could very easily. My husband calls it my White girl voice, I can very easily slip into my White girl voice and my persona and be fine. Then, of course, being Latina I understand my heritage and my culture. It served me well in that I can navigate all of these spaces.

However, being aware of my Mexican-American identity from a young age didn't quite prepare me for the level of racism that I would experience in my career. Going from an idyllic high school experience to [Secure University], yeah, I navigated some racist experiences. For example, I'm a chapter founder of my sorority and we were very frustrated with our institution. They lost our paperwork a couple of times, it was very very difficult. Then when we finally got a meeting with the director of student activities, I will never forget, his exact words were, “You people already have a sorority, why do you need another one?” I was incensed and angry and immature. I was less than professional in my response. I was telling Pa, my uncle, I called him Pa because he was my father figure. I was telling Pa all of this and he's like, “Look, remember what I told you. They're never gonna give you anything.” He's like, “They're always gonna fight you because you're Latina. The reason they don't want you to have another sorority is because then there's gonna be more of you and when there's more of you, there's power.” He goes, “I know you know this.” Again, you're young, you think of it as isolated experiences, right? You don't think of it as systemic. Not until you start to learn about that. It wasn't until I got older that I started to see and feel and experience the systemic biases and the mansplaining and all the different things that happened in the workplace. For that, I wasn't as prepared as I thought I would be, but again, my passion is to make sure that people of color, specifically women of color, get through the pipeline. My whole purpose is to make sure that more of us get through the pipeline. This is one of the reasons why I have worked mostly at PBIs, predominantly Black institutions, and HSIs. I call the work that I did at [Secure University] for eight years the blip in my career, because all my other experience is community college, predominantly with PBIs and HSIs. Ever since [Secure University], that's been my focus of how can I make a difference? What can I do? In the classroom, as an administrator, whatever, I want to make sure that we're doing what we need to do, we're learning what we need to learn and get across that stage.

My favorite conversation because I've had it with like three or four White women, because again in my White girl voice as my husband calls it, “Oh, I don't even think of you as Latina. You're just, you’re just Connie, you're just so smart. You're just so smart.” I'm like, “Did you just call my people stupid? Because that's what you said.” Sometimes I'm sarcastic, and I'll say it in a biting playful way like, “Did you just call my people stupid? Is that what you said?” “Oh no, no, no, no, oh

no, don't be silly." Sometimes I'll just take it on directly. The most recent experience, I just looked at her, she was a doctorate-level professional as well, I'm like, "Really doctor? You realize what you just said?" She's like, "What?" I'm like, "You just implied that I'm not like other Latinas because I'm smart and articulate were your words." She's like, "Well, I didn't mean it like that." I'm like, "But that's what you said." Sometimes I take it head on and talk to them about it and sometimes I'm a little sarcastic. I think it also depends on my level of comfort with them or my level of discomfort. I also have not outgrown that. I have no problem telling you about yourself. My Latina president from [Advance College] would always tell me that, she's like, "You know, you're gonna have to let go of that." I'm like, "No. I think it's served me well all these years, I'm gonna keep it." That little tool is gonna stay in the box.

There was also one time when I had a director and he was Mexican-American, so here I thought, "Wow, this is gonna be great, I'm working for this guy, he's Mexican-American too. This is gonna be terrific." Yeah, no, he's a *machista* [sexist]. On his third day, he said to me, he's like "Well." He's like and I forgot his wife's name. Whatever her name was, "She knows her place. Latina women belong at home, not in the workforce." I looked at him, I said, "Excuse me?" He's like, "You heard me." He's like, "Latina women belong at home." I looked at him and I'm like, "Well you're in for a rough ride." I was significantly younger. In retrospect, I probably shouldn't have been so rough on him, I wouldn't recommend it for administrators now, but I was hell bent on making his life miserable because how dare he say that to me. Again, I didn't know any better. Fighting had gotten me everything I wanted, I had protested at [Secure University] and we saved Casa Latina. Battle didn't bother me. A lot of it was I earned my space, how dare you say that to me. It was hard, and it was hard to accept. For whatever reason when I think about that particular supervisor, that particular Mexican-American male, I think he had his own issues.

Then there are other times when I get the pat on my hand of like, "Okay. You're done talking now." In meetings or when people think it's appropriate to yell at you. I'm gonna yell back. I'm either gonna yell back or I'm going to whisper very softly so you understand that I'm serious, one or the other. For as much success as I had, sometimes I question the decisions I've made. But at the end of the day I've gotten this far, so I'm okay. I'm strong in who I am, I'm strong in right and wrong. I'm very strong in, "You don't treat people like this, you don't treat anyone like this." I'm very committed to that. At [Cloud College] was where I really particularly honed that balance of: I could still engage in battle but I don't have to raise my voice. And I don't have to argue, and I just can still get my point across without having to do all the dramatics per se. But that took years to learn. You got to find joy somewhere. You can't live as the angry Latina every day.

Colleagues always mentioned, they're like, "Why are you so calm?" I'm like, "Look, at the end of the day, we're administrators. If they want to walk us out of here, they can walk us out whenever they want." You do what you do and if they don't like what you do, they'll get somebody else to do it. You can't sit here wasting time

fretting over whether or not somebody likes you, because at the end of the day, whether they like you or not, if they don't want you there, they don't want you there. It's like at the end of the day, it doesn't really matter. Just do your job, you got nothing to worry about. I'm very committed to having a strong work ethic. You know we're our own worst critics. I am not patient for a lot of things, but I think that feeds my hunger, right? Because I want what I want so I'm gonna work for it. When I show up, I do my work. I'm not there to play around. Yes, I want to build good relationships and be a good partner, but I'm not there to waste time. I don't want to sit and watch YouTube with you all day. I want us to work.

Professional development experiences. I also had an active membership with MALCS, *Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social*.[10] So these are women who I just like totally admire so every time I read Chicana feminist stuff, it's always, MALCS, MALCS, MALCS. I did get to do that membership for several years and got to meet some of the women I cited in my dissertation. It was incredible to be a part of that and attend their summer institute. Given that I was at [Cloud College] the times that I went to the summer institutes, it re-energized my commitment to the work, I'm like, "This is why I'm here." Yes, I battle with this administrator or that administrator every day or whatever, but this association always reminded me I'm here for a purpose. I'm here to make sure that my students are getting the best education possible and that they're getting the services they need to ensure that they can do what they need to do in the classroom. The MALCS summer institute also enhanced my writing skills, really listening to a lot of the presenters because what happened is that yes, the bulk were faculty scholars don't get me wrong, but there were a lot of student affairs professionals, a lot of grad students, a lot of people who were presenting. And then because I also teach, getting to be able to talk to these women about how I can incorporate *testimonio* writing into my classroom, and how I can incorporate more sensitive research and more critical analysis into my classes. And then of course personally, everyone needs to find their fountain of youth somewhere. And for me it was being with these women who I got to cite in my dissertation and now here I am meeting them and taking pictures with them. And they're encouraging me to write and submit and publish with the journal. It was just an amazing experience. Even now I'm thinking back and right now I'm smiling just thinking back meeting all these women. It was everything.

I was also a member of a [state-based Latino higher education recruitment council] when I worked admissions. I never really did NASPA or ACPA, but I did get to go to a couple of ACE leadership programs.[11] I got to go to the National Institute

[10] MALCS is an organization of Chicanas/Latinas and Native American women who work in academic and community-based settings and seek to support the education and advancement of Chicana/Latina and Native American women's issues. MALCS hosts a summer institute to serve as a space of support and empowerment (MALCS, 2017).

[11] ACE, the American Council on Education, is the leading body of colleges/universities in the U.S. and they offer a variety of leadership development programs throughout the year (ACE, 2017).

of Leadership Development for Women.[12] I met a lot of great women there who had some great influence in my life that way. This was specific for women, it was mostly all women in student affairs. There were a couple of academic leaders, you didn't have to be of color, but it was for women who were taking on leadership roles at colleges and universities. Again, understanding the balance, the perception of women, the things that we're gonna face. It was a lot of like scenario-based, like, "Okay, here's what's happening, how would you handle it? Who would you get involved and who would you contact?"

I also went to the ACE Spectrum Leadership Institute and that is specifically for people of color to advance in higher education roles, either student affairs or academic leadership, whatever the case may be. It really is to groom higher education senior executive leaders. That was a three-day event and we got to meet current and retired university presidents of color, got to talk about the sensitivity about when we take on a project specifically if it impacts students of color. You know, are we just being the token or are we actually doing something for students? Or are we just being too sensitive? Things of that nature, which is understanding the balance. Then really just talking about what are our skill sets and what are our goals and what do we want to do. We actually had a session with those, we call them headhunters, but those talent recruiting people who are looking for the next VP and president. We got to sit with them and they reviewed our vitaes and our cover letters and gave us advice on what we should be doing next. The provost at [Cloud College] encouraged me to go. I'm also active in the Higher Learning Commission.[13] I go to that conference every year. As a chief student affairs officer, you kinda gotta go because at some point you're gonna be under accreditation review. I'm active with accreditation. I've applied to be a peer reviewer and was accepted, so I'll be able to start going on those trips and being an accreditation peer reviewer. This will help me with my future career goals.

Closing Thoughts and Advice

My dissertation was on Latina leadership. My future goal is to be a community college president. I know it's a long way off. I specifically want it to be a little longer since I know how political presidencies are and I want to get my kids through college before I do that. I want to make sure I can pay for college before I take on a presidency so I am taking that part slow just because I know how political those positions are. I've also used the insight gained from doing this research in my career and plan to continue to use it. Being balanced was the biggest thing I learned. Like yes, you need to look out for Latino students because you're Latina and the Latino students are going to be looking to you because you're Latina. But remembering that you're there for everybody and you need to be the president for everybody. And I was very committed to doing that, plus I had that extra experience

[12] The National Institute of Leadership Development (NILD) provides a range of leadership and training opportunities to promote leadership development. They currently offer a program for executive-level women (NILD, 2017).
[13] The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is one of six regional college/university accreditors in the U.S. HLC accredits higher education institutions in 19 states (HLC, 2017).

of working with Black fraternities at [Secure University]. So for me it was always about everybody, but just remembering to balance.

And then every single one of the participants talked about being passionate about what you do. Yes, the presidency is a 24/7 job. Yes, you're always on call. Yes, you're the hostess with the mostest sometimes. But you got to be in it, you have to actually want to do it. And they talked about meeting all these other presidents who were just there because they got picked to be a president, it just kind of happened. Whereas these three women, yes, they had definitive people who helped them along the way, and yes it happened. But they were methodical. When you look at their career pathway, it was very clear that they were headed toward the presidency. I'm going to share with you the advice that I got from one of my dissertation interview participants. It was so powerful, we were sitting in her president's office and there was a little coffee table between us and she grabbed my hands and she's like, "*Mija* [my girl], let me tell you. People are not going to believe in you, you believe in yourself. You have the strength to do this. You will do this." And those were her words to me, and they have made me cry, they have made me happy.

A Response to Connie: A *Testimonio* of Resistance and Latina Supports

Connie benefited from a variety of resources in her career pathway to the SSAO role and two central themes surfaced from her *testimonio*: (a) the invaluable role Latina supports played throughout her personal and professional journey and (b) her drive to resist structural barriers to dismantle inequities and as a form of self-advocacy. These Latina supports included her mom, her Latina sorority sisters, Latina presidents, and Latina/Chicana feminist scholars she connected with through her involvement in MALCS.

Connie cited her mother as a strong source of support and motivation who fostered her hard work ethic and a strong value for education, doing anything she could to ensure that Connie went to college. Connie carried this commitment to education from her family into her career by striving to get more students and professionals, especially Latinas/os and Women of Color, through the pipeline given the inequities that we contend with in higher education. In addition to family support, Connie benefited from invaluable peer support from Latina sorority sisters in her

undergraduate years, support that continued into her career pathway. These connections with Latina peers provided Connie with family-like ties and a culturally affirming counterspace of support during her undergraduate years. Connie worked to establish this Latina sorority, but it did not come without challenges. In particular, Connie struggled with the administration's racist view that having more than one Latina sorority at the institution was unnecessary. Connie addressed experiences of discrimination directly, held steadfast to her commitment to social justice, and maintained high self-efficacy, resistance strategies she developed from her uncle, a labor organizer, to navigate these inequities illustrating the valuable knowledge Latina administrators can gain from their families. Although these strategies served Connie well at a young age, the mentality of feeling the need to "fight" and "battle" all inequities may lead to Latinas' burnout without holding their colleagues and institutional leadership accountable for their (mis)perceptions.

Connie's *testimonio* also demonstrated how Latina role models can serve as a valuable resource and unique source of social capital in Latina administrators' career pathways through her connection with: (a) a Latina president before pursuing a SSAO role and (b) Latina presidents from her dissertation research. These role models served as distinct sources of social capital by fostering Connie's career aspirations to pursue a presidency by allowing her to truly "see" herself in higher level roles through these connections. The powerful presence of Latina role models in Connie's career pathway illuminates the need for institutions to support an increased presence of Latinas in administration. While Connie benefited from multiple mentors and guides in her career pathway, these Latina presidents offered her invaluable advice to

pursue a doctoral degree and how to navigate campus politics. Although the Latina president who worked at Connie's institution cautioned her against navigating challenges head-on through a direct and sarcastic approach, and in some instances by raising her voice, Connie now recognizes how her approach to challenges as a young professional was problematic. With time and self-reflection Connie realized, "You can't live as the angry Latina every day," as this can lead to feelings of exhaustion.

Connie harnessed her resilience, sense of humor, ability to remain calm, and resistance strategies to navigate microaggressions, *machismo* [patriarchy], and stereotypes in her career from male and White female colleagues. Connie's attendance at the MALCS summer institutes also provided her with valuable research skills, connections with Chicana feminist scholars, and a space of rejuvenation from contending with racism and sexism in her career. Although student affairs professional associations such as NASPA are frequently the "professional home" of Latina/o SSAOs, MALCS offered a venue of support that restored Connie's commitment to work in student affairs. This support was critical given the unexpected and exhausting challenges she navigated as a dean of students, including the elimination of her position. While frustrating and unfair, this experience is not uncommon for cabinet-level leaders as Connie described how a change in presidency can mean drastic changes in institutional priorities and the organizational structure, which was her experience. Connie's Latina support networks provided her with critical emotional support, navigational skills, advice, and a source of empowerment to push through challenges in her career.

Selma

"The one thing I've learned is that it's never going to be the right time."

Personal and Family Background

I was born in Mexico, but my mom, a single parent, brought me and my sister here when we were quite young, probably toddlers. She remarried here, and then I had two younger siblings, half-brothers. I think because she couldn't afford us, she sent my sister and I back to Mexico to be raised by my great aunt and great uncle. So my sister and I see them as parents. So I attended first-, second-, and third-grade in Mexico. Then my mom sent for us, so we transported back to the United States and grew up there in a very low socioeconomic neighborhood. I think we had a one-bedroom apartment for six of us. Then eventually, we moved to another county, so I attended part of elementary school there, as well as middle school and high school. English is my second language, and so when I came back from Mexico to start school here in the United States, my sister and I didn't speak any English. My stepfather was born here, so he spoke English and Spanish, so we had to take ESL classes in elementary school. I was able to pick it up right away. I think within a year I was able to pick it up, but my sister, it was more challenging for her. So that was always a struggle between her and my stepfather.

My mother was a seamstress, and then when we moved, she started working from home for a company to make clothing. So I would see her working so hard, every day, stopping to make dinner and then going back to the sewing machine. There would be piles and piles of clothing in the house until that particular job got done. She got paid by the unit. My sister and I would also help her with some of that, and sometimes we were up til midnight, one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning, helping her complete these, “jobs,” as she called them. I just thought it was backbreaking work. My stepfather was a tile setter, so he was working in the construction field and that was so volatile all the time. If there was rain, there was no work, so there was no food. If there was work, we did fine, we had money to buy lunch at school, or we had money to make sandwiches and take a lunch, but if there wasn't any work, there was nothing to take to school. Just seeing how much my mom and stepfather worked, and it's not about the hard work, it's just how labor-intensive it was and the return on their work was minimal, and I just thought, “I have to do something different.”

I think I always liked to learn as a child. I did well in school. When I came to the United States, I was really good in math, and like I said, I picked up English pretty well. The following year, I wasn't in an ESL class anymore. So I think because I like to learn, I knew that that was something I wanted to pursue. And my mom always would say, “You need to go to school, you need to go to school, it's very good to go to school.” And from what I understand, my biological father is very smart. He only had probably a sixth-grade education, but he was very intelligent and had all these businesses, and she would always say, “You're really smart like your father. You should go to school.”

I also learned in particular from my mother the value of hard work. The fact that if you work hard, follow through on your commitments, and you meet the deadline, it pays off. The payoff for her was getting paid, and then us having food. I

think that she always instilled in us the value of hard work. And also the value and the importance of education. She would say, “I only went to third-grade, I can read, I wish I would have done more. You can do it. I couldn't do it, but you can do it.” She always wanted to go back to school, and she would sign up for classes, for ESL classes first, and she was very excited and enthusiastic. Then that would only last for a few weeks, 'cause then my stepfather would get jealous and she would have to stop. I think the other thing I learned from my mom is the importance of independence, and not relying on a man. I think that is the one thing that I feel, just from watching her, and how dependent she was on him, and how she craved learning more, and wanting to do more, and aspired to be more than what she was kind of boxed into doing. Watching that taught me a big lesson. I saw how unhappy she was, and it seemed to me that she felt trapped, and I wanted to be able to have choices. That was important, whether she intended to teach me that or not, that was something important that I learned. And that was always my drive, is that I want to be independent, I want to be able to support myself, I want to be able to provide for my kids, and I don't want them to have to struggle the way I did, to obtain my educational goals. I've been able to do that. I think the value of hard work has paid off wherever I land, whether it was in the military, whether it was my first job working at McDonald's. That was my first legal job, because I had under-the-table jobs before that. Hard work has always led for me to move up in a position and get promoted.

Educational Journey

I always knew I wanted to go to college, so I did take some college-level courses in high school, with the goal of going to college. I was accepted to [Bright University], through the [First-Generation Support Program (FGSP)] program. I attended a summer bridge program at the local community college, and then started at [Bright University]. My first year I did really well academically, but my second year, it started to become a challenge. First, because my stepfather said, “If you want to go to college, you can, but you need to become a doctor.” So I had to choose biology as my major. And even through high school, I thought, “I'm going to be a doctor,” because that's what he told me I had to be.

My mother had a third-grade level education from Mexico, I think my stepfather got up to the eighth- or ninth-grade in high school here, so neither one of them knew about college or how to support me being a first-generation college student. I was getting financial aid, but the financial aid was more going to help the family than to help me with my books and the things that I needed for school. So the second year became quite a challenge. I was subsequently academically dismissed from [Bright University]. So, when things didn't go well at [Bright University], I did leave [Bright University] and I did get a full-time job in a medical office, still thinking that that's what I wanted to pursue.

While I was at [Bright University], my [FGSP] counselor met with me, and through journaling and all the assignments that you get in a student success class, I think she learned about me, and she pulled me to the side and she just said, “Look, I know you're a really good student, you have a lot of potential. If you really want to be

successful in school, you're going to have to leave your home." That was a shocking kind of recommendation, because I did feel kind of like, "You don't know me, you don't know my family." I think I was offended by it at the time, I was really taken aback. I thought about that, in that job at the medical office that I had after I left [Bright University], so I decided I needed to do something different. While I was in high school, I did participate in this program called Naval ROTC, Junior ROTC. I knew about the military. That's when I decided to join the Marine Corps. I went in the Marines, I did that for seven and a half years, and I did five years of reserves after that. That was probably one of the best decisions I made for myself, because it did remove me from that environment, and it transported me to another part of the country, which was a shock. But I was able to continue taking classes at night.

What I always wanted to do was get my degree in psychology. And when I wanted to declare that as a major, when I first started at [Bright University], that's when my stepfather said, "No, you need to become a doctor. Psychologist, that's not an important job." He claimed to always know so much, but looking back, now I know that he didn't. So, psychology was always something that I really liked and enjoyed. I remember taking that Psych 101 class, and wanting to learn more. So when I was in the Marine Corps and I was taking classes, I was just taking one or two classes at a time then when I got stationed in a new area, since [Anchor College] had a campus at the Naval Yard. That's where I pretty much finished my bachelor's degree and I declared psychology as my major. But my goal at the time was to be a therapist, not to work in higher ed.

Pathway to Student Affairs

I decided to get out of the Marine Corps, because I had just become a single parent, I'd just gotten a divorce, or was going through a divorce, and I was going to be sent to Japan on unaccompanied orders, which meant that I couldn't take my son with me and because we were also fighting for custody I knew that that was a perfect opportunity for my ex-husband to get custody. So I decided, "Okay, that means that I'm getting out." I really had intended to stay in 20 years, retire, I really liked it. But I got out. When I got out of the Marine Corps, I was pretty close to almost being done with my bachelor's degree and the director of that center at the Naval Yard said, "Hey, I heard you're getting out. Are you looking for a job?" And I said, "Well, I think I'm moving back home, I got accepted to another university to finish my bachelor's, I'm looking into moving down there and starting in the Fall." This was early summer.

He said, "If you are interested in staying in the area, I know there's another academic center, the director of this other center in the area is looking for an administrative assistant. I know you could do the work, but the advantage would be that you would get your classes for free." I thought, "Wow." I kind of weighed my options since the person who is now my spouse lived there, and at the time we were debating moving to my hometown, but he had his career started there. I decided to just take a chance and stay. I became the administrative assistant, and it was really funny, because I went in on this person's recommendation just to fill out the

application. I was still on active duty, I was still in my uniform. I went at lunch time and filled out the application. I turned it in, and she overheard me talking to the admin assistant at the time, and then she called me in and interviewed me on the spot. But then I didn't hear from her, so I got out of the Marine Corps, then I went on vacation, and then I came back. I had like five messages on my message machine...back when I had a message machine...waiting from her, saying, “I'm really interested, I'm really interested.” And then I started working there, and started taking classes.

The director said to me, “You're pretty close to being done with your degree. If you finish your bachelor's degree, I'll promote you to assistant director.” And I did, and she did. Then she said, “You've got your bachelor's degree now. If you get your master's degree, I'll promote you to...” I think it was educational coordinator, working with the grad programs. I thought, “Okay, yeah, why not?” It just seemed like a no-brainer to me. It was the perfect scenario. And still my goal was therapy, and then I started to do observations, group observations, and then I had to do two internships. One of them was at a community college, and I was an intern for the [Latino Student Support Program (LSSP)]. So I got to work with the [LSSP] counselor. When I looked at the students that were coming in and out of her office, and I helped coordinate a couple of events for her, and I saw the population that she was serving, I just thought to myself, “These are all students that are just like me. They are all first-generation and listening to their stories, seeing their families come to these events.” I just thought, “This is what I want to do.”

I had also done some group observations, and I just thought it didn't excite me like the [LSSP], and being at the college campus, and participating in that and my conversations with her, and students just dropping in, and how much they looked to her as a role model and how she was able to influence their lives, all of those things really called to me. So then I changed the focus of my master's program to a master's in counseling and career development. That's how I got into higher ed. And she did, she promoted me again after I finished my master’s. Then we moved home to be near my family and his. I worked at the [Anchor College] main campus for almost four years, in the office of professional programs, it was working with all the campus extensions. This is before they had other institutions as part of the system and all that. So I worked coordinating the master's in human resources and the master's in career counseling.

Professional Experiences in Student Affairs/Higher Education

Once I was at [Anchor College], at the main campus, I knew that I wanted to get into the community college system. My goal was to be an academic counselor in a community college. But it's a hard system to get into. The boss that I had at [Anchor College] was very flexible with me. One of my students, who happens to now be a full-time counselor, she was an advisor for [FGSP] at [Fit College]. Two of my students from [Anchor] in the career counseling program worked there at [Fit College]. We just got to talking, and I said, “It's been really challenging, I can't seem to get an interview.” And then a few months later, these two students came to me, and they said, “There's going to be this part-time teaching, part-time counseling position,

and if you're interested, we can tell the dean." I gave them my résumé, and then the dean said, "Oh yeah, I'd like to interview her." And I interviewed for the part-time teaching, part-time counseling position. So I was working full-time at [Anchor], and I was doing that role part-time, for a little while, for a semester. But that's really what got my foot in the door, because then the dean, after interviewing me and seeing my résumé and my experience, he said, "I know you want to be a counselor, but you're very well-prepared for a management position. We have a [FGSP] coordinator position opening in a few months. I really would encourage you to apply for that, if you would consider."

And during that time period, things were frozen. There weren't a lot of counseling positions opening up, and I really wanted to leave [Anchor College]. And I thought, "It's just very natural for you." So I thought, "Okay, I'll give it a try." So, I did. I applied, and I got the job. And after that, I was getting all kind of offers. Full-time counseling, this, that...I said, "I just started this, it didn't seem fair to be there for six months and then apply for other things." And I've been in management ever since. When I got to [Fit College] and I got that [FGSP] coordinator position, I didn't know that much about the community college system other than the population it served, and that's what attracted me to it. And then [FGSP], I knew about [FGSP] 'cause I did the summer bridge program myself through [FGSP], so I knew about that. Then I did [FGSP] at [Bright University]. It was very similar. So the population for [FGSP] is very similar to the [LSSP], first-generation, low socioeconomic, developmental ed. It really called to me. The president of [Fit College], [Matthew], was assigned to me as my mentor through a mentoring program for managers. [Matthew] started out as a faculty member at a community college, and he had a mentor who kind of saw the potential in him as well, and then brought him on board, and gave him a position as kind of like assistant to the president, or assistant to the superintendent, or something like that, and then mentored him to become a president. [Matthew] is Portuguese and he introduced me to the [state-wide association for administrators in community colleges]. [Matthew] sponsored me for their mentoring program, and then a class focused on community college administration.

I was mentored by [Matthew] for a year and then through this association they assign you a mentor. Through this association you form a formal network, but then you develop those informal relationships. So [Sophia], who was the president of [Sunny College] at the time, became my mentor. So I got to work with her for a year. She also introduced me to others that I could also go to and meet with. She also introduced me to the formal process, and would allow me to sit in on some of her cabinet meetings, meetings with the chancellor, kind of job-shadow her for a couple of days. Both [Matthew] and [Sophia] said to me, "You have a lot of potential, you're a natural administrator, you really should consider moving up in community college. We need future leaders, and you have a lot to grow, but you have a lot of potential for a leadership position in community college." So through both of them encouraging me, and the mentoring and training through this association, that's where I started to think about, "I want to do what [Sophia's] doing. She was the president of [Sunny College], oh my God, I grew up in that area." I just loved her demeanor, I loved her

values, great character…a woman of integrity, Latina, I could just really see myself in what she was doing. An immigrant, very similar to my background, English second language, so on.

The president of [Fit College], [Matthew], then left to become president here where I work now. He became president here, and about a year after being here, he called me and he said, “I'm doing some reorganization, we're going to have a couple of positions, I would really like to meet with you and talk about a couple of these positions, and I really encourage you to apply.” I didn't want to leave, so we met. He brought the positions, one of them was financial aid director, and the other one was [FGSP] director. I said, “Financial aid, I've done it at [Anchor College], but I want to work with students. I want to be able to make a difference with students.” He said, “Okay, we're still finishing up this position for director of [FGSP], I'll let you know when it opens up. No promises, you have to get your application in, you have to make it through the first level of interviews, and then you have to make it through the final interview. But I just think it would be a really good opportunity for you.”

Getting connected to additional professional development opportunities. So the position came around, and I kind of went back and forth, back and forth, and then I went ahead and submitted it, and I got the job. So I became the director of [FGSP] here at [Desert College]. When I started here, [Matthew] sponsored me for the National Community College Hispanic Council (NCCHC) fellowship program. This mentor who is not Latino, who is not a woman, is the individual that saw in me what I just didn't see in myself, and encouraged me and provided me the opportunities to participate in these professional development activities. I think it's important that the leadership, not just our roles, but the leadership above us support those professional development opportunities. You know, programs like the NCCHC. So I participated in the fellowship program, and the main goal, or the purpose of the program is, it's a national program...you have to be Hispanic, Latino, and you have to be recommended and sponsored by your president.

Through that program, you go through a series of workshops, they introduce you to different high-level chancellors, presidents, superintendents, board members. They did a whole piece on leadership, you did a leadership assessment, interview, résumé...the basics, but the big piece was the leadership piece, and then they had different speakers from like I said, different levels, coming to talk to us about budget, diversity, access...just all the different pieces of community college, and different states, too. Because what they're trying to do is groom you to become a president, really anywhere in the nation. Through NCCHC, I was also assigned a mentor. At the time, he was the president at another community college. Now he's the chancellor at a different community college, and I sit with him on an executive board at [Bright University]. It's just really neat, because maybe we haven't stayed as connected as I probably did with [Sophia], but it was very easy to speak to him, and to get a meeting with him if I needed to, or meet him for lunch, he's very open. That connection is still there, and I think I went through that program six, seven, eight years ago. If there's

opportunities, he'll contact me and say, “I think you may want to consider this,” even though we haven't maintained that connection on a regular basis.

I also benefited from informal connections, like [Adam Garcia]. [Adam], I met through a friend, and I see [Adam] as someone that I can meet for lunch, for dinner. I'll just say, “Hey, do you have a few minutes? I really need to run something by you.” I think that's the important piece about these connections, these external connections, is that oftentimes, especially the higher you go...so who do I report to? I report to the superintendent. Am I going to discuss anything that I may have questions or second-guesses or anything about with anyone here? No, absolutely not. So I have to be able to communicate with someone that I trust, and vice versa. And [Adam] is that person for me. And [Matthew], I've called him a couple of times, too. It's funny, when the president position came open at another community college, [Matthew] sent me an email, and he said, “This is the one you've been waiting for, you need to apply.” I had to write back, “I haven't been in this position for two years, first of all.” But I'm not going to go against [Adam Garcia] for that presidency position. You'd be crazy to.

[Matthew] also sponsored me to go to a [women’s leadership institute sponsored by a state-wide non-profit association] seeking to strengthen leadership in the state’s community colleges. It's a week-long program and it's only women, and it's, again, to become an administrator in community colleges. I think with the women's one, it was about how to navigate sometimes the gender inequity, in terms of, there's a lot more male presidents than there are women presidents, how to demystify some of the generalizations that people often make about women in leadership roles, and how to navigate that, in terms of...if you're really harsh, you're perceived one way. If you're really soft, you're perceived...so how to balance that, and having a work-life balance. [Matthew] was also the one, from the first moment he met me, he started talking to me about getting my doctorate. And I had children, and it just never seemed the right time. But the one thing I've learned is that it's never going to be the right time. But this is the way it happened.

Encouragement to pursue dean of students role. I was the director of [FGSP], and after being in that position for three years, the dean of students position opened, and once again [Matthew] came to me, and he said, “I think you really should consider applying for this position. Again, no promises...” he's always really good about that up-front, that disclaimer. But I said, “That's just not for me. I love what I'm doing in [FGSP], I love serving this population.” And he was just the kind of person that would come into your office, just to say hello, remember your kids' names, “What's [Josh] doing now?” That real personal connection with people. He had that talent, still has it. And he would drop by my office, he might have a flyer about something, he's like, “This school is putting on this event, wouldn't that be nice if we did something like that?” I would say, “Okay, [Matthew]. I'll make it happen.” So I started *Dia de los Muertos*[14] [Day of the Dead] here, we revived the [Latina leaders

[14] *Dia de los Muertos* [Day of the Dead] honors the lives of those who have died through festivals and celebrations November 1-2 each year. *Dia de los Muertos* is strongly tied to Mexican culture, where

association]. We started the Hispanic speaker series, for Hispanic heritage month. When I was still the director of [FGSP], I brought a speaker from the Little Rock Nine, a segregated school, but the speaker lives here in the area. We filled the auditorium with our students and high school students, and that had never happened before. [Matthew] said to me, “Look at what you've done while you've been the director.” Then I did a lot of stuff for [FGSP] in terms of bringing speakers, and just different opportunities for our students. And of course, I didn't do this alone. I worked with my team to do that, but one thing we don't do well is, we don't take credit. Right?

That's something that I've had to work really hard at. So I spearheaded that, and it was really, really productive for our students. I wanted to bring in speakers where students could see themselves, and aspire to be that, that they could do it too. So [Matthew] said, “If you were able to do this for your...” at the time, I think it was close to 1,000 students that we had in [FGSP]... “Think of what you can do for all the other students that don't qualify for [FGSP] and what an impact you can make on this campus.” I was like, “Oh man, [Matthew], you always do that to me.” I think I waited until the day the application was due to submit it, because I kept going back and forth, back and forth, “Do I want to do this or not?” So I did it. Well, I got the job. And I did that for seven years, and then that's when he really started, “Okay, you're the dean of students, you're going to become a president. It's not required, but you really should get your doctorate.”

Pursuing doctoral study. So I think I started in 2007 as the dean of students. The following year, the legislation approved that the state institutions could offer a doctoral program, so I contacted someone and I said, “I'm really interested in starting the program in the Fall.” She said, “If you can hold off, I'm actually moving to [Bright University] to start their program there, call me in January.” And I did, and then it was just meant to be, because it was on my way home. I live right by [Bright University], and I stopped in and I could take my classes, and then I keep going home. I did that doctoral program. It was a three-year program and I finished it. I think [Bright University] has one of the best programs for community college leaders, because there's other programs in the area that talk about community college and they market it for community college leaders, but they really aren't, it's really more K through 12. The community college piece, the way that they've intentionally put it at [Bright University], they intentionally designed it for the community college leader, and the people they have teaching, the professors, they really look for those individuals that have had that background, that have worked in community college. If the person who is teaching the class didn't have that, they did a really good job of bringing in those speakers who were current chancellors or presidents or VP's, to bring in that practitioner perspective. What I really also liked about the program is that it had the equity piece. It was a really important part of the program, that diversity and equity piece.

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the celebrations began, but is also celebrated throughout Latin American and areas with large Latino populations (Micalizio, 2012).

I think politics is the number one challenge I have faced. One of the things that the doctoral program did for me is that, even though I had that voice, and I think I was being effective in what I was doing, and I was making an impact, I wasn't making an impact in the global sense. So having that doctorate and learning what I learned during the program...I knew the information, but having that research to support what your perceptions were, or what your intuition was telling you, as a practitioner to support that research and to be able to speak confidently, that's what the doctoral program did for me. Being that voice at the table, and being able to impact policy and being able to impact change is really, I think, where I started to grow, and feel like I'd arrived. In terms of some of the obstacles and barriers, I think politics is one of those. But I think you're going to have that, no matter where you go. And some campuses are more open to diversity than others, and equity. So for example, [Sunny College], the conversation's always going to be about low socioeconomic, first-generation college students, because of the population they serve. This campus here has changed tremendously within the last 10+ years that I've been here. The Latino population, I think when I first started here we had just become a Hispanic-Serving Institution, about 25%. Now we're close to 60%. So that's a huge change, and change in culture.

Navigating challenges and politics. So when I first got here, just introducing some of those programs to employees and faculty that don't really reflect what our students look like, you had to navigate that. We had a board of trustees who was all Caucasian. We don't anymore, but we did then. It's 80% right now, but still. I'm the first Latina, or person of color, on cabinet. Those have been cultural changes that have happened within the last 10+ years. I know that some faculty and staff are very proud that I am here, and I take that responsibility very seriously. But I think in terms of navigating the politics, in order for us to support our students, I have to be able to balance both, if that makes any sense. I like to be very strategic and intentional in what I do.

Our superintendent is very professional, and that's the expectation, that we're all going to be very professional. It's a very formal relationship. So there's not a lot of room to joke around, or cross the line. There's times where I feel like I have to push hard, gently, to be able to get things for students. For example, in November, after the elections, some institutions responded right away by sending a message to their campus community about supporting our students. Because of the populations that we serve here...so you have one of the lowest socioeconomic cities in the state and you also have an extremely conservative and wealthy population. So I have to balance both, because those are also my students. Those are the conversations that we have to have about this message, that we want to send a particular message to our students, we want them to feel safe, we want them to feel supported, but then we have faculty who are complaining about, “Why are you sending all of these messages to these students about how to deal with stress workshops, and how to deal with stress after the elections, and anxiety, and things like that?” That's also who I have to deal with. And then I have a club, the Young Republicans, and they're my students too. So I have to acknowledge that as well. And we have a DACA population who is now

afraid to sign up for financial aid, and I have to address those students too. I'm here for all students, but I don't forget who I am. It's that balancing act. How do we continue along this path and make our voices heard in a way so that it's being taken seriously to continue educating people and moving forward?

It's not easy balancing being here for all students while not forgetting who I am. Though I think what's always helped me, not just in this position, but in any position that I've held, is my job in the Marine Corps. I mean you want to talk about sexism and gender inequity and all those issues, that's the prime spot right there. But I did really well. And the reason I did really well is because I always maintained my professionalism, the way I carried myself, there's no nonsense. It's learning who to trust, because you get burned. So I think all of those experiences have helped me do the job that I'm doing today. And I think when I was dean of students, one of the most hurtful things that happened to me was this group of students in this club were being advised by a person from the outside, not an internal person at the college, and they accused me of being a sellout, and they accused me of being whitewashed, and that was probably one of the most hurtful things that I've gone through, because they were completely twisting things around for their benefit. Actually that happened while I was going through the doctoral program, so it was good because then I was able to use that to help process and support me. I've been asked by other colleagues and professionals, "What's your indigenous name? Is there a reason why you didn't hyphenate your name? Why didn't you keep your maiden name?" Almost insinuating that I am not proud of my background, which is not what it was at all. I was in the Marine Corps, and it just made it easier to take one name. I didn't want to keep my ex-husband's last name that was Latino and you don't even think about those decisions at the time, until people start asking you these questions years later. I think if anything, I felt it more from my own race, than from the other people. Which is tough, yeah. It's hurtful.

But you know what I do is, I tell my story. I tell it to students, I get invited to speak at graduate programs, and I tell my story. Initially I think I was kind of ashamed of my story, the whole being academically dismissed from college and all of that. And now it's the story of, "If I was academically dismissed from [Bright University], and then came back and got my doctorate from [Bright University]...full circle." Everything happens for a reason. We carry this load on our shoulders where we are representing our communities, in terms of going against that narrative, going against what people may assume or expect, and it is quite rewarding and unexpected oftentimes when I hear back from students that I worked with along the way, who are now graduated or in their own professions, and coming back and talking about what an influence either working with them was on their experience and education. It's just amazing to me how many people you meet along the way and how people impact you, and how you've been as individuals. So, that's been something very important to me, in terms of always wanting to give back because of those who gave to me.

Spirituality has also always been part of who I am. I think more so within the last ten years or so. Even though we were raised Catholic, my mother was not a very

religious person, in terms of, “We're going to church every Sunday.” But we were raised Catholic, and it was important for her that we knew that. So, as much as she could, she would. A lot of it had to do with her working all the time, too. A lot of it had to do with us not having transportation to get there. There was a lot of different variables. So I've raised my children as Catholic, and it is part of how I deal with some of the stress that I go through sometimes. I have, I think for the last three years or maybe the last two years, three years, I get up and I read a women's prayer book that I purchased. Those things, it's a form of meditation, and those things help me. Can I tell you something funny? I don't do this much, but I know I did it initially that whenever I would go into a meeting, or whenever I was going to speak somewhere, I'd say, “God, please don't make me sound dumb. Please, oh please, don't make me sound dumb.”

All the leadership traits and principles that I learned when I was in the Marine Corps has also helped me be the leader that I am today. I got promoted to a non-commissioned officer, and I left as a staff sergeant, as an E6. I usually talk about that. I'm surprised I didn't talk about it earlier, but I usually talk about how that's important. I still have the leadership traits and principles memorized. You know, there's things you just don't forget. And I still call upon the lessons and historical lessons that I learned about different leaders when I'm dealing with some issues here. I think the Marine Corps, or the military in general, one of the things that it does for people who are open to it, is that it does expose you to all kinds of personalities, people from all over the nation, and even other parts outside the country. And it really helps you with that whole diversity piece. When I went to boot camp, several people I was in boot camp with had never seen anyone that looked like me. When I went to my first duty station, the two women that I was assigned to a room with, they were from somewhere in the south...that was the first night. The second day, I went to do the check-in when I came back to the room, they had rearranged the room so that the wall lockers were segregating me from them. And it just got worse from there, to the point where I had to go to my master sergeant, probably after a couple of months, and say, “You need to get me out of that room, or...” I won't tell you what I said, but...they were White. It was not good. I told him, “You get me out of there, or I'm going to do something.” And about a year later, he said, “The look you had, I knew you were serious, so I knew I had to get you out of there.” They just put me in another room, with an African American woman. And my boss was African American. So he was very used to...I'm not saying he was, “used to it,” but I'm sure it's not the first time.

That's the thing. That, right there, was a lesson for me to learn. That's a lesson that I have carried my whole life, and that is...I don't ever want anyone to feel the way I felt that day. Because it is absolutely unacceptable for any human being to make another human being feel that way. If I was who I am now, back then, I probably would have handled it differently, but back then, I wasn't equipped. Just like I know that, back then, my parents weren't equipped to be supportive of me and my education. All these, “*Mija* [my girl], you're getting how much money? We need help with the rent. We need groceries. We need this, we need that.” Next thing I know, I

had no money, and I'm working full-time to pay for my books. I think the military was a great experience for me. There were some ups and downs, but I was an admin clerk. I remember telling the recruiter, “I want a job that I can work during the day, and go to school at night because that's my goal for going in the Marine Corps, to continue my education. I just can't do it here anymore.” So I remember going to the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) where they do the military processing and all that, and screening and the recruiter pulled me out of a session that I was in. He said, “I have good news and I have bad news. The good news is, I have the job you want. The bad news is, you leave tomorrow.”

So I called my mom and I said, “I'm leaving tomorrow.” They had no chance to really react. The next thing I know, I was on an airplane. It's the best decision I made for myself. And for my family. Because of that, and being able to then get promoted, and move up, and get better jobs and get my education, and all of that. When my mom became very ill several years ago, I was able to help provide for her, and moved her into my home. Had I not gone into the military and got my education, I wouldn't have the means to do that. That's what I tell our students. A lot of times, they'll want to quit, because they need to get a full-time job to help their families. I tell them, “Think about how the sacrifice you're making today is going to pay off multi-fold. Just not right now. You've got to hang in there.” And then I tell them, “This is what I did, and then my mom had nothing, and that's why I was able to help. If you want to be there for your parents, it's going to be more important for you to be there then, than it is right now.”

I think one thing I also haven't shared is that, when I was in the Marine Corps, I moved from a Marine Corps Air Station to a Naval Shipyard, that was the security forces school and that was right before Desert Storm. So a lot of the jobs that are open to women today, weren't open back then. And so they needed someone to volunteer, to go through the security forces school, so I did that. And then I volunteered and I became an instructor. So I became the first woman to go through that, first woman to become an instructor, and then I was the first woman to be sent to a small arms weapons instructor course. There was another woman with me in that class, but she got dropped, like two days before graduation. It was extremely difficult, they were dropping people up to the day of graduation. So I think that perseverance, and that drive to accomplish and succeed, I've had that regardless of where I am. I think that's what has allowed me to be successful in doing what I do now.

A Response to Selma: A *Testimonio* of Service and the Power of Mentorship

Three themes were central in Selma’s *testimonio*: (a) the significant role her Marine Corps experience played in her educational and professional journey, (b) her commitment to serving underrepresented student populations, and (c) the value of

mentorship and sponsorship in supporting her career advancement and fostering her career aspirations.

Selma's resiliency and drive to complete her college degree led her into the Marines, a life-changing experience that nurtured her leadership and navigational skills. Even though prior research has highlighted the strengths student veterans bring to the college environment, Selma's *testimonio* highlighted the assets former military personnel bring to student affairs administrator roles. Selma's prior Marine Corps experiences fostered her sense of discipline and collaborative leadership approach while providing her with a rich understanding of the world by working with individuals from all backgrounds. However, since the military is predominantly White and male, Selma's experiences in the military did not come without challenge. Although Selma did not describe contending with structural barriers in her career as a higher education administrator, she contended with sexism and racism in her military experiences. Selma navigated these encounters by maintaining a high-level of professionalism and confidence, demonstrating her resilience. While experiences contending with overt and covert discriminations has the potential to derail an individual's goals and aspirations, Selma viewed challenges as an opportunity to channel her self-efficacy. Selma's military experiences also fostered her savviness in assessing who she can trust and pride in being a trailblazer, both in the military and as a SSAO.

Selma's nontraditional educational and career pathway to student affairs also brings distinct assets to her work as an administrator. Selma's *testimonio* illustrated the power of pivotal experiences that can shape the direction of a Latina

administrator's career. Selma's experiences shadowing a Latina counselor for a Latina/o student support program ignited her ardent desire and commitment to make a difference in the lives of Latina/o and first-generation college students. Selma's desire to support underrepresented students also stemmed from her life experiences and passion for giving back for the support she has received. This desire to serve underrepresented students also prompted Selma's drive to work in the community college setting since this is where many underrepresented students begin their college journey. While career opportunities in the community college setting are limited and competitive, Selma's social capital, perseverance, and work ethic led her to secure a part-time role at a local community college. Selma's determination to obtain a full-time role in the community college setting led her to balance full-time work at a four-year university with this part-time role until she could secure a full-time position. Even with the increased presence of Latina/o students in community colleges, Selma's *testimonio* demonstrated how the presence of Latina/o leaders are few.

Selma's *testimonio* also illuminated the valuable role mentorship and sponsorship played in supporting Latina administrators' career pathway to the SSAO role. The cross-gender/cross-race sponsorship Selma received from a Portuguese male president, Matthew, served as a central source of social capital in her career pathway. Matthew fostered her career aspirations, encouraged her to apply to advanced roles and pursue doctoral study, and sponsored her participation in professional development opportunities; experiences that Selma would not have pursued otherwise. This sponsorship heightened Selma's visibility in the field and connected her to individuals and opportunities that expanded her access to valued

knowledge, skills, and networks to promote her advancement. Matthew also expanded Selma's social capital by sponsoring her participation in a formal mentoring program where she connected with a Latina president, Sophia, who served as a second mentor in her professional journey.

Latina/o students are not the only ones who benefit from Latina/o role models in their journeys. Given the limited presence of Latina role models in higher education, the mentorship Selma received from Sophia allowed her to envision herself in a presidency. Sophia also provided her with key shadowing opportunities that exposed her to the responsibilities of a president firsthand. Now that Selma is the only Latina in a cabinet-level role at her institution, the support she has received from Matthew and Sophia and a connection with a Latino male colleague at another institution, Adam, equips her to thrive in her role. Given the responsibilities of a SSAO, this off-campus connection provides her with an outlet where she can openly discuss challenges with a trustworthy, knowledgeable colleague. All Latina SSAOs would benefit from this type of external support.

Maria

"That challenge is very small when I feel the rewards at the end of the day."

Personal and Family Background

I came here when I was eight years old. My mom and dad came to this country from Mexico to provide us with a better life like a lot of us do. I attended a predominantly White school when I first came. Actually, my sister and I were like the only two Latinas that we could see in the elementary school. Now I know there's more diversity at that school, but back when I came there was hardly any. Anyhow, I grew up here. I got married when I was 16. I got married in high school. So I was known as a couple, my ex-husband and I. And I just knew that getting married was part of what I was supposed to be doing, and not anything related to college because my mom attended a third-grade education, well my mom taught my dad how to read and write. So for them high school was as high as we could go. College was never like even talked about because it meant money. And so, after I graduated from high

school, I got married and stayed home for maybe like six months and then my son came and I started working shortly after I had him because we needed to make ends meet. And I just worked in different jobs. I can tell you all the jobs I've had, nurse assistant, phlebotomist, waitress, oh God what's the other one...I worked in like a poultry processing plant as a receptionist and then I was doing payroll. So I had all kinds of flavors of jobs.

From my family I have learned a sense of responsibility. My dad was so responsible. He'd get to work like an hour before his time, so he didn't have to rush, he wanted to be there on time. And so he taught us responsibility and he used to say, "Do the work." "*Trabajen duro, es todo lo tienen que hacer* [Work hard, that's all you have to do]." In fact, some students have asked me, "Did you chart your career path? Did you go through the career center and do this?" Like, "*Nada, ni nada* [nothing, nothing]." You know what it was, I was never thinking of the next job, ever. I never did. If they placed me in doing the front counter, answering the phone, I did it to the best of my ability. I went above and beyond. I was focused, and I'm a very focused person when it comes to my job. So I did it. I never thought, "Oh I'm going to do this, and then let me see what's over there." I never did that because you lose focus and then, *como dicen el dicho el que mucho personas dicen como mi papa, "ustedes que lo hagan, hagan lo bien* [as the saying goes that a lot of people say like my dad, "you who do it, do it well"]. And that's what I think is something that was ingrained you know growing up.

Pathway to Student Affairs

I fell into higher ed just by accident. It wasn't that I thought I could either go to college or anything. I had my daughter and we moved to another city because there were no jobs over in the area where we lived, and my husband, my ex-husband rather, back then, was in construction and they offered him a job here. One of his uncles was in construction. So I started working at a medical center. And I was a phlebotomist, back then I thought I'd get training and I can go get benefits for my kids and stuff. Anyhow, when my daughter was born, there was not a whole lot of education at that point about AIDS, and they didn't know what it was. It was messy and I was pregnant. And so I was exposed to one of the patients who had AIDS and nobody knew what could happen, and I was traumatized during the pregnancy so what ended up happening was that I said, "I can't go back to work," because I was worried for my baby, right?

So I didn't go back to the medical field, and then a friend told me about a receptionist job at a company, and back then they manufactured technical ceramics and they needed someone who was just personable, who could answer the phone and I said, "I could do that, I'm very personable." So they hired me. And I was there for almost three years. And this same friend left that job and came to a university that was going to be built. And she said, "Maria you gotta come because they're going to open up a lot of jobs." And I had three years permanent work over there as a receptionist, and I took a 60-day appointment at the new university. I took a big risk thinking they're going to open up positions. And then sure enough before my 60-day

appointment was up…the founding director of the career center said to me, “You're very talented. You really need to consider applying for this job. It's like an administrative assistant.” And I said, “I don't know how to do that.” And she said, “Oh you were fine.” They hired me for 60 days to register the first 500 students.

They were all transfer students. And so I learned the computer, I learned everything. It was really fast. You know, I mean it was nothing, it was so practical. But she said, “You're good at what you do, you're good with people. I really suggest you apply for this job.” And I said, “But I don't qualify.” She said, “Yes you do. Bring me your résumé.” So she helped clean up my résumé. Very nice lady. I don't think I would be here if she hadn't taken the time to help me. She was the director of the career center, so I didn't even know her. But she saw my work, 'cause she was overseeing it at that time. They had like a little [one-stop shop] over there, the cashiers, evaluations and admissions was right in the front, and recruitment.

And the career center was like right there right next to it, so she was overseeing all of that. And I applied for that job and I got the job. They were hiring a director of admissions and records back then, that was the title of it. I competed there. I had people upset at me 'cause they told me that there was a lot of people applying for that job, because that was like one of two permanent positions, they were hiring just temporary people. And the permanent positions come by every time that the state budget goes through and so it was very small for student affairs; 'cause they didn't warrant any permanent employees at that time, just yet. And so they hired me, I learned a lot in the admissions office, and that's how I started.

Educational Journey

When I went back to school, what ended up happening was that I was here already at the university and I was…like a recruiter. I would go to the local community colleges and talk to students about transferring. We would say, “Come and create programs from ground up. Leave your legacy here at the university.” And I did that for about a year in combination with administrative support, like budget. I was a jack of all trades because back then that's what you did. You did a little bit of everything. And so they finally started opening permanent positions and they had a position for a recruiter. Back then they called it the office of school relations. Bottom line is that I didn't get the job because I didn't have a degree, and I was really upset because I thought they were discriminating against me, I took it bad and I said, “How could you do this to me? I'm trained, I've been doing this work for a little over a year and why are you denying me the job?” And they told me, “It's because you don't have your bachelor’s and we cannot justify to the other folks that just because you're here, you're getting preference. It's required, a bachelor's is what’s required.”

I truly believed I didn’t get the job because of my race...who I was. Because this woman, and I thank God for that woman who gave me hell. One of the worst bosses I've ever had in my entire career, she was racist from the get go. And I knew that because of how she carried herself and the decisions she made to exclude a lot of students of color. She used to say to me, “You want to go back to school?” And she

had an accent. She was White and from Louisiana. And I was so angry at the level of how she tried to demoralize me, to step on me. So I thought she hired me to look good that she had hired a Latina, but she didn't want me. So immediately after the year was over, she was like, “You need to get out.” Like she didn't know how to handle people of color, right? And it was telling because all her hires became White. When I left, she hired a White person. So I realized what she had done and it just angered me. And I go, “People in authority, in power like her, I need to do something for me so that at some level, at some point, if I ever hold a position, I want to show that: 1) that we can accomplish, and 2) that I'm fair in my interactions and that we're here to serve all students.” And so I think that anger carried me for a while. I have a colleague who left the campus after 23 years, and she's working in a community college. And she knows what happened to me through that process with that supervisor, and she told me, “You know what I did before I left? I wrote to her and I said, “Well Maria’s a vice president now. I hope you know now that she can go to school.” She did it. And this woman said, “Well I am very happy for her,” but there's people that have hidden racism and it's covered with education, it's covered with many different things, but deep down inside *no tolera* [she doesn’t tolerate it], you know. So I think that had something to do with it.

So that combination of the anger and a combination of like, well nobody told me I could do college led me to go to college. I went to the community college and I started from ground zero basically in terms of math and writing and started with all the remedial courses that I needed to get up to par. And I worked at the university but didn't even have so much of an understanding of specific advising; what courses to take. And I thought, “I could do it, I could do it.” And so I read the catalog, and I took all the English classes under the sun and basically because I wanted to learn how to read well, write well, and communicate well. And because I believed that they didn't give me the job maybe because I didn't communicate well; maybe because I didn't write well; maybe because I...I don't know, what do you call it? Insecurities with my second language issues, right? And sometimes I turn things around in my head or I write things differently. So I thought it was that. And it was really that I didn't have a bachelor's, but I convinced myself that it was a combination of all of it. So I took every English class under the sun. And I remember that I had like close to 60 units and an advisor was like, “You know you can transfer?” And I'm like, “I can?” “Yeah you can transfer, and then just finish your bachelor’s. It's only going to take you two years.”

And I did, I transferred to the university here. And because I had so many English classes I declared a literature and writing degree; and the emphasis of it was writing. And I was actually fascinated because I loved writing anyway. Both English and Spanish and so I loved it. And so I graduated with a bachelor’s degree here in literature and writing. And then I could compete. I competed for a position and I got it. My first professional, not paraprofessional, like they call them, job, was access and analysis specialist in the [First-Generation Support Program (FGSP)] office. Well I was loving it because then I could see all of our students, all the students of color, practically all the low-income kids. No matter what color they are, I thought, “Ooh I

grew up poor, I can help these kids." I loved it. So I did that for a while, and then my boss was not allowing me to do any type of counseling. And he said because I needed a master's degree.

And so I said: "Oh so I need one of those. Okay." So then I went to another university and I got my masters in educational counseling. And then I came back. I competed for another position, and I became an [FGSP] counselor. So I did counseling for about probably four or five years. And then he wanted me to become an associate director, to provide leadership to [FGSP] and another support program since the two programs were combined. And I was terrified then because I had to supervise professional staff and I didn't have that experience. I had supervised students, but it was different because I would even allow them to read their books during work time if they didn't have anything to do. And a professional staff member, you don't. You have to structure their work, you have to make sure that there's checkpoints and I thought you know, I've had the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to bosses and I don't want to be one of the bad bosses. I wanted to be the good one, it's just a big sense of responsibility to supervise people. And so at that time when they named me as associate director I looked into what programs I could go to train myself. And so they were creating a master's here in business administration, and the focus of it, they had two tracks. They had finance and management. And I said, "No, I'll go for management." It was perfect because it really allowed me to learn a lot about people and supervision, and systems, and organizations and things like that. So I finished that.

Professional Experiences in Student Affairs/Higher Education

Right when I was getting ready to finish that MBA, I already had a nomination. People were nominating me for things. A friend nominated me for a position at another university as the assistant dean in the college of leadership. Back then it was the college of education. So I looked at it, and my friend said, "This has your name all over it." And it's at the senior level, in terms of senior leadership, because here I was a supervisor, leader, but I could not hire or fire people because of the [Leadership Personnel Structure (LPS)] in the state system. Which means that if you are in higher level administration, you are able to hire and fire folks like a regular manager, but then you serve at the pleasure of the president. They give you a contract. If they decide to let you go tomorrow, they don't have to have a reason.

Professional development experience fostering CSAO aspirations. They didn't have any [LPS] positions here, and I said, "Well as I'm growing, I really need to get that experience if I think I want to be some kind of an administrator." At that point I didn't even know I was going to be what I am now, the VP. So I attended a training through NASPA, and it's called the Alice Manicur Symposium.[15] Attending that NASPA symposium was when I could see the VP role, and I thought, "Well it looks like they are called chief student affair officers or whatever," I'm like, "I think I

[15] The Alice Manicur Symposium is designed for women in mid-level management roles who are considering a future role as a vice presidents of student affairs (Aala, 2012).

can do that. I mean, it's natural to me." And I didn't know that my style had a position; I'm very student affairs-ish, you know how people call it. I attended that symposium and I really got a broader perspective of women leadership in student affairs. I also learned that I could do it because I saw all the other women who shared stories about their experience with gender inequality. And it hit me that I had gone through something and I didn't even pay attention. And I'm like, "You know what? That's what happened." In fact, my colleague that I competed with back then for a position, during the time when I left, I had another position that I had applied for at another local university, and it was as an assistant to a VP. And this was before I went to the symposium. And that's where they're talking about stories. It hit me, well that's what I went through. They hired a Latino male. And I have more experience than he did in terms of, I saw the career trajectory. I had been in student affairs longer, but he was internal. And he was a male, and the people interviewing me were all males. All of the AVP's, they were all males. There was no women. And the VP back then, also African-American, male. And they had just the administrative assistants as women. And it hit me, well that might of been scary for them to have someone in that role so close to the VP...I don't know. But as we unpacked it, I think it gave me a different lens of looking at it. I didn't think anything of it back then because I saw there was diversity within the males you know that I could see. But they were all males. And so I learned that. Take a look at a situation from a variety of different lenses.

At the Alice Manicur Symposium I said, "I don't need a PhD." You know I was getting ready to finish my MBA. I'm like, "I'm going to have an MBA, and that's all I need." And they're like, "Well not really. You really need a PhD if you want to be a vice president of student affairs." And I thought, "Well the new vice president of student affairs has to be very wise with numbers, know the trends that are changing worldwide, and we're getting all of that, so I don't know the need." Someone told me, "Well you're in academia." And I didn't understand that then like I do now. In any case, I accepted the nomination for the assistant dean position. I applied formally, and they interviewed me, like God I was there like within three weeks. They called me, I was interviewing with like everybody and their mother. And it was a two-day interview, and they offered me the job and so I took it.

Taking risks and pursuing new career opportunities. I was conflicted whether to accept the assistant dean position at first because of the predominantly White population that university serves. But I looked at the pockets and the opportunities to build programs from ground up, which I had a lot of experience doing here. And they had grants that they had written for Black students. And I thought, "Ooh I can work on that." So I developed a process for scholarships for Black students. Then I was moving into supporting Latinos. I created an association, and so it was really nice. And so I was there as assistant dean for a little under three years, actually, because when I left the university to pursue this assistant dean role there was a Latino president there. And the president was just plucked and taken to work on the state system-level because he was so good with legislative advocacy. So the chancellor plucked him from here, left the campus with no president. So during that time my sister who works on campus said, "Hey you should think about coming

back, because they hired a woman president. She's White, but she has a PhD in social work and she really believes in the underrepresented populations, and she's awesome and they're going to be creating positions at higher level. And you qualify and all this."

And I'm like well, I thought about it, and I thought, "You know what? I'm going to try it." And they had a position open for my former bosses' position 'cause he left and staff anyway started calling me, "Maria you need to come back. We need you back." So that kind of motivated me also. In any case, I applied for that position and I got it. And they asked me to write a success grant. And so they said, "If you're successful in writing that grant, then you need to write a director in for that grant, separate the other support program from [FGSP], then you become the senior director of the centers for learning and academic support." So I would be overseeing the directors of those programs, and then I would be inheriting the language center, computing center, math lab, and writing center. What motivated me a lot was the writing center because I had been there as a student and I knew they had no Latino writers or pedagogical approaches to Latinos. When they tell you, "Fix that sentence." You're like, "Well show me 'cause hell I don't know how to fix it." There's more direct intervention. And so I jumped at that, I got really excited about that. I figured I could have the writing center's philosophy embed how to help people of color basically, because every culture writes differently. And so that's what really I guess pulled me.

But then something came to my head about academia and hierarchy and things. And I thought, "You know what? I'm going to need a doctorate." This I did on my own. I did some self-reflection. I said, "Because I'm going to be working with faculty." And they're going to say, "Who's this chick? She's doing pedagogical interventions or something related to academia with the centers and she doesn't even have a doctorate." That's kind of my own thinking. So I did, I went back to school. I went back to where I previously worked, they were coming up with a program back then. I was part of the first cohort and it's a PhD in leadership studies. And so I said, "I want to apply there." So I did. And they accepted me. I got a stipend. They paid for my first year, and then I paid for the other three, like at the high-level. And so the program was five years. I finished in four because I went year-round. I said, "I'm going to get this done. Get this chapter over and done with." And I did. And I finished my doctorate. And right when I was finishing, a year before I was finishing my doctorate, I was offered an interim appointment for the associate vice president of student academic support position, which was part of what I was already overseeing. I was overseeing the centers. But then this was my boss's position.

She retired, so they said, "You need to do this for us in the interim." And I'm like, "But I'm working on a dissertation!" And they said, "Well we really need you to do this." So I did. I was supposed to be interim for one year and then my boss called me and said, "We gave your position back. The old position, because the [LPS] conversation was that there's too many administrators and we don't have any money." And this time they're like, "Well we gave your position." Well what does that mean?

Am I out of a job? And they're like, “No no no. You're staying where you're at.” So I was almost like forced to take that position and I did. I had no choice. God knew what I was thinking. And so I stayed doing that position probably for like four and a half years? A little more? And then in the process, I had interim appointments as an AVP of enrollment management because the AVP of enrollment management left the campus and so they needed someone to take over. So I was overseeing two big areas in student affairs.

And I did that for like eight months, then went back to my job and then when my boss left, the president called me in. They hired a new VP is what happened. And this new VP, I don't know. She was *loquita y un desmadre* [crazy and a total mess]. It was really twirling with a lot of uncertainty and everything. She took off in less than two years. Like a year and a half. But the place was already upside down, I mean it was like bad. And everybody was like, “What's going on? We're not used to doing business this way.” And so my boss called me in and said, “You've been nominated by another colleague. Another colleague nominated you to take over for the next six months until we do a national search and we'll revisit at the end of six months if we're going to do another six months until we hire the new vice president. Can you do this?”

I'm like, “Oh here we go." And I said, “You know, I'm going to be very honest. I need to think about this.” And she said, “Well don't think about it too much.” She told me that Thursday. And I came back to her by the following Wednesday. And I thought it through and I told her, “Okay, at least it gives me an opportunity to see how the job is, to see if I could...” 'cause all my life I had been moving from...what do you call it? Supervising your peers, like moving into that sort of position. And that's not an easy one but I became really good at it after a while. So I said, “Let me try it. Let me see how my folks...” I mean they actually nominated me, so they wanted me to take the position. So I did it and I'm like, “Oh well, this is easier. I was doing a lot of front line, now I just go back to leading.” And I'm like, “Where's my work?” It's different but you have to be very strategic and very thoughtful, and help folks see the bigger picture and things like that. And I already have that intuitively so to speak maybe because of the length of time I worked here. So time went by and before the six months were up, the president called me back in and she said, “Well I already did my homework and I talked to everyone and nobody wants me to open the VP position.” And I said, “Why?” They said, “Well because if you compete, and you go through the process and you don't get the job, I don't want to lose you. They don't want to lose you. And we don't want to risk that.”

And because at the end of the day, I could have said, “Thank you for the position,” and then gone back to my position. But then I would've been looking elsewhere; 'cause when you apply sometimes in the same institution and you don't get the job, you're kind of like, “Oh, they didn't think I could do the job.” And you have to deal with that. So when she told me that, she said, “So I'm offering you the permanent role.” And I said, “Well let me think about that.” And she said, “Ughh, Maria.” I'm like very responsible and I don't want to just say yes because it's a high-

level position. I said, “It's a lot of responsibility and I don't mean job responsibility. I mean the people. The people that you work with, who you're going to provide leadership to, the fit, the style, all of it.” And I thought, “Let me think about this and I'll let you know.” And so I thought about it, and I'm like, “You know what? I'm going to accept it.” So I did. Actually, when they offered me the associate vice president position, I was going through a divorce. And that was also compounding me taking that appointment. And I thought I have too much going on. I need to clear my head and do all of this. And it was fine. Everything went fine. And so that's how I ended up in this role. And so this is my fifth year as vice president.

Experiences as a CSAO. And one of the things that we do in student affairs is…we complain that we're viewed as the soft side of the house and all this. And I thought, “Well it's our own doing.” And it is our own doing, because we need data and scholarship. And so when I became the permanent VP, I implemented an assessment program for the division that included student learning outcomes that also involved a professional development plan for the division. So that all the student services professionals can understand their core competencies as student affairs professionals; 'cause I was asking, “What do you do in student affairs?” They're like, “Well I work in student affairs.” So I asked, “I know but what is student affairs?” They didn't even know the history of student affairs. They didn't understand the importance of the partnerships, the bigger picture.

So I hired a consultant to help me craft a comprehensive plan. And so when the accreditation board came last year, they gave us very high ratings or a shout out for what we're doing. And it takes the leadership to change that, to change, and I've always told my folks, “We're not the fun side of the house. We are the supportive side of the house, but we're not fun. We're not just having pizza for the sake of having pizza. We're intentional about our programming. We understand student learning outcomes. We assess our programs. We do timely interventions.” I started doing that rhetoric and so then my colleagues started doing the same thing. And so I always talk about that when I go out. I also read the literature, and the literature is kind of like saturated with that. And it's almost like we keep replicating it. So to me, okay rather than saying that we're viewed this way and that there's not clear partnerships, it's because we don't do our part. And it's time to stop whining. It's time to act. And so that's what I tell my folks. *Como se dicen* [how do you say]...it's like you demonstrate your competency by doing, and we're not like...ra ra we have done this. All you need to do is show outcomes, show the evidence. And I think it speaks for itself; and I believe that student affairs is respected here on this campus because of that, I guess, those conversations that we started and that I've explained to my folks. And they actually really like it.

What really focuses me in this role is when I hear the student stories, that if I have an opportunity to influence programs and services because of the role that I have, I feel like I'm getting my reward just by doing this job and I'm giving back myself. Like right now, I'm writing a curriculum for our undocumented students. I don't think any VP would take on this role or the want. And I think it's rewarding and

so that challenge is very small when I feel the rewards at the end of the day. You know I feel like, “You know, I need to stick with it.” Because at the beginning, it is very stressful; you have to have a lot of support around you. You have to have a good solid system at home, family, and administrative. Your boss has to always support you. I think your spouse or your partner can be a support. To have a strong support system, you need somebody that's close to you who could be your confidant at this level unless you're strategic about it in terms of confidentiality. I mean I have my assistant who's paid for confidentiality. But it's still not confidential, and so your support system really is your partner and your spouse or somebody that's close to you because you need it. You need to break away a little bit from the work because this job is 24/7.

I carry this cell phone around my neck. It tells me when my next meeting is. They keep me on track and everything, but this is continual. I mean it's right next to my bed, even if I go out of the country I have it with me. My dad lives in Mexico and he's got health issues, but I have to have this with me wherever I go because they need me. And when I took the job, the president said, “Oh you can't leave your phone.” I used to be able to leave it. Like, “Oh no. This is a 24/7 job.” And so you have to have the stamina to want and the wisdom to know what you need involvement in and what you don’t. I said to all my folks, “You are hired to do your job, do it to the best of your ability, and we have boundaries that we set about what I need to know. And just for me, it's the high political impact or risk or reputational risk that I need to know ASAP, something burned, somebody died, something happened. Other than that, do your job and then we'll connect. We'll review.”

And for the most part, they have pretty good autonomy. And so I have one, two, three...I have four AVP's, 'cause the area is fairly large. And so they get paid well. So they're seasoned administrators. I don't need to be hovering over them and asking for a level of detail that I don't need. So it's good but it still keeps my brain on a higher level, different things. And sometimes things don't reach me. They get resolved. And that's fine. But I still keep an eye, overall, just like a mom. But I do it very gracefully, without people feeling like I'm breathing down their neck or anything. And so all of those pieces are key for your success. And I feel pretty good in what I've been doing so far. There was another VP who served here for longer but she was let go. And her last name, [Ramirez], is my maiden name and when I got divorced I didn't want to change my last name back to my maiden name because then they'd say, “*Otra doctora* [*Ramirez*], *olvidate*! [another Dr. [Ramirez], forget it!].” But I think in terms of the other VP's, I'm moving into the longest serving one here. So it's a good thing. I've also used faith forever to navigate challenges, I do like self-reflection, to think about *ay Dios* [oh God] I'm here for a reason or it's faith. And I really believe in it, and my whole family does too. At work, I start the day with a prayer. I do reflection on my little couch. And I read. I have like daily devotions that I read so yeah that's a big part of me.

Views on mentorship and role models. I also have not had any official mentors in my pathway to help me. But I look at people and I learn. I mean like I'll

learn something from you today. I know that. And as you're telling me about your journey, I'm like, “Wow that's very committed,” and you're trying to contribute to the literature which is awesome. And so to me, I think the way I view mentorship is through interaction and learning. And so, I learn from my boss, the good things. And I also learn the bad things. And I think a formal mentor where I had to sit down and say, “What do I do here?” I don't think I've ever had. I was part of the faculty mentoring program. I selected a male mentor because this individual was just very cool with students. But he would say, “Maria, if you need a letter of recommendation. Just tell me.” Or, “Maria you need to be part of that committee.” Just things like that that he would throw out. And I think what helped me there is the part about having people believe in me that I think reflecting back, looking at what gave me a lot of like...motivation, assertion to do certain things, it was that people would say, “You could do it!” Just like the president who offered me the VP position who told me, “Of course you can do it.” Everybody's like, “She can do it.” And why do they say she can do it? Because they believe in me. And so it gets back connected to my dad. When I graduated with my bachelor's my dad and my whole family came when I graduated. But the second time, my family was like, “Well she's graduated again. *Y ahora de que?* [And now of what?]”

So I would explain what I do to my dad and he never understood. And so when people would ask him, “*Y su hija que estas trabajando* [and your daughter, what is she working in?],” he would say, “*pues mi hija es maestra de maestras* [well my daughter is a teacher of teachers].” And when I was in my master’s, my dad, I could hear him with his *compadres* [friends], “*Ah que vamos a hacer una puerco, carnitas* [ah we are going to make some pork, carnitas].” I'm still not even passing finance, and my dad was already planning a graduation party. And I felt such a pressure and I didn't want to disappoint him because he believes in me. So that thread translated into my professional interaction with folks and mentors. So I would say that mentorship is about your interaction with folks. And sometimes I had students tell me, and this is why I know this has happened to me, they're like, “Hey Dr. [Santos], I remember when you said...” I'm like, “When did I say that?” “Well you were just passing and you said something.” And I'm like, “Are you for real?” And so it's that sense that they know they can do it. So people could see that I could do it.

And so I had a bunch of little mentors along the way, everywhere I went. And so I don't think I've sat and said, “I have a mentor.” My boss is a part of a higher education women's network in the region. And she wanted me to do a mentee-mentor program with her, and I said, “Well you know what? You really haven't been my official mentor. I believe that mentorship is just through interaction. So I've worked with you and I've watched you. So I've inherited you as a mentor in my head, but we've never talked about can you be my mentor.” It just happened because I learn from her, I watch her. I see what she does. I see how she reacts, how to respond, all of it. And I think it's just a natural interaction that you get what you can out of it; or want. So that's the mentorship part.

There is a woman that I just met. I was so honored. She's part of the board of trustees. She was just appointed by the governor and I looked at her résumé because she came to visit the campus and I'm like, “Oh my God,” and then I thought, “*es Latina, es Mexicana* [she’s Latina, she’s Mexican],” so I waited til the whole meeting was over and I said, “I'm sorry, I can't help myself. I need to come and ask you.” I said, “I noticed your last name. Are you Latina identity? Or 'cause you married?” She said, “No, I'm both.” And she said, “Mexicana” and I'm like, “You have no idea what it means to see you at this level.” It tells me, I don't know what my career trajectory is going to be, but I love what I do. I love helping students. I said, “But to see you at that level, it's just so inspiring to not only me as a professional, but you're motivating so many other students to tell them that you know they can do it. They can set their mind to it and we can do it.” And she said, “Thank you.” And so I was really impressed, in terms of like you see all of these folks that have accomplished so much and you're like, “We'll be fine.” But I didn't know there was low number of Latina VPs across the U.S. It would be nice to call a meeting one day and say, “Hey, girls, let's hang out,” develop a little network.

Navigating microaggressions and racism/sexism. I think the biggest challenge I have navigated is the perception that a Latina's a vice president. And I'll explain that. Even with students, when they come in, they want to talk to the vice president. My office used to be at another corner, and they're like, “Oh vice president?” Like, “Yeah I'm the vice president.” So I didn't explore like, “Were you expecting somebody different?” But obviously body language and reaction said it all. I even experienced challenges with community members and students and this happened before I remarried. A White female student called and said she was very upset and said she wanted to speak to the person who's in charge. And I had at that time a Latina assistant. And so she said, “Maria, this lady is very upset. She wants to speak to whoever is in charge.” And I said, “Well put her through.” And before she put her through, the student said, “What's her name?” And she said, “Maria [Torres],” that was my last name before. And the student said, “What? Is she the vice president?” “Yes, she's the vice president.” “Does she speak English?” And then my assistant, as you can imagine, Latina, she put her on hold. My assistant came and I go, “Put her through.” So then the student goes, “Well first of all, I want to hear you speak. And I want to know about your credentials.” And I said, “I don't think...*dije* [I said], okay ma'am, with all due respect, I don't think you called here to find out about my credentials. When you are ready to talk to me about a problem that I can help you with, you can call me back.” And I hung up on her.

She was furious. So then we have like a red alarm system or red alert system whenever there's a student going to everybody, we connect. And so I told my assistant, “Call the president's office, all the deans, tell them we have a problem student, and she's very upset. She needs to route her back to me. I'm the one in charge.” So sure enough, she kept calling and calling. She was livid. And she was finally yelling. She ended up threatening me. She said, “You better tell me about your credentials or else.” And I said, “Like I said, I don't need to tell you my credentials. Whenever you're ready to talk to me....” She said, “You're so disrespectful.” I said,

“No ma'am. You're the disrespectful one.” And so she said, “Well you better give me your credentials or else,” and then she started like threatening me. So we had to do a threat assessment. And so then I had the police here just for this one woman. So to answer your question, in terms of challenges, the challenge is going against the perception that Latinos don't accomplish and could never achieve at this level. And so where you get categorized, or the stupid comments. Even with one of my colleagues at the cabinet level, when I first took the job he said, “Oh my God, Maria, you're so intelligent.” What did you think? You think...*una pendeja que porque soy Latina o que?* [I’m stupid because I am Latina or what?] But that's offensive. It's ignorant, but you can only fight against that by demonstrating who you are and what you do. Right? And being respectful, I always tell my students, “You can advocate intelligently but you need to be very strategic and very respectful.” So that's been definitely one challenge, and then the challenge is also internal because when somebody says something to me, I have to put it through a filter. Did they say this because *soy Latina* [I am Latina], did they say that? I have to give it the whole check before I react.

I'm pretty good at it now, because there's a lot of stupid people and ignorant people. It’s not always about being Latina and sometimes it is. And I have to make it, what do you call it? I have to keep it balanced for myself so that I know, “You know what, Maria? No, it wasn't about that.” I talk to myself in that way. So that in combination with the societal perception of Latinos, you go against the current. Keep doing what you do best and work hard, basically at this level you just gotta work hard. You can't just sit and relax. But I would say the way we're perceived as Latinas is assertive and almost borderline aggressive when we raise our voice and use our hands. And I already had that happen to me with a colleague. They're like, “Well you came in here yelling.” And I go, “You have never heard me yell.” Not even my ex of so many years has heard me yell. I don't know how to yell. And I said, “So what you heard, you heard me get passionate about a topic. And I use my hands.”

And so keeping that in mind at this level, one, is not to take it personal because if you take it personal, then you won't get very far because strategy at the VP level is key and you have to develop strong alliances. They have to be able to trust that you know what you're doing. And so diplomacy is the thing for me. I always say, “Is there anything else, or did I do anything to offend you? Did you understand what I was saying?” “Oh yeah.” So I've been able to navigate that. But for us as Latinas it's always a little bit more of proving above and beyond that we can still do the job. That we can, and I think that comes with the territory. And that is a given. We already know it. For example, I've seen colleagues that are my counterparts that do horribly. And nobody says anything; but if I would do it, they're going to say, “*Mira, esta Latina no sabe lo que esta haciendo* [Look, this Latina does not know what she is doing],” and it's very interesting because it is unfortunate, even if we don't want it to, it is tagged to who we are. And so I think it's just navigating that, with that understanding. And letting it roll off your back, and keep doing the job. Otherwise, it'll continually stop you if you take it personal.

A Response to Maria: A *Testimonio* of Risk-Taking and Resistance

Three prominent themes surfaced from Maria's *testimonio*: (a) her willingness to take risks and pursue new opportunities throughout her career which fostered her career advancement to the SSAO role, (b) her passion and commitment to supporting underrepresented student populations, and (c) how she defends her rightful place in administration by resisting micro- and macroaggressions through self-efficacy and strategic responses.

Maria's path to a career in student affairs stemmed from her willingness to take a risk and her hard work ethic, initiative, innate ability to connect with people, and willingness to learn new skills led her to secure her first position in student affairs and other roles throughout her career. Maria was approached multiple times to pursue new roles throughout her career path. Although she could have declined these opportunities, after thoughtful reflection, Maria recognized the value in taking on new experiences even if she experienced conflicted emotions or feelings of uncertainty at first. Maria's risk-taking nature not only led her to take on a diversity of positions across academic and student affairs, leading her to the VP role, but her risk-taking also facilitated her access to the hidden curriculum of higher education career advancement (e.g., taking on a diversity of roles, gaining supervision experience, the need to pursue a doctorate). Even though Maria did not identify formal mentors that supported her career path, she recognized the potential she has to learn something valuable from all interactions and maneuvered through her career independently with limited support.

Maria's nontraditional educational and career pathway provide her with a unique perspective regarding the diverse and often challenging educational pathways of Latina/o, first-generation, and low-income students. Maria's salient identity of growing up low-income fostered her commitment to serve and advocate for all students, especially underrepresented student populations throughout her career. Even amid the busy demands Maria navigates as a SSAO, she continues to carry out her commitment to social justice in her work. For example, Maria is currently engaged in developing curriculum to support undocumented students, a task frequently carried out by entry- and mid-level professionals. Due to the limited presence of Latinas in administration, Maria also serves as a role model for Latina/o students. However, Maria has also benefited from meeting a Latina role model in her career pathway who served as a valuable source of inspiration and reminder that she can push through racialized experiences and challenges in her career.

Given the macro- and micro-aggressions that Maria has faced in her career pathway and the limited presence of Latinas in administration, her presence as a Latina in a cabinet-level role is of itself an act of resistance. Maria is committed to challenging perceptions of what a VP should "look like" and takes pride and responsibility in serving as a SSAO, a role frequently held by White colleagues. Despite the skillset, credentials, and assets Maria brings to her VP role, Maria contended with a power imbalance as her credibility was questioned solely because of her Latina identity and a Latina/o surname. Rather than feeling disempowered by these negative encounters, Maria resisted overt and covert discrimination in her career through her self-efficacy, diplomacy, and strategic responses that affirms her rightful

place in senior leadership while preserving the dignity of others. In addition to coping with structural barriers through self-efficacy, Maria also benefited from participating in a women-specific professional development experience that provided her an outlet to process the gender inequities she faced in her career.

Valerie

"Figure out ways to find your voice to be a champion and a change agent for equity."

Personal and Family Background

My father was born in New Mexico, and we can trace our family back to that area, all the way back to the 1500s. Then my mother was born in Michigan. My father's family moved to where we are now during World War II, because one thing I didn't know is during the Depression New Mexico was one of the poorest states. Although they had a ranch and they were able to grow their own food, and they had animals and all of that, the jobs became harder to get. They moved during World War II because they had a dream that their sons would graduate from high school. In rural New Mexico at the time, all schooling stopped at the eighth-grade, and that was where the local school went to, and then you went to work on the farm, or the ranch. They wanted their sons to graduate from high school. So that was my grandparents' dream, and they had all boys at the time. They had two girls right at the end, poor things because they had all those older brothers. The great thing was that of those ten children, nine of them graduated from college. They took a risk to leave what they had known because that community settled there in the 1500s, and it had been part of Spain, and then it was part of Mexico. For a while it was part of France, and then Mexico again, and then it became the U.S., and my father's family were just always there.

So everything they knew about how the world worked, what language was spoken, and what norms and customs were, was all around that little community in New Mexico, and they took a risk to move to a place that wasn't very welcoming to Latinos. It wasn't a very welcoming environment, but they moved there because they wanted opportunity for their sons. They ended up getting so much more than they had originally hoped for. Then my mom grew up also in a rural area. She was the youngest of six and the first person in her family to go to college as well. Her older sister, who was 17 years older, was the first person to ever graduate from high school.

My mom went to a private religious college where the alumni paid the tuition. So that was really her only chance to go, and all she had to do was earn enough money for living expenses. But when she graduated from there, it was the '50s, and women pretty much could be a teacher, a nurse, or a secretary. So she decided on education, and applied to transfer to the institution where I went, [Riverview University]. They would accept more of her credits, and the out-of-state tuition was

less expensive than going to a university back home. So she came out here instead, but she only went a year. After that, she met my dad, and they got married, and started having children. My dad started out as a high school teacher. He taught English, speech, and drama at the high school level, and he later on taught Spanish and social studies at the middle school level. We moved to another state for a job for my dad and my dad taught high school there and also taught at the college level. My sisters were born there.

Then he needed to get a graduate degree and so we moved again for him to get a graduate degree, but you know they had three little kids, and my mom was a stay-at-home mom at the time, so I don't know how they thought that was going to work. So he taught again and worked and was a director of migrant education. I started school there and then we moved back to the state where I was born and he worked for the Head Start program. I finished elementary school there, then he got an opportunity to work at the National Education Association, and we moved outside of Washington, D.C., and that's where I went to junior high and high school. We moved around. I had a lot of different experiences. Then I started college in [the DC/Maryland/Virginia area] and really liked it and wanted to stay there, but they moved back home after my grandfather died. My father got worried about my grandma being alone, although she had 10 kids. So I don't think that was ever going to happen. But my parents didn't want me to be so far away and they said you know, “You lived at home your first year of college and you never lived on your own. We're not going to be able to afford to fly you back and forth whenever you get lonely, so just come back with us and go to school here.” I moved back with them and I finished. I transferred and I finished at [Riverview University]. But I am the only one in my family native to this state. So that's my claim to fame and then I've been here ever since. I've done my whole higher education career in institutions in this state.

I was also the first in my immediate family to get a PhD. I have massive amounts of cousins. One of my cousins has a doctorate degree in math and statistics, and she's a professor. Then I have a couple other cousins who are MDs and a couple who are JDs. So we all had a lot of pressure. Then I have a few cousins from that second generation who didn't go to college, but there was that expectation for all of us, “We knew nothing and we did it, so now you're expected to do it.” I can remember my grandma one time. She was so sweet. She just was so proud of us, and she wanted to finish school. She went all the way through the eighth-grade, like they do in New Mexico, and she had straight As. She could read, write, and speak English and Spanish. She was fully bilingual and fluent in both languages. She wanted to finish high school, but the high school was in Las Vegas, New Mexico, and they lived out on a ranch. She was born in 1911, so one year before New Mexico became a state, and it wasn't feasible to drive her back and forth to town every day to go to school, and it wasn't culturally acceptable for her to live with someone other than her family. So my great-grandfather arranged a marriage for her when she was 15 years old. She was always a reader, always, always, always, and she wanted to finish school. Even after my parents were married, my grandma was trying to finish her GED because it was just so important to her to finish.

I can remember one time I was at some kind of a family event, and she told me about my cousin Patty, the one who was a teacher, and she said, “Patty got her master's.” I said, “I know, Grandma. I'm going to get a master's too.” She said, “Well, when?” She was just like, “Okay, get it done.” She was wonderful. I so wish she could've lived to see me get my doctorate, but she had a heart valve that wasn't functioning properly, and it's really common in people in their 80s, but they wanted her to have surgery, and she said, thank God she said it in Spanish, because she said, “Oh, no.” My aunt was translating. Grandma said, “Oh, no, I'm not going to die on an operating table. You just want my insurance money. I've lived long enough.” So she went off on this little rant and my aunt was toning it down and translating, but just because she was stubborn and she didn't want to have surgery, she passed away in '97. But she did get to see me graduate. She was at my college graduation, and she was at the party when I got my masters, but she didn't get to see me get a doctorate.

Reflections on Spanish and connection to Latino culture. I also understand a lot of Spanish, but I don't speak it very well. It's interesting because when my parents got married, they decided that my father was going to speak Spanish to us. My mother was going to speak English so that we would learn both. Then my father backed off on that. Doing well academically was really important to him, so he started to get worried when I went to preschool that knowing two languages might interfere with me doing well in school, and later on I told him, “Well it didn't interfere with you doing well in school. Don't you think I'm as smart as you are?” I really wish he had spoken Spanish to us, because with our generation, because on that side of the family, I have 30 first cousins, and I don't think any of us speak Spanish fluently, although I have one cousin who just retired. She was a teacher and her master's degree was in English as a second language. She said when she was in one school where everybody spoke Spanish, she didn't get called on a lot to speak with parents, but then she moved to a different school, and she was one of the few people who they assumed spoke Spanish. She got a lot better because she got called on a lot to speak to parents.

There's also an assumption that if you don't speak Spanish, you have lost your cultural connections, and I completely disagree with that because I very much operate from a cultural perspective, and so it's interesting to see people's take on that. But when you don't speak Spanish, they're like, “What's wrong with you?” I say, “Well nothing's wrong with me.” You have to look at it differently. I actually learned this from a professor that I worked with who worked in bilingual education. She said it's definitely tied more to the language of the mother because they tend to be the primary caretakers, so whatever language your mother spoke, and what the language policy was in the state that you lived in. For example, in New Mexico or, say, in south Florida, a lot of people retained both languages because the lobby for bilingualism or for retaining your heritage language was really strong, the political lobby was really strong. But in this state for example, people were punished for speaking Spanish in school, and so parents got worried and said, “I don't want my kid to be singled out,” and so they didn't teach them. So it has a lot more to do with political forces than it

has to do with whether your parents value the culture, because I was very much raised in Latino culture. We just spoke English.

Assets and traits learned from family. Among the Latino community we have a very strong work ethic, so work ethic I learned from my family. Growing up, what I saw the adults do is when the adults get up in the morning they go to work, that's what you do, and that's why I'm working on the day before a holiday because I'm new, and somebody said, “Well, you're going to take Monday off?” I said, “Why would I take Monday off at my second week at a new job? That's just not something that you do.” I think I definitely have work ethic. Work ethic is something that I brought with me from my family, my community, and definitely a commitment to equity and social justice. I feel like education is one of the keys to achieving that. Then within education that's something that we really have to examine: are students experiencing our campus in the same way, and are our outcomes equitable?

My family contributed to my commitment to equity by just always making me aware of the structural inequalities that are woven into the fabric of our country and our institutions. So we talked about that and we always had intellectual discussions, and even my grandpa...I'll never forget, my grandpa owned a lawn service and we loved going out with him on his truck. He had this agreement with a local farmer to give the grass to them for his sheep. And so we loved hanging around with grandpa. And grandpa, he could speak English, but he preferred to speak Spanish, and he said, “I have to speak English with the customers.” And if we were out with him and we noticed something, I think that's one of the things, when you have training in equity and inclusive excellence kind of issues, they talk about PANning, Pay Attention Now. And I think my family taught me to PAN. So I would notice things. And when something would happen and maybe somebody wouldn't treat my grandpa respectfully, or they would make fun of his accent, I would look at him and I would say, “Grandpa.” And would always tell me, he said it in Spanish, but I knew, I could understand him. He would say, “Oh, don't mind them. They're still mad at us because we kicked their butts at the Alamo.” He would say that, because he's like, “We're secure in who are, and if they have a problem with it, that's on them, not on us,” which also showed really good emotional intelligence for a man who was born in the early 1900s and grew up in a very traditional kind of structure.

And then my uncle was a journalist. And when my dad and his brothers were growing up they still had the rule that Latinos couldn't sit in the balcony of the movie theater. They actually had a sign that said, “No Mexicans in the balcony.” And so my uncle wrote a letter to the editor talking about how that was an inappropriate rule and it wasn't fair and they were Americans and all of that. And it got published in the newspaper, his letter to the editor. And so he was just walking down the street one day minding his business, and the movie theater manager ran out and was yelling at him and he goes, “You have to tell me who wrote that letter, because no Mexican can write that well!” And my uncle who became a journalist, he said that's when he understood the power of words to fight for equity and social justice. So I got told

those kinds of stories growing up, so it was just something that was always part of my consciousness.

I use storytelling a lot too when I work with staff and with the faculty that I work with. I remember one of my former staff members who was in a graduate program, a doctoral program in higher education, he said that I was a study in narrative inquiry because often if somebody comes to me with a problem, I will tell them a story that parallels their experience to see if we can find a way in there to resolve the issue. Storytelling really is a Latino cultural value. Latino parents, if a little kid comes running in the house and says, “Mommy, Mommy, there's a car accident down the street,” the American way of parenting is to say, “That's why you have to look both ways before you cross the street because you have to be careful of cars.” Whereas a Latino parent will tell a story that teaches a lesson. They'll say, “You remember your Uncle Lolo, he was crossing the street, and he didn't look both ways, and he got hit by a car.” I definitely feel that I brought that storytelling, that cultural piece in with me. It's what I do, and even the president, at my going away party, she said, “Well, I don't tell great stories like Valerie does. But here's one that I want to share with you about when we first worked together.”

Educational Journey

It was always a clear expectation from when I was really young that I would go to college, that we would go to college. I had two younger sisters. So it was always a clear expectation, but in terms of what we would do, that was a lot more vague because my parents, again, were first-generation college students. Even as a second-generation college student, I went because it was the expectation, and I took college preparatory classes in high school and all that, but I still didn't have exposure to a lot of what I know now after having a whole career in higher education. For example, when I applied to college, I just selected the major of psychology. I didn't know if I would like it or not, but I thought if you picked undeclared, the admissions staff would think, “Oh, well, she's not smart. We're not going to admit her. She doesn't even know what she wants to do,” not even knowing that many, many, many students start undeclared and then move to something else.

Then I just kept taking classes in psychology because I liked it, but I explored a lot of other things. I explored communication. I explored elementary education. I explored nutrition, and the university that I graduated from was on quarters. Where I transferred from in [the DC/Maryland/Virginia area] was on semesters, and I went there one year, but the university I graduated from was on quarters. It takes 180 quarter hours to graduate. There were 60 hours of general studies, 60 hours in your major. So that left a whole other 60 hours that I could've done a second major. I could've done two minors had I known how to do academic planning in college, but I didn't, so I just took a bunch of random things. Then I did a graduation check in my junior year, and the advisor said, “Oh, well, you need three more classes, and you're done with the psychology major.” I said, “Okay. I guess I'm graduating.” I really didn't know what I was going to do, and I was actually just talking with the dean of

students here on this new campus where I now work because we actually graduated from college around the same time.

Pathway to Student Affairs

When I wasn't sure what I wanted to do, I had worked as a work-study student in the financial aid office. I had been an orientation leader in the summer and a peer advisor in academic advising in the school year. Orientation was run out of academic advising, so my boss at the time, the director of academic advising, he said, “Well, you know, you can actually do this for a living,” and I said, “What?” He said, “Student affairs.” I said, “That's a career?” I really didn't even know. That's how I got interested in it. And my current dean of students had the exact same conversation with somebody at her college. So I said, “Wow! So I can hang around with college students my whole life! That sounds fun!”

Role of social capital in student affairs career pathway. The director of academic advising was a White male and the thing that's interesting, when I think back on it is White males have given me more opportunities than anybody in my career. And I think part of it is because I'm not a threat to them. With the privilege that they carry, both the White and male privilege, they assume that they can do whatever they want in their career and giving me an opportunity is not going to diminish any opportunities for them. Now, he also gave me some advice because at the time he was telling me there weren't a ton of student affairs master's programs. Now they have many. You can be selective. You can have student affairs. You could have higher education. You could even have specific, like, there's a really highly regarded master's program in Kansas in academic advising. You could do really specific things, but they didn't have anything like that. So the boss, who told me about the field, he recommended, “Get a master's degree in counseling because you can be an administrator with a master's degree in counseling, but you can't be a counselor with a degree in administration,” which was really good advice, but I didn't take it.

I ended up getting my master's in educational administration, and it was called supervision, administration, and curriculum development. It focused really specifically on adult learning and instructional design. I liked it and it helped me. What I needed was a master's degree in order to move up in higher education because I had been a financial aid advisor, I had been an advisor in TRiO programs. I find this in a lot of women's careers that it wasn't really planned. It was sort of random and unplanned and I just took opportunities as they came up. While I liked the students, I didn't feel very fulfilled in those positions. I didn't think they were very creative, and I like doing creative things. My first job that made me want to stay in higher education, because I was really thinking, “Do I even want to stay in higher ed?” was in academic affairs in a position called coordinator of student services in the school of education. I did recruiting for all the programs in the school of education. I did pre-admissions advising and academic monitoring for the students in the teacher education program, and I taught the very first class in the teacher education program, which was only one credit, and we offered it once a year for the first five weeks of every new cohort. It was really a career development class focused on introduction to the teaching

profession and introduction to the program. It set the stage for what was the philosophy of the program, which was reflective practice. It was a really fun job. I really liked it. But I had done those entry-level positions and I needed a master's degree to move up. Supervision, administration, and curriculum development was what was offered at the school of education where I was working, so that's the master's that I did.

One of the reasons why I pursued the master's that I did is a lot of people in that master's program were going to go into corporate training and I really like teaching and training and working with people. I just wasn't sure higher education was for me after those first two jobs in financial aid and TRiO. But I ended up really liking that coordinator of student services position and it was a good fit for me. It was really entrepreneurial and others in the school of education noticed that I liked that, so after that they would just come to me and say, "We have this new initiative, and we want you to run it." I would say, "Okay." After I was coordinator of student services for about four and a half years, then I moved into a position where I was assistant director of extended campus programs. Part of that position was brand new. We were working with all the school districts in the area to coordinate professional development across the districts. Part of it was existing, some of the other extended campus programs, and they were a mess, and I had to clean it up. That's another theme in my career. In addition to liking positions that I can create, I also tend to inherit or get asked to take on departments that are a mess and clean them up. I was talking to my former assistant, and I said, "Why do I always have to clean up the messes?" He said, "Because you'll do it. You do it, and you do a good job." So I did that for almost four years before pursuing doctoral studies. Now I am in my ninth position in higher education. I had eight positions before this, and four of them were really traditional student affairs positions, and four of them were completely made up, and I got to walk into it brand new, and create it, and make it my own. That's what I found I really loved. I've been in this career for 28 years. I've spent 14 years in student affairs and 14 years in academic affairs. So for somebody who's spent half her career in student affairs, I don't actually have a student affairs master's degree. I have a more general one.

The dean of students at my undergraduate college who was a White female also exposed me to a career in student affairs, she was the dean, well, before I got there. She was the dean while I was in college and got to know me as a student leader. When I graduated, I worked at a proprietary school for just about 18 months, then I went back to my undergraduate institution and worked in financial aid for three years and she was still there. She really advocated for getting me back to the campus in a professional position and stayed in touch with my career all the way through until she retired. And in an odd twist of fate, she was once my husband's supervisor. Because he was a K-12 educator, but he went into higher ed for a short period of time, and he was assistant dean of students for cultural diversity and he reported to her. So he would run into her throughout the years and she always asked about me and how I was doing and was really proud of my career. She went to one of the first student

affairs master's programs that I heard about. It was at Bowling Green State University, and so she was one of them.

Also, there was a woman that was a friend of our family, she was African American, and she was the first woman of color that I knew who had a doctorate. She went into academic administration. I remember when I got my doctorate, my mom sent her a graduation announcement. [Marie] called my mom and said, “Oh, that's so wonderful.” My mom said, “You know, you were one of her role models.” [Marie] said, “I was?” She had no idea. When I was little [Marie] would come and visit us. My parents met her along the way, I think, through my dad's career, and then she just stayed in touch with our family. She still sends my mom Christmas cards, and she would come and visit us at the different places where we lived, and she always took time to talk to me and listen to what I had to say. Most adults would do all the talking, but she always listened to my perspective, and I was so impressed with that, and she of course in her Christmas cards would always update us on her career. I think she met my parents when she was in a master's program, and then she got a doctorate. Then she went into faculty. Then she went into academic administration. I think she's still working. I believe she's a provost somewhere. So she was another person who exposed me to this idea that you could be an administrator in higher education.

Professional Experiences in Student Affairs/Higher Education

I know my previous president said that when it comes to diversity, equity, and social justice, she said, “I'm fierce. I'm clear and uncompromising on why this is important and why we have to continue to work on it in higher education.” She appreciated that about me, but I just don't get emotional about it. I'm just calm and say, “No, we need to do this, and this is important, and here's why, and I'm going to continue to do it.” One of my legacies at my previous institution is I helped them achieve Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) status. When I got there, it's a really diverse campus, the most diverse campus I've ever worked at, and it's got a huge immigrant population, mostly from Ethiopia and Mexico. After English, the second most common language they spoke was Amharic, which is an Ethiopian language, and the third was Spanish. I noticed in the data, because I always look at data, that we met or exceeded the demographics of the different populations in our service area in all categories except for Latinos, and I said, “That's a problem. We're a community college. We're designed to serve a certain region. We should meet the demographics of the populations in our service area.” I said, “This is a social justice issue because the jobs of the future in the state and in the nation are going to require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential. So if we're not providing access to the Latino population and we're the access institution, then we are doing them a disservice.”

Between forming a student success center and growing concurrent enrollment, that brought the Latino population in, and so we went from 17% Latino student population to 28%, and the population in our service area was 29%. We achieved HSI status. Some of the cabinet members were sort of rousing about, “Well, yeah, we're an HSI now, but who knows? In this presidential administration, we might not get any money for it.” And I said, “I don't care if we get any money for it. That's not why this

was a focus for me, it's a social justice issue." The jobs of the future are going to require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential, and we weren't serving the Latino population in our service area at the same levels that we were serving our other populations. So, I want them here, earning a post-secondary degree or credential. I don't care if we ever get Title V[16] money for it. And they all looked at me like, "Wow, we never thought of it that way." That's the way I've been thinking of it this whole time. I just look at data and I always have. I always write a strong proposal. I always have data. I always have a logical argument and process for how we will do this. I look at it logically, which is hard for people to argue with. It's easier to argue with an emotional appeal and I say, "No, we're going to do this, and this is important, and this is why." Then I just focus on it with single-minded intensity until we get it done. The rising tide floats all boats. So, if we're doing what we need to do to help one group of students be successful, that's going to impact all of our students. You have to flip that narrative because they're seeing it as, you give opportunity to this group, then you deny opportunity to this group. I was like, "No, no, no. The rising tide floats all boats." I definitely have an equity focus, and I really noticed it when they had my going away party at my last job, where I was a vice president of student affairs.

Reflections on work-life balance. Lots of people who got up at my going away party also talked about how I modeled work-life balance, and I encourage that among my staff because family is important, and we're working so that we can help our families. I'm not one of those people that thinks that you have to work all the time in order to prove that you're good. You work efficiently so that you have time to take care of the people that depend on you. I think that's another thing that I brought with me from my family and my community was work-life balance.

There have been times in my career when work-life balance made me a little uncomfortable, but the people that depend on me are a priority in my life, and there definitely is that dominant cultural value of you can't do this unless you work 80 hours a week. It's like, well, a) I don't think that's true, and b) I'm not going to do that because I have other responsibilities. The way that my former president described it, she said, "You all may not know this because you see her go home at 5:30 unless she has an event to go to, but this woman works hard. She comes, and when she's at work, she is here, and she's focused, and she's engaged. Then she goes home." My 81-year-old mother lives with us, so we're her primary caretakers. She got to the point where she needed a little more help, and so we moved her in with us. So my former president said, "Valerie comes here, and she works, and she's focused. She's here. Then she goes home, and she checks in, and she takes care of her family. But then as soon as she has their needs taken care of, she gets back on the computer, and she works." She said, "You may not have always seen it, but she was working at her full capacity. Whenever she had the ability to get something done, she would get it done, and she's one of my go-to people for if I need something done, I give it to her."

[16] Eligible HSIs can apply for federal Title V funding which would provide grant support to help HSIs expand educational opportunities for Hispanic students and develop initiatives to strengthen the retention and graduation of Hispanic students (HACU, 2017).

I prioritize and I focus so I can get things done, and I remember a previous boss said, “Wow, I give you something that I would expect to take two weeks, and you get it done in two days.” That's because I know all the things that I'm responsible for and I try to be as organized as possible so I can get it all done and still take care of the people who need me. I don't think that it's impossible to have work-life balance, and one term I've heard recently, more like the millennial generation because they grew up expecting that, they call it “work-life blend.” So you figure out a way to blend your work and your personal life in a way that works for you. If I have an enrollment event or some other campus event on Saturday, my husband comes with me. In the last job I had, I worked about a half hour from where my mom was living before she moved in with us. So I would go pick her up in the morning and I'd bring her to work. Everybody at work loved her, they'd come and visit her, and she liked being around. Then I would take her to her doctor's appointment when she needed to go, and I'd either take her home, or we'd come back to the campus, depending on what my schedule was. I just blended my family into my work because spending time with them was important, so I balanced it that way too.

Pursuing doctoral study. My dissertation supervisor was a great support, I remember I had had hip replacement surgery, I had been out for six weeks, and at the time had applied to the doctoral program. I wrote my admissions essay. On the day I had my six-week checkup with the surgeon and I could finally start putting weight on my right foot again, I had my interview for the doctoral program, and it was a whole afternoon of different sessions. They had us going from thing to thing to thing and I was walking with just one crutch instead of two. And [Stacy], who I knew because I had helped her recruit for her grant programs, she came and she said, “Let me walk with you,” she said, and I said, “Well, I can't walk very fast yet.” She said, “That's okay. Let me walk with you to the next session.” Then she said, “I read your essay, and I want to be your advisor in the doctoral program,” and I said, “Okay.” She said, “I also want you to come work for me.” I said, “Well, you're grant funded.” She said, “I know. You need to write a grant. Here's the RFP [request for proposal]. I want you to write this grant proposal, and then I want you to come work for me. Then your research can be focused on what we're doing.” I said, “Okay.”

We wrote the grant, and we got it, and so I moved from being an assistant director of extended campus programs to being assistant director of the [research, training, and resource institute in education]. I ran the grants that helped teachers-in-training become teachers. Everyone told me, “It's a really bad idea to have your dissertation advisor and your supervisor be the same person.” I said, “No, I think I have this. I think it'll work.” Everybody warned me against it, but what she did for me was amazing, so not only did I get to work with students and feed the student affairs part of my soul, but she exposed me to the academic side of it, we did research, we published papers from our research, and presented them at conferences. I also learned how to write grants there. This is how I got interested in community colleges, because at the time, we didn't have an undergraduate teacher education program. We had a graduate-level teacher training if students already had a bachelor's. I sent my students to the local community college and then to [Champ State]. One of our presidents in

our system worked there for a while, and she said, “There's a reason why that model hasn't been replicated across the U.S., because it's very challenging to navigate.”

The HR classification for my position was professional research assistant, but I was assistant director of the [research, training, and resource institute in education]. The first thing she did is I had just taken our group of students to Mexico for two weeks in June, and they would teach ESL in the public schools. So I'd just gotten back from the trip to Mexico. We had moved for my husband to take a superintendency while I was working on my dissertation, and I met with [Stacy]. I had done my comps and I had done the dissertation planning and design class. I went and met with her. At that point I was thinking I would probably graduate in about December of 2004. I showed her what I had done. I said, “I wrote a draft of Chapter 1, and I have outlines of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. So I didn't get as far as I thought.” She looked it over, and she said, “You don't think you got very far?” I said, “No.” She said, “No, you're ready. You're going to finish writing this this summer. You're going to defend your proposal in September. You're going to do your human subjects application in October. You're going to start collecting data in November. You're graduating in May.” I said, “Okay.” She just got me on that momentum. Then while I was writing, she said, “I want you to spend three days a week writing your dissertation.” I said, “But I have to do my job.”

She said, “As long as you meet the objectives of your grants for this year, I want your focus to be your dissertation. So take annual leave days. Take a few sick days. Sprinkle them out here and there, but focus on getting your dissertation done. You can front-load your grant activities in September and October before you start collecting data, and then in April and May after you defend.” The gift that she gave me was incredible. She helped me. I had originally started in 2000, and I thought I wanted to finish in 2005. Because of her, I finished in 2004, so I finished a year before my original deadline. I've worked with plenty of people who even though I was supportive, I know how hard it was. They just were struggling with getting that dissertation done while they were working full-time. My dissertation chair and supervisor [Stacy] wasn't a person of color, but she was a first-generation college student and she was actually the only person in her family who went to college. So she understood from that perspective how important it was for me to finish. I also really loved that position. It was a perfect blend of sort of my need for academic and intellectual stimulation and my need to connect with students. I was going to stay there forever. Then we ran out of grant money. So I had to look for another job, but I remember thinking, “Do I really want to go back into traditional student affairs?”

I started out my career in student affairs and then moved into academic affairs and then went back to student affairs, I brought that scholar focus with me. One of my former assistants told me, “You're a scholar practitioner.” I really like that term because I think in student affairs, a lot of times, we don't get credibility because...you know, earning the doctorate is one thing, teaching is another way to get credibility with faculty, and then doing research and publishing, we need to highlight our good work and our successes. So I've published since I got my doctorate. I've published all

throughout my career because, a) student affairs needs to highlight their good work. We need to demonstrate that we're co-curricular. What we do extends the learning beyond the classroom. And we are impacting students in positive ways, and we do have good practices that the instructional side can learn from. And then b) to mentor people along the way. What I always do is I have young professionals, either who are working on their doctorate or who just need to learn that process, I always have them partner with me on publications, and sometimes, they're like, "I'm not sure if I can do that." And I'm like, "You can do it. Come on." And I break it down into small parts. "Okay, take this little piece of research and analyze it, and see what themes you come up with, and then we'll meet…Oh, we have the same themes." I'm also on three different dissertation committees right now, because they ask me and I say, "Yes, I want you to finish. It's important. You need to finish. This is something that you will value for the rest of your career." If we're working in practitioner roles, we have to somehow find a way to participate in scholarship so that our voices are heard in the conversations around higher education. Find a way, as you go through your career, to be involved in research, scholarship, and discussions about the profession.

Valuable role in having a Latina supervisor/mentor. I loved what I did in the school of education, and I was there for 13 years. What I loved about that position was the flexibility that it offered me because I could work at home and do things like that so I could support my husband's career. That was when he was in a lot of rural school districts as principal and a superintendent, and he was moving up. So I could support him in his career and still have work that was meaningful to me because my positions were more academically focused. Then when my husband retired from K-12 education, he told me, "Okay, your turn," since I followed him around the state. So we moved back when I left the research center at the school of education and just a few months later I got hired as [Champ State's] director of admissions and outreach. [Angela], the AVP that I reported to was the first Latina supervisor I had ever had. People didn't get me because I had this eclectic résumé that was sort of student affairs, part academic affairs, and the person who gave me an opportunity was Latina. When she called me to offer me the position, I tried to talk her out of it, I was like, "Oh, I don't know if you want me. I'm not really a traditional candidate since this is a director of admissions and outreach position," and she goes, "No, I want you because you're non-traditional." So I dipped my toe into something that I wasn't sure about. Prior to this I just hung out at that middle management level, and it didn't occur to me that I should be thinking about moving up, but what I learned from [Angela] is she was always thinking about where she could contribute, where she could step up.

It was November of 2006 that [Angela] hired me. About five years later I was a dean at another institution, [Brookside College], and then a couple years later I was a vice president. I feel like what was amazing about [Angela] is: a) she believed in me, b) she challenged me, c) she allowed me to bring all my identities to work. For example, I grew up in a family that came from New Mexico and we tended to talk half in English, half in Spanish at times. And I could do that and I didn't have to stop and explain to people what I was doing. So I could say things, like I said, "Oh, what's wrong with her? She's just being *escandaloso* [scandalous]," and she knew what I

was talking about. So being able to do that and not have to think, “Oh, I better not say it that way, because they won't understand what I mean and I'll have to stop and explain it.” But just being able to do that, it was really powerful, a really powerful experience. She understood that I was going to operate from a cultural perspective, and she liked that. That's what she wanted me to do. That institution served a huge Latino population and was trying to become an HSI, and she loved that I had that perspective. [Angela] is still one of my best friends and one of my mentors because she believed in me when I was thinking, “I'm not sure I want to do this.” She would say, “No. I want you to do this.” She pushed me out of my comfort zone and said, “You need to step up.”

There was a time when I worked for [Angela], she was the associate vice president for enrollment services, and our first-year experience program was floundering, so she and the director of advising stepped in because advising at the time reported to academic affairs. The college leadership said, “Okay, if we're going to have people step in and take this over, it has to be a joint partnership between student affairs and academic affairs.” So they stepped in to stabilize it and sort of rebuild it and get it going again. She would do that, and whenever she got opportunities, she would go testify in the legislature about a bill. Especially since our legislative session is limited, it goes from January to May, so there's a lot going on during those months. During the legislative session, she was always up on different policy issues and the current legislative issues. And every morning she would read the newspaper and look for articles that were important. I learned from her to pay attention to those things and always being willing to step in and contribute to moving something forward.

I think what was great about our partnership is we learned from each other because what she learned from me is we have to celebrate our good work, so what I would do, and this was a theme through my career too, is people say that I promote their professional development, and I would say, “Instead of just celebrating our good work internally, let's do a presentation at a conference to promote the good work that we're doing.” Then we had to do weekly reports at that college. Here we do monthly president's reports that go into the state board packets. We have one board for our whole system. I always promote the good work of the staff, saying they presented at this national conference, or they did this, or they published an article, or they did this. She and I, I think learned from each other how to be engaged professionally beyond the boundaries of your job. We're still great friends today. For a while she was my counterpart. We were both vice presidents of student affairs in the community college system. In fact, when she joined, my assistant at the time told me, “You're a lot happier since she's been going,” because we would have once a month VP council meetings at the system office, and I was always so happy that I got to go because then I got to see [Angela], because she's one of my favorite people ever.

My former dean of students [Jean], who is African American, and I, we talked about that, we are actually going to work on a manuscript to talk about how powerful it is to be supervised by a culturally competent woman of color as a woman of color

in higher ed who allows you to bring all your identities to work, allows you to be who you are, allows you to operate from a cultural perspective. I hired her when she was in her late thirties and it was the first time in her whole career she had ever been supervised by a woman of color. I never planned on being a vice president, but it was [Angela's] belief in me and her support that put me on that trajectory. [Angela] was the first time I had been supervised by a culturally competent woman of color and who understood me and who really helped to promote my career. That connection with [Angela] made a huge difference in the whole trajectory of my career.

It was so powerful to me because I met these two women, [Angela] and [Jean], kind of right at the midpoint of my career, when I was starting to think, "Oh my gosh, can I really hang in there and do this?" In our state system, to get full retirement you go 30 years if you work for state institutions. And I met them when I was right about at about 15 years and I was thinking, "Oh my God, 15 more years of this. I don't know if I can do it." And they're the ones who saved me and also helped me get promoted. That's how I ended up here. What I did mostly is opportunities came up and I took them, and I said, "Okay." Sometimes I took them kicking and screaming, but I did it. Then I would say, "Okay, I did that, and I didn't die, and actually I'm pretty good at it." I did the same thing when I became a vice president. My former president was the vice president of student affairs, and she created that dean position at [Brookside College] to fit exactly my experience. I was called the dean of student success, and I supervised outreach and recruitment, which had been a big focus of my career. I supervised the cohort-based retention programs, which we were able to form into a student success center. That really fed my creative soul and my entrepreneurial soul. Then accessibility services, which we changed actually to be disability services, and a big focus of the time I had been working with paraprofessionals, they were paraprofessionals working in special education.

Becoming a VP. The dean position totally fit my background and my experience, and I loved that job. Then our president left suddenly. I think he was probably asked to leave. They never tell you the details, but he left suddenly. I told the vice president of student affairs [Marsha], "They're going to ask you to be the interim president." She said, "No, they don't ask vice presidents of student affairs to do that." I said, "No, they are," because I'm really good at watching interactions, and we're part of a system, and watching what was going on I knew that they were grooming her to be a president. I just knew. [Marsha] went into a meeting and came out. She came to my office. She said, "They asked me to be the president." I said, "I told you." So she said, "Well, I'm going to need you to step up and be the vice president of student affairs." And I thought, "I don't want to do that," because I felt like my dean position was created for me and a vice president of student affairs comes with some very specific expectations, and I didn't know if I wanted the weight of those expectations on me. I think some of it was, sort of the expectation that…in student affairs they always want to do things that are fun and I'm kind of a serious person. Like I can remember the vice president that I reported to when I was a dean, one time we had this event at a high school, and somebody was dressed up like a chicken and the vice president danced with the chicken. That's just not something that

I do. I'm an introvert and I don't like the attention that comes with the VP role. It's like don't focus on me. It's not about me. We're here for the students. Let's focus on the work and the students.

I was also a little bit hesitant about some of the community responsibilities, because again, not taking away time from my family. And the vice president sort of did everything. The vice presidents and the dean of students from when I was an undergrad, they did everything in the community. And then I realized later on, after I got into the role, that I could pick and choose what I did. I didn't have to do everything and I think White women of that era, I mean they're technically my generation because I'm right at the end of the Baby Boom, but I think I have some influence of Gen X and some Baby Boomers. I think the White women of that era felt like they had to do everything to prove that they could be leaders. I didn't feel like I had anything to prove. My focus was on providing leadership that demonstrated to people that you could have work-life balance. I think it was all the community responsibilities and some of the silliness. I didn't want to do the silliness, like icebreakers. My dean of students was a traditionally trained student affairs professional, and when she ran leadership team meetings when I was gone, she would go, “Valerie’s not here, so we're going to do an icebreaker.” I would never do those. I would just get down to business. Here's the agenda. Okay, it's time. Let's start. Let's start going down the agenda items.

So [Marsha] took me out to lunch and she said, “Okay, let's talk.” She goes, “Here's what you need to understand: you can make this your own. You can make it fit who you are, so don't say no just because you think there's only one way to do this. There's not.” So I said yes and I got to shape it in a way that fit me and my personality. It really hit home a couple years later because I teach once a year in a higher education master's program. I teach leadership and supervision. One year I taught the community college class, but I mostly teach leadership, and I brought all the vice presidents of student affairs from the community colleges in the area on a panel to speak in my class. As they all told their stories of how they got there, it really hit home for me because we all had completely different paths. We all had completely different areas of emphasis, and we focused on different things. Yet we were all vice presidents, and we were all doing the job that was expected of us. We were just doing it in our own way.

Assets brought to the VP role as an introvert. For example, I didn't even know I was an introvert. A long time ago way back when I was a financial aid counselor, I took the Myers-Briggs, and the person who was administering it was my friend, and she was the assistant director of career services. I came out as an “I” and she said, “That can't be right. That's not you. You've got to be an E.” So she just changed it, and so I went for about 10 years thinking I was an “E,” and then, when I was in that coordinator of student services position in the school of education, they sent me to a leadership program where we did the Myers-Briggs again, and I came out as an “I.” I read the description, and I went, “Oh, that is me.” Then I went home and told my husband, I said, “Am I an introvert?” He said, “Absolutely.” I said, “Oh,

okay." That's when I learned about it, but I didn't really realize how much it helped me in my role until as vice presidents in this community college system, we're required to have a 360 evaluation every year, and so we do it in the spring. The presidents have to do it too, all senior-level administration, and a lot of times what would come back in my 360 feedback, the things that they liked about me were a result of being an introvert. Somebody said I'm very calm, because when somebody comes to me with a problem, I immediately start processing it. So I don't have an emotional reaction because I'm thinking, I'm processing and thinking about, "Okay, how can we look at this? How can we resolve this? How do we address this? What are all the different parts?"

They would say things in my 360 like, "We like that she's really calm. So we come to her with a problem and it's not that she doesn't care, but she very calmly and thoughtfully helps us think through it and helps us work through it and resolve it." I feel like that comes from being an introvert. Then another time a staff member, we had done some focus groups to see if we could figure out what was helping our Latino and our African-American students be successful, and if we could replicate that for more of our students and take it to scale. One of the administrative assistants who was helping me with that lost one of the transcripts from one of our focus groups. It got erased off her iPad, and she was just beside herself. She thought she was going to get fired. Her boss said, "Just go tell Valerie. Of all the administrators on campus, she's the most consistent and the least likely to overreact," because I just don't freak out because I don't go to that emotional place. I just think. I immediately go in my head and start thinking about it and we can figure it out. I told her, "No problem. That was the last one we did. It was only a few days ago. We can sit down and we can recreate it. It may not be exactly what was in there, but it'll be the gist of it. That's what we need because we're looking for broad themes anyway." She said, "Oh my God, I thought I was going to get fired," and I said, "Why would I do that?" because I think being an introvert also makes me be really logical, and so I think, "Why would I do that?" It was a mistake. Mistakes happen, but it's not the end of the world.

I think that definitely helps. I think it also helps in meetings. Even I can remember a long time ago I was in a meeting, and I said something, and this woman said, "Wow. You're really quiet in meetings, but every once in a while you speak up, and what you say really resonates with people." It's because I'm not one of those people in a meeting who just talks and talks and talks to hear myself talk. I tend to listen, and I think about it. Then I've processed it. I've synthesized it. I've connected it to other things that I know. Then when I have something to contribute, I speak up, and my previous boss, the president, she said in her remarks at my going-away party, "Valerie always has something helpful to contribute at meetings," because I'm not just jumping right in there to talk right away. I've been thinking about it and I think, "Okay, how can I be helpful in this situation, or what can I contribute that will move this conversation forward?"

Professional development opportunities. I’ve also benefited from different professional development opportunities. I've really enjoyed NASPA. I've gotten involved on so many different levels there, and it's so interesting how interconnected we are. I first got involved with them by reading conference program proposals for both the regional and the national conferences, and then I became a part of the editorial board for a student affairs journal, which I've just loved because it's so interesting to read the new articles that are coming out and see what research they're doing. What I like about that journal is we always ask the authors to, after they do the results, talk about the implications for research but also the implications for practice, which I think is really good. So I've done that. Then as soon as I became a vice president, because once you're involved with NASPA, they sort of track what you do, and you start getting asked to do things. So after I became a VP, I got connected to a group of chief student affairs officers and we would have conference calls to talk about big issues that were going on in the field. It's just been a really good experience, and there's nothing that you get asked to do that's so time-consuming that you can't do it within the context of what's already a demanding job, but it definitely enriches what you do.

There's a woman that I met through those experiences, and what's so interesting is our lives have intersected in ways that we didn't even realize. She grew up in the same state I did and we graduated from high school around the same time. We both got into student affairs in the same way. She was a first-generation college student, and I was second. We didn't even realize it was a profession. I was involved with NASPA a little bit early in my career, and then I wasn't all that time I was in an academic department, and then I got re-involved when I went to [Champ State]. We met because she and her wife moved back recently, so she had been out of the area for a really long time, but she'd done most of her career after getting a master's in student affairs here. They moved back. They had built a house a couple years ago and always planned to move back here, and so she met just to do an informational interview with me when she came back while she was exploring what her next things were that she was going to do because her last job, she was in the central administration for the community college area of a state system.

I just always thought, “Wow, she wants to meet with me?” I was so impressed. I felt like it was an honor that she wanted to meet with me. Then she told me, “I've been following your career since you were at [Champ State]. You're a rock star.” I thought, “Are you kidding me?” The funny thing is that after meeting with me, she got inspired by the work that I did and she applied for my old position, and she was a finalist. So I'm hoping that she'll get it because she would honor the work that I did, but will build on it and bring a new perspective, which I think is good. I always say that I think leadership should turn over every five to seven years because I really think you just need to bring in new perspectives. It's not that the last person didn't offer anything of value, but things change, and it's always good to have fresh eyes on situations.

Then within the state there's an organization that hosts a leadership program for women in higher education. I went through it. [Angela], the AVP that I worked for at [Champ State], who inspired me to take advantage of opportunities that came up and to move up in administration, she sent me. It's a four-seminar program that you go through in one academic year with women all over the state and a neighboring state since they don't have resources like that, and they're just right next door. Then it was just a great experience. I really enjoyed it. So then I went to the alumni events for a few years. Then they asked me to be a part of the leadership team. So I've been helping. I was the institute director, so I was actually the person that got to design the four seminars one year, and I've helped them with logistics with the hotels, and getting people roomed, and all of those kind of things, and gone to the seminars. I've just really found it to be a great experience and have stayed connected with them since I went through in '08, '09.

I still have my notebook from when I went through. At almost every session there was at least one president who presented. The first session focused a lot on knowing yourself as a leader, because you really, to be an effective leader, you have to know who you are. So just around that time, actually before that, but around that time was really when I understood how it impacted me. I learned more about being an introvert. It focused a lot on women coming in and talking about their professional journey and their personal journey. We did the Real Colors Assessment, which is kind of similar to Myers-Briggs, not exactly. This organization sent me to training to become a Real Colors facilitator, so I have a handout that shows people, “This is your color. This is where you are. This is where you probably are in Myers-Briggs, and this is likely what your strengths are in StrengthsFinder.” They don't exactly measure the same thing, but they can fall into categories. We also had sessions on budget and finance. We had sessions on higher education policy. We had sessions on academic program leadership and student affairs leadership because there were people, again, from all across higher ed in different kinds of roles. It was almost all women presenters, except for I think there was one male presenter at my session. Sometimes there were panels. Sometimes there were individual presenters. For the most part, I found them all helpful. There was just a couple that I thought, “Not really relevant to me,” but it was a really interesting program. You focused on knowing yourself, knowing the context of higher education that you're working in, and then really specific talks about leadership and personal journeys in leadership.

Navigating challenges and microaggressions. In terms of challenges, I'm 5'2. I have a tiny baby voice, and I'm Latina, so I think in a lot of ways people just write me off because they think, “She's not a threat.” They don't see me coming because I think, “Okay, go ahead and underestimate me. I will change that perception eventually.” So I think in a way it's helped me in some ways fly under the radar and get things done. Then as soon as I got into director-level positions or higher, I really started noticing the position power. I can remember we had a unit when I was director of admissions and outreach, and it was called the internal operations unit, and they did the application processing, the transfer evaluation, the international evaluation, the data management, the prospect database, and the people that worked in that unit

could be a little grumpy. I can remember one of the recruiters telling me, “Gosh, I can't get them to do anything for me upstairs.” I said, “Oh, really, because every time I go up there and ask them to do something, they do it right away.” They said, “Of course, Valerie, because you're you!” I thought, “Oh yeah, I forget.”

I forget the position power because I am very relational, and I think that's cultural. So I'm very relational in how I do things, and I'm very collaborative. It doesn't occur to me to be any other way. I can remember when I was at the school of education and I was recruiting, I thought, “Well, the other two institutions on this campus have teacher education programs, but we all have something different to offer. We have the associate's degree in elementary education that leads to/is a transfer degree. Then [Champ State] has more of a traditional teacher education program, and we had a graduate teacher education program that was a partner school model. We also had a few grant projects that were alternative licensure.” So I said, “Why don't we all recruit together, and then no matter where you are in your professional journey, you'll have a school there that will fit your needs?” I remember I came back, and the associate dean for teacher ed said, “Oh my God. How did you get those schools to work with you?” I said, “I don't know.” I just asked them, “Let's work together.” I think the collaboration and the relational piece definitely has a cultural base, but it's benefited me in forming partnerships and forming collaborations that people sometimes from their perspective think, “Oh, that'll never work.” It’s like, “How do you know? Let's try it.” I think also people sort of underestimating me has helped me because then I can just quietly get done what I need to get done. I have something that says “be grateful” in my office, but I think that's more of a general statement. I bought that when I was first vice president of student affairs and I was doing it on an interim basis, because I didn't know if my president would become the permanent president, and we had a crazy student government. I just didn't think I was going to make it through that year. I got the sign to remind me to be grateful for this opportunity because someday you're going to be on the other side of this and you're going to feel really good about the work that you did.

I think there are challenges I’ve had to navigate from two perspectives, internally and externally. Internally it's thinking of myself in that role because like I said, in every leadership position I went into, I sort of went in kicking and screaming because I said to myself, “I don't want to do this,” except for being a dean. For some reason there was something about the dean position that just was so cool to me, I just loved that title, and it's so unique to higher education. You have directors, vice presidents, and presidents in other sectors, but you don't have deans. So the dean one really, that one really interested me. But I think just overcoming my own limitations that I put in my mind, thinking I don't ever want to do that, and making myself, pushing myself to try different things, and then also there's some inherent sexism and racism that's institutionalized in higher education that at times was really frustrating. I can remember one time the dean of the school of education when I was there, he liked people who worked hard. So if you worked hard, he gave you more opportunity. Sometimes he gave you too much. I think one of his limitations as a leader, his Achilles' heel, is that he would only trust a small number of people, and if you were

one of his go-to people, he dumped everything on you, and he would overwhelm people.

I was relatively young when I started there. I was 31 and I worked there from when I was 31 until I was 44. It just so happened that most of the people that were his go-to people were women of color because we were willing to work hard. When he started working there, his wife was a combination of Asian and Portuguese, so the scuttlebutt in the school of education was that he favored Asians, and if not Asians, then women of color. I can remember one time a White female colleague telling me, “The dean only likes you because you're young, you're a woman of color, and you have nice legs.” I was stunned and thought, “Oh my God, how insulting on so many levels is a comment like that?” I said, “Not to mention the part that I work my ass off.” We were all really hard workers and that’s really what he appreciated. He liked hard work. This woman just kind of looked at me and then walked away because she realized what she had done. So those perceptions, especially when you're younger. When you get older, I have a little bit of gray in my hair, well, I have a lot, but I only have a little bit that shows, a little bit of gray in my hair. I have a PhD. Those kinds of things help. When you have experience, then you get a little more intimidating. I was just talking with the dean of students here this morning about how dress codes are different in different institutions, but I said, “I've always worn suits.”

Originally, I wore suits because as a financial aid advisor, I was so young, I wasn't very much older than the students, and they would look at me and say, “Can I speak to your supervisor?” So I started wearing suits to look more authoritative. Then it got to the point where I was cold, so it's good to dress in layers. I could take my jacket off if I needed to. There were things like that where there were some age discrimination, some sexism, and then some inherent racism, just assumptions. I hyphenated my name because I didn't get married until I was almost 30, and knowing just the little that you've heard about my family, my family heritage is really important to me, and I didn't want to give up my maiden name, but I also felt like it was important to acknowledge my partnership with my husband, and so I hyphenated my name. I remember a woman telling me at a conference one time, “Oh, with a name like that, that must get you a lot of job opportunities,” just assuming that that's all it takes is you have to have an ethnic name or to be a certain identity and not understanding that it may open a door if people are looking to have a diverse pool, but it doesn't get you the job unless you interview well. And it doesn't keep you the job unless you add value to the organization. They just make assumptions like that. I can remember one time we were at a party at the parents of our godchildren, and talking with these people about higher education, and I mentioned an interest in faculty positions, and they said, “Yeah, well, you need a PhD to do that.” I said, “Yeah, luckily I have one of those.” They looked all shocked, like, “Really?”

One form of microaggression that my friend [Stephanie], who is Latina and a faculty member in ethnic studies, and I have both experienced is microaggressions about having a PhD and not having kids. Once you have it, then there's always a question about how did you get that? What corner was cut or what rule was broken to

allow you to get a PhD? And so I've had multiple people since I finished 13 years ago say, they say it in a nice way, but they say, “Well, you know, I decided that I needed to be a mom, and the kids needed me more than I needed a PhD.” And it's kind of a double-edge sword, because this faculty member friend of mine [Stephanie], neither of us have kids and it wasn't a conscious choice, it was how our life evolved, and we got to the point where we said, “You know what, we're good.” Yes, it would have been wonderful to have children in our lives, but when that didn't happen we were okay with it. We have that in common. It's kind of like a microaggression against the fact that I don't have kids, and a microaggression about having a PhD. And so now my response is, because after I thought about it, I said, “You know, that's interesting, because the majority of people in my doctoral cohort were women. Most of them had children and most of them were working while going through this program. So they all figured out a way.” And then that just makes them think. I also had really supportive supervisors while I was going through it, but when I was thinking about it, I had someone one time who said, “Well you can't do these jobs,” meaning student affairs, “and doctoral work and do both well.” Also not true. The majority of people in my doctoral cohort and in her doctoral cohort were working while they were doing this. And getting good evaluations along the way. And so there's those little microaggressions about, “Well you got a PhD, but somehow you dropped the ball in some other part of your life.” And it's just not true. And then I've even had people say about the PhD, “It doesn't really mean anything. It's just something people do.” Well it means something to me. So when people say microaggressions about having a PhD. You wouldn't think they could find a deficit in that, but apparently they try.

I've noticed because when you're a person of color, you get asked to be on search committees a lot, and my advice to you is you can say no. I said no for the entire four years I was working on my doctorate because I said, “Nope, I've got to keep this job, and I've got to get this done, so I can't be on extra stuff.” I got off all my professional organizations. I didn't do anything with those. And I didn't serve on any search committees. You can say no. You can always start with, “Okay. This is my job responsibility. Does it relate?” When I was in financial aid, for example, I was on the college-wide student orientation committee, I said, yeah, that's a good thing for me to be on because financial aid is a system that new students have to learn how to navigate, and so I definitely want to have that voice on there. When they brought students to campus through the cultural centers for different admissions and outreach, I would get asked to speak to them. I wanted to do that because I wanted them to know there are people of color in leadership positions on campus, so I would do that. But then you learn how to say, “No, I can't do everything, and I can't do this right now.” Or there are times in your life when you have to say no to this for now, but loop back in a few years when I'm ready. So you learn to say no, and then learn to speak up and address things.

The dean of students at my previous position, I loved the way she put it. She said that I have this way of getting people right together, and afterwards they say, “Thank you.” Then later on they reflect, and say, “Did I just get a talking to?” because some of the assumptions that people make just aren't logical to me, and that's

always my focus, “This isn't logical.” So I'll ask, “Why would you say that? I don't understand what that means.” Then they say, “Well, you know...” and they try to explain. But it is exhausting because what you really want to say is, “What do you mean by that,” or, “What's that supposed to mean?”

The dean of students said that I just have this way of doing it that’s very gracious and very calm. Then I was reading the book, *Journeys of Social Justice*, and one of the authors of the book, Menah Pratt-Clarke [(2017)], noticed that phenomenon in a lot of women of color leaders and she coined the term “counter-transgressive grace.” So when you experience a microaggression, the way she describes it is that you respond in a way that's professional, that preserves the dignity of everybody involved, but lets them know clearly that they have committed a transgression and they shouldn't do it again. And I was like, that's what the dean of students meant when she was talking about how I have this way of getting people right together and afterwards they're like, “Thank you.” And so I think I tend to approach it from a more intellectual point of view than emotional, because you can get emotional about that, especially if you're having a bad day and somebody does something ignorant. But it's more intellectual. And I say, “Well, I don't understand what you mean by that.” I just go back and question them and then they start to backpedal and go, “Oh, well, uh,” and they stumble over their words and they're kind of going, “Umm, ahh, ahh, ahh, ahh.”

And so I think that’s instinctively how I approach it, because also, when I first started experiencing it, before I even knew about microaggressions, I really was confused. Because I grew up in a family that had high expectations and when we lived in [the DC/Maryland/Virginia area], my parents socialized with this broad group of really diverse people. African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos, who were all highly educated, and they were professionals who worked in various levels of government or sometimes organizations like my father did. So I thought everybody was like that. I remember when I started experiencing microaggressions I was like, “Oh. My parents kind of sheltered me a little bit from some of this.” So when I first started experiencing it and when people would ask me a question based on low expectations, I really was confused and would say, “I don't understand what you mean by that.” And then I realized that it was a really good technique to use. Once I was more aware, and when they did it and I was like, “Oh, I know what you're doing.” But I've learned how to do that, but for a student to sit in a class and suffer through those experiences and not know how to navigate that, it's exhausting in addition to figuring out how to balance in work and family and school, and the challenge of the increasing costs, you know. Our housing prices have gone up so much after the recession that students are sometimes trying to decide between buying a book and buying gas and paying rent and buying food and dealing with all that, and then to have somebody say something ignorant. It can be the thing that can be just too much for somebody.

Whereas I just very clearly go through and say, “No. This is what you need to focus on, and this is why this is important.” Afterwards they'll say, “Thank you.”

Then later on they'll be thinking, “Wow, did I just get in trouble?” There occasionally are people who have come back to me and said, “Wow! When you asked me that, it really made me think and I realized that that wasn't from a good place and I needed to rethink my focus on that.” So that made me feel good, because I helped them grow. Then another person, one of my employees who worked directly for me, who just had some personal challenges, he said, “Wow, you have a way of telling people things that are really hard to hear, and they still want to be your friend.” I said, “Okay. That's good to know,” because I just feel like, especially with other people of color, you need to be honest with them about here's what you're doing well and here's where you need to grow, because for us, when we struggle, it's not just our own personal struggle, we're speaking for our entire community, which isn't fair. If you're White, then basically your achievements or your failures are yours alone, but if you're a person of color, then it reflects on your community. While it's unfair, you have to be aware of that and try to address it. I feel like you need to be honest and say, “This is what you need to work on.” For example, in my last position when we just did evaluations this last spring, I told the dean of students that she needed to work on her poker face because when people would say outrageous things in meetings, you could just see on her face that she was just horrified or shocked.

I'd say, “Work on your poker face because I was totally with you and what you thought, but you need to look calm on the outside, so then you can come back and say, “Help me understand why you think that or why you thought it was appropriate to…” For example, the financial aid office had a party on Cinco de Mayo, and thought it would be a good idea to wear sombreros. I thought, “Oh God.” Three people came and reported it to me and said, “Financial aid is wearing sombreros.” We had quite a few employees who were Mexican immigrants, and they came to me, and they said they were offended by that. I said, “Okay. Understandable. We'll talk to them.” I went and got the inclusive excellence director that was doing all our inclusive excellence work, and we planned a little intervention. I emailed the assistant director of financial aid. I said, “We need to come to your next staff meeting and here's what we're going to talk about.” We just had a conversation with them about cultural appropriation. People cried and I just remained calm through that and talked to them about it. We talked about intent versus impact and all of that. You have to be willing to have those conversations, but you have to remain calm, because if you get emotional, then people ramp up their emotions, and then it ends up not being a productive conversation.

Also some of the things that people say in search committees and people assume in search committees were just stunning to me. Then the introvert in me, they would say it, and I would be stunned. I wouldn't say anything because I'd have to process it for a while. I've gotten much better at right away pushing back and saying, “Why would you say that? You're making a lot of assumptions. Does it say that in the application?” And then they would go, “Ah, no.” And I'd say, “I don't think you could really make that assumption unless it explicitly states that. That's not something we can consider.” What we can consider is what's on paper and when we interview them, we can consider their responses. Then when you say things like that, people realize,

“Oh, okay. I guess that was out of line.” And there are times when other people came to me afterwards and said, “I'm so glad you spoke up because I was thinking the same thing, but I didn't know what to say.” I've gotten better over the years at speaking up and saying, “That's not true. That doesn't make any sense.” But at first when people said it, I would go to my office, and I would email my sisters, “Can you believe...?” Or I'd go home and I would tell my husband, because I would have to think about it for a while, but then you start to see some consistencies in what people think. So I've gotten a lot better at addressing it right away, so I just call people on it and help support others to do the same.

For example, we were in a training together in the fall leading up to the election and our system legal office was presenting about managing protests on campus because we were thinking that it's not something that typically happened on our campuses, but it could now in this political climate. In beginning the training, they were holding up these different signs, pretending to be protesters, and one of them said, “Dogs lives matter.” I saw it and I gasped. I turned around and I looked at [Jean], the dean of students, and I told her, “Just breathe.” I said, “Just take a deep breath.” She said, “You don't know how much that meant to me that you knew immediately that that would be a problem for me, and why.” I encouraged her to go talk to the presenter about why she could've chosen any number of different examples. How in using that, the message that she was sending is that she was equating African Americans to dogs, and she was demeaning that whole movement, which is not appropriate.

So I said, “Do you want me to go talk to her or go with you so you don't feel like you're the lone Black woman in the room going to have this conversation?” She said, “No, I think I should. I want to handle this.” But just having people like that who immediately understand what the issue is and who you can look at to give each other support, but she told me, “You don't know how much it meant to me that you turned around immediately and looked at me because you knew that it was going to impact me, and you told me to breathe.” She was also the one that needs to have a poker face. So I turned around immediately. To have those people that you can go to, like my friend [Stephanie] who teaches ethnic studies, we went out for lunch, and we processed the Cinco de Mayo thing. Having people like that that I can call and say, “Wow, this thing happened, and I just want to talk about it.” So that's been really, really helpful. I also have a small but really tight circle of Latina female friends and they're always there to support me. When I think about what they've done for me along my career, is that strong women help other women rise. They don't try to keep them down.

Figure out ways to find your voice to be a champion and a change agent for equity. I had noticed some things in higher ed and there were times when I said things and times when I didn't, and having that support helped me find my voice so that I always spoke up. I was just telling my friend [Stephanie] at lunch today that there were three things that happened in this new position I am in that, to me, indicated, oh, we've got some work to do around equity issues and how we talk about students of

color. I spoke up all three times. I didn't hesitate. Whereas earlier in my career, I might have. But finding my voice to be a champion and change agent for equity is really what helped me find a way to feed my soul through this work. One of these experiences was in my first two months in this new job that made me think, “Oh, I have work to do,” because [Brookside College] was working really hard on diversity and inclusion initiatives, and they had done some really hard work and had a really diverse student population. I knew that in changing jobs I might land in an institution that wasn't exactly there, although they're having conversations. Once a month we have a President’s Report, they also had this at [Brookside College]. So each campus or each division sends in things they want to highlight and PR puts it together, has the president approve it, and it goes in the board packet for the state board meeting. And one of the things they were highlighting is a Latino leadership program that we have here on this campus that's been really successful. And they sent me that because they had graduates from that program. They sent me that as one of the things to highlight from this campus. And the way they wrote it up was, “This program teaches Latino students that their culture isn't a detriment to becoming leaders.” And I was like, “Holy crap.” And so, I said, “How do I address this?” So, I rewrote it. I submitted it for the president's report, but I said, “This program teaches Latino students to use their vast social and cultural capital in their leadership development,” and I sent that report back to all the people who had sent me items, and I said, “Here's what I submitted for the President's Report.” And I said, “Wow.” Because when I first read that I was like, “I want to go back to where I was. Bring me home.” And then I was like, “Nope. Okay. I have some teaching to do and I have to figure out a way to do it so that they hear me without turning them off.”

Then we have what's called a P-TECH[17] program here, and it's delivered entirely in the high school. Students start in ninth-grade and each year in addition to their high school curriculum, they've got some college curriculum, so that by the time they graduate they have an associate's degree in computer science. And it's a partnership between the college, the school district, and IBM. So it's a really great program. Almost all the students in it are Latino, because it's at one of the most diverse high schools in this area. And some of the parents initially were a little unsure about whether they wanted their students participating in this. And the director of the program said, “Well, I'm pretty sure it's because they didn't want their kids to do better than them.” And I was like, “Oh my God.” I didn't know what to do because I was so stunned. It was like my second week here. And I thought, well maybe they didn't want their students to be tracked into vocational programs, and maybe you made this decision for their student without involving them, which is inappropriate because they're the parents and it's their decision, or maybe they wanted to be sure their students still had an opportunity to transfer to a four-year institution when they

[17] Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools (P-TECH) provide high school students, particularly first-generation and underrepresented students, an opportunity to complete their associate’s degree from grades 9-14 at no-cost in applied science, engineering, and computing areas at select public schools across the country. In this six-year program students learn in-demand skills and knowledge to prepare them for a career through an innovative education model co-developed by International Business Machines (IBM; IBM, 2017).

were done with this. They wanted to make sure the courses were transferrable. There are a lot of different reasons why they could have been hesitant. And so I realized early on that the dean of students on this campus, who is a White woman and she went through a master's program in higher ed that's really got a heavy social justice emphasis, so everybody that comes out of that program has done some really serious work around equity and social justice issues. So she gets it and so I thought, I'm going to talk to her. So I mentioned it to her and she said, “Oh my God, he said that?” and I said, “Yeah.” She goes, “Don't worry, I'm on it. I will make sure that we do some work and he evolves.” And I said, “Thank you.” So you have to find where your allies are, who can help you move people along.

Additional sources of support. There was also a young woman who, she's actually Asian, first-generation college student, but married to a Latino, and so she understands a lot of identities. Her dad is White and her mom is from Thailand, and then she's married to a Latino whose family are Mexican immigrants. I hired her when she was really young, but I noticed right away how savvy she was about human interaction. For example, we would go to this meeting and she would come to my office afterwards and we would just laugh, because she would just hit the nail on the head about what was really going on in the dynamics of it. I've hired her twice at two different institutions, and I would hire her again. Because she really was a good sounding board. She would be a good person to tell me the dynamics of what was going on. She would come and say, “Okay, this is what people are talking about. So you need to address it.” So I would address it and people would look at me like, “How does she know that we were talking about that? Or how does she know we had questions?” It's because I had really good people like that who would give me the pulse of what was going on.

What's wonderful is I can also talk about things like that with my husband because he's a first-generation college student. He has a PhD. He became a superintendent. Let's see. When I met him he was actually working in higher education for a while, but he didn't like it, so he went back to K-12. I saw some of the stuff that he had to navigate as a man of color, male of color...like, people having meetings that he should've been included in, and they're all down the hall laughing in the meeting, and he's sitting in his office, and they didn't even invite him to join, things like that. He's had those experiences, so he can talk with me about them. Now, he and I approach things really differently because we're both direct, but he's really blunt, and I'm more subtle. I have a different way of approaching it. I'll process something with him. He'll say, “Just go in there and tell him...” For example, one time, after he retired from K-12, he was running a nonprofit agency that served people with developmental disabilities. They had an alternative school, and there were quite a few people in that school who wanted to get their teacher licensure. We had a grant that would help them do that. So they worked with me and another institution where I have worked previously. We had a few of his people in that grant. A few of his people were in grants that my former colleagues had, and the associate director didn't like those partnerships, so she said, “We're not going to be doing the partnerships anymore.” He just sent out this email to the whole leadership team that

said, “I heard a conversation that we are ending the collaborations. That's not your call. That will not be happening. Please find other ways to feed your need for power.” I thought, “Well.” I don't know if I would've done it that way, but it was a good way to get it across. I probably would've gone and talked to them each individually and said, “We're going to continue these partnerships, and this is why they're beneficial. We're going to continue to be supportive of it, and here's the behaviors that I need to see to show me that you're supportive of these partnerships.” I would've just done it in a different way, but he's definitely more blunt than I am, but at least I can talk to him about it and get his perspective.

New opportunities and supporting future Latina/o leaders. A colleague of mine who has my same role on another campus wanted to know why I applied for this job, and I said, “Well, because it's the CEO of the campus, it's sort of a good capstone to my career since I've worked in both student affairs and academic affairs,” and I said, “But I also was getting tired of the microaggressions and the structural barriers and those kinds of things in my last job,” and I said, “So, this is my test. Was I just tired of my last institution, or am I tired of higher ed?” Because higher education really was designed to be a really classist system anyway, and sexist, and racist, and so this is my test. I'll let you know in a couple of years, “Am I done, or did this reinvigorate me?”

What I would say most of all about the career paths of Latinas in senior leadership and higher education is knowing how my career path just happened randomly and I took opportunities that came up. I want to work to develop more clear pathways for the ones that are coming after me. I always feel like I want to give back. That's why when doctoral students want to interview me for their dissertation, I always say yes. When master's students want to meet with me when they're graduating for an informational interview or talk about job opportunities, I say yes. When students that I've taught before want to meet with me about their careers I say yes. Right before I came here, I met with one of my students who I taught four years ago. I originally helped her when she was graduating from her master's. She got connected with [Champ State] and she went and worked with them, and I served as a reference. Then when she left them, she's in a new job, and it's not really a good fit, she wanted to meet to talk about what new opportunities she could explore. I always say yes because although I feel like I've had a great career and I feel like it has fit who I am and what I needed at the time in my life, my career path might have been more focused. Maybe I would've gotten more out of certain opportunities if I had had somebody to talk to at the time. So I always feel like I want to do that for others who are coming along.

As I was leaving [Brookside College], two of our staff members both wanted to tell me that they were going to start their master's degree in student affairs in the fall together and that I inspired them. One was a coordinator of our welcome center, and one worked in recruitment and orientation. They are both Latinas and we brought them in to work in temporary positions while they were finishing their bachelor's degrees at two different institutions in the area. You know, you get in the grind and

you're just doing the next thing, the next thing, the next thing, and when you realize that just coming to work and bringing all your identities with you helps to inspire people has an impact. This morning they kicked off an in-house leadership program that they have at this college. They just had cabinet members go to be there for the first part, for the breakfast and it's nine Fridays. I'm doing one of the presentations on leadership and one of our staff members from this campus who is participating, this is her very first job. She's a bilingual admissions representative and I was so proud of her. They had to introduce themselves, say what their job title was, which campus they were from, and then what were they hoping to get out of this and she said, "I'm hoping to learn more about Latina leadership and I noticed that I'm the only Latina participating in this program." And I was like, "Good for you!" That's why we do this work. She's in her very first job and she's already saying things like that.

And then yesterday, I was up visiting our campus in another county because I had never been to that campus. I'd been to the campus that I'm running, and another that I live close to, but I'd never been there and I wanted to get to know the VPs so we could be a good VP team. We walked in the cafeteria and the person escorting me in said, "There's some people that want to meet you." And I said, "Oh, okay." And it was Latina and Latino faculty and staff at that campus, and they stood up and shook my hand and they said, "It's such an honor to meet you. We're so glad you joined this college." In my mind I'm just the same little goofball I was in sixth-grade and I just have to remember that impact that we have as Latinas. One time, I was teaching a class at my last institution, and a Latina student needed a handout that I had given out the week before and I didn't have it with me because we weren't talking about it, and I said, "Well, just come back to my office." And we're walking down the hallway, and suddenly, she realizes that I have the corner office, and she went, "Are you in charge?" And I said, "Of some things." And that was just so powerful for her. I like it when I get reminded of that, because it keeps me hopeful. I think sometimes, we carry more of a responsibility, and sometimes a burden, to reflect those images of our people that present counter narratives to the ones that we're hearing in the news and all of that.

A Response to Valerie: A *Testimonio* of Social Support and Strategic Navigation

Three key themes emerged from Valerie's *testimonio*: (a) the invaluable knowledge and support that she gained from her family that she continues to benefit from in her professional journey, (b) the transformative role a culturally competent Latina supervisor played in shaping her career pathway, and (c) her experiences navigating microaggressions and challenges through "counter-transgressive grace" (Wise, 2013).

Valerie's commitment to social justice surfaced throughout her *testimonio*, illustrated by her passion for supporting and advocating for Latina/o students and future Latina and Women of Color leaders throughout her career pathway. Valerie grew up hearing *cuentos* [stories] about her family members' experiences navigating inequities because of their Latina/o identity. These family stories and her own experiences navigating microaggressions throughout her career spurred Valerie's drive to push back against inequities. Valerie not only benefited from emotional support and knowledge from her family, but also derived strength from her family's experiences resisting discrimination. Valerie affirms the assets Latina/o communities possess (e.g., hard work ethic, collaborative approach) and is not afraid to challenge inequitable practices and dismantle deficit views of Latina/o students. Valerie's family also fostered her pride in her culture and instilled within her a strong work ethic and drive to persevere. Even when the institution did not leverage or recognize the assets Latinas/os acquired from their families, Valerie recognized the strengths she brought from her home environment to her institution. Valerie also benefited from additional social support and perspective on how to navigate her career pathway since she comes from a family of educators, with her father and spouse having spent their entire careers in the field of education.

While cross-race and cross-gender colleagues guided Valerie into a career in student affairs, the presence of a culturally competent Latina supervisor provided her with life-changing mentorship and support, highlighting the powerful presence of Latina supervisors, mentors, and role models in Latina administrators' career pathways. A Latina supervisor, Angela, offered vital support at a critical juncture in

Valerie's career by pushing her to take risks and believing in her during times of self-doubt. Though Valerie pursued new career roles throughout her path when the opportunities presented themselves, it was not until she connected with Angela that she envisioned herself on a career trajectory to the SSAO role. Even though Valerie possessed a drive to succeed, Angela's confidence in her abilities empowered her to pursue new opportunities. Angela also served as a role model of a culturally competent and culturally affirming leader, a leader who encourages their staff to bring all their identities to work and seeks to leverage the assets they bring from these identities. This culturally affirming support was powerful and inspiring and came at the right time as Valerie was at a juncture in her career. In addition to the support she received from Angela, Valerie also benefited from a connection with a Latina faculty member in ethnic studies who empathized with her racialized and gendered experiences Latinas navigate in higher education and offered vital peer support.

While Valerie discussed coping with covert and overt discrimination by drawing from her resilience, self-efficacy, and social support, she also described navigating microaggressions and challenges in her career through counter-transgressive grace. Counter-transgressive grace is a form of emotional intelligence that Women of Color draw from to address racism and sexism in a way that treats the transgressor with dignity and respect (Wise, 2013). This navigational approach involves calling attention to the transgressor's problematic language and/or behavior in a way that discourages them from repeating it (Wise, 2013). Rather than reacting hastily, Valerie recognized the assets she brings to problem-solving and decision-making as a self-identified introvert. Valerie's introverted approach involves

remaining calm, reflective, and seeking to understand the intent of colleagues' actions when addressing challenges and microaggressions in her career. However, Valerie's ability to face challenges in her career through a reflective, thoughtful approach still did not eliminate feelings of burnout in her career that Latinas can experience in administration. Valerie emphasized that colleges and universities were developed out of a sexist, racist, and classist system. Given these structural barriers that pervade the higher education environment, Valerie strived to take proactive steps to dismantle inequitable practices in her institution and benefited from locating networks of support.

Coureck

"Don't let anybody stop you from realizing the goals and dreams that you have."

Personal and Family Background

I was born to a family of 11. There is nine children. My father was an immigrant from Mexico, and he had a first-grade education. My mother was born here in the United States, and she dropped out at ninth-grade. We had a large family. We had a great upbringing of understanding about our issues of poverty and helping others. That was really rooted early and because my family had limited education they wanted more for their children, so education was a huge emphasis as a number one priority, besides food on the table. You had to go to school, you had to make something of yourself, you had to be better than they were. Education…was a way to change our family, ourselves, and to not realize the same outcome as they had. I had the expectation from my family to go to college.

I had two older brothers and two older sisters. My two older sisters were going to college and it was a time of the late '60s, early '70s, where there was a lot of student activism. So when they were in college, and they were like four or five years older than me, they took us to the various protests on the issues of Chicano studies, immigration, police brutality. Then they would take us to the university campus. So that was always a trajectory that I was going to go through, they actually mentored me on how to apply for enrollment as well as financial aid. They also mentored me in terms of the importance of promoting college education for others. I was very involved in some of their so-called "study groups." I got involved when I was 16 with a youth leadership movement on immigration reform. When I was entering college they were leaving, so then when they were leaving they were leaving their leadership

positions of the MEChA and I became involved in that, in the leadership group. It became more of an expected outcome because of my own kind of development into that area. Their network helped develop or helped really embrace my ability to transition into higher education and pursue my degree.

I also learned a virtue of gratitude from my family, of having a family that was supportive, a family that was active in their community in the way that they could be, and also issues of poverty and issues of the lack of being represented in the education system, the experience of discrimination just ground me. All those ground me, that's why I'm continuing working on those efforts on ensuring that we look at our community in different ways, that we don't look at them as marginalized communities, that these are communities that have just great wealth to contribute. That's what they did instill upon me. Latino and low-income communities have a lot more to contribute than people think. I pursued my education pathway in obtaining a degree so that I can become a role model to others and to my children, and also to help provide economic support to my family.

Pathway to Student Affairs

Before I went into administration I worked in community non-profits and understood about integration of community in terms of community empowerment. I worked for a Head Start program and that was their initial impetus, not taking care of children, but to look at community empowerment programming. I was overseeing various early education programs and parenting programs. I was being asked to do presentations, professional development series, workshop trainings. So they saw that I would also be a good candidate to teach. I feel that my role…as a non-profit administrator was teaching anyway, teaching the community how to maneuver and access resources, teaching the staff there who were former parents how to become employees, and also how to continue to advocate for the community. It still was teaching, so they pretty much encouraged me to do that. When I started doing it I enjoyed that as well, administration as well as teaching. So I went from being a non-profit administrator to the college as an instructor, faculty member, looking at my role a little differently, more of a classroom base than a campus.

I felt encouraged to go into higher education administration since I saw other Latinas who were either coordinators or presidents. Well, very few presidents. They were either deans who were moving on up, and so they were definitely a source of encouragement. Well, actually I began as a faculty member and I was a department chair. When I became a faculty, my department asked me to step up to be the department chair, so I became a department chair, did that for six years, and then went to look at student programming. I was in education. Although I did have a bachelor’s degree in business and master’s in education. I still was a faculty but I was released part-time to develop their off-site dual enrollment program. I was doing that and developing other programs and writing grants, and just looking at how we could promote access in our community. I was doing a huge emphasis on that and looking on onboarding activities and strategies. In doing so I was then encouraged to apply for a dean position. I applied for the dean of students role and then a year and a half

later became the vice president. It was kind of quickly, but I actually had an administrative background. It's a parallel track. How can I help them institute additional services or various strategies to support students, in terms of the challenges that they're facing. It's not like I had someone choosing me for the position. I actually just showed a lot more initiative, leadership, and was instituting a lot of programming for access for our students, bringing in a lot of enrollment, and then looking at how we could develop the support mechanisms for them. Then it just felt natural to apply for those positions. Then I also realized that in order to really effect change that we've been talking about as faculty, that we need to have like members be integrated and embedded in administration. There were several of us that had that discussion.

I've seen other people, other Latinos, whether male or female, who have come up to me asking how they could follow a similar path, and now that they see that there's someone there, they're interested. I think that's important, looking at the role models. What's really interesting for the Latino community is that we need to have that influence in order to create that change, whereas if you have White privilege you're just still very confident. That's something that comes up, is that you see a lot of – whether they have experience or not, they're overly confident. I think with the Latinos, including myself, we're like, "Well, can I do this or can I not?" We question ourselves. I've been urging other Latinos to step up, look at our roles, and so that we can really effect change. We're starting to permeate the system. If we're looking at whether institutions are being reflective of the community, here at [Southeast College] we are serving one of the largest communities that are Latino. Then we have had predominantly White leadership. If we want a greater representation of Latinos, then we need to move forward that effort so that we can get Latino faculty members. Because typically they need to have some faculty background, for the most part, then we can help others aspire to become academic or student services administrators. Because the institution's not planning for a greater representation of Latinos.

Professional Experiences in Student Affairs/Higher Education

A hard work ethic has also helped me. You got to work double, triple, even ten-fold, right, about work ethic. But it shouldn't be that way at all. It should be based on, "Okay, we have a background." That work ethic, it supports my credibility. Even from board of trustees, they know my work ethic. That work ethic is what you start with because that's what we need from students, initiative. Need hard work but you've got to have initiative. Initiative is a key aspect of people really finding a competence. If you're able to initiate, people see that, that you're able to initiate strategies or initiate professional development or initiate various projects. That helps bring in the credibility for the work. Saying, "I see what she's saying and what she's doing is based on initiative." So I think having strong initiative has to be kind of hand in hand. You have to be able to initiate and be a hard worker.

One thing that helps me is to be reflective. If something's not working then I have to come back and say, "Well, time to negotiate conflict by being reflective." And I think a big thing is people, so they don't take it personally, need to understand

what White privilege is really about, and looking at the signs and symptoms of the various biases that we have. In fact, I went to do some training for early education for how to be a diversity trainer for young children and their families, but that's really carried me well in looking at the goals of people's behaviors and human behavior, even myself, thinking, “Why are we acting this way? Do I want power? Do I want to get back at someone or are they trying to do that to me?” That has helped me personally, trying to figure out the motivation behind people and myself, our actions, and being reflective upon it.

Contending with structural barriers and challenging colleagues. As a faculty I was really well-accepted. I got along well. Then when I applied for an administrator position, even people from my own ranks, I experienced not just micro-aggressions but aggressions that were unbelievable. I got anonymous letters, even before I started. Then I got attempts to ostracize me or to label me that I'm not capable. That there is no mentoring going on at all, and…I didn't know what I was doing and I was trying to do too many activities. Yet I knew I had a vision. Within the year we proved them wrong, and then everyone looked at our division for leadership and it was being acknowledged. But just initially it was unbelievable relational aggression to ensure that I wouldn't be successful. I'm glad that I have the background in human development and business management so that I was able to understand it about their behavior of being threatened. The institution was being threatened and it was because I was entering it and I am outspoken and I do have a lot of social capital with faculty, community, and classified staff, the rank and file. It was difficult. I can't say that oh, I just let it go, not take it personally. Try not to, but you get in there. I'm always being attacked, covertly, overtly. Being undervalued for sure. Being looked upon as a novice. It's just interesting and it just shows the resiliency that I have, I feel quite good about it.

Just putting it out there, discrimination is still alive and well. We have to know ourselves and be able to develop all these networks in order for us to lead, but not forgetting that we are constantly facing various forms of discrimination for ourselves and for our students and for our communities, and not to lose sight of that. There's also no manual on how to be an administrator, but understanding the politics of the various systems, whether it's our district or our own institution and within various committees is important. Also, understanding the influencers and the obstructionists on how we frame things and take a different course so that we can continue to positively impact advancement of our students, advancement of ourselves. In terms of my role as an administrator, as the chief student services officer, I also see that no matter where we're at we’re still facing all these various obstacles, especially if you're a woman, especially if you're a person of color, even worse. We have to excel. It's just so contradictory, we have to do like ten-folds. We have to work harder than our counterparts. I think students are also seeing that and we are just even more sensitive to students, thinking how do I help them in their navigation of not only campus resources but linkages to the community, and also understanding their role in their journey of self-efficacy. It's a parallel experience no matter what role we are in or as we move up. I guess it comes down to the micro- and macroaggressions we

have in the society, micro- and macroaggressions we have in an institution as well. So our role, it's similar but it just changes in terms of who the audience is and who your obstructionists are.

Sometimes I do feel like being a VP is not worth it. I think that aspiration, and not a personal aspiration, where I look at the issues of equity, access for students, is very parallel to the same as administration. Another challenge involves dealing with others who have White privilege who have control and have the power, and even our own Latinos who get into this system, get in a higher level, they get lost in their aspiration of becoming the next-level. We need to have more people who really have an activist background versus people who want an opportunist reality. That's why I call it opportunist, is they're looking for the next opportunity, not looking at what we're supposed to be doing, what a plan of action could possibly be. Opportunists are looking at their own personal career trajectory, activists are looking at how we can open opportunities. You know, setting the vision of not just looking at enrollment numbers, but looking at how we're impacting our community and making sure they're in close contact with the community. Also, just being able to talk at this level, being able to talk about racism. When it was mainly White administrators at the table and it was brought up about issues of race, they don't want to hear about that. They get defensive. Of course, it would be defensive because then it has to deal with their accepting their responsibility and their impact. They don't want to deal with it. Whether it's White leaders in the academic senate, the lower level administration and even the higher level. It becomes where, if you don't deal with issues of racism and how it impacts our students and we can't have a conversation, then we can't change things. We're just repeating this recycling of the same type of institutional goals and strategies.

Now if we're able to talk and be free to talk about it, and there's more of us activists, that's when I have found support. I had to battle when I came in as a VP, battling my other administrators, one White, one Latina. Because she's assimilated so much and forgot about her background, she says the right things and opportunists are definitely not helping me, not really helping visualize our mission. Then it becomes another cycle, another circular issue of challenge that is created. We just become institutionalized ourselves. We assimilate into this institution and that everything's okay and let's keep things minimal. That's not what I feel my role is. For me, access and equity are going to always be up there in terms of making sure that we mitigate those gaps for students. I think that's what I'm struggling with, is that I like to see that we have more Latino administrators in higher education who really have a background in activism versus a background in just this college readiness, because they will never understand how our students are struggling. We are constantly looking at these outcomes and disparities. But the disparity is when you truly understand it and you utilize the community cultural wealth model [(Yosso, 2005, 2006)], where you don't have to explain things. You just know this is the best course to take and how we really can examine these barriers and not just talk about them, and realize that all these institutional set standards need to be focused on what these students can do. Because we definitely are always looking at what students can't do.

I'm trying to change that to say, “Well, let's focus on the strength base even for ourselves. What are our strengths as faculty? What are our strengths as administrators, as an institution, and how can we get the most out of these students?” Versus looking at constantly being confronted of what the students are not doing. We have to look at their challenges. So that's what motivates me. How I can keep interjecting that?

It's astounding to see the dialogue at a high-level. How do we maneuver the institution as faculty or chairs or even lower level administration in terms of deans? Faculty and administrators have frustration of why they can't maneuver the institution and I realize at the higher level the frustration of not having facility requests met or budget requests. You have to have people at the high-level that have that understanding that can help be that champion and can help be that beacon of light saying, “You can do it and let's do it this way and here's how you go about doing it.” Because I was in that position before when I was advocating for the department, and waiting for years for a facility request or waiting for years to implement a strategy. I realize that at the cabinet level we need to be there to advocate for our other brothers and sisters and faculty members and also the students, because the things that are being done against students is unbelievable. For example, the labeling, the labeling of faculty, it's us against them, the labeling of students. I have been astounded by some of the language that goes on, calling them “those homeless students.” They're labeling the students as what issues they bring to the campus, versus why we're there and why they should be there to change society. I've had different discourse, and I would say arguments, not just discourse…about how we treat students and what we're saying about students, and the message we are sending about students and how we label students. I had another key administrator labeling homeless students as, they're bringing in fleas and they're dirty; disabled students as having a host of challenging behaviors. That's my role, to advocate for the students. The students are our customers, and I think we forget about that.

Navigating adversity as a CSSO. I also feel like meditation helps when navigating challenges. I feel having friendship circles helps to support one another. After me another Latina came on, so now we have another Latina VP…she was just recently hired about six months ago. She's very much attuned with issues of equity. The two people that were basically trying to prevent this are leaving, so it's great. The energy, the spirit is looking after us because they're finally leaving, because all of a sudden all their verbal and covert behavior was being uncovered. We got more and more support to look at how we can change and transform the institution. So actually it was worth the struggle. Now I think we're able to talk a little bit more about issues in open forum, like the critical race system. We're able to talk about how do we look at these issues because it's not just race. It's also the sexism that is rampant. Also looking at how we oppress others. Really, as a leader I've seen my colleagues, how they treat our line staff, how someone with an accent is treated. It's…unbelievable.

I even went to a *curandera* [female folk healer or medicine woman], to just assist me in understanding my role. Would this ever get better, because it's going

through my head, thinking, “was this worth it?” I feel that the core spirituality and family, having a husband that's supporting children, that they understand I'm working late. It's important that when I want to just give up, just saying, “You don't let anybody stop you.” Back to what my father's family said. “Don't let anybody stop you from realizing the goal and dreams that you have.” That helped a lot. And prayer. How do I get out of this situation? How do I help? Do I continue doing what I'm doing and considering the way I feel, is it possible to keep focusing on students and the community, or do I just give up?

Having a social network is really important. Having a social network of people that support you, from all different roles of the line staff, classified, other deans, faculty leadership, and knowing that you have that support, it drives me. If it was totally me against the institution it would be something, but there is like-leaders on campus that have the same vision. How can we improve our services and how can we make them at the core of student emphasis? So I think that helps. We would have little get-togethers, little rallying meetings. The social network, whether we're doing it in a social or even having a strategy meeting, those help. I also am part of a [Latina leaders association], I attended some of their events. I would say that it's like a sub-organization, it’s really helpful. Because the emphasis is on being Latina and being who you are and not losing yourself and not selling yourself out. Because I see that a lot. I see it where people are focused on the next career level. Even though I've moved up, it's not been the position, and I think that's the difference for me is they know I can always go back to the classroom because I have that tenure status.

The struggle was not easy, and I don't have to struggle. I could go back to teaching, and it'd be nice to have a schedule. Here I am doing double work. I was taking care of like four or five positions while the other VP's were just doing their positions and their employees were leaving at 4 or 5. I'm staying here 'til what, 9, 10, 11, one o' clock in the morning. Why am I working so hard? They're telling me I'm not working smart, but I'm doing so many positions. For a while back I was doing like five positions: a VP, a dean, another dean's position, an outreach coordinator, and my own clerk. I didn't even have a secretary. Being patient, struggling, and working hard. Working hard for me is different than my counterpart, who has four secretaries. Then they finally see that, as we're bringing in and growing the college, that I needed more positions, so I was able to advocate to get additional positions. So I also feel for me it gives me a comfort level and a confidence that, “Well, I'm not subjected just to what you tell me to do. I'm not subjected to just orders or directives.” And also, the way we need to promote ourselves as CSSOs in terms of what our expectations are in being treated, or have had to tell the CEO, “Not even my husband talks to me that way.” So they know there are some things I won't put up with. I think that helps arm ourselves for aggression.

I’ve also had very little formal training. I've had to figure it out myself. I've had to use my background, my resilience. I think that our state has a lot of push on these equity initiatives, so they have equity funding. I went after that and that helped cement what I was doing and gave credence to what I was doing. Those student

equity workshops were very helpful because it's very parallel if we look at how best practices for students need to be best practices for other administrators and how we treat faculty. But very little training. There's very little. In our institution we're one of many colleges in a larger district, and you look at how they're male-dominated. And you look at the males, are they helping women? No. Are there other people of color in senior leadership? No, there are not. So you have to rely on your own I would say skills and ability as well as figuring how to maneuver, and then find people, like people. It's very difficult, because again, most of them, I call them opportunists and not activists who are so intent and concerned about their image versus what's best practices for our institutions. So it's been a difficult journey. I've had so many jobs I haven't been able to partake in professional development, because I've had to model for my employees and build my staff capacity in terms of the number of personnel, in terms of also their knowledge base. But I'm not trying to do it as fast as I can since I plan on retiring soon.

I've only gone to a few conferences through professional associations. As I mentioned, I don't really have time. But the times that I've gone, having other people of color that are in these roles, we face similar barriers of similar aggressions. Just the networking part is I think the most important, maybe not the content, but the networking. I'm not involved in the association infrastructure at this level because I'm new to this position. It's only been a year and a half. But when I've gone there, I think it's very critical that we not only have a network that has great support and information but also knowledge and wealth of resources to share on content in being an administrator such as technical areas. But I think it's more important on the social network of being able to pick up the phone and call someone honestly about a certain situation that may occur, and creating more sub-networks that, they can help give us insights to their experiences and strategies that they've used and also vice versa, sharing that as well. That I think has been the biggest benefit. I think what we do have at our district is that all the CSSO's meet on a monthly basis and we have a full day of professional development and problem solving with each other, as to what not only is going on in our campus but in terms of the district-wide and keeping up with any issues, new legislation. So those are all very important beyond the established associations. Then of course I'm looking forward to this next year going to another phase of actually attending more of the conferences and taking part of those member benefits, but right now on their websites NASPA has really good articles on various issues, whether it's student mental health, looking at the financial wellness area. All those are really great in terms of technical knowledge to support our strategies and to reach our outcomes. Again, it comes back to within all these groups forming the sub-networks.

The best way I figured things out on my own is going on the ground, to your line staff. It's going to all the units, introducing myself, finding out what are some of the issues, the barriers, listening to them, listening to your staff. Having monthly meetings and not just with deans. I'll have the monthly meetings with the deans but I'll also have a student services division meeting with leads, and there'll be line staff there. There'll be managers, and there'll be deans together. So if I'm hearing from a

dean, it's not watered down. It's what is the line staff saying. What are all the units? All the units are represented. I think getting that knowledge has been from listening to what your workforce is saying, what the workforce is doing. Listening to their keen ideas and suggestions. So I think that's been the best strategy because I've seen so much growth and so much evolving skills and abilities. I've been able to realize some of the objectives we set out that would take three-years, or a year and a half. That, as well as making sure that I keep up with my internal personal readings about making sure as leadership I don't lose track of not making assumptions.

Assets in having a non-profit background as a CSSO. I think that it's just really so important to strategize to support others and look at how we can help one another and not just look at our position of power, but our position of sharing opportunity. As I mentioned, access is so important, because to me I worked a lot with the high schools, and that's where colleges tend to be very myopic in that they don't talk about the campus community. But our students come from a community. One of the things we've done is go out into the various communities and have various, not only functions, but various engagement strategies. It just makes it easier to onboard students. At the same time, it helps the college, it helps them with their enrollment. The college, even if it's a CEO that is Latino, he's looking at numbers. Well, I'm looking at making connections with families. Our college is not having this problem, but the problem at a lot of colleges is that there seems to be a reduction in enrollment. Our college is not having that problem because we don't recruit students, we recruit families and look at family strategies. We have parent workshops. We look at the family as a whole. We look at these students come from these families come from these communities. That whole ecological model is very real to me and I've tried to make it as integrated as possible.

Because if we don't look at the whole ecological model we're just looking at one area of the system, and that is not sustainable. The whole question is that: “Are we ready for the students, are the students ready for us?” We have to be ready for these students and their families. Getting the families to feel that they're integrated and then it becomes more supportive, especially for Latino students, because they are very interdependent on their families. They're not just taking this role of where I'm done, 18 you move out. We know that. They still live with their families. They're very much dependent on the influence of their family. I think that's a huge role that I need to advocate for, looking out for the college to have a stronger role in the community and stronger role with families and parents of our students.

I keep at the forefront Yosso’s [(2005, 2006)] community cultural wealth model. I have that community cultural wealth model on my desk, so when people don't know what they're talking about to people or others, I'm saying, “Well, what's the strengths?” That's like a little Bible to me. Because I hope that the institution, in another five years we'll be talking about how do we look at developing a community cultural wealth model for our professional development, for our employees, for our students? It's like blank stares. So I have that. If you look at the aspirational capital, the students that Yosso talks about, those still remain our aspirations as a Latino

leader. How families are included, families have these dreams with their students, and how I can be a great impact for that, to support that. Looking at the linguistic capital, well, I'm looking at our materials. We don't have anything that's bilingual or trilingual. At the colleges, we tend to have this view that's this covert speak English only, or by this time they need to speak English. Well, but now we're overseeing adult programs. But even before then I was always pushing to have things translated, not just translated, but materials being translated, workshops being done in various languages.

The social capital. One of our units that I oversee is student life. But how do we make the social capital for our students help them in their navigation? That's part of that navigational capital. We're so focused on how they navigate classes, and I've been told by my counterparts that, “Oh, the most important thing here is the bread and butter, the academics.” I'm saying, “No. Students will not be successful in their academics if they don't have the whole ecological piece satisfied, the Maslow’s basic needs.”How do we help them navigate not only our campus, but how do we give them, again, pushing forth self-efficacy for housing, food? They're not going to come tell us. I have so many students that are just coming out that they're homeless or they're couch-sitting. How do we help them navigate? We're just putting out a call for community resources. They've been fighting me over this for a year and a half, two years almost now. Now we're going to have it on all the community partnerships that we have so that we show that community engagement is important to us, it should be important to our students and faculty. Also, what are the community networks we have out there? Again, it goes back to the ecological model. That's part of that community cultural wealth model. That's linked to it but not necessarily, that we look at all these systems. If students have to maneuver through this system to navigate, then we need to know that these are the systems that they're navigating. So that's been a big effort, getting people to understand that. I've been told, “You're bringing a whole host of other problems. We're not a social welfare.” I'm saying, “Well, we are part of their social need.”

Bringing social services is key. I've been building different partnerships. We have co-located partners on campus. We have the foster youth group now, a non-profit that supports homeless youth 18-25. We built the undocumented student resource center in the last few years. Now we have lawyers coming twice a month to provide legal services. We also have the Mexican Consulate that comes out every quarter to provide their workshops. We developed a partnership with the county office of probation, bringing in a lot more students on probation. Looking at all these structures that are out there on campus and in the community, then how are we able to break down those barriers as part of that community cultural wealth model? Students cannot only know how to navigate, not only their classroom, but navigate the system if we are able to better support that and provide the conduits for that. Through student life, through co-located partnerships, through our own advocacy, through serving as a model.

I'm chairing a partnership group that is 50 members, community agencies, and I take students out there. I take deans and I take different people to come experience that. Now I have other people joining, where they're seeing that there's agencies that have health, mental health, foundations, early education programs, charter schools. We built this coalition, and we take students with us and I take classified staff. Now they feel that they're part of a group. The reason I do so is that if we have students who have issues, concerns about housing, then they know who to call. They met them. Building that invisible network outside and then we'll bring them in. We haven't done that before. We haven't done co-located partners.

Resistant capital should be embedded just like equity should be embedded. Social justice is everything we do. Just like student equity, they try to make it like, "Oh, here's a separate one. We're trying to embed it into hiring practices. We're trying to embed it into professional development." It's like an add-on, but with student life or associated student officers, bringing student leaders to the community partnerships, that's showing that we still believe in social justice. Having the students be on the shared governance committees. We have them on our equity committee, our student success support committee, all of our shared governance. That's what we're there to do, is embed that. All this is social justice work. It's not just academics to get a degree. It is all social justice, whatever you take from it. So I feel that their resistance is really embedding equity into everything that we do from a social justice perspective, and talking with students about our experiences. Some students think, "Oh, you're established," so I start talking about what I've done and what I've experienced. Then they see the light. They're not the only ones. They have other people that have come before them. That's part of the whole thing I brought up in the beginning, is having a virtue of gratitude. I am grateful and I share this with students right away because then it puts them at ease. I'm grateful and I have a deep sense of gratitude as a virtue that we should have in some of the work we're doing, getting to know each other, and gratitude in terms of being poor.

I also have the Completion Agenda[18] on my desk. Also through my website I have the College Completion Agenda from the point of momentum and points of connection to their completion. So keeping in mind how we plan, and how we program. All of our units together need to follow the community cultural wealth model as well as the College Completion Agenda, because we know we want students to complete, we want to have our success measured, but at the same time we can do both. We can integrate, and then I was also charged with doing our equity plan and making sure that we embed equity into our institution. We're working with a university right now on their developing equity scorecard.[19] We teamed up with a faculty member on their work. There is also a non-profit that has a great equity tool

[18] The College Completion Agenda was developed by the American Association for Community Colleges (AACC) with five other national organizations to demonstrate a shared commitment to student completion in the community college setting (McPhail, 2011).
[19] The Equity Scorecard™ is developed by the USC Rossier Center for Urban Education (CUE) to help institutions develop tools to achieve equitable student outcomes, especially for underrepresented students (CUE, 2017).

that we used to use for early education and institutions. That's a third thing that I always go back and refer to so I don't get lost in all of this bureaucracy. So making sure we keep up on our readings, you know the *Journal of Higher Education* or looking at the *Chronicle of Higher Education,* making sure I keep up with all the current events as well.

Also, I keep up with what's happening in our local high schools, how they're doing, legislation with the charter schools, local funding model. As I mentioned, if we stay myopic with our campus we lose track of what's happening, what's going to impact us years later. So understanding and keeping up my relationships with the high schools and the affiliated districts. I think that's what keeps us going and being successful is because we're in touch with what is happening out, again, in the local community. Because what happens to them impacts us. And making sure we have our networks out there. So those are some of the things that I do to make sure that we're relevant, we stay relevant, and we also meet our targets.

Closing Thoughts and Advice

Not forgetting where we come from and what our experiences have been, and what we're there for is important. I keep hearing from others, “Oh I want to be a president,” or “here are the deans, I want to be a vice president, how do I get there?” I think that it resonated with me because timing is everything, but I wasn't preparing for that. I was more able to focus on outcomes and successes. I think there's not enough trainer information on that, to look at what's the career development of a successful administrator in higher education. Don't get me wrong, that we should not be intentional. There should be some intentionality. I think that's my role now to help reach out to help get additional intentional leaders, because standing alone is not sustainable, and who would take our places? I think that we should have career ambition, but for the right reasons. When people mention just a position, that's not thinly veiled. When people mention that they would like to be someone that can impact the course of where we're going for these reasons, I think that's where it's about being prepared.

Also, it's timing, being prepared for opportunities. Sometimes opportunities come. I know they came to me before and I said I wasn't ready, but now we all realize the importance of pursuing opportunities when we're talking to some of the future Latina leaders. I've had to convince them to not turn down this position. I said, “Look at what we could've done, look at who we inherited. Ten years of this or 17 years of this.” We have to be smarter than that. So I've been having that dialogue with various Latino and Latina leaders, that when the timing is right and not just for you, you've got to take it. Because I think when I first came I said, “No, no, I'm not ready, I'm not.” Then the people that inherited it were so mediocre or very even, I would say, poor performers and were the biggest obstructionists I've ever seen. That becomes the legacy we leave. We don't want that, so we have to also be smarter in developing people. There's a lot to be said about understanding others, that political dynamics, emotional intelligence, all that's true, but also looking at the timing and being prepared for opportunities if they come. Then accept them and go for it, because

they're not going to come again for a while. I think that when it came again, this time I was a little hesitant but not as much as I was before. It's like, "No, this is a time that we can make change." I have to tell you, many times I was wanting to give up. But it's been a great journey.

A Response to Coureck: A *Testimonio* of Activism and Resilience

Coureck's *testimonio* illuminated the diverse professional pathways of Latina SSAOs. Three key themes emerged from her *testimonio*: (a) her unwavering commitment to activism and social justice, (b) her resilience in navigating experiences of adversity throughout her career in student affairs, and (c) the assets she brings to student affairs administration from her prior non-profit work experiences.

Coureck's siblings played a critical role in fostering her commitment to social justice by exposing her to the inequities Latinas/os contend with in the U.S. that trickle into the education environment. Coureck's involvement in community organizing efforts carried into adulthood, demonstrated by her activist orientation and fearlessness in challenging deficit views of underrepresented students from colleagues. Coureck affirms the wealth present in underrepresented communities and utilizes Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model and other literature (e.g., *the Journal of Higher Education*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*) to inform her practices and leadership. Coureck is not only an activist through her words, but she is also transforming the culture of her institution by employing evidence- and assets-based practices to promote the access and retention of students. Coureck's commitment to social justice is not limited to supporting students; she takes it upon herself to cultivate Latina/o colleagues' career aspirations and serve as a role model and support. Coureck's commitment to equity also stemmed from her lived

experiences navigating racism, sexism, and other challenges in her journey that magnified when becoming VP.

Coureck described navigating structural barriers when making the transition from faculty member to administrator. As an administrator, Coureck contended with White privilege, inequitable resources, and overt and covert discrimination. Although systemic barriers had the potential to hinder Coureck's career advancement, she resisted these experiences of adversity with colleagues and a lack of institutional support through resilience and locating networks of support with like-minded colleagues. However, Coureck's initiative and proactive nature were not enough to wane her feelings of doubt in whether the stress in serving as VP is worth it. Coureck can return to a faculty role anytime, but her self-efficacy and commitment to social justice keep her in her role and resist the oppressive structures that manifest in her career. Even though a majoritarian narrative pervades that we live in a post-racial society, Coureck's *testimonio* illustrates how discrimination is still present and how equity-conscious leaders like Coureck continue to channel their self-efficacy and resilience to cope with challenges throughout their career.

Coureck's nontraditional career pathway to the VP role exemplifies the assets Latinas can bring from non-profit work experiences to student affairs leadership. Coureck's prior non-profit work experiences led her to employ a community-based approach as an administrator that involves bridging community resources with student services to support student retention. Helping students access vital community resources and social services (e.g., housing, healthcare, food, mental health services), resulted in increased student enrollment for low-income students and

students on probation at Coureck's institution. Coureck's community-based lens led her to employ a family engagement approach to her work, which can better support Latina/o students. Coureck knows firsthand how students' interconnectedness with their families and communities serve as an asset, rather than a deficit, to their success.

Although Coureck explained how some student affairs professionals utilize a myopic approach to student services, she recognized the benefits students could reap when student affairs leaders exercise a community-based approach to their practices. Coureck is an exemplar of what it means to carry out theory to practice in her decision-making and embed social justice in student affairs work. Her connections with the community not only support student persistence, but these community connections also contribute to her persistence as a VP. These community contacts provide Coureck with support and an avenue to leverage her assets in her work as a transformative higher education leader, even when her colleagues do not recognize the assets she brings.

Julia

"We have to be the ones that create the world that we want to see."

Personal and Family Background

My family structure was that I had a mom and dad and they had both come from Mexico as undocumented and were still undocumented when I was born. I'm one of eight and I, at the time and throughout my life, have had five older siblings. So I was one of the younger ones and only three of my oldest siblings were born in Mexico, the rest of us were born in the U.S. When we were young my dad and mom used to do picking of vegetables and cotton, so they traveled for work. My dad became more of a localized laborer as we were growing up and my mom would tell us stories about how when we were little the immigration service would find out about him and throw him back to Mexico. They would always send him back in areas that they didn't know, trying to dissuade them from coming back. But my dad was just pretty adamant that he was coming to the U.S. to work and so he was able to come and also arranged for my mom and he to become naturalized citizens and that was his goal for the family. And so we were economically disadvantaged and I knew

it, and we knew it, but we had a lot of love and a lot of comradery growing up. And my older siblings had a little bit more of a challenge with the language than I did because the older ones taught us English before we went to school, so I pretty much knew English by the time I went to school.

And my mom and dad were primarily Spanish-speaking, particularly my mom. My dad picked up a lot of English because he worked outside of the home but my mom was a stay-at-home mom. And so we had that advantage that after my parents settled down from the cotton picking, etc., my mom was at home with us and so there was always someone at home when we got home from school. And we got encouragement when we were kids and since I tended to do well in school, that was something that was a little plus. But it was a challenge economically for us and we grew up in a place that had been segregated and so it had been recently more inclusive, but there was a lot of discrimination growing up. So, that was something that I knew about and felt as I was growing up. We lived in a low-income area where we were all low-income but it was primarily African-American and Latino and there were a few low-income White families that grew up in the area we did. The segregation was mostly Black. It had been historically segregated and they were getting out of it, or trying to get out of it, by the time I was growing up but there was still segregation because of the housing patterns, the living patterns, and somewhat definitely discrimination against African-Americans but also against Mexican-Americans, as well.

My dad was a pretty smart guy and although he didn't go on to college, he came from a family that also supported education in Mexico and so he had almost a high school education. My mom came from more humble roots and she only had a third-grade education but they both really supported us and the way that they supported us is that my dad was really engaged in my learning. I tell people that he found out I liked math and he liked math, so we would just play and try to see who would finish basic arithmetic problems first. It was just a way for him to get me to work on it and plus, he knew I liked it. And so we just kind of had fun seeing who would finish the arithmetic problems first. And then spelling, he would do spelling with me. And my mom was just so sweet, I look back and I feel guilty because I could always get away from doing household chores because my mom put emphasis on our learning over household chores so she was always willing to do anything for the house as we were growing up. Even though we were older, as teenagers or whatever, if I said I needed to go and study, which I often did whether I really needed to or not, that's the guilty part, she would just always be there to help and be very supportive. She wanted us to do well and so did my dad. And they were very proud of the fact that I was doing well in school. That wasn't necessarily the case for all my siblings. My siblings struggled. Well, we had three boys in the family and they were all older than I was and they all dropped out of school, never finished high school. All the girls finished high school and did well and went to college, as a matter of fact. Well, not all of them, because my oldest sister did not go to high school, and I have a sister who's deaf who's very close to me and although she went to school, she was

mostly in the special education classes, so she did not finish high school as a result of her disability. But, nevertheless, we all managed to make it through life.

I think my family gave me a sense of love. I always felt a lot of love and warmth and support, lots of support. And they also taught us to appreciate our culture. So, we had my mom who was a stay-at-home mom who cooked the traditional food and, oh, I love Mexican food to this day and my mom was a real storyteller. And she would make us laugh all the time because she had all these *dichos*, or sayings, and she would just pop out with all kinds of sayings in Spanish that were just so funny and just lessons in life, too. In fact, I tell my sister we need to get together and just write down what we can remember of the things that she used to tell us because when we're together, we can remember more of the things that she would say and we'll just giggle and come up with things that she would say to us. And so, she was just that kind of funny person. I remember interviewing her when I was older and she didn't like talking about those very early days when they were struggling and had nothing and they were being deported, it was a very, very hard time for her. We had no money, so when we went to the movies, we would go see *Cantinflas*,[20] it was very culturally oriented. And we couldn't go out to eat, we didn't go out to eat at restaurants, at all, because we couldn't afford it and so whenever we went to the movies it was like a real treat to do that. And so she was reluctant to talk about it, but I got her to talk about it. And my mom was a very strong person, but she was also though very quiet and very much an introvert. My dad was the extrovert, she was the introvert.

And the other big thing that we did is we traveled to Mexico to see my relatives every summer and so there was a connection with the Mexican culture in Mexico and that was really strong. So, when I went to [Balance University], I had all that strong connection to the culture that I think really helped me have a good sense of myself. And of course, I always did well academically so I felt fairly confident, although, the teachers had said, “Oh, you might not do so well at [Balance University],” so I kept that in the back of my mind and I studied hard. I also knew that there wasn't a safety net in the sense that I needed to follow a straight pathway and do well and be responsible for myself. My parents gave me that sense of responsibility. In fact, I tell folks that my dad would say, “Okay, Julia, what are you gonna do when you go to the university? Are you gonna go and chase boys or are you gonna study?” And I looked at my dad and as knowingly as an 18, 19-year-old could be, I said, “Well dad of course I'm gonna go study.”

So, you know that was really drilled in me that I needed to be responsible and take care of myself and that they were gonna be there for me. But it wasn't like I could be irresponsible and not be careful with my money because there was no money except what I was getting in financial aid and I did work-study. I knew all of that was on me and I had very high goals for myself, so if I was gonna do well, I was gonna have to really work hard and be responsible. So that's how my family and my

[20] Mario Moreno, known as “Cantinflas,” is a Mexican comedian/actor/producer who was popular in the 1940s-1950s (NPR, 2014).

upbringing really helped me because I was brought up to be a strong person and to be responsible.

Educational Journey

Ever since I was a kid, I realized that I liked school and that going on as far as I could was something fun for me. But it really crystallized when I was about in the ninth-grade because I got invited to be a part of the National Honors Society (NHS) and that was when people started saying how wonderful we were because we all did academically well, those of us that were being invited to NHS. And of course NHS had a really beautiful reception and dinner and celebrated our academic success and I thought to myself, “Oh, wow, these grades really are important.” And I always just did well, I didn't particularly put a lot of emphasis on it, but then after that reception the teachers started to talk about how if we were going to go to college, we needed to take as much English as we could and math and that those of us who were college bound would need to be in certain classes and that kind of thing. I thought to myself, “Well, okay, I want to be in that group.” And so I did start paying a little more attention after ninth-grade.

I also had a sister who is older, she was a few years advanced of me and she ended up with a scholarship to go to college. So she went to a local community college and I knew that that's probably where I wanted to go while I was kind of following in her footsteps. At the time, I really didn't think about going away to college, to a university, because I knew my parents didn't have any money to contribute to going to college and I thought, “Oh, I better go to the community college to see what it's like and to learn more and then I could figure out whether I can go on to the university.” Well, my sister meanwhile got into the community college and she decided after finishing her associate's degree that she was going to [Balance University]. And so she got admitted there and I went to the community college. And so that's kind of how it happened and my sister tells me that she would never have gone to school, onto college if it hadn't been that she got that scholarship. It meant a lot to her.

And then I, on the other hand, I don't remember getting a scholarship. But, what I did is I got a lot of good financial aid, as did she, and so we were kind of set to go on to college and that's how it happened. Of course, the community college didn't have admissions requirements and so I went on to the community college and my sister, after she finished her associate's degree, went on to [Balance University]. After I'd been there a year, I did really, really well and during that year I just decided, I pretty much have taken everything I can at this community college, I need to go on to [Balance University], more than likely. So I applied and I pretty much knew I would get accepted because I had a 4.0 GPA and I was a strong student in high school and in college, so I didn't doubt that I would get accepted at [Balance University]. I made my decision to go there after visiting a couple of schools. And I tell everybody that when I got my admissions letter, I was happy. But when I got my financial aid letter, I was exuberant because I knew then that I could go to school. So my financial aid letter's more the ticket to go to the university because I knew then that I could afford

it. And my sister had also gotten financial aid and so I was really happy that I could go on to the university. I knew [Balance University] was a pretty good school and so I also tell everybody that when I made it to the university my sister and I roomed at the residence hall together, the dorm.

I would walk around the university just practically skipping because I was so happy to be there. I just felt so privileged to be at [Balance University], I really did, and I was so excited. Course I was kind of lonely for a while because my sister ended up leaving [Balance University], she got married instead, and so I was on my own right after I got there. And I do remember that the first time my parents came to visit me at [Balance] after they'd dropped me off, I was so happy to see them and the whole family came to see me and I was just so elated because I missed them. And it wasn't easy to get back to visit them even though I was only about an hour and a half away. I had no car, so it was not that easy to get home. And so I had to wait a few months before my parents could come and see me.

One other thing is that I remember our high school teachers, they would tell us, “Oh, y'all think y'all are so smart, if you go to [Balance University], those of you who are making As are gonna make Bs or Cs. Those of you who are making Bs might make Cs or Ds.” They would tell us, “You just need to work hard and do well here and prepare yourselves because [Balance University] will be really tough.” And so of course, I believed them and I did the best I could in high school and then I did the best I could, I definitely studied in college and at [Balance University] I did very, very well. I had a 4.0 my first semester there and I actually maintained that GPA and graduated within three years total at [Balance University], so I have always had a really strong academic background.

Getting involved in co-curricular activities. One of the things that happened when I was in high school is that there were these other opportunities to get involved in the high school and the only two things that I was able to do were the National Honors Society and I was a member of the choir and I loved singing. I'm terrible at singing but I loved it. I mean, I loved everything, anything I got involved with, I just gave it 110% and I also liked sports and anything I could. But, as we got older, my family only had one car. In fact, I was recollecting with my husband that we had the one car that we were all embarrassed of as teenagers because we had to push it in order to have it start in the morning. And so my dad, he was busy trying to make a living, he didn't have time to take us to all these extra-curricular activities at the high school so I remember a teacher once telling me, “Well, you don't like being involved here at the school.” And I was thinking to myself, “It has nothing to do with liking, lady. We're poor and my dad doesn't have time to bring me to the school and have me involved in different things.” And so when I went off to college, I had a yearning by the time I was there at [Balance University] to get involved and now nothing was stopping me because now I lived right there on the campus. So I became a student leader.

And I tell folks, though, that the [Chicano Student Society (CSS)] at [Balance University] had a big influence on me because they called me in the dorm one day and they said, “Hello,” they said, “We'd like to invite you to a [CSS] meeting.” And I said, “Well, why should I go to a [CSS] meeting?” And they go, “Well, we want you to go because there's not a whole lot of us here at [Balance University] and we want you to come and talk about how we can bring more of us to school and have us do better.” And I said, “Well, what do you mean better?” I said, “I'm poor and I made it to [Balance], why can't other poor people make it to [Balance] like I did?” I said, “I don't have anything special going for me and I'm here.” And they go, “Yeah, but not everybody gets that chance.” They go, “Come on over for a meeting.” And I said, “Well, okay, fine, I'll do that.”

So I went and I loved it because they started talking about all the things that were going on, big picture, and they were a few years older than I was and they were learning about discrimination and I got really interested in learning more. And so that's how I got started in getting involved and being a leader and people were inviting me to be on this or that board or chair this or that committee or get involved in this or that community event. And I soon got involved in recruiting Latino and African-American students to [Balance University] because I realized that the enrollment was really low. And so once I realized that I could do really well academically, then that was my number one thing, and then I could fall into being a student leader, I enjoyed it and I learned that I, like my dad, am very extroverted. Not off the charts, but I have a high need to be social and so that kind of drew me to all kinds of leadership opportunities.

Pathway to Student Affairs

And because I was also doing very, very well academically, 4.0, I also got invited to the president's home and the vice president of student affairs home. I got to meet all the administrators and they got to know me and so that's how I started getting an interest in higher ed and administration and student affairs because I got to meet these folks. And so I started thinking, “Wow, that's an interesting thing they do.” When I went to college at the community college, the first thing they asked me is, “What are you gonna major in?” And I said, “Well, I want to come to college because I have a sister who's deaf and I want to help her. That's my goal, to help my sister, who's deaf.” And so they go, “Oh, okay, then you'll be a speech communication major.” And I said, “Oh, great.” I said, “Fine, I'll be a speech communication major because I want to help my sister.” So, I was a speech communication major, I continued to be interested in helping my sister. I learned about what it's like to be deaf and I particularly was interested in how the Spanish language influenced and made it difficult for someone like my sister to learn English and to learn how to communicate, all that interested me. So I went ahead and got my master's in communications. But by the time I finished my master's degree, I started getting interested in higher ed. I recognized that that was a career opportunity. I had wanted to be a teacher for the deaf.

The other thing that I was doing is I was meeting some Latinos that were at [Balance University] and most were grad students. I got real influenced by the graduate students, they were working on their PhD while I was working on my master's. And then I met a person who was an assistant dean of students who later became a president of a university and another person who worked in a dean of students office who later became a president of a community college and they were strong influences on me. Them and these other doctoral candidates. And I learned about the fact that we had a community college leadership program at [Balance University] through one of those grad students who also became a president of the community college. I met a lot of really strong, Latino graduate students, that all did real well and are still my friends to this day. And so they influenced me greatly. In fact, we started a Chicano Graduate Student Association, I was president of it and this is while I was in grad school.

At the time, I thought to myself I wanted to be a university faculty member. I was going to go on and get a PhD and teach in the area of speech communication. But at that time, right after my master's is when I made the decision that, “Oh, no, I have another opportunity here and that's working at a community college level.” So I pursued a PhD in higher education. As a younger person while I was finishing my doctorate, I actually got a lot of experience in research at [Balance University] because I worked very closely with the person who was responsible for doing the research in student affairs and so I ended up with a really good background in research and data. I wanted to go to the community college because I had studied and read and understood that there were projections that there would be more underrepresented Latino students, low-income at the community college. That they were going to go to the community college more than they were to the university. And that was my understanding from all the research I'd done. I just think college can be so wonderful, picking up so many opportunities for me and for my family. I'm a real advocate for college, because that's opportunities for people to have a better life. And so, at the time, I just formed this idea that I would want to work at the community college.

First work experience in higher education/student affairs. I got inducted into one of the most prestigious honors societies at [Balance University], it's called [Stars Society] and all the rich alums would invite the actives over to their homes and in this occasion, they invited all the administrators, including the [Balance University] president, to this reception where we could meet them. And I met the president, right there at the fajita bar, and so he asked me, “What do you want to do when you finish your PhD?” and I said, “Well, I want to go into higher ed administration.” And he goes, “Oh, that's awesome.” He goes, “Well, why don't you look me up when you finish the PhD?” And I thought to myself, “Oh, well, he seems nice, very sweet,” but I didn't think any more of it.

But later, because I was known there at [Balance University], one of the women that was one of the higher-level administrators, she told me, “Julia, the president really wants to meet with you.” And I said, “Are you sure?” And she goes,

“Yes.” And so she goes, “You need to go and look him up.” So I did. Actually, he created a position for me to work with him and so after I did that, he called it an administrative internship position. After a year in this administrative internship position I said I was interested in working in student affairs and so he helped me get a job with the vice president for student affairs. And that vice president earlier had tried to influence me into being interested in university administration and I told him, “No, I really am interested in community college administration.” But I ended up working for six years at [Balance University] because the president gave me that opportunity to work with him and the VP for student affairs. And so I had a lot of support because there were very few Latinas then and I was very vocal, people knew me, and they, I guess, liked me. The president was a White male and I just recently went to his memorial service. He just passed away. He was in his 90s. He just really liked the Mexican culture and so I think he really wanted to help me as a part of that. And I didn't realize that until just recently that he had that level or depth of commitment. He was definitely a mentor.

Law school journey. When I finished my doctorate I took a law school course. And I loved it. And I went and I did research at the law school and I just enjoyed that law school course. And when my chair of my dissertation asked me, “Well, Julia, what are you going to do in your future?” I said, “Well, first I'll find a job and then maybe in the future I'll go to law school.” So, while I was working in the president's office I met the dean of the law school and I asked him if I could take one of his courses. He said, “Sure, Julia.” And so I took it and I really liked it and I did fairly well in it and then I said, “Well, can I take another one of your courses?” And he goes, “Well, Julia, why don't you just go to law school?” I said, “Well, I can't go to law school, I have to work full-time. I just got out of school.” And he goes, “Well, just apply, I'll help you with that.”

So I applied and got admitted and started going to law school full-time while I was working full-time. And at the time what happened was that I was getting married and my husband was finishing his doctorate. He's younger than I am by four years so he was finishing his doctorate and I thought, “Well, I've got time on my hands. I don't want to have any babies right away.” We had just gotten married the same summer that I started law school. I didn't want to really be a lawyer, I just wanted to be a college administrator in a community college and I figured law would help me in my career path. But at the same time, I wasn't thinking in terms of, “Well, I'll become a vice president or a president.” I wasn't thinking like that, I always thought, “Well, I'll go work at the community college because I want to go and help people.”

Then my idea was I would work really hard and do a really good job and then if I did a really good job then I would just get promoted and I would do better, that was just my thought. And so that's what happened. I ended up actually graduating from law school and then working as an attorney for three years and then finally I got my opportunity to go to the community college, so it took nine years for me to get over to the community college, but I did it. It was a planned kind of thing. I wanted to get to the community college as soon as I could. When I found that there was a

position, a director's position available at [Golden Mountain College], I applied for it, and the person that helped me get it was my chair of my dissertation committee, who was married to the person who hired me who was an associate VP. He highly recommended me. She told me much later that they were afraid to hire me because I was so well educated and they had a lot of trouble keeping someone in the position. They had two or three people who had come and gone within a year or two. So it was really unstable, and so that when they interviewed me, the president had said to her, "Are you sure you want to hire her? She's going to be here for another couple of years and then she'll be gone." So I started as a director in student affairs and then within the next couple of years I got promoted to a dean position. So I stayed in the dean position for almost 20 years and during that 20 years is when I had my family and I took care of my mom, I took care of my deaf sister, my dad passed, there was just all these life things happening within those 20 years. I could have left from the dean position for a vice presidency earlier, but I had a lot of family responsibilities.

The law degree really helped me throughout my career because there are so much legal policies that we need in higher education. I've always been strong in policy. Then I was also strong in working with the student conduct area because of my understanding of legal rights and due process. I was just telling my husband today how complicated that area is, how stressful student conduct is. To have that legal background, I always had the confidence that I knew what to do, and when sticky situations came up I understood what I needed to do, and so it allowed me to stay out of difficulty. Because you can get sued, you can have Office of Civil Rights issues come your way if you don't do conduct correctly. You also have all of these employee issues that come up, and if you understand the law, and you understand that there is policy and there is the law, so you know what to do to be able to make good decisions. Also to help guide your team so they make good decisions. So law was really helpful. The other thing is that I got a lot of respect from colleagues because I had a law degree. They would all also go, "Oh, Julia's my lawyer." I had that extra level of respect because people know I had that law degree. Frankly, it also kind of helped me in ways where people wouldn't mess with me as much, because they knew that I had that legal background, I think that kind of helped me in the long run, so that people pretty much respected that extra knowledge that I have. So it was great, I'm very grateful that I got the law degree. Plus, I just love to learn, so it was fun for me.

Professional Experiences in Student Affairs/Higher Education

I worked in the community college and we ended up with the second Latino president of our community college and he encouraged me a great deal to pursue a vice presidency. I loved being in the community college but then I started realizing, because I was also very active in NASPA, that some of my colleagues were going on to becoming vice presidents and I was still a dean. And I thought to myself, "I can become a vice president." And so I started wanting to apply to become a vice president but the problem was I knew I'd have to move from where I was and where I had been all that time. And so that was a juncture there when I decided I wanted to become a vice president, it was gonna be really tough. It was really tough because I was at a period where my dad had passed, my mom had gotten sick, my deaf sister

and my mom came to live with us and then my mom passed. This is in the 20 years I was as a dean of students at [Golden Mountain College].

Challenges pursuing a VP role. And so at that point I thought to myself, “I could become a vice president but my husband is a university professor and he has a great job,” and he really didn't want to move. My family is very traditional and they were like, “Why would you ever want to move? And move away from your family?” And so it was really a hard, hard, hard decision but I applied for a VP position and I got the offer and I had to say no because my husband was not ready. And so then I was very upset, he saw that I was very upset, I told my children who were already getting closer to being you know 18, 19, and I said, “This means a lot to me.” And I told my husband, I said, “You've got to get yourself ready.” I said, “Because if I get another opportunity, I'm going to move and you've got to understand that this is so important to me.” So, sure enough, a couple years later, I had another opportunity, applied, got the offer, and by then, my husband wasn't too keen on my going but I said, “I'm gonna accept.” And so he was not at all happy, but he and I have had a long marriage, my kids were already 20. Each of them were about 20, they were okay with my leaving, they weren't crazy about it but they knew that's what I wanted to do. And so despite the resistance from my husband, the biggest issue was my sister who is deaf, she's very, very close to me and she's low language and I've always been responsible for her, after my parents died. I have sisters but none of them wanted to help me. And they said, “She's your responsibility.” So I finally had to sit with my sister and tell her you know, “I have this great opportunity for a job, I need you to come with me.” And she wasn't very happy but she looked at me and she said, “Okay. I'll go with you.”

Well, she came with me and didn't particularly like it, it was a rough first semester. But my husband then came around by the end of the first semester, it was a spring semester when I came up here to accept the vice presidency, and so he came around and he realized that I actually was doing well. He'd always told me you know, “If it doesn't work out, you can always come back. We'll be fine.” And I said, “Okay, because I need to know I have a safety net, if it doesn't work out.” And he goes, “No, no, it'll all be fine. We'll make it work.” And even though he was reluctant, he was still reluctant supportive. But after the first semester, he actually liked it because my sister decided to move back and we had our son still living with us and so our son lived with my husband and my sister. I lived up here and my husband started liking it because he could come up and we could have our own time together and have fun in the area. So actually, it worked out and I've been up here for eight and a half years and he and I have really enjoyed it. We have a spark in our relationship because we've been married, it'll be, let me think, 34 years in August. So, that's how it happened that I became a VP because I had a lot of support from a friend who's Latino who was president and a vice chancellor and then I had support from other people including our associate vice chancellor of human resources.

Role of professional associations in career journey. I was involved in NASPA, thank goodness to [Balance University], from the very beginning of my

career. [Balance University] said, “You have to go to NASPA.” And I started presenting at NASPA and being very involved at NASPA early on in my career and so NASPA was very encouraging. I loved that association because I could travel and just have access to so many fun and wonderful things. NASPA has given me so many opportunities to develop my leadership skills because early on I got invited by the president of NASPA and this other person who later became president of a community college, they both got on the phone and they both worked hard to convince me to take on a national leadership role in community colleges. And that's how I got real involved, because I was like, “Oh, no, I'm busy.” And they go, “No, you're gonna get involved. And here you go.” And so they recruited me heavily into the NASPA leadership. Prior to that, I had done a lot of presentations, people knew me, but that was like in the '90s and I got involved and ever since then I just kept moving up the ladder of involvement in NASPA. So NASPA just helped me develop all those leadership skills and helped me stay connected nationally and helped me publish. I published articles and chapters in books and a lot of people got to know me. I have found NASPA to be very inspiring. NASPA was just so wonderful.

The [Chicano Higher Education Professionals Association (CHEPA)] and NASPA were greatly involved in helping me move to the vice presidency level. NASPA always meant a lot because no matter how stressful my job was, whatever I was doing in the job, I could always feel motivated by all of my peers, and national peers, and I could see I was making a difference nationally through this association. I felt very supported, and I could feel really good. So for example, if I might be having a hard time achieving something at my own college, I could achieve something through [CHEPA] or NASPA, so it balances out and it becomes less stressful because you are achieving. Of course for me, achieving means a lot, and it’s not just about me, it’s about achieving whatever the agenda is, and a lot of times, the agenda was to help underrepresented students, or make presentations, or publish or any of those kinds of things that would move that agenda forward. That is how it all helped me. That's the strategy that I used to be successful.

One of the things that also helped me a great deal is that I made a decision many years ago, when I was working at [Golden Mountain College], to try to do something different every year. Add to my portfolio. So I would be presenting, I would be publishing, I would be head of this or head of that. I intentionally sought these different kinds of opportunities. When I was at [Golden Mountain College] I made a decision to form a [Golden Mountain College] [CHEPA]. So the group voted me in as president of the [Golden Mountain College] [CHEPA], and we did really well, and that was something new, to be able to be a president of a group like that and be able to help form it and everything. I got to be the president of the state [CHEPA] because of my work. I was at [Golden Mountain College] and there was a young professional there who really wanted to recruit me as president of [CHEPA] and so they came knocking at my door saying, “We want you to be president.” I was actually at a HACU conference, Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities conference, and one of the [CHEPA] past presidents came to me and he said, “We've been talking about you, we really want you to consider becoming a president-elect for

[CHEPA].” And I said, “Really?” And they said, “Yeah.” And I said, “Well, okay.” I said, “I'll think about it.” I go, “I need to talk to my husband and I need to talk to my president of my community college because I need their support.” And they said, “Sure, sure. Take your time.” So I talked to my president and he said he would support me. I talked to my husband, he said yeah. Because it was a big role, for president-elect you have to plan the state conference, so I learned how to fundraise. You have to raise the money to put on a statewide conference, you have to develop your planning committee. I developed the statewide planning committee and you have to work with all these different entities in order to get your conference done.

I worked really hard on fundraising and raised a lot of money and plus, I also had a lot of connections and was able to market the conference so that we had a lot of people attend the conference. So I got networked very, very well. And what was really awesome is that the chancellor of [Township College] challenged me and said that if I could raise $5,000 from people's pockets, he would match it with $5,000 from his personal money. That's how I got to know him before I went to [Township College]. And so I raised the $5,000, he matched it with $5,000, and then [CHEPA] matched it with $10,000 so we had like a $20,000 endowment for scholarships through [CHEPA]. So, one of the skills that I really learned was fundraising. And not to mention just networking and leadership and actually, that had a lot to do with my courage to leave because I realized I had a lot of potential, I could be a vice president and I needed to leave [Golden Mountain College] and the hardest part was leaving my family. But I just knew I needed to do it. So I was involved as president of [CHEPA], and a lot of people knew me and they wanted me to come here to support Latinos at [Township College] and the associate vice chancellor of human resources is Latino, part of [CHEPA], and he helped me make the transition.

He would always tell me that I can be a president. He said, “You will do well as a vice president.” He goes, “You need to move forward and try to do well.” And he understood the dynamic, he said he understood about Latinos and how Latinas typically have such a hard time and so he was just really very supportive. And that also helped. And of course, I also had my other long-term friends who were also very supportive, who were also presidents of institutions. And then I had a lot of support from my [CHEPA] group, I've had a lot of support from them and they are vice presidents and presidents and other levels at both universities and community colleges. So, I have had a lot of support. Also at the time that I came here to [Township College], there was a Latino chancellor and vice chancellor. Shortly after I got here there was a huge change in leadership and so I sadly didn't have the opportunity to work with the people that I really liked, but I still did very well because the president who hired me was just an awesome leader. So that's how I made the transition. But it was very hard. It wasn't easy. I put myself out there, I worked hard, I took risks, and in the end they paid off.

Aspects of identity shaping experiences and interests. Early on I also had strong roots of my Mexican-American culture and Latino culture and I've always understood that we have way too many Latinos that are low-income and I wanted to

help Latinos do better. I still do, that's just a passion of mine and a goal of mine. And so my ethnicity as an identity was very, very strong. My low-income identity is very strong, as well. I have a lot of passion for people who are poor, that brought me into global interests into understanding the developing countries and poverty and what a horrible thing can happen especially if they can't get out of that poverty cycle. Those identities are really strong with me. The gender identity is kind of interesting because my cultural identity really surpassed my gender identity. I was so busy trying to move the needle in terms of underrepresented, Latino, getting more in higher ed, and doing all kinds of things in that direction and really paying attention to low-income that there were all these women who wanted to invite me to do all these things on behalf of Latinas and women. And I did not put an emphasis on that. I was involved somewhat, but I didn't put an emphasis on it. Actually, at the time I thought of the feminist movement as more of a White women's feminist movement and I could not relate to that. I thought to myself, “Yeah, women, we do have challenges, but as an ethnicity, as Latinos, we have greater challenges.” And I wanted to put my emphasis on that.

But more recently I've become interested in the feminist identity because of my understanding that women in developing countries are oppressed, way so much more than we are oppressed in the U.S. Although we are oppressed in the U.S. as well in terms of economically, there's much bigger issues of oppression globally. And then I also have been interested in, even in the U.S., what's happening with the sex market and having women be traded and used in that market in that way, so that has interested me more in terms of the feminist oppression. And so in that sense that identity, I'm interested in just learning more and just keeping an eye on it because I think it's wrong to do that and it's happening in the U.S. and there's a lot more light being shed on it but there's also women being brought in from different countries that are being oppressed and used and abused and that interests me. But those are my stronger identities, the cultural identity, but I recognize that as a Latina there's fewer of us involved in leadership roles and I'll tell you that the other way in which my gender identity has been an issue is that I have had a lot of pushback from men, in particular White men, in regard to my leadership style and my strength as a leader. Many White men really push back around that. They don't want to see a strong person who's verbal who puts out her ideas and so in that sense, also, I'm aware that my gender identity has something to do with my ability to move forward. And so I would say those would be my identities that are important.

And then the other one that most recently has become even more aware is the privileges that I have as a vice president. And so on the privilege end of things, my heterosexuality is a privilege and I have gotten more connected with the LGBTQ struggles and I definitely support being civil and not discriminating against LGBTQ or anyone else that's different. So, my heterosexuality makes me realize that that's a privilege and because I am a vice president, I'm active and involved, that I need to speak positively about non-discrimination against LGBTQ. The other identity that I've always been a supporter of is the ability identity. Not having a major disability and having ability is another privilege and I used that privilege to support individuals

with disabilities because I have had a sister with a disability and she's been so, so very important in my life. And I've been really interested in intersectionality as a leader and in fact, wrote a chapter in a book and have referred to intersectionality and how we need to use those understandings of ourselves as a leader and especially to make a difference in terms of transforming our institutions and community colleges because there's so much diversity in the community college and that includes the ethnic diversity and the sexual identity diversity, the ability diversity, it includes all those diversities. So we need leaders who understand that people learn differently, people need different support systems in order to be successful, so all of that is very important to me.

Spirituality and religion is also one of those areas that I do want to grow in into the future and that's one of the other motivators for retiring in August because I would love to explore my spirituality more. I'm very spiritual and my spirituality also gives me lots and lots of strength and allows me to be positive despite anything that might come my way and I have had a lot of challenges because my sister who's deaf has had a lot of health issues. Spirituality is the foundation of it all. I go to church every Sunday that I can go to church and I read the Bible and I like to think and explore my spirituality. I'm someone who's very introspective and so my spirituality has helped me a whole lot in my career because despite anything that can be happening, I know that there is goodness and there is more goodness than there is not and that I can be one of those. I love Gandhi, I have this little statue of Gandhi on my desk because I had traveled to India before and I bought it as a reminder that we have to be the ones that create the world that we want to see. And so, if I want to see a good and positive world I have to do more in that area and do less in the negative.

It doesn't mean that I don't get right into the negativity sometimes and that I get upset and angry, I do all those things, but I work myself out of them as quickly as I can. And I try to portray positivity as much as I can rather than negativity because there's enough in the world that you don't want to add more to it. For me, life is too short not to be happy. So if you find yourself in a job where you're not happy, that's where I would say, “move on,” because you can go out and just do so many things. There's just so many opportunities. Spirituality has also helped me immensely because I can remain very uplifted regardless of what comes my way because of my faith and my spirituality and my belief in people. And it's interesting because I just went to church on Sunday and the priest’s homily was about how important it is to basically love thy neighbor and especially anyone who is giving us a hard time or who just really upsets us and those are the people who we have to try to love the most. It's hard to do, I can't say that I'm achieving that, but I'm trying to be more in that, in the positive about things as much as I can because I think that is a better way to go.

Also if there was something that I really believed in, that was part of my values structure, especially in regards to helping underrepresented students be successful, I didn't veer from that. So I didn't give up, I worked to get allies. I learned how to make allies, so that also helped in being able to achieve some things that

perhaps there were others that were wanting to stand in my way, but if you make allies with other people and you get other people to join you in the interest in achieving something, then you are more likely to get it done. So I learned how to do that, and it takes a lot of time and effort, but if you can make those connections, network with people, then you can get it done. Because we are leaders representing all the students, being able to work effectively with allies is really important. There are so many different groups, so one of the things that I was able to do at [Township College] was an initiative for Latino students, and the chancellor liked it so much, that she contacted one of the African-American faculty leaders and said, “Go see Julia and have her walk you through, and let's start one for African-American students,” and so, I did that. We worked hand-in-hand, the Latinos and the Blacks in this celebration, and luckily for me, that faculty member is very open and wonderful, embraced the Latinos, and we embrace them. I believe in breaking down all those barriers, working across groups, helping support the African-American students. I want them to be successful. The Latinos, the students who have a different sexual orientation, gender identity. We also have our Asian-American population. What's important is that students be successful, and if we can help a certain group of students and put some initiatives in place for them, it usually helps the other ones, as well, once you scale it up. The little boutique kinds of programs, which is a lot of our programs, aren't good enough. The research is showing that.

Navigating challenges in career pathway. I will tell you that it's been an awesome experience, but not without its challenges along the way. In terms of challenges, I think I have faced the microaggressions and I have to admit, though, I'm not real mainstream so I'm actually conservative economically but socially I'm not at all conservative. So, people are taken aback because my thinking is very different. I can make myself fit in but I will bring up topics that other people mostly don't want to discuss and so it's been that kind of a struggle in the career trying to push people. First of all, the big thing was to disaggregate data. People didn't want to disaggregate data, they didn't even want to look at the data, they didn't want us to know what the retention rate was. And I was like, “I'm the dean of students, I need to know what the retention rate of students is. We need to be looking at it by ethnicity.” Well, there was a lot of resistance to doing that and so that's not a very popular position for someone to be asking for that data and to be pushing for it and there's a resistance from the faculty and from the administration. And then there's the microaggressions, especially from the gender identity, the males just do not like it at all and will push and try to shut you down but you have to continue, you have to do it though in a way that can be accepting. I had to calm myself down, I had to be very watchful and very careful, and that's stressful.

And honestly, I have experienced a difficult situation where the president is a White male and he could never identify with my interest in terms of diversity and interest in moving forward and being involved. He was just completely unsupportive and I worked to make it work because I love my job. I love what I do, but he has done everything he could to be unsupportive and I know that it's because it's a threatening situation to have somebody who's strong as a vice president. He apparently doesn't

have a real strong sense of self and there are lots of other people who felt the same way about him, I'm not the only one so that makes me feel better. Yes, you can find that in your career and you have to learn how to navigate it in a sense that I know how to play the game and I had to play the game with him. The other thing that happens is I have seen many a VP leave after a new president comes, there have been vice presidents out the door within a year or so. So, definitely you've got to be able to work with your president and it just has to be that way. And what has happened with me is that he hasn't been able to be a problem to me because I have a lot of support at the college and then I have a lot of support nationally and he's finding that some of the people he knows, know me and my work. But he has been completely unsupportive. Yep, sorry to say.

People know about him and his leadership style is not necessarily conducive to supporting creativity and innovation. He doesn't allow other people's ideas to flourish and as a leader, you want to be a strong leader and you want to be good yourself but you also nowadays really need to have other people be able to flourish and innovate and be creative. I'll give you one good example. The year that he was coming in, the year before I had already had all these proposals accepted. I did four national presentations because that was one of my goals that year was to do these national presentations, so he came on board and he said, "I want you to stop doing those." Yeah. He goes, "You can do one or two but that's it."

But that's how a president can keep you from progressing because that was just something that he just decided, that he didn't want me away from the campus, he wanted me here, and he wanted whatever he wanted. And one thing he did not want is for me to have that exposure. Well, what I did is I gently just got through the year and then gently managed to get to do two or three presentations the following year and kind of eased him into things. But still, very unsupportive. It's just amazing, but you run across those leaders in your career and what you can do is, of course, leave or learn how to navigate it. And I have to tell you that NASPA and [CHEPA] have helped me in doing that because I've been really honored in many ways by NASPA and they're very supportive so I can maintain my positivity because I'm a strong leader and because I have other connections that continue to motivate me and keep me inspired. Since I'm a very positive person, no matter what happens, I can twirl it around and have it be positive because to me that's very important to stay positive, to stay motivated.

A resource and support that has been very, very special for me in navigating challenges is actually matrimony, my relationship with my husband, who's a university professor. He has been extremely supportive of me even though for that time he didn't want me to leave, for a good reason, he was probably worried and he didn't want our you know wonderful marriage to fall apart. But he's been a real source of inspiration and support and he just supports my success quite a bit and so I really as a female, I have to say that I certainly have not done all of this alone, I have had him right by me and giving me an immense amount of emotional support and financial support and just a lot of joy in my life. And that helps a great deal because

our jobs are tough. They're very stressful and they're very tough. Because we're dealing with people and their lives and we're dealing with all kinds of people that have all kinds of challenges. I do student conduct, I've done student conduct my entire community college life. So student conduct is a very serious area and health and safety of the campus is very important. And that's what I'm right there to do and so it can be dicey. And having all the support that I get emotionally from my husband has been a huge boost to me and then my faith. And so no matter what, I can just work through it. It's interesting though because my husband and I do think differently. He thinks more like a university professor, I think more like a community college administrator, so we do think a little differently but he's very supportive. And that makes a huge difference.

My husband is also retiring. I bring that up because one of the things that I have done in terms of my gender identity is that I've had a lot of women who have sought me out to be a mentor and I always make myself available, it doesn't matter whether it's male or female or what color, I've been interviewed many times by graduate students for their doctorates and I make myself available as a mentor. That is what I like to do, support people that want to do that for themselves. It’s always been a goal of mine to help students who are working on their doctorate, that been another major area of mine, anytime I have a chance to help people I can do it and I have done it. That's because we need more leaders with their PhDs, and I know it takes a lot of work. But one of the things I've learned as I listen to women is that the relationship is an issue, relocating is an issue, family is an issue, everybody and for good reason is concerned about that and how it's gonna impact their careers. But again, I also have to say, that in my interactions with men sometimes all those issues are also present for men, they don't want to uproot their families but it's easier for them to do that. And easier only in the sense that the male is just looked at differently.

Closing Thoughts and Advice

I would say that one of the things I'm really proud of is that I was able to keep a really strong tie with my family throughout my life. So, I never gave up on supporting my family in any way that I could because I always saw myself as one of those very privileged ones of my family because many of my brothers and sisters have struggled. So I feel like I'm very proud and I would say that it's very important to stay connected with your family, continue to be supportive as you make your journey from possibly coming from a low-income to a very much, much more privileged situation like I have been able to gain. I feel blessed that I'm very close and always have been to my family and I've tried to support them as much as possible. So as leaders and in our culture as we move ahead, we need to remember we didn't do it alone and we need to bring other people forward with us, whether it's family or other people.

The other thing I really believe in is I do believe in globalization, being aware globally, and finding a connection with the global world and cultures. The thing too is that our world is actually much more complex. Even though I have all of this education, it’s still hard to understand all of the different areas. And the other thing

that I haven't mentioned at all is that I am also very, very involved in what is called the Future Forward College Movement[21] where we're thinking in terms of the future and how we can change the system of education to be more progressive and be more open to helping our young people get ready for a world and jobs that don't exist, that is ever-changing, fast-paced, complex, that we've got to learn ourselves and teach others to just be much more flexible. And also learn how to work well with a diversity of people and problem solve with a team of diversity. And diversity can be used in a lot of different ways, diversity of interests, diversity of knowledge, diversity of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, you name it. So, those are things that I think are really important and I work on all those things as well.

It's also important to keep up with the trends in higher education. So doing a lot of reading, books, journal articles, blogs, anything that you can read. I do a lot of reading. I'm a very fast reader. For example, I'll get this email from the American Association of Community Colleges and embedded in it is all of these different links about all of these different reports, one on poverty, one on transfer students, whatever. I will take time to read them. Not only read them, I will share them and I will think about them and I will talk to my leaders about them. So reading is fundamental to staying 'trendy' with what is going on, or up to date on what the issues are, because the issues change over the years and you want to stay fresh. So I stay fresh by doing a lot of reading. Also by staying involved nationally and in my state by taking the time to do all of the research to present to also publish. Publishing is really hard, writing, researching, but I kind of like all that. That was based on my research, because I did all that research for my master's thesis and my PhD and I ended up really liking research and writing. So publishing is very important. I would definitely recommend that.

Also getting your doctorate, I highly recommend that. I encourage people to consider getting their doctorate. That would be important to do. Then one thing that I learned which is really a tough lesson is to never burn bridges, and to be as kind to others as you can be. Because people, you run across them in different arenas. So it's best to make a good impression with everybody you meet, be kind with everybody you meet, you just never know. Even if you never cross paths with them again, when they remember you they will remember you positively. It's really hard to do that, because there's so many different people and they rub you the wrong way and they are mean to you or whatever the case may be. It's best to really stay kind and loving and positive if at all possible. So like I said, it's a hard one, but very important. We also need to be those courageous leaders because you're not always going to be greeted with embracing arms. It's just not going to happen. And we have to make sure our voice is heard in as many ways as possible. And it's not about us, really, it's about everyone else whose lives we can impact and just really assist.

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[21] A Future Forward College recognizes that existing technologies and educational practices need to adapt to prepare students to learn and live in the 21st Century given a constantly changing and increasingly complex world. Faculty and administrators can adopt this transformative approach and pedagogy to support the next generation of learners (Communities of the Future, 2017).

Reflections upon retirement. It's also amazing to me, after a long career, to realize that there just continues to be so much work that needs to get done. Although all of us understand the importance and the necessity to move the agenda forward for Latinos, that is not the case for all leaders necessarily in community colleges and universities. And so, in some ways, we have come a long way in higher education, and in other ways, there is much work to be done. But that is a good thing because our numbers have grown nationally. Latinos will be the ones that all the universities, including the prestigious selective universities and community colleges, are going to be wanting. And those of us who have dedicated time and energy to do research and to understand the issues and the data and to be compassionate about helping Latinos get an education, we're going to be in a great place to help everyone. I also think that moving forward as leaders, things that we're going to have to continue to do is stay motivated to work on these issues, because we, as vice presidents, as leaders, we have many responsibilities, yet it's also very important to work on the Latino agenda to the extent that we can and be those role models because there's still too few of us. One of the things I want to mention about motivation is that we are looking at what is called the student-ready college, basically, looking at ourselves as professionals and what can we do rather than blame the student when they're not successful. So, in other words, we have to look at ourselves. Why are we not helping students be successful? And I think that is a really critical paradigm shift.

The support I've gotten from Latino colleagues over the years has also been amazing. I was telling my husband that there are three college administrators that I've known since I was in my early 20s that I had met as a graduate student. One of them worked as a dean of students, and another as an assistant dean of students. So I was telling my husband on the last day of work, I had been thinking about them, and just been so busy that I hadn't emailed them. So I emailed them and I said, “Well, today's my last day of work, I'll be retiring,” and each one of them responded. One of them is a retired university president and the other two are community college presidents. They were friends from way back. I would see them at conferences or [CHEPA] here and there, and so it was just really neat to have them still be my friends after all these years. I also have a lot of Latina friends, one of them is a former president who is Latina. I didn't know her when I was younger, I met her actually at [Township College]. I was just so happy at my farewell party that all of these Latinos from different campuses, because we have five brick-and-mortar campuses and one connect campus that is online, so we're a huge district. And a number of Latinos came from different campuses to come and say to people there, at the farewell party, how much it had meant to them to have me be a leader and a Latina voice for them. How important it is to have leaders that look like them to be in these positions and what it's meant to them for me to be a mentor to them. These were all young professionals, and one of them is another doctoral student, I participated in her study, and she spoke about what it means to have the support for finishing a dissertation and was something that I really enjoyed doing over the years was helping students with their research, and supporting them in any way I can. It was just a fabulous event. They were just saying words of encouragement as I was retiring. That made me feel really,

really good because it makes you realize how important the work is around Latino issues. Just how very important it is.

I'll share a perspective of someone who's about to retire, and that is one of the things I realize is that in our world, we're always plying for resources, for attention, for our initiatives, etc., and one of the positive things as you finish your career is that everybody recognizes the value you, as an individual, and as a leader leave, no longer being looked at as someone who's going to be plying for those resources or whatever at that particular institution, and that gives me a lot of hope. In order to stay energized and motivated, we've also got to work on that wellness piece, because the more that we feel good, love our bodies, spiritually, in all ways, the more we're able to give and evolve and stay happy. And I really enjoy following through in that way of thinking because it has helped me stay really happy. I'm here, it's my last day, and I can tell you that I love what I do. There are challenges and so forth but I intend to continue working in this area, because it's so important. And so, staying motivated, for all of us, it's essential. I'll still be involved with [CHEPA] because I'm a past president and they've already said they want me to stay involved in an advisory kind of capacity. Then of course, nationally, with NASPA there's a lot of appreciation and support from all of these folks.

A Response to Julia: A *Testimonio* of Latina/o *Colegas* [Colleagues] and Passion

Three important themes surfaced from Julia's *testimonio*: (a) her love of learning from a young age that served as an asset throughout her career, (b) her unwavering commitment to serve in the community college setting, and (c) the valuable role professional associations played in her career pathway by serving as a counterspace of support and providing her with key skills and connections with Latina/o *colegas* [colleagues].

Julia developed a love of learning at an early age, prompted by her inquisitive nature and her father's engagement in her learning. This passion for learning carried into Julia's career pathway by prompting her participation in critical experiences that prepared her for the VP role such as graduate studies, research, national presentations, and publication opportunities. Julia's desire to learn and passion for research led her to engage in knowledge generation throughout her career, contributing to the student affairs literature base. With the increasingly complex and political nature of SSAO

work, completion of a law degree serves as an invaluable asset that SSAOs can leverage in their role since most student affairs professionals do not have a legal background. This legal knowledge equipped Julia to make sound decisions, increased her self-efficacy, and gave her added respect and credibility from colleagues. However, Julia's rich knowledge and skills could never eliminate the sexism and racism she contended with as an administrator. Rather than viewing Julia's knowledge, networks, and commitment to life-long learning as an asset, the White male president she reported to felt threatened by her wisdom and skills, illustrating the patriarchy that can impact Latina administators' experiences in higher education. Instead of feeling discouraged by these experiences, Julia channeled her self-efficacy and positivity to move past structural barriers and challenges throughout her career pathway.

Julia's experiences growing up low-income, prior experiences as a community college student, and graduate research experiences fueled her unwavering commitment to serving in the community college setting. Even though Julia possessed the knowledge, skills, and passion for supporting the community college student population, her *testimonio* illustrates how Latinas benefit from the support of mentors and guides to access positions in student affairs. The mentors and guides in Julia's pathway opened doors of opportunity for her to access roles throughout her career, especially a White male president who provided her with her first career opportunity in student affairs, setting the foundation for her career in higher education. Although others could have felt discouraged by how long it took Julia to attain a community college administrator role, Julia remained steadfast to working in

this institutional type because of her commitment to serving Latina/o students. Julia brings assets to this institutional type by being a fierce advocate for student success and serving as a role model and mentor to Latina/o professionals. Julia's *testimonio* also highlighted the challenges Latinas can face in uprooting their family to pursue a SSAO role because of the diverse caretaking roles they balance. During this time when Julia supported her family, her Latina/o colleagues continued to encourage her to pursue her career goal of becoming a VP at a community college, many of whom she met through professional associations.

Julia's connections with Latina/o peers throughout her educational and professional journey served as vital sources of social support, inspiration, and rejuvenation. These Latina/o peers strengthened her commitment to serve the Latina/o community as an undergraduate student, fostered her aspirations to pursue a doctoral degree in higher education, and provided her with leadership development opportunities that supported her career advancement in student affairs. Julia developed critical connections with like-minded peers through professional associations. For example, Julia's involvement with NASPA and a state-based Chicana/o administrators association provided her with venues to connect with Latina/o colleagues especially those in cabinet-level roles. Even though Julia did not always see the potential in herself to take on leadership roles in these professional associations, these Latina/o colleagues recognized the assets she would bring to these organizations. These Latina/o colleagues provided her with opportunities to develop critical skills that would help her in her career pathway to a SSAO role such as fundraising and networking. Julia's connections with these Latina/o colleagues also

served as a counterspace of support and contributed to her retention in the profession especially when contending with challenges from her unsupportive, sexist supervisor. Julia's experiences exemplify how Latinas' involvement in professional associations have the potential to serve as a valuable resource in Latina administrators' career pathways, especially when institutional support is lacking. Julia benefited from engaging in professional association opportunities throughout her career, not only at one stage of her career journey. Julia's involvement in these groups provided her with treasured life-long connections and an avenue to support the next generation of Latina/o leaders.

Conclusion

This chapter illuminated the diverse career pathways and lived experiences of seven current/former Latina SSAOs in U.S. higher education by sharing their *testimonios* in their entirety. The participants' *testimonios* offered a rich, thick description of their unique personal and professional journeys. The *testimonios* also highlighted the range of supports the Latina SSAO participants benefited from in their career pathways and the diverse strategies they employed to face challenges throughout their career paths. Although the participants shared many commonalities in their personal and family backgrounds and challenges that they faced in their journeys, there is not one sole Latina SSAO experience. There is much to learn from the participants' diverse experiences. Moraga and Anzaldúa (1981) asserted that knowledge is produced from Chicanas' subjectivities and racialized experiences through the Chicana feminist conceptual tool of "theory in the flesh" (p. 23). This study provides an opportunity to theorize from the participants' *testimonios* about Latinas' career pathways to the SSAO role and construct knowledge from the

participants' lived realities (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). The participant *testimonios* and responses shared in this chapter provide a foundation to the findings that emerged across the participant sample described in Chapter Five which stem from their lived experiences.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to provide a deeper understanding of the career pathways and lived experiences of seven Latina senior student affairs officers (SSAOs) in U.S. higher education. Two research questions guided this research: 1) What resources and supports have Latinas benefited from in their career pathways to the SSAO role? 2) What strategies have Latina SSAOs employed to navigate challenges in their career pathways? To establish a foundation for an exploration of Latina SSAOs' career pathways, I conducted a thorough literature review on the development of the SSAO position and the challenges and resources that shape women's career pathways, especially for Women of Color and Latina administrators in higher education.

I drew from Yosso's (2005, 2006) community cultural wealth (CCW) model as the conceptual framework for this study. This conceptual framework provided an opportunity to uncover and better understand Latina SSAOs' experiences through a strengths-based lens that recognizes the assets Latinas bring from their lived experiences, families, and communities. The CCW model coupled with Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE; Delgado Bernal, 1998) allowed for a deeper understanding of Latina SSAOs' career pathways by validating their lived experiences as truth, recognizing the structural barriers that may impact their educational experiences and career journeys, and affirming how their resistance of systemic oppression serves as a navigation tool.

I employed a *testimonio* research design to center Latina SSAOs' voices and experiences. *Testimonio* was initially developed within the field of Latin American studies to document the social, political, gendered, and cultural experiences that shape

an individual's life, particularly individuals who experienced injustice (Beverley, 2008). Over the years *testimonio* has become a methodological tool for Chicana feminists to reposition Chicanas/Latinas' lived experiences as the central source of inquiry and create knowledge from Latinas/Chicanas' lived experiences (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Employing a *testimonio* research design offered a powerful tool to bear witness to the participants' personal and professional journeys. The *testimonio* research design also generated a rich, thick description of Latina SSAOs' career pathways to senior student affairs leadership and encouraged collaboration among participants to build community and provide insight on the findings of this research. Data collection for the study involved participants' completion of a demographic form and participation in an individual interview, virtual focus group, and follow-up interview throughout the data collection and analysis process. Participants could opt-in to each of these data collection pieces based on their interest and availability. Semi-structured interviews in this study resembled more of a *plática* [conversation] so that participants could narrate their *testimonios* freely and guide the dialogue.

For data analysis, I adapted the three-phase data analysis process employed by Pérez Huber (2010). The three-phases of data analysis include (a) preliminary data analysis, (b) collaborative data analysis, and (c) final data analysis. The preliminary data analysis process began once all initial interviews were conducted with the seven participants. Prior to conducting a preliminary analysis of the data, all transcripts were read in their entirety. Drawing from a codebook of *a priori* and *in vivo* codes, all verified transcripts were coded line-by-line by hand utilizing a constant

comparative approach (Fram, 2013; Malagon et al., 2009). Seven preliminary themes were identified in this preliminary data analysis phase that emerged across the participant sample. These preliminary themes were shared with the participants prior to the collaborative data analysis phase. The collaborative data analysis phase involved hosting a virtual focus group via videoconferencing where participants had the opportunity to connect with one another and provide feedback on the preliminary themes in order to offer an authentic representation of the participants' career pathways and experiences.

Participants' insight, along with multiple readings of participant transcripts and *testimonios* guided the final data analysis phase. As part of the final data analysis phase, a follow-up interview was held with participants to gather additional context on their experiences and/or individuals in their journeys. This follow-up interview also provided participants with an avenue to share further insight on their experiences prior to conducting a final analysis of the data. As a result of this three-phase data analysis process, four themes emerged illustrating the collective power of the participant sample: (a) *Familia* [Family]: Source of Knowledge, Aspirations, and Emotional Support; (b) Signaling Opportunity: Mentors and Guides Fostering Career Advancement; (c) It's All in the Approach: Transforming Experiences of Adversity; and (d) Follow your Purpose: Mission-Driven Leadership Fostering Persistence. These themes address the research questions guiding this study by illuminating how family and mentorship served as beneficial resources in the Latina SSAO participants' career pathways as well as how the participants navigate adversity through strategic responses, self-efficacy, and by holding steadfast to their

commitment to social justice. However, given the richness of the participant *testimonios*, I also recognize that the findings from this study go beyond the resources that participants benefited from in in their career pathways to the SSAO role and the strategies that they employed to navigate challenges in their journeys. There is much to gain and learn from the participants' rich *testimonios*.

In this chapter, I begin by describing the findings and overarching themes from this research. After providing an overview of the findings from this research, I provide a discussion of implications and recommendations for research and practice. I then provide advice for current and aspiring Latina SSAOs derived from the participants' *testimonios*. I conclude this chapter and dissertation with my *reflexión* [reflection] of how conducting this research and bearing witness to the participants' *testimonios* was a transformative experience for me.

Findings from the Collective Power of the Participant Sample

The *testimonios* and responses in Chapter Four illuminated the diverse career pathways and lived experiences of current/former Latina SSAOs. The collaborative data analysis phase was critical to better understanding the participants' collective experiences and identifying the central themes that surfaced across their *testimonios*. Through a constant comparative analysis of the data, multiple readings of the transcripts and participant *testimonios*, and insight from participants, four themes emerged that illustrate the collective force of the participant sample. These themes offer a glimpse into the resources the participants benefited from throughout their professional journey to the SSAO role and the strategies they employed to navigate challenges in their career pathways: (a) *Familia* [Family]: Source of Knowledge,

Aspirations, and Emotional Support; (b) Signaling Opportunity: Mentors and Guides Fostering Career Advancement; (c) It's All in the Approach: Transforming Experiences of Adversity; and (d) Follow your Purpose: Mission-Driven Leadership Fostering Persistence.

Familia [Family]: Source of Knowledge, Aspirations, and Emotional Support

The Latina SSAO participants found strength and solace in immediate and extended family who served as their first sources of social support and inspiration. Participant *testimonios* also dismantled deficit views that Mexican/Mexican-American families do not value education and do not support their children's success by demonstrating the vital role family support can play in Latina SSAOs' personal, educational, and professional pathways. This familial support not only includes support from parent(s) but extends to include support from siblings and extended family members (e.g., uncle, grandparent).

Although Latina/o parents may not show they value education based on dominant cultural standards (e.g., assisting with homework, providing college application support), they impart *educación* [education][22] outside of the formal education setting that serves as a foundation to their learning. The *educación* fostered participants' personal (e.g., respect, hard work ethic) and social responsibility (e.g., commitment to equity, preserving the dignity of others) that they carried with them throughout their personal and professional pathways. Participants' parents also

[22] Although *educación* is the Spanish term for "education," educación is a Mexican cultural construct that goes beyond the knowledge gained in the formal academic settings and emphasizes responsibility, respect, sociability, and insight on how one should operate within the world (Valenzuela, 1999). *Educación* embodies the knowledge an individual learns from their culture nurtured by their family and community.

demonstrated a strong value for education through the interest they showed in their learning and how they took it upon themselves to locate resources within their networks to contribute to their daughters' college pathways. The messages their family members communicated about education led participants to view a college degree as the means to have greater life and career opportunities. The Latina SSAO participants' mothers especially equated the pursuit of higher education as a type of passport for independence that would provide them with the knowledge and resources to care for themselves.

Along with the support and *educación* participants gained from their parents, older siblings also played a central role in fostering their educational aspirations and passion for service. Older siblings offered invaluable guidance to participants in their higher education journeys by providing them with the knowledge and skills they needed to apply to college and financial aid. This support was especially critical for the participants who identified as first-generation and/or low-income, as financial aid made college a real possibility. Even for participants who described navigating the college application and transition process alone, their families' words of encouragement and a desire to make their families proud served as sources of motivation to complete their college degrees despite any obstacles they faced. Although parents and siblings supported participants' pursuit of an undergraduate degree, participants often relied on themselves and other sources of support (e.g., mentors, peers) when pursuing their graduate degrees as this was unfamiliar terrain for all but one of the participants' families. Even if the Latina SSAO participants'

families did not understand firsthand the nature of their work, their pride and the emotional support they provided remained unwavering.

In addition to nurturing participants' aspirations, participants' families also nurtured their self-efficacy, resistance strategies, and commitment to social justice through the *cuentos* [stories][23] and *consejos* [advice][24] imparted by their family members. The Latina/o culture has strong oral history roots, with storytelling serving as a central way to share knowledge and *cuentos* across generations. Participants' awareness of the inequities Latinas/os face in the U.S. stemmed from their families' *cuentos* coping with racism and xenophobia in their own journeys. Rather than dismiss and/or give in to these structural barriers, immediate and extended family members navigated these challenges head-on. Two participants also described how their family members engaged in advocacy efforts on behalf of the larger Latina/o community, emphasizing the importance of engaging in community-organizing efforts. These *cuentos* led the Latina SSAO participants to internalize the importance of always believing in yourself despite (mis)perceptions of Latinas/os' abilities and advocating against micro- and macro-level inequities. Participants also witnessed the strong work ethic of their immediate and extended family members firsthand, one of the many assets that they developed within the contexts of their home environments that they bring with them to their institutions.

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[23] *Cuentos* are stories stemming from lived experiences that are passed on by Latina/o families across the generations. Since *cuentos* intend to share knowledge and insight to guide one's life, storytelling within Latina/o families also serves as a socialization tool (Riojas-Cortez, Flores, Smith, & Clark, 2003).

[24] *Consejos* as a concept goes beyond the English translation of "advice" to embody the informal cultural narratives that Latina/o parent(s)/family members impart to youth to guide their lives and aspirations. *Consejos* are shared with empathy and love with the goal of fostering inspiration and a sense of responsibility (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994).

As participants continued to benefit from words of encouragement from their families throughout their careers, the participants who were married also described benefiting from the support of their husbands. The 24/7 and confidential nature of the role frequently leaves SSAOs and other cabinet-level leaders with few sounding boards with whom they can confide. Spouses offered a safe space outside of the institution with whom the Latina SSAO participants could openly discuss the politics, racism, and inequities they faced in their career. Two participants also experienced an added benefit of having spouses who worked in the education sector and had a firsthand understanding of the microaggressions Latina/o leaders may face. Spouses who genuinely listened and empathized with the participants' professional experiences offered them critical affirmation and an external perspective on how to navigate challenges in their respective journeys. Moreover, since pursuing a SSAO role frequently requires some form of relocation, open communication with spouses was key. Emotional sustenance from families and spouses contributed to the participants' desire to stay close to family throughout their career. This finding overall illustrates how the knowledge, skills, and support participants' families provide serve as a powerful resource in Latina SSAOs' pathways from childhood to senior student affairs leadership and beyond.

Signaling Opportunity: Mentors and Guides Fostering Career Advancement

In addition to familial support, a common theme that surfaced across participants' *testimonios* was the valuable role mentors and guides play in Latinas' career pathways to the SSAO role. The Latina SSAO participants cited supervisors, faculty members, peers, and other on- and off-campus contacts as mentors and guides

in their career pathways. The presence of mentors and caring peers in the participants' journeys supplemented the emotional sustenance they received from family members by providing them with added knowledge and support. Participants benefited from support from cross-race and/or cross-gender mentors and guides as well as from Latina/o contacts within their social networks.

Mentors were identified as individuals who provided sustained support to participants over time. While some of these mentoring relationships developed organically through shared interests and lived experiences, others developed through formal mentoring programs. Mentors provided critical knowledge and support that helped participants transition into new roles, navigate politics and challenges in their career path, and engage in professional development opportunities. While many Latina SSAO participants described benefiting from the presence of Latina/o mentors in their journeys, the participants' *testimonios* indicated that White males and Women of Color were especially valuable supports for the participants. As White male mentors afforded the participants opportunities to advance and grow, Women of Color mentors provided vital empathy and support because of their shared race-gendered experiences in higher education. These cross-race and/or cross-gender mentors recognized the opportunity and responsibility to promote the participants' advancement through words of encouragement and sponsoring their participation in diverse leadership development opportunities. Mentors saw the potential the participants had to advance in their career and genuinely verbalized the faith they have in their skills and abilities, potential that the participants did not necessarily see

within themselves. The support they received from mentors fostered their self-efficacy and professional growth.

It is important to note that the participants did not describe intentionally seeking out mentors to support them in their career journeys; mentors seemed to fall into their path and showed them the way. When these mentors appeared in their journeys, the participants took the initiative to cultivate the relationship and heed the advice that mentors offered. In addition to imparting direct one-on-one support, some mentors expanded the participants' social networks by connecting them with colleagues in their professional circles or sponsoring their participation in professional development opportunities where they could connect with colleagues from across the state and the nation. Participants' gratitude for the support they have received, coupled with a desire to expand the pipeline of Latina/o administrators in higher education contributed to their commitment to also mentor and coach young professionals, especially Latinas/os.

Although not all participants identified a mentor in their career path, all participants benefited from guides throughout their journeys who provided one-time or limited support to participants. I contend that these guides served as signalers of opportunity who encouraged participants to pursue specific experiences or positions to promote their career advancement in student affairs. Guides are trusted contacts within the participants' networks who are in a position of power to initiate opportunities for Latinas (e.g., creating a position, providing funding for participation in professional development experiences) and/or provide words of encouragement to pursue a particular role or opportunity.

Many of the participants described how their career pathway to the field of student affairs was unplanned. If it were not for these guides or signalers of opportunity, the participants might not have connected their passion for helping others with pursuing a career in student affairs. These guides helped the Latina SSAO participants recognize that they could make a career out of supporting students in higher education and offered advice on how to pursue their next professional steps. Guides throughout the participants' career pathways also prompted their participation in research and career opportunities, publishing experiences, conference presentations, and institutes to fill their gaps in knowledge. The following was a common experience identified in the participants' *testimonios*: (a) a guide would encourage them to pursue a particular opportunity (e.g., a career in student affairs, apply for graduate school, apply for a new position); (b) the participant would agree to pursue this opportunity; and (c) the respective opportunity contributed to the participants' professional growth or career advancement.

Although participants could have declined the career opportunities recommended by supervisors and peers, after reflection, they pursued these opportunities because they recognized the benefits and skills that they could gain from pursuing new roles and experiences. However, guides' encouragement alone was not enough to promote participants' advancement. The participants exhibited a willingness to take risks, drive to succeed, and commitment to utilize available resources in their pathway. Even though guides did not necessarily remain in contact with the participants on a regular basis, the participants benefited from multiple guides throughout their careers who encouraged them to apply for a specific

opportunity. The encouragement participants received from guides boosted their self-efficacy to pursue additional roles and opportunities in the future and exposed them to knowledge and opportunities they would not have gained otherwise. Participants' breadth of experiences in higher education/student affairs along with the support, knowledge, and networks from mentors, supervisors, guides, and colleagues in the field supported their pursuit of a SSAO role. Latina SSAOs' unplanned career pathways contribute to their desire to create intentional career pathways for others, since they recognize that not everyone benefits from mentors and supports in their career paths, especially Latinas/os.

Latina/o supports. While five of the participants described benefiting from cross-race and cross-gender mentors and guides, all the participants' *testimonios* demonstrated how Latina SSAOs benefited from connections with Latina/o mentors, guides, and peers in their professional journeys. Participants benefited from: Latina/o peers, Latina presidents, a Latina board of trustee member, a Latina supervisor, on/off-campus Latina/o mentors, and connections with Latina/o *colegas* [colleagues] from professional associations. Thus, the valuable presence of Latina/o supports surfaced as a sub-theme of this finding, emphasizing the unique support the Latina SSAO participants received from Latinas/os within their social networks that a non-Latina/o cannot provide. Even though there is rich ethnic diversity within the Latina/o community and Latinas do not have a shared monolithic experience, these Latina/o supports can share common cultural values (e.g., respect for others, interconnectedness with family) and experiences contending with structural barriers (e.g., racism, deficit views, xenophobia) in the U.S. Given the limited number of

Latina/o SSAOs in the country, these connections with other Latinas/os also supplied the participants with valuable knowledge, skills, empathy, and a counterspace of support from the structural barriers and challenges they contended with throughout their careers.

Five of the participants stated that Latina/o mentors and supervisors positively impacted their career trajectories by providing them specifically with words of affirmation, understanding their unique experiences as Latinas (e.g., contending with tokenism, resisting racism), and exuding a genuine commitment to their success by imparting valuable advice and knowledge. The participant *testimonios* illustrated how Latina/o mentors could provide distinct knowledge and support to Latinas by exposing them to injustices impacting the Latina/o community, shaping the focus of their leadership to center on social justice issues, and encouraging their participation in community-based efforts and professional development opportunities. While all the participants demonstrated a drive to succeed and ambitious nature, the words of encouragement they received from Latina/o mentors pushed them to engage in new opportunities. Even if the participants did not quite feel ready to pursue a particular opportunity (e.g. doctoral study, a new role), they moved forward and followed the advice from their Latina/o mentors out of a desire to make them proud and because they trusted that their mentors had their best interests in mind.

The presence of Latina role models also played a critical role in fostering the participants' career aspirations by helping them envision themselves in higher-level roles through these connections. When experiencing feelings of uncertainty about their career path, the presence of Latina role models in the Latina SSAO participants'

journeys was reassuring, validating, and inspired them to persist in their careers. Latina community college presidents in particular provided valuable advice to participants about navigating politics and the importance of engaging in professional development opportunities. These connections and words of affirmation from Latina community college presidents fostered, in at least three participants' career aspirations, to pursue a presidency. Participants' connections with Latina presidents illustrates how a presence of Latina role models in Latina administrators' pathways have the potential to shape their professional goals. Due to the beneficial presence of Latina role models in the participants' experiences and their desire to expand the limited presence of Latinas in administrative roles, the participants also took pride and responsibility in serving as a role model to Latina/o staff members at their institutions and in the student affairs profession.

Participants also benefited from Latina/o peer support from undergraduate and graduate Latina/o student organizations, a Latina sorority, and Latina/o peers from professional associations. These connections with Latina/o peers provided participants with *colegas* [colleagues] who could empathize with their racialized experiences in higher education and serve as a counterspace of rejuvenation and resistance from the challenges they navigated in their institutions. In some cases, these Latina/o peers provided familial ties for the Latina SSAO participants by affirming their Latina identities and offering an outlet where they could discuss their unique experiences as Latinas. The participants were rejuvenated and reminded of their purpose for working in student affairs through these connections. Participants' connections with a variety of Latina/o support networks illustrate how Latinas'

relationships with Latina/o peers, mentors, and role models have the power to uplift Latinas from the adversity they contend with in their daily experiences and promote their career advancement.

Even though participants described benefiting from graduate programs, graduate programs do not provide all the knowledge, skills, and networks to ensure Latinas' career advancement to senior student affairs leadership. Mentors and guides led the participants to engage in critical experiences at opportune times that aligned with the hidden curriculum of career advancement, unwritten expectations and knowledge that the participants may not have accessed otherwise without the support and encouragement from individuals within their social networks. Some examples of the hidden curriculum that participants engaged included pursuing advanced roles, completing a doctoral degree, engaging in research opportunities, and pursuing leadership roles through professional associations. These critical experiences (e.g., pursuing advanced roles, doctoral study) are reflective of the values of success, personal achievement, and a focus on status; values privileged by the dominant culture. Thus, mentors and guides served as valuable sources of social capital[25] who fostered the participants' cultural capital[26] by providing them with knowledge and access to opportunities that could promote their career advancement.

It's All in the Approach: Transforming Experiences of Adversity

The participants' *testimonios* illuminated the diverse challenges Latinas face in their career pathways to the SSAO role. The primary challenge that all participants

[25] Social capital includes an individual's valued connections and social networks (Bourdieu, 1986).
[26] Cultural capital is defined as the accumulation of valued knowledge, abilities, and skills that can promote an individual's social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986).

faced in their professional journeys involved navigating structural barriers (e.g., racism, sexism, microaggressions). Participants also described contending with cultural taxation, an added race-related responsibility that their White colleagues are not called upon to provide. These negative encounters had the potential to adversely impact participants' career aspirations, day-to-day experiences in administration, and their self-efficacy. However, the participants coped by channeling their resilience, navigational skills, self-efficacy, and faith. Participants' navigational skills also led them to employ strategically crafted responses when addressing challenges throughout their careers. Rather than feeling discouraged from negative encounters, this finding illustrates how the Latina SSAO participants developed a thick skin to resist challenges and inequities in their career journeys and address experiences of adversity in a way that is strategic, diplomatic, assertive, and unapologetic.

While contending with structural barriers is a common experience in Women of Color administrators' journeys, the participants' *testimonios* demonstrated how they transformed challenges into opportunities to prove others wrong and fuel their drive to succeed. Latina administrators have every reason to feel enraged and frustrated by the sexism, racism, classism, xenophobia, and microaggressions they face. However, rather than approaching these encounters through anger, the Latina SSAO participants contended with experiences of overt and covert discrimination with professionalism and feelings of gratitude for the opportunity to serve students and transform institutional practices. Three of the participants' *testimonios* illustrated how adopting a mindset of gratitude can propel Latina SSAOs forward to navigate challenges throughout their careers, a valuable resistance technique since experiences

with adversity are not frequently one-time occurrences for Latina SSAOs. Rather than letting the structural barriers that pervade the higher education environment paralyze their progress, the participants navigated these challenges independently and/or through support from family, peers, mentors, and guides. If these Latina SSAOs had internalized others' (mis)perceptions and microaggressions, they would not have persisted in the profession. However, the Latina SSAO participants resisted these challenges in their journey.

Participants' *testimonios* also illuminated how Latinas channel their self-efficacy and resilience to recognize how the microaggressions they faced are rooted in ignorance and (mis)perceptions. The words of encouragement and affirmation participants received from family, role models, and peers contributed to their self-efficacy. The Latina SSAO participants' awareness of and confidence in their strengths and abilities also served as a source of their self-efficacy, even if others doubted their competence. Most participants also recalled contending with adversity at an early age or hearing *cuentos* about their family members experiences battling discrimination. The participants' early exposure to structural barriers familiarized them with the level of discrimination they might face in their future careers, especially as a SSAO. However, prior exposure to overt and covert discrimination should not equate to assumptions that Latinas are innately equipped and willing to navigate these challenges without holding transgressors accountable for their deficit views.

Nonetheless, the Latina SSAO participants were unafraid to use their voice to address microaggressions and challenges in their career pathway but were mindful of

how they addressed challenges and inequities. They were reflective, thoughtful, and utilized strategic responses to call attention to the inequities they faced in their career in a way that was respectful and held others accountable for their deficit views. Valerie described navigating micro- and macro-aggressions within and outside of the higher education environment through "counter-transgressive grace." Counter-transgressive grace is a form of emotional intelligence that Women of Color draw from to address racism and sexism in a way that treats the transgressor with dignity and respect and calls attention to their problematic language and/or behavior in a way that discourages them from repeating it (Wise, 2013). Although this is not a term that all the participants are familiar with, this approach accurately describes the way the Latina SSAO participants addressed negative encounters they experienced firsthand on a micro-level and transgressions impacting underrepresented and Latina/o communities on a macro-level. This approach allowed the participants to uphold their dignity and address challenges in a way that others perceive as professional and thoughtful and not emotionally reactive. While colleagues were frequently surprised by their ability to remain calm during stressful situations, the participants employed approaches that avoided negative (mis)perceptions and reactions.

The Latina SSAO participants also responded to challenges in their journeys by employing active measures to persist. Some of these actions included connecting with like-minded colleagues, developing connections with allies to achieve shared goals, and utilizing advice imparted to them by mentors and guides. Participants were savvy in identifying sources of support who were genuinely committed to their success and possessed a shared interest in supporting the success of underrepresented

students. Even though strategically crafted responses and navigational skills are assets the participants utilized to resist challenges in their career, navigating challenges independently through resistance strategies also places the onus on Latina SSAOs to uplift themselves without challenging the oppressive structures and double standards that exist in higher education.

In addition to resisting challenges through confidence, resilience, allyship, and strategic responses, six participants described drawing from faith and spirituality as resources and coping tools in their personal and professional journeys. Meditation, reflection, attending Mass, and reading daily devotions were central ways participants carried out their spirituality. Participants relied on faith to keep them focused and strong especially in times when they were unsure of whether being a SSAO was worth it. The SSAO is a very demanding role and the Latina SSAO participants' belief that everything happens for a reason prompted their positive outlook and ability to persist in their careers, despite the challenges they faced. In times of uncertainty or despair, participants whose spirituality was a core aspect of their identity recognized the power of prayer to navigate challenges in their careers by providing them with an outlet for reflection and insight. While six of the seven participants were self-ascribed women of faith and drew inspiration from their spirituality, one participant emphasized the importance of separating her professional work from her faith which is especially key since participants worked at public colleges/universities. Rather than letting inequities and challenges deter them from pursuing their goals, participants' ability to move past negative encounters through self-efficacy, faith,

resilience, and strategically crafted responses were internal resources the Latina SSAO participants utilized to transform adversity throughout their career pathways.

Follow your Purpose: Mission-Driven Leadership Fostering Persistence

All participants possessed a commitment to social justice that they carried out in their personal and professional lives that went beyond their day-to-day responsibilities as an administrator and stemmed from their early life and professional experiences. Participants' commitment to infusing social justice in their work helped them push through challenges in their career pathway by reminding them of their purpose and passion in student affairs. The Latina SSAO participants' mission-driven leadership and commitment to serve underrepresented communities led them to cope with negative encounters in their career out of a desire to reduce inequities on their campuses and pave the way for others. In this way, participants' mission-driven leadership is not only an asset they bring to their institutions, but it also serves as a resistance and persistence strategy that Latinas draw from throughout their career. The participants' *testimonios* also illustrated how their commitment to serving underserved communities sparked their interest and desire to lead and work in the community college setting, since this type of institution is where many Latina/o, first-generation, and low-income students begin their higher education journey. This finding affirms the assets Latina SSAOs bring to their campus communities and how the participants' equity-conscious leadership kept them focused on their purpose in student affairs.

The Latina SSAO participants cited their background as Latinas, growing up low-income, and/or being a first-generation college student as core impetus for their commitment to equity in higher education and desire to serve underrepresented

students. The participants also recognized the strengths they derived from their social identities to empathize with underrepresented minority and/or first-generation college student populations. The participants carried out their commitment to social justice as SSAOs by implementing equity-minded practices that transformed their institutions (e.g., implementing cultural competency training for the board of trustee members, directing equal opportunity programs, helping their institutions achieve HSI status). Participants took this social justice commitment seriously as this was a driving motivation for their work in student affairs.

Four of the participants described instances of reaching their tipping point, questioning whether the challenges they faced as a SSAO were worth it. In these instances, they continued to persist in their career because they recognized the structural and climate changes they were making on their campuses that positively impacted the lives of the students and staff they served. All participants expressed frustration in dealing with microaggressions and challenges throughout their career pathways, yet they resisted adversity out of a desire for others to not have to cope with similar challenges in their educational and professional journeys. In times when participants may have doubted their desire or willingness to continue to hold senior-level roles, they never quit or lost sight of their work because they know that their work has a larger purpose and how powerful it is for students/staff to see leaders with a shared culture in these positions.

Even though the participants described being the only one or one of the few Latinas in administration, they took pride in challenging perceptions of what a SSAO should “look like,” as White males frequently occupy high-level positions.

Participants' personal mission for service and equity also contributed to their desire to serve as a SSAO because of the larger impact they could make on student services and retention in this role. While participants possessed a commitment to serve all students as SSAOs, they also recognized the power they have to influence decision-making and implement evidence and assets-based approaches to support students, especially those who are historically underserved. Holding steadfast to their purpose and social justice commitment served as a strategy the Latina SSAO participants employed to push through challenges and advance in their careers. The findings from participants' *testimonios* illustrated the range of strategies that Latina SSAOs employ to navigate difficulties in their professional journeys and daily experiences as a SSAO as they fostered social change in student affairs through their mission-driven leadership.

Limitations

While I recruited participants through various outlets, I could not control who would have an interest in and consent to participate in the study. Given the small number of current and former Latina SSAOs in the U.S., I wanted to remain open to involving any participant who met the criteria and desired to participate rather than limit participation to Latinas from a specific institutional type or ethnic/national background. Given my approach, another limitation of the study was that certain social identities were not present among the participant sample, such as Latina SSAOs from other ethnic backgrounds or who identified as LGB or trans* since all participants are of Mexican descent and identify as heterosexual.

In addition, the goal of qualitative research is to focus on the lived experiences of an individual and is not intended to generalize to the larger population of focus (Glesne, 2016). As such, the intent of the study was to provide an authentic representation of the *testimonios* and lived experiences of the individuals who chose to participate, rather than ensure that the findings are generalizable to the entire Latina SSAO population in the U.S. The findings and themes that emerged from this research are intended to capture the unique experiences and career pathways of the participants in this study.

I am also very aware of the busy personal/professional lives Latina SSAOs lead. Thus, I adapted the data collection and analysis plans from past *testimonio* research (Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Burciaga, 2007; Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010) in a way that offered a rich description of Latina SSAOs' lived experiences and journeys to senior student affairs leadership while also ensuring a manageable way for Latina SSAOs to be involved. While it would have been ideal for all participants to participate in both individual interviews and the virtual focus group to provide feedback on the preliminary findings and share added context from the initial interview, the participants only opted in for some of the data collection components based on their availability. However, it was more important for me to affirm the level of involvement each participant was able to commit to and I did not want to limit their participation if they could not commit to all data collection pieces. In addition, although beneficial for protecting participant confidentiality, limiting the identifying information (e.g., geographic location, job title) from participants' *testimonios* may serve as a limitation as providing this context may help readers to

better understand participants' personal and professional experiences. However, given the small number of current and former Latina SSAOs in the U.S., maintaining confidentiality is key.

Implications

This study creates a new discourse on Latina SSAOs' experiences by providing a deeper understanding of seven Latina SSAOs' personal and professional journeys. While the body of literature on Latina student affairs administrator experiences is limited, the participants' *testimonios* and findings from this research complement and extend the knowledge base of Latina administrators' experiences and pathways to senior-level roles. By sharing the *testimonios* and experiences of these trailblazers, who represent the few Latinas/Chicanas in SSAO roles, this dissertation offers insight into how to support current and future Latina SSAOs. In this section, I discuss the implications of this study for future research and practice in higher education and student affairs.

Implications for Research

In this section, I will describe the contributions this study has made to the literature base as well as theoretical and methodological implications of this study for future research. Although prior research explored the experiences of women SSAOs, this research was the first study to focus explicitly on Latina SSAOs' experiences. By bringing Latina/Chicana SSAO voices to the forefront, this study offered a deeper understanding of the nuanced challenges they face in their journeys and the distinct resources that have facilitated their advancement in the student affairs profession. While this study focused specifically on the experiences of current/former Latina SSAOs, the participants' *testimonios* may also resonate with Latinas from academic

affairs and other fields, adding to the body of literature on Latina leadership. Given the deficit views of Mexican and Mexican-American populations in the U.S. (Valencia, 2010; Valencia & Pearl, 1997), this research revealed the assets, achievements, and successes of a subset of women of Mexican descent who are transforming higher education institutions through their leadership and service.

This research offers an opportunity to pay tribute to the accomplishments and experiences of Latina SSAOs, whose experiences have gone overlooked in prior research on women in SSAO roles that included predominantly White samples. This study also contributes to the literature by illuminating the diverse resources that can support Latinas' career journeys to the SSAO role across two areas: a) internal resources and b) external resources (see Figure 6 on p. 349). I broadly define internal resources to include individuals within the participants' family circles; personal traits (e.g., resilience, self-efficacy, ambitious nature); strategies (e.g., employing strategic responses, risk-taking, counter-transgressive grace); and social identities (e.g., Latina, Chicana, first-generation, a woman of God). In some instances, these internal resources were accessed and/or nurtured by participants' families and communities. External resources include individuals within participants' social networks and critical experiences participants engaged in that fostered their career aspirations and promoted their career advancement to the SSAO role (e.g., doctoral study, leadership institutes).

There is potential for future research to continue to explore Latina SSAOs' experiences and expand the body of research on Latinas and Women of Color in senior-level higher education/student affairs administration. Future research on

Latina SSAOs can strive to recruit Latinas from other ethnic backgrounds since all the participants in this study are of Mexican descent. Since all the participants also identified as heterosexual, future research could also include participants who identify as LGB or trans* since the intersection of these identities could also shape Latinas' career pathways and experiences in student affairs. Future scholarship in this area should strive to illuminate the *testimonios* of Latina SSAOs who possess diverse social identities to further explore their personal and professional journeys and offer a more holistic view of Latina/o/x SSAOs. Because of the microaggressions and structural barriers the participants navigated, future research would benefit from an in-depth exploration of how Latina cabinet-level leaders navigate intersections of oppression in their career pathways.

Future research could also include participants from private institutions since the current sample all work in public two- and four-year colleges/universities as well as participants from the Pacific Northwest and East Coast to include individuals from additional geographic locations. To further contextualize Latinas SSAOs' career pathways, future research can also explore the extent to which working within certain institutional types (e.g., community college, Hispanic Serving Institution) shapes Latinas' career pathways, as well as how organizational structures and resources impact Latinas' career advancement. As Latina/o college enrollment increases, future research could also benefit from an exploration of the extent to which Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) cultivate and support the Latina/o leadership pipeline and foster the career advancement of Latinas/os into senior-level roles.

College presidents also heavily influence SSAOs' experiences. Future research can further explore the nature of Latina cabinet-level leaders' relationship with the college/university president and the extent to which this shapes their leadership approaches, retention as an administrator, and day-to-day experiences. Additionally, given the limited body of research on Latina college/university presidents, future research can explore the career pathway of Latina presidents who previously served as a SSAO to better understand the factors that played a role in their advancement to the executive-level role. A longitudinal study with these participants can also serve to understand Latinas' career pathways in higher education/student affairs over time.

Although this study focused on the experiences of current/former Latina SSAOs, a complementary study could be conducted to explore the career pathways and experiences of Latina senior academic officers (e.g., provosts, chancellors) to better understand and compare/contrast the experiences of Latinas in diverse cabinet-level roles. For scholars seeking to replicate this study to uncover the experiences of Latina senior academic officers (SAOs), I would recommend adding an organizational lens to this research given the structural, environmental, political, and interpersonal tensions that can shape SAOs' experiences since classroom-based experiences and curriculum are understood as central to the mission of higher education. Since the SAO role is frequently a prerequisite to a college/university presidency, the influence of the college/university president on SAOs' experiences and career aspirations should be incorporated as well in a parallel study of this nature. Since prior research exists on the experiences of women SSAOs broadly and Black

women SSAOs, future research can expand to include an investigation of the career pathways and experiences of additional Women of Color sub-populations (e.g., Asian American, Pacific Islander, Native American, Indigenous, Biracial, Multiracial). Expanded reseach in this area could provide a more holistic understanding of Women of Color SSAOs' experiences.

Theoretical implications. The conceptual framework guiding this study was Yosso's (2005, 2006) community cultural wealth (CCW) model. Scholars have utilized Yosso's (2005, 2006) model of CCW to uncover the cultural wealth of Latina/o high school students (Liou et al., 2009; Martinez, 2012), Latina/o undergraduate students (Hernandez, 2016; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2015; Luna & Martinez, 2013; Pérez, 2012, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2009, 2010), and Latina/o graduate students (Espino, 2014; Navarrette García, 2014; Zell, 2014). However, this research was the first study to employ the CCW model in research on SSAO and Latina administrator populations and the Latina SSAO sub-population specifically.

There were both benefits and challenges in utilizing the CCW model as the conceptual framework in the present study. In terms of benefits, Yosso's (2005) CCW model offered a foundation to employ an assets-based research design that recognizes the strengths that Latina SSAOs bring from their families, communities, and lived experiences. For example, the CCW model guided the way in which I framed the interview protocol to uncover the knowledge, skills, and networks that the participants benefited from throughout their career pathways, demonstrating how the CCW model can be adapted for research on administrator populations. Semi-structured interview questions in the study focused on understanding the resources

participants benefited from throughout their personal and professional journeys including knowledge and skills gained from their family, community, and other individuals within their social networks to affirm the *familial* and *social* capital Latina SSAOs possess.

Yosso (2005) asserts that Communities of Color possess multiple assets stemming from their culture and their communities. The participants' *testimonios* demonstrate the values and behaviors that can contribute to Latinas' career advancement in higher education (e.g., a hard work ethic, commitment to social justice, resistance strategies); behaviors learned within the context of their families as early as childhood. Participants' *testimonios* also illustrated how Latinas navigate the higher education environment and contend with micro- and macro-aggressions in their journeys, central pieces of Yosso's (2005) concepts of *navigational* and *resistant* capital. However, the present study expands Yosso's (2005) concepts of *navigational* and *resistant* capital by illustrating how Latinas' resistance of structural barriers and challenges throughout their career pathways are inspired by their commitment to dismantle deficit views of underrepresented student populations and implement evidence- and assets-based approaches to improve students' lives. The present study not only affirms the assets Latina SSAOs possess, but the participants' *testimonios* also highlight the assets they bring to their institutions.

Drawing from Yosso's (2005) CCW model as the conceptual framework for the study also uncovered a unique understanding of the assets and cultural wealth that Latina SSAOs possess and benefit from in their personal and professional journeys. Yosso (2005) looked forward to the ways the CCW model would take on new forms

and understandings when applied to future research. Even though I did not conduct a content analysis of the data utilizing the CCW model to identify the forms of capital Latina SSAOs possess, the participants' *testimonios* offer added insight on the concepts of *social, experiential,* and *spiritual* capital (Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010; Yosso, 2005). While Yosso (2005) recognized the valuable social contacts and community resources that Communities of Color benefit from, this study provides a deeper understanding of *social* capital by uncovering the instrumental role Latina/o mentors, peers, and *colegas* [colleagues] can play in Latina SSAOs' educational and professional pathways. These Latina/o support networks not only impart valuable knowledge and skills to Latina administrators in their career journeys, but also supplies them with inspiration, empathy, and emotional support.

In addition to connections with Latinas/os, Latina SSAOs benefit from connections with administrators of color and especially Women of Color peers who can empathize with their raced-gendered experiences in higher education. These connections can provide critical emotional support and, in some cases, resemble family-like ties. These beneficial connections can offer a unique understanding of *social* capital where these contacts serve as *hermanos* [brothers] and *hermanas* [sisters] in their personal and professional journeys not only equipping them with valuable knowledge but also an outlet to rejuvenate and feel affirmed. Some of these connections may develop during undergraduate/graduate education experiences, illuminating how brother/sister-scholars serve as unique forms of *social* capital that can go beyond support from mentors and guides. Latina SSAOs not only benefit

from *social* capital throughout their career pathways, but they also serve as a source of *social* capital to the Latina/o professionals and students they serve.

Navarrette García (2014) identified *experiential* capital as an additional form of cultural wealth to encompass an individual's life experiences that do not fit within a pre-existing form of capital from Yosso's (2005) model that can enhance and strengthen an individual's journey. Although Navarrette García's (2014) research described *experiential* capital as highlighting the valuable role of personal, lived experiences (e.g., engaging in farm work at an early age) contributing to Mexican American women's success; I would expand this to encompass additional experiences Latinas/Chicanas engage in that contribute to their growth and career advancement. For example, experiences engaging in professional development opportunities (e.g., participating in leadership institutes, presenting at conferences), graduate study, advocacy efforts, and work experiences outside of the higher education environment can be understood as unique sources of *experiential* capital that can support Latina SSAOs' career advancement, professional aspirations, and personal growth. These experiences provide Latinas with valuable knowledge, skills, and access to supportive peers, mentors, and guides.

In Pérez Huber's (2010) research on undocumented and U.S. born Chicana undergraduate students, *spiritual* capital surfaced as another form of capital to expand Yosso's (2005) model. *Spiritual capital* helped Chicana students transcend current challenges and develop a sense of hope by drawing from their belief in something greater than themselves and in using one's inner resource (Pérez Huber, 2010). Although Latina SSAOs draw from a variety of resources, supports, and strategies to

navigate difficulties in their career, five of the participants in this study described drawing from spirituality to cope with challenges. This spirituality contributed to their positivity and rejuvenation through meditation, reflection, and prayer illustrating the how spirituality can serve as an asset to Latina SSAOs throughout their journeys especially when coping with challenges and self-doubt.

Although there were many benefits of utilizing Yosso's (2005) CCW model as the conceptual framework in this study, employing this lens also posed unanticipated challenges during the research process particularly the data analysis phase. Given my focus on the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina SSAOs, the CCW model felt restrictive at times given the rich *testimonios* participants shared with me. Yosso (2005) did not specify that research drawing from CCW as a conceptual framework must utilize a content analysis approach to determine the findings from a study. I contend that researchers should determine the how the CCW model is utilized throughout the research process based on the purpose of the research. After conducting this research and reflecting upon the findings from this study, I recognized that the CCW model served more as an underpinning guiding the research design rather than an analytical tool.

The CCW model supports an assets-based research design that can uncover the experiential knowledge Latina SSAOs and other Latina sub-populations gain from their lived experiences, families, and communities. The purpose of this study was not to conduct a content analysis to identify the forms of capital the participants possessed, but rather to offer a deeper understanding of the Latina SSAOs' career pathways and lived experiences. I encourage future researchers utilizing a CCW

framework to keep in mind the purpose of their study and their research questions. Segmenting participants' experiences based on the forms of capital in the CCW model may get in the way of (re)telling their stories and providing an authentic representation of their journeys. When applying a CCW lens to future *testimonio* research, scholars should employ a flexible application of the CCW model to ensure the findings are grounded in the data and participants' lived realities rather than imposing a rigid and restrictive approach to present the findings.

Even though I coded for the different forms of capital during the preliminary data analysis phase and all forms of capital in Yosso's (2005) model were present across the participant sample in this study, this does not necessarily mean that all forms of capital were salient in participants' career pathways. Although it is a common practice in CCW research to present the findings by describing each of the forms of capital participants possess (e.g., *aspirational*, *familial*), I sought to move away from this traditional approach to uncover the broader themes within and across the participants' *testimonios*. To honor the participants' lived experiences and provide an authentic representation of their personal and professional journeys to senior student affairs leadership, I sought to look beyond participants' CCW to illuminate the diverse resources Latinas benefited from in their career paths to the SSAO role and uncover the strategies they employed to navigate challenges in their careers. As a *testimoniadora* [producer of *testimonios*], it was important to impart findings that place the participants' lived experiences at the center of the research, documenting what *is* for the participants since I had the honor to bear witness to an oral account of the participants' personal and professional journeys. Since *testimonio*

as a methodology supports the generation of knowledge from Latinas/Chicanas' lived experiences, CCW as a concept recognizes the social and cultural assets People of Color, and in this case Latinas/Chicanas, utilize in their journeys stemming from their lived realities. Employing a CCW perspective to future *testimonio* research can provide scholars with an opportunity to align their epistemology and methodology when conducting research with a larger social justice focus.

While prior CCW research primarily focuses on Latina/o student populations, the present study demonstrates how Latina SSAOs' CCW not only served as a resource throughout their educational journeys, but also throughout their career in higher education administration. The participants gained valuable knowledge and skills, stemming from their home environment, community context, and lived experiences, demonstrating the applicability of the CCW model on administrator populations. Although the CCW model can be utilized in research on administrator populations, researchers should keep in mind how they intend to utilize an assets-based and culturally-affirming framework like CCW in their research design from data collection to data analysis. Researchers should also reflect upon the extent to which they will utilize the CCW model when presenting research findings. Since Yosso's (2005) concept of cultural wealth acknowledges the knowledge, skills, and networks that Communities of Color possess, CCW holds utility for future research on administrators of color by affirming and uncovering their CCW, documenting the rich assets present within their communities.

Methodological implications. This study was guided by prior *testimonio* research that documented and illuminated the experiences of Chicanas/Latinas in

education and academia (Acosta-Salazar, 2014; Burciaga, 2007; Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Espino et al., 2010; Espino et al., 2012; Navarrette García, 2014; Pérez Huber, 2010; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Saldaña et al., 2013; Sánchez & Ek, 2013; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Given my desire to center Latina/Chicana lived experiences, this study employed a *testimonio* research design to better understand the experiences of a new Latina sub-population, Latina SSAOs. To my knowledge, this is the first study to utilize a *testimonio* methodology in research about Latina administrators. Future education researchers would benefit from drawing from the foundation set by the Latina Feminist Group (2001) to guide their use of a *testimonio* methodology in education scholarship.

Since the Chicana/Latina scholars in the Latina Feminist Group (2001) narrated their own *testimonios* with one another, it is important for scholars to reflect upon how they will honor the historical intent and approach of *testimonio* research. This reflection is particularly important for scholars who are bearing witness to the *testimonios* of others and not conducting autoethnographic research. My desire to honor the work of the Latina Feminist Group (2001) influenced the way I presented the findings of this study by sharing the participants' *testimonios* in their entirety and uplifting the themes present within each *testimonio* before discussing the themes that surfaced across the participant sample. Future research on Chicana/Latina populations can continue utilizing a *testimonio* research design to break away from the privileging of Eurocentric and male-dominated ideologies by affirming Chicanas/Latinas' lived experiences as a source of knowledge.

Another methodological implication of this study includes extending the use of Pérez Huber's (2010) three-phase data analysis process. This study adapted Pérez Huber's (2010) three-phase data analysis process in a way that was flexible for the Latina SSAO participants' busy lives by affirming the level to which participants would like to engage throughout the research process. Employing a collaborative data analysis approach affirms Chicanas/Latinas as producers of knowledge by offering a space for participants to provide insight on the findings and the way their *testimonios* are represented. Adapting my approach to the collaborative data analysis phase was critical since Pérez Huber's (2010) participants were located within the same geographic region to conduct the collaborative data analysis phase in-person. Given the geographic diversity of the participants, I utilized videoconferencing to facilitate a virtual focus group and gain insight on the preliminary themes. Videoconferencing provided a beneficial venue to build community among participants and gain feedback on the preliminary themes that emerged from the preliminary data analysis phase. Due to the increased use of technology in the research process, future research should continue to utilize virtual focus groups in the research process to connect participants with one another and gain participant feedback on the preliminary findings. The collaborative data analysis phase can take on varying forms such as focus groups, follow-up interviews, and written reflections to gain feedback on preliminary findings. Researchers should reflect upon and employ a collaborative data analysis approach that works best for their population of interest and can continue to adapt Pérez Huber's (2010) three-phase data analysis approach.

Implications for Practice

This section will describe the implications of this research on practice in the field of higher education and student affairs based on the participants' *testimonios*. The participants' experiences not only have the ability to inspire aspiring Latina SSAOs, but this study also informs practices that can support the next generation of Latinas in higher education.

Implications for institutional leadership. There are several ways that institutional leadership can support the career pathways of Latinas to the SSAO role and beyond. Supportive supervisors, mentors, and institutional support mechanisms such as a Latina/o faculty/staff association and professional development opportunities offer invaluable support, community, and insight to Latina administrators. While there are strategic choices that an individual can make to prepare themselves to apply for a SSAO role, Latinas benefit from guidance and support from supervisors and mentors in their career journeys. Although Latinas benefit from mentors and guides in their path to support their advancement, there is an opportunity for institutions to create a visible career path for Latinas' to pursue cabinet-level roles through succession planning and institutionally-based professional development experiences. A visible career path could facilitate Latinas' understanding of how their current role can lead them to advanced positions and how they can position themselves through future opportunities to be a competitive candidate for cabinet-level positions.

Many Latina administrators also desire to stay close to home amid rhetoric in the student affairs profession that emphasizes the importance of geographic flexibility

to pursue a SSAO role. Given many Latinas' desire to stay close to their family and community, institutions should leverage and recruit local talent to promote the advancement of Latinas to mid-level and senior-level roles by considering Latinas within the institution and local region for new positions that may open. One way to cultivate and leverage talent locally and meet future workforce needs in the higher education environment is through succession planning (Betts, Urias, & Betts, 2009). Succession planning efforts involve supporting the professional development of individuals within an institution to nurture the growth of the next generation of leaders through targeted leadership development initiatives across all administrative levels from entry- to senior-level (Betts et al., 2009). Given future retirements, institutions need to take proactive steps to fill future leadership openings with talented individuals, especially individuals from underrepresented backgrounds due to the increasing diversity of college/university campuses and the assets they bring to higher education administration. Some of these distinct assets Latinas can bring to the SSAO role include a commitment to equity, passion for mentoring Latina/o and Women of Color colleagues/students, employing a community-based approach to student services, and strengths in building relationships on- and off-campus to support the students they serve.

Due to the underrepresentation of Latinas in senior-level administrative roles, it is important that institutions implement ways to increase the number of eligible Latinas in the leadership pipeline, especially those who aspire to advanced roles. Institutions can increase the presence of eligible Latinas by supporting their success and retention through undergraduate and graduate education as well as providing

Latinas with access to critical opportunities (e.g., internships, work experiences, leadership development programs) that can prepare them for a career in higher education administration. Institutionally-based leadership development initiatives not only have the potential to support the growth and self-efficacy of staff on an individual-level but can also increase the retention and availability of qualified employees within an institution to take on advanced roles (Betts et al., 2009).

Institutional diversity offices should also make available cultural competence and unconscious bias training for departments/units and require this training for key decision-makers across the institution. Search committee chairs, cabinet-level leaders, and board of trustee members would especially benefit from participating in these types of training given the structural barriers Latinas contend with in the higher education environment and the presence of implicit bias in hiring processes. Since not all higher education leaders bring an equity and social justice lens to their work; this is where additional knowledge can serve as a resource.

Latina SSAOs lead very busy lives as they balance their high-level of responsibility with personal and familial commitments. The SSAO role is a 24/7 job and given the stressful nature of this role, human resources units should offer health/wellness initiatives to support the well-being of Latinas. Self-reflection, meditation, and mindfulness serve as valuable resources that can help Latina administrators cope with challenges in their career. Some initiatives that can support the well-being of Latinas and staff overall can include mid-day meditation, sessions/resources on reducing stress through mindfulness, and initiatives to tap into

techniques that they already possess such as resiliency and strong interpersonal skills. Institutions can complement Latinas' existing practices with supplemental resources.

While institutional leaders cannot quickly eradicate the structural barriers present in the higher education environment, there are several ways that supervisors and campus leaders can support the career pathways of current and future Latina SSAOs. Supervisors and colleagues of Latina administrators should affirm and recognize the assets Latinas bring from their work experiences outside of higher education and from their families and communities. Supervisors and institutional leaders also play a critical role in supporting and nurturing the professional development of the Latina staff members on their campus. One way to invest in the professional growth and career advancement of Latina administrators is to support and sponsor their participation in professional development opportunities, especially in opportunities specific to women and/or People of Color where they can connect with colleagues with a shared identity. Although many institutions have reduced and/or frozen travels funds in today's economy, institutions should strive to offer financial support for Latinas' participation in these opportunities. Latinas can also engage in low-cost options for professional development such as institutional and regional webinars and leadership development activities as well as staying up to date on news, research, and policies impacting higher education on a local, state, and national level.

The pursuit of a graduate degree, especially a doctoral degree, is an example of a professional development experience that supports Latinas' advancement to senior-level roles. Supervisors can encourage and support Latinas' pursuit of a

doctoral degree by offering flexible work hours so that they can enroll in required coursework and complete other doctoral program milestones. While some institutions can provide full or partial tuition remission as one way to support the pursuit of graduate degrees of their employees, supervisors should also provide their staff with an opportunity to adjust their work schedules as needed without compromising the focus and responsibilities of an individual's role.

Supervisors and colleagues should not underestimate the power they have to foster the career advancement of Latina administrators by providing words of encouragement to pursue new opportunities, as these are opportunities Latinas may not have pursued otherwise without this advice. Due to the limited representation of Latinas in senior-leadership roles, Women of Color mentors have the potential to serve as valuable role models and supports to Latina SSAOs especially when they contend with politics, tokenism, and the intersection of racism and sexism in the higher education setting. Human resources and/or equity/inclusion-related units should also provide the infrastructure and resources needed to institute formal and informal Latina/o networks on-campus and connections with other administrators of color. These networks not only provide Latina SSAOs with an outlet to build community with Latina/o colleagues, but these connections with Latina/o and People of Color colleagues also serve as spaces of resistance and rejuvenation from the inequities and structural barriers they navigate. One way to dismantle the inequities that Latina SSAOs navigate is to ensure that Latina SSAOs receive equitable resources (e.g., fiscal, staff support) in comparison to their cabinet-level colleagues.

Institutional leaders can also enact hiring practices committed to diversifying higher education administration, especially an increased presence of Latinas/os.

While limited in number, Latina SSAOs also benefit from connecting with Latina/o mentors and culturally competent supervisors. Culturally competent leaders and mentors are individuals who affirm Latinas' diverse social identities, leverage the assets Latinas bring with them from their families/communities, and make diversity/equity a priority in their work. In this way, Latina/o mentors and supervisors can also serve as role models Latina SSAOs aspire to emulate in their career. Even if a supervisor or mentor does not share social identities with the Latinas they support, this does not mean that they cannot serve as a valuable guide to Latinas. Given the privileging of White, upper/middle-class norms, knowledge, and networks in the higher education environment, supervisors and mentors should not encourage Latinas to assimilate to these valued norms. Rather, they should affirm the skills, knowledge, and networks that Latinas bring from their families and extended communities. In addition to validating the skills, knowledge, and networks Latinas bring to their institutions, institutional leaders should also recognize the critical role that student affairs/student services play on a college/university campus. These are some of the many ways that supervisors and institutional leaders can support the career pathway of Latinas to the SSAO role.

Implications for professional associations. Professional development experiences play a valuable role in the career advancement and leadership development of Latina SSAOs (see Table 2 for a range of professional development resources participants utilized on p. 343). Professional associations should continue

to collaborate with scholars researching higher education and student affairs administrators, by posting calls for participants to email listservs and social media outlets. Professional associations can also support research in this area by providing research grants. The VPSA Census hosted by NASPA is a helpful tool to understand the demographic backgrounds of current VPSAs. Professional associations such as NASPA and ACPA should maintain longitudinal and current data on the demographics of SSAOs in the U.S. within their membership base. These are important to understanding the demographic changes among SSAOs and changes in Latina representation in senior-level student affairs roles given the large presence of Latinas in the U.S. and their growing presence on college/university campuses.

Professional associations frequently host leadership development institutes (e.g., NASPA, MALCS, ACE) that offer networking opportunities, valuable knowledge, and a space of reflection and rejuvenation. These associations should continue to provide and expand leadership development opportunities to promote Latinas' advancement outside of the institution. Leadership development opportunities targeting women and/or administrators of color are especially beneficial for Latinas by providing them with opportunities to develop their skills and connect with peers and role models who share social identities.

Professional associations also offer an opportunity for Latina SSAOs to connect with Latina/o and female peers for informal mentorship and support through sub-networks within professional associations (e.g., the Latinx/a/o Knowledge Community from NASPA, the Coalition for Women's Identities from ACPA). These sub-networks can take proactive steps to coordinate mentoring opportunities to

intentionally connect Latinas with peers and role models during annual conferences and beyond. NASPA's Center for Women has instituted a Candid Conversations program to expand relationship-building and support among women which can serve as a foundation for future mentoring/networking initiatives.

Implications for higher education/student affairs graduate preparation program faculty. Given the valuable role that graduate preparation programs in higher education and student affairs play in supporting the next generation of the profession, there are ways that faculty in these graduate programs can support the career pathways of Latinas to the SSAO role. This support can begin as early as the recruitment/admissions process. Graduate preparation program faculty can support the next generation of Latina administrators through targeted Latina/o recruitment efforts that expose undergraduate students to a career in student affairs (e.g., Latina/o/x student organizations, initiatives through professional associations such as NUFP through NASPA or NextGen through ACPA, undergraduate courses on student affairs).

The majority of the participants pursued their doctoral degrees part-time while they were employed full-time. Graduate preparation programs should strive to make their programs accessible and adaptable to working professionals to make pursuing a doctoral degree a possibility for Latina administrators who work full-time. Graduate preparation program faculty can market their doctoral programs to institutional, regional, and state-based Latina/o affinity groups to support future Latina PhDs/EdDs. A presence of faculty conducting research on Latina/o/x-centered research can also attract Latinas to particular doctoral programs.

Graduate faculty should also employ diverse pedagogical practices to support current and future Latina administrators and offer opportunities for Latina master's-level students to engage in research and publication writing opportunities, to foster their aspirations to pursue doctoral study. Faculty should provide Latina doctoral students with a strong research foundation to equip them with the skills to complete their dissertations and participate in research throughout their career. In addition to fostering Latinas' research skills, faculty should also connect doctoral students with current SSAOs and other senior-level leaders to expose them to the diverse career pathways one could pursue with a doctorate and shape their career aspirations. Graduate program faculty can also invite practitioners to serve as guest speakers and/or instructors of courses as affiliate/adjunct faculty members based on their areas of expertise to provide a practical perspective for students.

Higher education and student affairs graduate preparation program faculty should strive to infuse access/equity/social justice throughout the curriculum, not only in required diversity or multicultural practice courses due to the importance of social justice work in higher education and student affairs. Graduate preparation programs would also benefit from having and recruiting faculty members who center equity and social justice in their research. In addition to incorporating a social justice lens in the curriculum, graduate faculty should also expose students, especially master's-level students, to multiple functional areas of student affairs and academic affairs work that they could pursue upon graduation beyond residence life. Graduate preparation faculty should encourage students to gain experience across both academic and student affairs to not only understand student services but also to gain experience

collaborating with faculty. Since four-year colleges/universities are the home to graduate preparation programs, graduate program faculty should also provide students with an introduction to the diverse mission and organizational structures of different institutional types (e.g., community college, four-year, Minority Serving Institutions). Students should especially receive exposure to community colleges through guest speakers, class field trips, and course assignments.

Graduate preparation faculty can also support the career pathways of future Latina student affairs administrators by providing knowledge and skills to support their successful career development such as navigating campus politics, networking, negotiation skills, and job search strategies. However, not all Latinas access this type of support. Faculty can connect graduate students with student affairs professionals who can provide supplemental knowledge and support. In addition, graduate preparation program faculty can foster Latina SSAOs' passion for learning by keeping them informed of professional development experiences and opportunities to learn new skills to nurture their professional growth beyond graduation.

Advice for Current and Aspiring Latina SSAOs

The *testimonios* of the seven participants can serve as a source of empowerment to Latinas across the professional pipeline and inspire Latinas to pursue SSAO roles. Four participants currently serve as a SSAO; one participant left her SSAO role to serve as a campus vice president; another serves in academic affairs and teaches as an adjunct faculty member; and another participant recently retired from her SSAO role and plans to stay involved in student affairs professional association leadership and publish in the field. There is much to learn from these participants' diverse journeys. Within the participants' *testimonios* lie *consejos*

[advice] for current and future Latina SSAOs based on their personal, educational, and professional experiences. Women of Color broadly, not solely Latinas/Chicanas, can benefit from these *consejos* to guide their career pathway given the participants' race-gendered experiences in higher education administration. In this section, I will provide an overview of the *consejos* derived from the participants' *testimonios*. Although these quotes below are embedded within the full participant *testimonios*, I drew from my cultural intuition to provide a snapshot of valuable *consejos* for current/aspiring Latina SSAOs. After reflecting upon the participants' *testimonios* and the knowledge and insight they shared with me, I sorted these *consejos* into five areas to guide and inspire Latinas as they traverse their personal and professional journeys.

Take Pride in your Purpose and Leverage your Assets

Stay committed to your purpose for pursuing work in higher education – this can keep you inspired when facing challenges in your career: "My whole purpose is to make sure that more of us [Women of Color] get through the pipeline" (Connie).

Never lose sight of your mission and who you are: "For me, access and equity are going to always be up there in terms of making sure that we mitigate those gaps for students…. Not forgetting where we come from and what our experiences have been, and what we're there for is important" (Coureck).

Never forget what motivated you to pursue this work: "What really focuses me in this role is when I hear the student stories, that if I have an opportunity to influence programs and services because of the role that I have, I feel like I'm getting my reward just by doing this job and I'm giving back myself" (Maria).

Recognize the strengths that you bring from your Latina/o culture to the higher education environment: "I think that's a part of our background and our culture, the ability to collaborate effectively with others and cultivating those skills is definitely beneficial…because oftentimes, in higher ed, we love staying in our silos in our departments and just doing what we're responsible for and not figuring out how to work with others. Students don't experience college in compartments like we do" (Catherine).

Understand the strengths you bring from your intersecting identities (e.g., female, Latina, first-generation): “We need leaders who understand that people learn differently, people need different support systems in order to be successful” (Julia).

Share your story: “I tell my story…. We carry this load on our shoulders where we are representing our communities, in terms of going against that narrative, going against what people may assume or expect, and it is quite rewarding and unexpected oftentimes when I hear back from students that I worked with along the way, who are now graduated or in their own professions, and coming back and talking about what an influence either working with them was on their experience and education. So, that's been something very important to me, in terms of always wanting to give back because of those who gave to me” (Selma).

Tips for Navigating your Career Path in Student Affairs

Take risks in your career: “I was almost finished with my PhD when I decided to leave. It was really hard because they [co-workers] were like a family to me, but I just knew in order to diversify my experience and then potentially serve our community, coming to a community college would be better for us as Latinos and for me” (Catherine).

Timing is key: “There's a lot to be said about understanding others, that political dynamics, emotional intelligence, all that's true, but also looking at the timing and being prepared for opportunities if they come. Then accept them and go for it, because they're not going to come again for a while” (Coureck).

Make your voice heard: “We also need to be those courageous leaders because you're not always going to be greeted with embracing arms. It's just not going to happen. And we have to make sure our voice is heard in as many ways as possible. And it's not about us, really, it's about everyone else whose lives we can impact and just really assist” (Julia).

Be thoughtful and calm when making decisions: “I'm very calm, because when somebody comes to me with a problem, I immediately start processing it. So I don't have an emotional reaction because I'm thinking…. “Okay, how can we look at this? How can we resolve this? How do we address this? What are all the different parts?” (Valerie)

Hiring staff you can trust is critical as a SSAO: “This is a 24/7 job…so you have to have the stamina to want and the wisdom to know what you need involvement in and what you don’t. I said to all my folks, “You are hired to do your job, do it to the best of your ability, and we have boundaries that we set about what I need to know. And just for me, it's the high political impact or risk or reputational risk that I need to know ASAP, something burned, somebody died, something happened” (Maria).

Engage in Professional Development and Research Opportunities

Participate in professional development opportunities: “I would say that I am constantly going to professional learning, conferences, regional, statewide, national conferences and I bring back the things that I learn and share it with others. I promote my folks to also go and then come back and share because I think professional learning is one way to nurture the people that work here and ourselves. When you feel nurtured, you’re a better servant to the students” (Catherine).

Recognize the potential professional development opportunities have to rejuvenate you in your work: “…it [the MALCS[27] summer institutes] re-energized my commitment to the work, I'm like, “This is why I'm here.” Yes, I battle with this administrator or that administrator every day or whatever, but this association always reminded me I'm here for a purpose. I'm here to make sure that my students are getting the best education possible and that they're getting the services they need to ensure that they can do what they need to do in the classroom” (Connie).

Stay open-minded to the potential that professional development opportunities have to foster your career aspirations: “I attended that [Alice Manicur] symposium and I really got a broader perspective of women leadership in student affairs. I also learned that I could do it because I saw all the other women who shared stories about their experience with gender inequality” (Maria).

Completing a doctorate can equip you with skills to navigate higher education administration and inform your decision-making: “One of the things that the doctoral program did for me is that, even though I had that voice…I was making an impact, I wasn't making an impact in the global sense. So having that doctorate and learning what I learned during the program...I knew the information, but having that research to support what your perceptions were, or what your intuition was telling you, as a practitioner to support that research and to be able to speak confidently, that's what the doctoral program did for me” (Selma).

Stay engaged in readings in the field: “It’s also important to keep up with the trends in higher education. So doing a lot of reading, books, journal articles, blogs, anything that you can read...reading is fundamental to staying 'trendy' with what is going on, or up to date on what the issues are, because the issues change over the years and you want to stay fresh” (Julia).

Engage in publishing opportunities and collaborate with others: “I've published all throughout my career because, a) student affairs needs to highlight their good work. We need to demonstrate that we're co-curricular. What we do extends the learning beyond the classroom. And we are impacting students in positive ways, and we do

[27] Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio [MALCS] is an organization of Chicanas/Latinas and Native American women who work in academic and community-based settings. The MALCS summer institute showcases art and research focused on Chicanas/Latinas and Indigenous communities and seeks to foster community and empowerment among attendees (MALCS, 2017).

have good practices that the instructional side can learn from. And then b) to mentor people along the way. What I always do is I have young professionals, either who are working on their doctorate or who just need to learn that process, I always have them partner with me on publications" (Valerie).

Locate Networks of Support

Have a strong support system: "You have to have a good solid system at home, family, and administrative. Your boss has to always support you. I think your spouse or your partner can be a support. To have a strong support system, you need somebody that's close to you who could be your confidant at this level…so your support system really is your partner and your spouse or somebody that's close to you because you need it. You need to break away a little bit from the work because this job is 24/7" (Maria).

Do not forget the valuable role familial support can play in your path: "It's very important to stay connected with your family, continue to be supportive as you make your journey from possibly coming from a low-income to a very much, much more privileged situation like I have been able to gain. I feel blessed that I'm very close and always have been to my family and I've tried to support them as much as possible. So as leaders and in our culture as we move ahead, we need to remember we didn't do it alone and we need to bring other people forward with us, whether it's family or other people" (Julia).

Find supportive supervisors, they have the potential to positively impact your career, especially culturally competent supervisors: "I feel like what was amazing about [Angela] is: a) she believed in me, b) she challenged me, c) she allowed me to bring all my identities to work…. I never planned on being a vice president, but it was [Angela's] belief in me and her support that put me on that trajectory. [Angela] was the first time I had been supervised by a culturally competent woman of color…. That connection with [Angela] made a huge difference in the whole trajectory of my career" (Valerie).

Don't hesitate to seek out mentors: "If you aren't lucky enough to have mentors fall into your lap, find them. They are so important. I never would have made it this far without the people who believed in me…there's no shame in asking someone to mentor you…I always encourage people to do that, because not everyone gets one thrown in their pathway. Sometimes you gotta seek them out" (Connie).

Connect with like-minded colleagues: "Having a social network is really important. Having a social network of people that support you, from all different roles of the line staff, classified, other deans, faculty leadership, and knowing that you have that support, it drives me" (Coureck).

Come together with other Latina/o colleagues to support one another and the next generation of Latina/o leaders: "I have to make a way so that there's more people like us in roles and positions of authority and decision-making. I knew I wasn't the only

Latina who worked here, yea maybe I was the only dean and above me, there wasn't any Latinos in administration but there was Latino faculty and staff. If we all came together, we could do a lot" (Catherine).

Locate off-campus sources of support: "I think that's the important piece about these connections, these external connections, is that oftentimes, especially the higher you go...so who do I report to [as the CSSO[28]]? I report to the superintendent. Am I going to discuss anything that I may have questions or second-guesses or anything about with anyone here? No, absolutely not. So I have to be able to communicate with someone that I trust, and vice versa" (Selma).

Resist Challenges throughout your Career

Do not let others' (mis)perceptions of your leadership impact your experiences and aspirations: "You can't sit here wasting time fretting over whether or not somebody likes you, because at the end of the day, whether they like you or not, if they don't want you there, they don't want you there. You just do what you do" (Connie).

Challenge experiences of adversity through positivity: "We have to be the ones that create the world that we want to see. And so, if I want to see a good and positive world I have to do more in that area and do less in the negative. It doesn't mean that I don't get right into the negativity sometimes and that I get upset and angry, I do all those things but I work myself out of them as quickly as I can. And I try to portray positivity as much as I can rather than negativity because there's enough in the world that you don't want to add more to it. For me, life is too short not to be happy. So if you find yourself in a job where you're not happy, that's where I would say, "move on," because you can go out and just do so many things. There's just so many opportunities" (Julia).

Continue to resist structural barriers and inequities throughout your career: "…discrimination is still alive and well. We have to know ourselves and be able to develop all these networks in order for us to lead, but not forgetting that we are constantly facing various forms of discrimination for ourselves and for our students and for our communities, and not to lose sight of that" (Coureck).

Do not take microaggressions personally: "And so keeping that in mind at this level, one, is not to take it [microaggressions] personal because if you take it personal, then you won't get very far because strategy at the VP level is key and you have to develop strong alliances…but for us as Latinas it's always a little bit more of proving above and beyond that we can still do the job…And so I think it's just navigating that, with that understanding. And letting it roll off your back, and keep doing the job. Otherwise, it'll continually stop you if you take it personal" (Maria).

[28] Chief Student Services Officer (CSSO) is another title for a senior student affairs officer, titles vary by institution.

Stay professional while upholding your dignity when addressing challenges: "So when you experience a microaggression…respond in a way that's professional, that preserves the dignity of everybody involved, but lets them know clearly that they have committed a transgression and they shouldn't do it again…I think I tend to approach it from a more intellectual point of view than emotional, because you can get emotional about that, especially if you're having a bad day and somebody does something ignorant. But it's more intellectual" (Valerie).

Never give up: "Think about how the sacrifice you're making today is going to pay off multi-fold. Just not right now. You've got to hang in there" (Selma).

My *Reflexión* [Reflection]

I culminate this dissertation by offering a *reflexión* [reflection] on my experiences engaging in this research process as this research also informs my career pathway and aspirations in the profession. During the summer of 2015, after shadowing a Latino male vice president in student affairs, my dissertation interests shifted from seeking to focus on Latina first-generation college student experiences to better understanding the experiences of Latina SSAOs, who are one of the few in their positions. Little did I know then how I would be inspired and transformed by conducting this research because of the privilege I had to bear witness to the *testimonios* of seven Latina leaders in higher education and student affairs.

Collecting data for this study was especially reaffirming for me as I had just recently begun a new full-time role at a Predominantly White Institution, where to my knowledge, I am the first Latina staff member they have hired. While I am excited to serve in this role and have an extremely supportive supervisor, this does not take away from feelings I have each day knowing that I am the only one. Bearing witness to the *testimonios* of these Latina SSAOs who were also the only ones, or one of the few, in cabinet-level roles inspires me to recognize the privilege and power I have in being the only one. Their *testimonios* also encourage me to leverage the unique

assets that I bring from my family, community, and lived experiences to make a difference in the lives of the students I serve just as the participants do each day. I look to these participants as role models who advocate endlessly for student success while navigating challenges in their journey through resilience, support, and a drive to support underrepresented student and professionals.

When first putting out a call for participants for this study, the responses that I received were also encouraging and reinforced the importance of conducting this research as I received messages from the participants such as

> "I would be happy to participate in your study."
>
> "I look forward to participating in the phases of your research."
>
> "This is so exciting!"

The words of encouragement I received from participants throughout this dissertation journey also inspired me to continue during periods when I felt like I could not write another word. Some of these words of affirmation that I continue to carry with me included

> "About time someone was researching the experiences of CSSO/CSAOs…looking forward to reading your dissertation as well as seeing you in the position of CSSO/CSAO. We need intelligent and culturally responsive Latinas to take our place."
>
> "I wish you the best of luck and the strength to complete your study. It's a hard road, but well worth it!"
>
> "I am so interested to hear the results of your research. I am glad that researchers are sharing the voices of Latinas through their work."
>
> "I think the work you're doing is awesome, thank you for inviting me to be a participant!"
>
> "I love the idea of another young Latina professional who wants to move up and wants to make a difference, and I wanted to contribute whatever I could to

> help you and your study and to get you motivated to get on your path, wherever that may lead you, and to reach your goals."
>
> "You're doing a great job in a very thoughtful process in the way you're approaching your study, and I'm really proud to be a part of it and honored that you included me."
>
> "Keep going. You're in the home stretch. You can do this!"

These words of encouragement motivated me to persevere and not lose sight of my goals to complete a Ph.D. It was especially powerful for me to connect with the participants as a collective during the videoconference focus group and to witness their laughter and supportive words to one another and to me on this journey.

This study also impacted my professional aspirations during the data collection and analysis process as I gained a deeper understanding of the pathway to senior student affairs leadership and reflect upon whether this is a path I aspire to for myself. This research offered me an opportunity to reflect upon my own career interests and aspirations. While this is something I will continue to think about, I know that I am committed to this work and have a rightful place in higher education administration.

Growing up with the privilege of having supportive parents, I always believed that I could do anything that I set my mind to even when experiencing challenges in my journey. It was reaffirming for me to hear the strength these participants also drew from their families and communities which also fostered their desire to make a difference in the lives of others, especially underrepresented students and professionals. However, it was also disheartening to bear witness to the participants' experiences contending with overt and covert discrimination, tokenism, and feelings of isolation; realities that continue to pervade Latinas' experiences along their

educational and administrative pathways. Despite the challenges that participants navigated in their personal and professional pathways, not once did they let these experiences of adversity negatively impact the pursuit of their goals. The participants' unwavering commitment to pursue their goals and their drive to resist structural barriers throughout their careers motivates me to continue to push through challenges I contend with in my journey by reminding me that I have the strength within me and within my community of support to navigate these challenges. In order to foster social change in our institutions, dismantle deficit views of Latinas/os, and support current/future Latina/o student and professionals, I must resist these challenges and locate networks of support to persist in the profession.

I am honored and appreciative of the opportunity to learn from the *testimonios* of the seven participants and value the connections that I developed with them through conducting this research. Not only did I have the privilege to bear witness to seven individual *testimonios*, but I also had the privilege to bear witness to an empowering collective story. I will conclude this section by (re)sharing a transformative memory I have from conducting this research. One of the participants, Connie, shared with me about her own dissertation experiences researching Latina leaders' experiences. One of the participants from Connie's study imparted to her critical advice that I now carry with me today, "People are not going to believe in you, you believe in yourself. You have the strength to do this. You will do this." These are words of advice that I will harness to remind myself of the strength I have within. After recounting this experience, Connie then commented, "And Molly I'm telling you, *mija*, you got this, and you've got a whole bunch of us who are going to

support you!" These words had a lasting impact on me during the dissertation writing process. Although dissertation writing can feel lonely at times, this message was a reminder to me that I am not alone.

Conducting this research was truly a humbling and inspiring experience. I feel a sense of pride and responsibility in sharing this work with others to support the next generation of Latina leaders. I also intend to continue to carry out my commitment to support the next generation of Latinas in higher education. Just as the participants reminded me, I want to remind the future *doctoras* in the Ph.D./Ed.D. pathway, know that you can do it and you are not alone! Despite the feelings of isolation and uncertainty that can surface at times, you have a community of trailblazers ahead of you! Do not give up! We need you! We are here for you!

TABLES

Table 1

Participant Demographics (n = 7)

Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity	NASPA Region	Number of Years Served as a SSAO
Latina = 6 Chicana = 1	Region III = 1 Region IV-E = 1 Region IV-W = 1 Region VI = 4	Range = 1.5-8.5 years Average # of Years = 4
Highest Degree Attained[29]	**Marital Status**	**Languages Spoken**
Master's = 1 EdD = 2 PhD = 4 JD = 1	Married = 6 Single = 1	English = 2 English and Spanish = 5
Caretaking Responsibilities[30]	**Professional Association Membership**	
Children/Step-Children Extended Family Parents Siblings	• AACRAO (American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers) • ASCA (American School Counselor Association) • ACPA (American College Personnel Association) • HACU (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities)	• NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) • State-based associations for higher education and student affairs administrators • State-based associations for faculty • State-based associations for Latino higher education administrators

[29] Participants could report more than one degree
[30] Participants reported a range of caretaking responsibilities

Table 2

Professional Development Resources Utilized by Participants

Publications to Read
• The Journal of Higher Education • The Chronicle • College Completion Agenda • Yosso's model of Community Cultural Wealth: Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *8*(1), 69-91.
Leadership Development Institutes/Conferences
• ACE Spectrum Aspiring Leaders Program • NASPA's Alice Manicur Symposium • Harvard Leadership Institutes through the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) • National Community College Hispanic Council Fellowship Program • HACU Conference • NASPA Conference • NCORE Conference • MALCS Summer Institute • Regional and state-based conferences and leadership development programs
Other
• Pursue graduate studies • Serve on an editorial board • Review and submit conference proposals • Present at national conferences • Engage in publication opportunities from your dissertation research and based on your professional interests

FIGURES

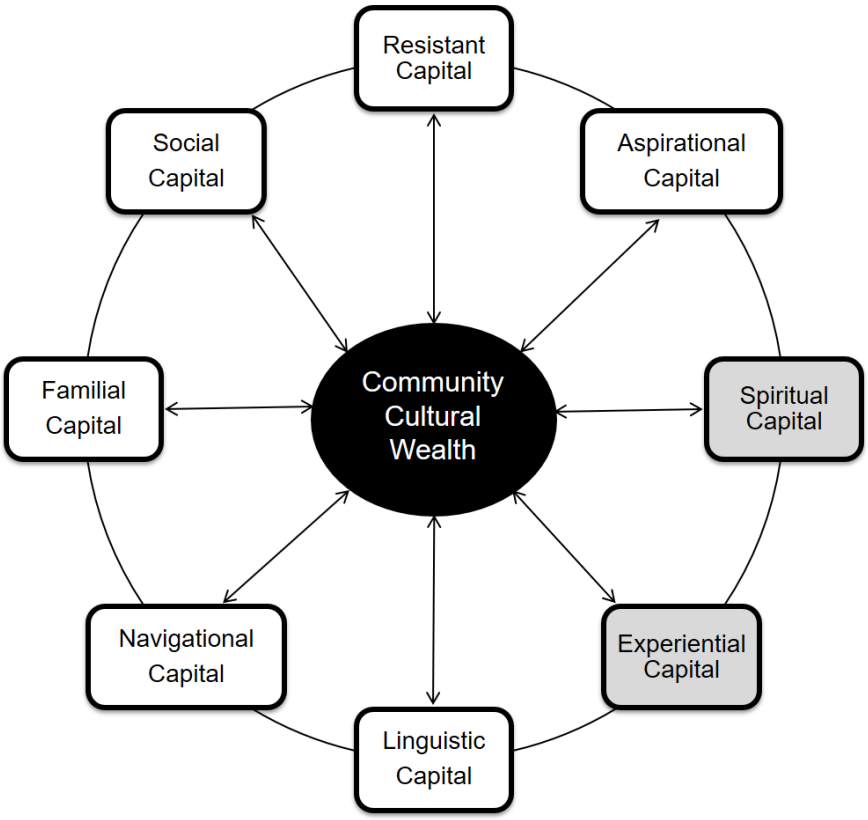


Figure 1. The conceptual framework guiding this study: community cultural wealth (adapted from Yosso, 2005)

Figure 2. Timeline of data collection and analysis processes

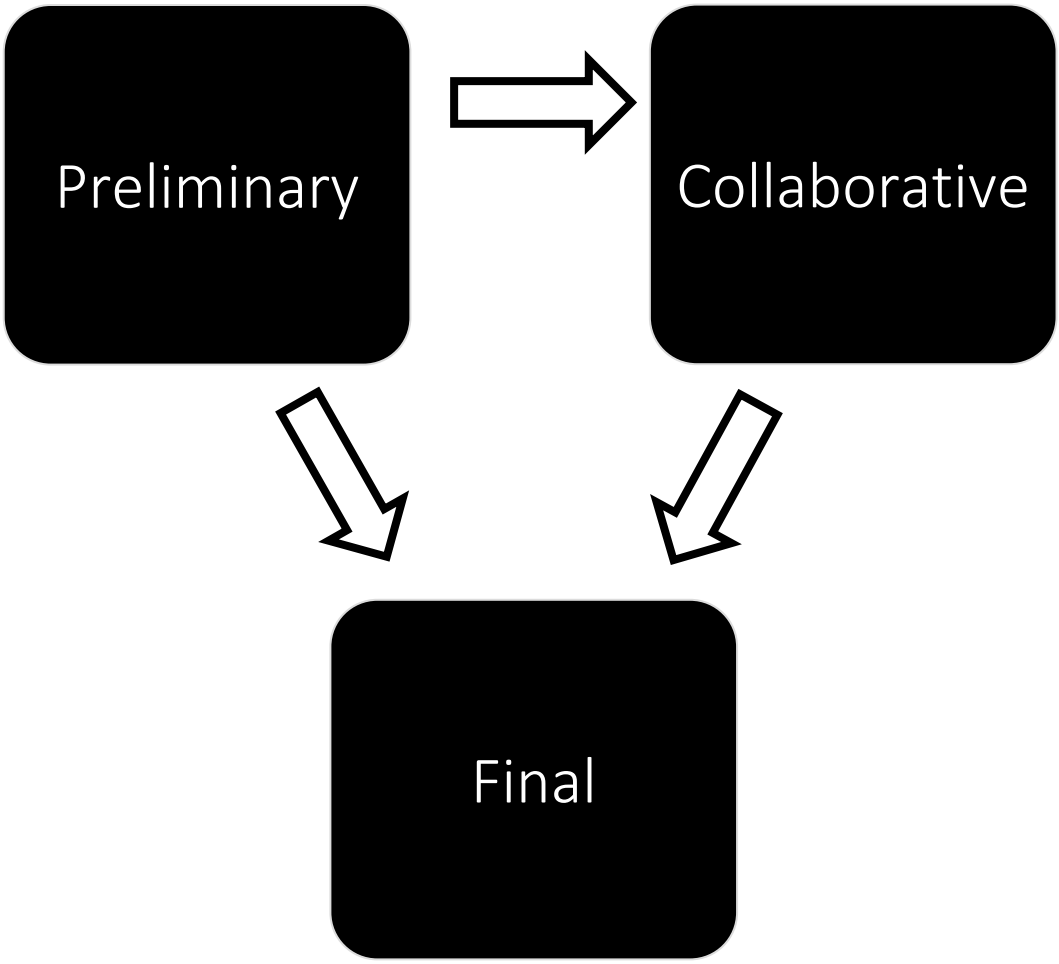
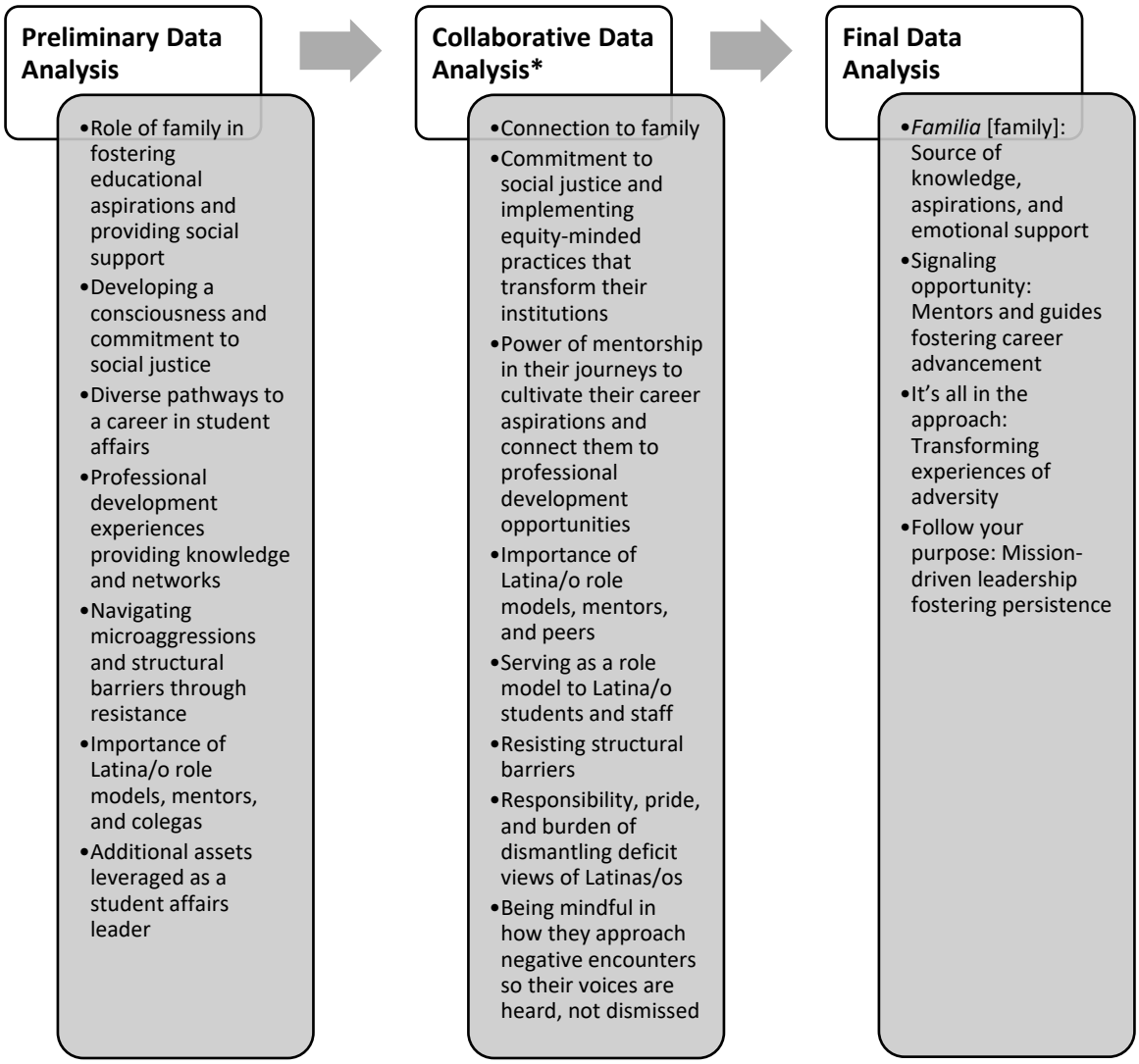


Figure 3. Visual of three-phase data analysis process utilized in this study adapted from Pérez Huber (2010)



*Salient themes from the participants' conversations during virtual focus group session

Figure 4. How the themes evolved throughout the data analysis phases

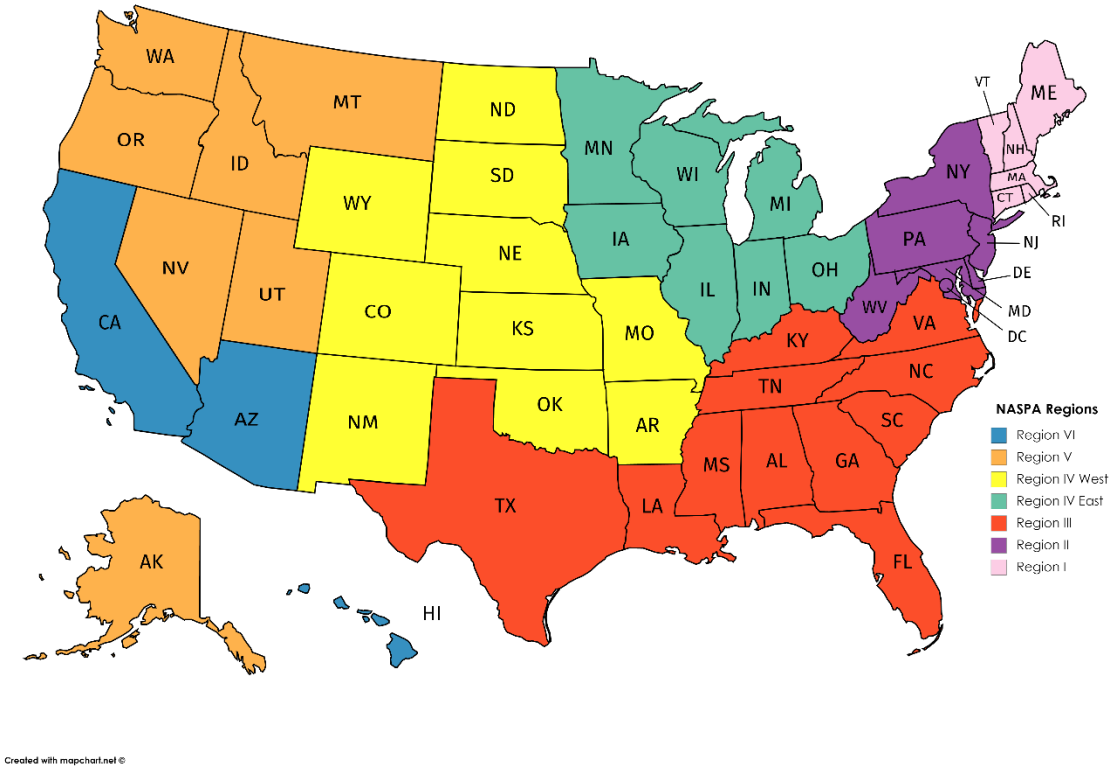


Figure 5. Map of the U.S. by NASPA regions

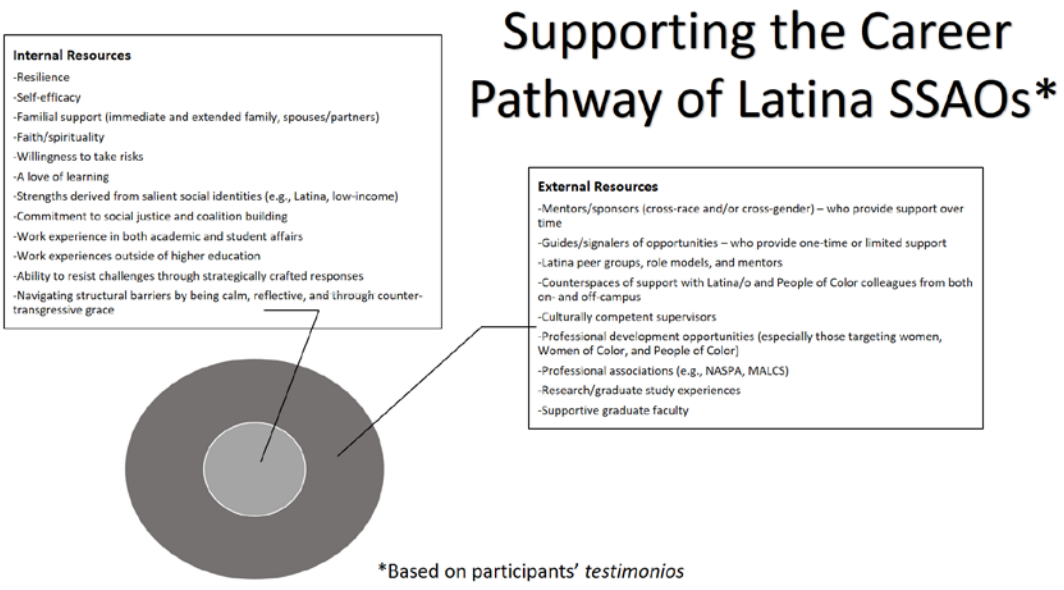


Figure 6. Resources the participants benefited from in their career pathway to the SSAO role

APPENDIX A

Range of Programs and Areas that a SSAO can Oversee (CAS, 2016)

- Academic Advising
- Auxiliary Services
- Campus Activities
- Campus Information and Visitor Services
- Campus Religious and Spiritual Services
- Career Services
- Civic Engagement and Service-Learning
- Clinical Health Services
- College Honor Societies
- College Union
- Commuter and Off-Campus Living
- Conference and Events
- Counseling Services
- Dining Services
- Disability Support Services
- Financial Aid
- Fraternity and Sorority Advising
- Health Promotion Services
- Housing and Residential Life
- International Student Services
- Learning Assistance Services
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Services
- Orientation
- Multicultural Student Services
- Parent and Family Services
- Recreational Sports
- Student Conduct
- Student Leadership
- Undergraduate Admissions
- TRIO and Other Educational Opportunity Programs
- Undergraduate Research
- Women and Gender Student Services

APPENDIX B

Recruitment Letter for Association Representatives

Dear _____,

My name is Molly Morin and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am seeking participants for my dissertation research focused on the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs) in higher education. I am requesting your assistance in sending this recruitment letter to your e-mail listserv to help identify Latina CSAOs that meet the following criteria:

(1) Self-identify as a Latina or Hispanic woman
(2) Hold current or former employment as a Chief Student Affairs Officer at a college/university in the U.S. (e.g., Dean of Students, Vice President of Student Affairs, Vice President of Student Services). A CSAO is the top student affairs administrator at an institution who frequently reports directly to the president or chancellor of their institution and may serve on the president's cabinet.
(3) Have worked a minimum of 10 years in the field of higher education/student affairs administration

Participants in this study will be asked to:

(1) Complete a demographic form
(2) Participate in one 90-minute initial individual interview (conducted by phone or in-person)
(3) Review and edit their transcript to ensure accuracy
(4) Participate in one 90-minute videoconference focus group with all participants to provide feedback and reflection on the preliminary analysis of the data
(5) Participate in one 60-minute follow-up individual interview (conducted by phone or in-person)

As a Latina administrator, I recognize the importance of illuminating the narratives of Latina CSAOs who remain underrepresented in top levels of student affairs leadership. I am passionate about this research and hope you will assist me in identifying individuals interested in participating.

The risks of the study are believed to be minimal as the interview will provide a space for participants to reflect on their past and current experiences. Participation is completely voluntary and participant information will be kept confidential through the use of a pseudonym.

Interested participants can e-mail me at: **mmorin@umd.edu** and I will send prospective participants with a link to a secure informed consent form and demographic form.

Thank you in advance for considering this request. For questions or further information, please contact:

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APPENDIX C

Recruitment Flyer for Social Media

Hello everyone,

My name is Molly Morin and I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am currently seeking participants for my dissertation research focused on the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs).

I am looking for Latina CSAOs that meet the following criteria:

(1) Self-identify as a Latina or Hispanic woman
(2) Hold current or former employment as a Chief Student Affairs Officer at a college/university in the U.S. (e.g., Dean of Students, Vice President of Student Affairs, Vice President of Student Services). A CSAO is the top student affairs administrator at an institution who frequently reports directly to the president or chancellor of their institution and may serve on the president's cabinet.
(3) Have worked a minimum of 10 years in the field of higher education/student affairs administration

Participants in this study will be asked to: complete a short demographic form, participate in one 90-minute initial individual interview (conducted by phone or in-person), review and edit their transcript to ensure accuracy, participate in one 90-minute videoconference focus group with all participants to provide feedback and reflection on the preliminary analysis of the data, and participate in one 60-minute follow-up individual interview (conducted by phone or in-person).

If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions, please e-mail me at: **mmorin@umd.edu**

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX D

Consent Form to be Signed Electronically through Qualtrics

Project Title	*En Su Propia Voz* [In Her Own Voice]: Illuminating the Community Cultural Wealth of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs)
Purpose of the Study	This research is being conducted by Molly F. Morin at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you identify as a current or former Latina/Hispanic woman Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) in a U.S. college/university with at least 10 years of experience as a higher education/student affairs administrator. A CSAO is the top student affairs administrator at an institution who frequently reports directly to the president or chancellor of their institution and may serve on the president's cabinet. The purpose of this study is to expand research on the experiences of Latina administrators in higher education and student affairs by better understanding the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina CSAOs in U.S. higher education and the circumstances that promote or hinder their advancement.
Procedures	The procedures will include completion of a demographic form, participation in one initial individual interview, transcript review, a virtual focus group, and an individual follow-up interview. All interviews will take place in-person or over the phone depending on your geographic location and the focus group will take place virtually via videoconferencing. Both individual interviews and the focus group will be audio-recorded. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. Please check mark each box below to indicate which data collection procedure(s) you consent to participate in. After signing this informed consent form electronically, you will be directed to complete a demographic form: Yes No ☐ ☐ Participate in one 90-minute initial individual interview (conducted by phone or in-person) ☐ ☐ Review and edit your transcript to ensure accuracy ☐ ☐ Participate in one 90-minute videoconference focus group with all participants to provide feedback and reflection on the preliminary analysis of the data ☐ ☐ Participate in one 60-minute follow-up individual interview (conducted by phone or in-person)
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There may be some risks from participating in this research study. It is possible that you may feel uncomfortable or anxious discussing

	issues regarding your personal and professional experiences or personal background. I will not disclose your actual name, position title, or any other identifying information gathered during data collection. I will utilize pseudonyms for all participants.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits to the participants for participating in this study. However, the data collected from this study will be beneficial in understanding the career experiences and trajectories of Latina/Hispanic women in U.S. higher education. You may benefit from sharing about your personal and professional experiences and expanding the limited body of research on Latina/Hispanic women administrators in higher education.
Confidentiality	To ensure and protect privacy, the identities of participants will remain confidential. The principal investigator will ask you to select a pseudonym to be used throughout the interview process. Actual names and other forms of identifiable information (i.e., e-mail addresses, title) will not appear on interview data and in potential future reports, articles, and publications. If a report or article is written about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. The principal investigator will be the only person with access to the recordings and the recordings will be destroyed when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of five years after data collection. Data will be securely stored on the principal investigator's hard drive on a password protected computer, which will be used solely for the research study. All data will be destroyed (shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of three years after data collection.
Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the **principal investigator**: Molly F. Morin 535 W. Michigan Street – Room IT 475K, Indianapolis, IN 46202 **mmorin@umd.edu** (XXX) XXX-XXXX

	Dissertation Chair: Dr. Michelle M. Espino Lira 3214 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742 **mespino@umd.edu** (301) 405-2860
Participant Rights	If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **University of Maryland College Park** **Institutional Review Board Office** **1204 Marie Mount Hall** **College Park, Maryland, 20742** **E-mail: irb@umd.edu** **Telephone: (301) 405-0678** This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.
Statement of Consent	Selecting "I Consent" below indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. If you do not agree to participate, please select "I Do Not Consent." You will receive an electronic copy of this consent form via e-mail for your personal records. If you select "I Consent" this will serve as an electronic signature to consent to your involvement in this research for the procedures you responded "yes" to above under the "Procedures" section. You will then be directed to complete a demographic form to provide the principal investigator with some additional information including contact information and demographic background information. If you would prefer to submit these items in a different format, please contact the principal investigator at: **mmorin@umd.edu**. ☐ I Consent ☐ I Do Not Consent

APPENDIX E

Demographic Form Information Collected through Qualtrics

- Name:
- Preferred email address:
- Preferred contact phone number:
- Preferred method to schedule individual interview(s) (check one):
    - Contact me at the phone number provided above
    - Contact me at the email address provided above
    - Contact my scheduler – please provide their contact name, phone number, and email address below:
    - Other – please describe: _____
- Pseudonym (please select a name that you would like me to use when representing your narrative):
- Age:
- Race/Ethnicity:
- Gender identity:
- Sexual identity:
- Hometown:
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) education levels. Please describe:
- Language(s) spoken:
- Current relationship/marital status:
- Do you have any children or other care-giving responsibilities? Yes (please describe) or No
- Number of years you have worked in higher education/student affairs:
- Number of years you have served as a Chief Student Affairs Officer:
- Highest degree attained:
- Please list the professional associations you are a member of, if any:
- Are there any additional identities or information you would like to share? If so, please describe:

APPENDIX F

Interview Confirmation E-mail for Initial Interview

Dear _____,

Thank you again for your interest and participation in my study titled "*En Su Propia Voz* [In Her Own Voice]: Illuminating the Community Cultural Wealth of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs)."

This e-mail serves as a confirmation of my 90-minute **PHONE/IN-PERSON** interview with you for my dissertation study. We are scheduled to connect at **DATE TIME**. For phone interviews, you will call the following number: (641) 715-0632 and then enter the following access code: 242480

Please let me know if you have any questions in the meantime. Thank you. Have a great day!

Take care,
Molly

Molly F. Morin, M. Ed.
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
Student Affairs Concentration
University of Maryland, College Park

APPENDIX G

Interview Protocol for Initial Interview

Description of Study and Pre-Interview Procedures Script

Thank you for allowing me to interview you for my dissertation research focused on the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers. This study will help to expand research on the experiences of Latina administrators in higher education.

As mentioned in the consent form, this interview will be recorded. I will not ask you to give your name, position title, or institution affiliation. If you do mention any identifying information, I will change it to a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality once you review the transcript. I will also not use your name or that of your college/university in any research reports, presentations, or publications that are produced from doing this research.

This interview will take approximately 90 minutes and your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participating in the interview or answering a specific question at any time. Do you have any questions I may answer before we begin? [once question(s) are addressed: let the participant know to please hold one moment and I will begin recording]

Interview Guide

[These questions will serve as a semi-structured guide, but I want to ensure that the participants guide the direction and flow of the conversation as she narrates her *testimonio*. Thus, the questions in **bold** will be asked in every interview to provide a baseline for analysis and so the participants can guide the interview conversation].

Personal/Family Background (important for CCW framework/testimonio design)

1) **Please start off by telling me about your personal background and family upbringing.**

2) **In what ways did your family or community shape your educational aspirations?**
   a) What about your career aspirations?

3) **What type of knowledge or skills do you feel you learned from your family or community that played a role in your educational and professional pathways?** (e.g., *dichos* [sayings], certain values, beliefs about life)

a) Who taught you this?
b) How did they teach you this?
c) In what ways, if at all, have you utilized this knowledge in your career pathway to the CSAO role?

Career Pathway/Lived Experiences as a CSAO (critical for research questions/purpose of study)

4) What led you to pursue a career in student affairs and higher education?
a) Were there any particular people or experiences that influenced you to pursue a career as a student affairs administrator?

5) When and how did you make the decision to pursue a career as a CSAO?
a) What motivated you to pursue a career as a CSAO?
b) Were there any particular people or experiences that influenced your aspiration to pursue a career as a CSAO?
c) Who, if anyone, encouraged or discouraged you to apply for the CSAO role?

Challenges/Supports in Career Pathway (critical for research questions and CCW framework)

6) As you think about your career pathway, are there any particular individuals who come to mind that have helped you in your pathway to the CSAO role (e.g., mentors, supervisors, colleagues, friends)?
a) In what ways have they supported you?
b) What type of knowledge or skills did they provide?
c) What is the gender and race/ethnicity of these mentors(s)/supporter(s)?

7) Can you tell me about some of the informal or formal networks you are a part of?
a) What knowledge or skills have these networks provided to you in your career pathway?

8) Were there any formal training opportunities such as graduate school or professional development opportunities that supported you in your career pathway to the CSAO role?
a) What type of support did this/these opportunities provide?
b) Who, if anyone, encouraged you to pursue these opportunities?

9) Are there any organizations or programs that supported you in your career pathway to the CSAO role that you haven't mentioned already (e.g., coaching, fellowships, leadership institutes)?

a) What type of support did this organization/program provide?
b) Who, if anyone, encouraged you to get connected to this organization/program?
c) Were there any professional development opportunities that you wanted to take part in but chose not to pursue? Why not?

10) Are there any particular "inner resources" or personal traits you would describe that helped you navigate challenges or stressful events in your career pathway?

a) Can you talk about a time in your career pathway to the CSAO role when you used your "inner resources" to move through a challenge?
b) Was there ever a time you called upon or used spirituality to move through a challenge?

Race-Gendered Experiences/Navigating Systemic Barriers (critical for CFE lens)

11) *In* what ways, if at all, did your gender, race/ethnicity, or other identities shape your career pathway to the CSAO role?

a) Did you ever feel there were any obstacles or barriers to believing that pursuing a career as a CSAO was possible for you?
b) How did you navigate through these challenges?

12) Have you had to face any racism, sexism, classism, or other systemic barriers in your career pathway to the CSAO role?

a) Is there a particular memory or story that comes to mind?
b) How did you navigate this experience?

13) What other challenges, if any, did you face in your career pathway to the CSAO role?

a) How did you navigate these challenges?
b) What, if anything, motivates you to find ways to navigate these challenges?
c) Who provides support, if anyone?

14) Are there any resources or supports you wish you had received to navigate challenges you may have experienced in your career pathway, if any?

15) Is there anything else that you would like to share about your career pathway as a Latina CSAO that would help me to better understand your experiences?

<u>Post-Interview Script</u>

Thank you again for taking time out of your day to interview with me. If you have any questions after today, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail or phone. Once your interview has been transcribed and verified I will e-mail it to you to ensure accuracy. Then once all data are collected and I have had the opportunity to begin preliminary analysis of the data I will reach out to all participants to schedule a time for the videoconferencing collaborative focus group.

Thank you again for your participation and interest in this research. Have a great rest of your day!

APPENDIX H

Transcript Verification E-mail

Hello **NAME OF PARTICIPANT**,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study titled "*En Su Propia Voz* [In Her Own Voice]: Illuminating the Community Cultural Wealth of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs)"

Attached you will find a copy of your interview transcript for review. I ask that you read through it to ensure accuracy. You are also welcome to add to this transcript if there is any additional information or context that is beneficial for me to know about as I read your *testimonio* or any additional reflections you would like to share. If there are any edits you would like me to make to the transcript, please do so using track changes and let me know by **INSERT DATE OF TWO WEEKS FROM WHEN THIS IS SENT**. If you do not have any edits that you would like to make, you can also confirm with me by noting no changes are needed. If I do not receive a reply from you I will not make changes to your transcript.

Also, as a note you may see highlighted information in your transcript. I have highlighted identifying information to edit on my end after the transcript has been verified to maintain confidentiality. After all transcripts from all participants have been verified and I had the opportunity to conduct a preliminary analysis of the data I will send you a copy of my preliminary findings as well as reach out to all participants to schedule a 90-minute videoconference session at a date/time that works best for everyone.

Thank you for your time. Have a great day!

Take care,
Molly

Molly F. Morin, M. Ed.
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
Student Affairs Concentration
University of Maryland, College Park

APPENDIX I

Preliminary Data Analysis Review E-mail

Hello **NAME OF PARTICIPANT**,

Thank you for verifying your interview transcript. I am looking forward to the videoconference focus group session that will be held on **DATE** **TIME** and accessed using the following link: **INSERT WEBSITE LINK**

Attached you will find a copy of the preliminary findings and themes that emerged from my individual interviews with all the participants. Please take the time to read through this document before the focus group session. During the focus group session, there will be an opportunity to share your reflection and personal reactions to these findings as well as your experiences narrating your *testimonio* to me. My intent is to provide an authentic representation of all participants' experiences as Latina CSAOs.

To protect the confidentiality of the participants, please also note that I utilized pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

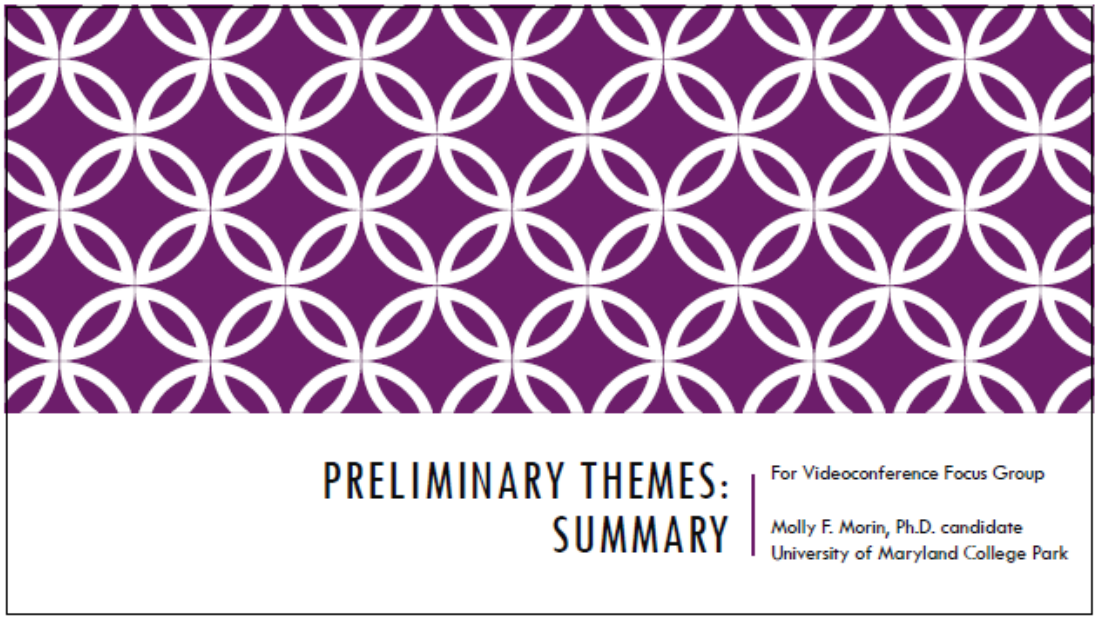
Thank you for your time. Have a great day!

Take care,
Molly

Molly F. Morin, M. Ed.
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
Student Affairs Concentration
University of Maryland, College Park

APPENDIX I CONT'D

Preliminary Data Analysis Review E-mail Cont'd: Summary of Preliminary Themes for Focus Group Attachment Emailed to Participants



Background on the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a deeper understanding of the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina CSAOs in U.S. higher education and the circumstances that promote or hinder their advancement. I was particularly interested in learning more about the resources and supports that participants benefited from, the challenges participants experienced, and the extent to which structural barriers (e.g., racism, sexism) shaped the career pathway and experiences of participants.

Background on Participant Sample

Seven Latinas who currently or formerly held the role of Chief Student Affairs Officer/Chief Student Services Officer participated in this study. Participants held a range of titles including: Vice President of Student Affairs, Vice President of Student Services, and Dean of Students. All participants were of Mexican/Mexican-American descent and have worked extensively in the field of higher education and student affairs. Participants had a range of 22-36 years of experience working in the field, with an average of 27 years. The combined higher education and student affairs work experience for this group of participants is 190 years!

Preliminary Analysis

After all initial interviews had been completed, transcribed, and verified for accuracy, I conducted multiple readings of participant transcripts. By drawing from my cultural intuition and utilizing Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model as my conceptual framework, seven themes emerged from multiple readings of the transcripts in this preliminary analysis phase. A summary of each theme is provided for your review. My intent when presenting the findings is to provide an overview of each individual's journey, her community cultural wealth, and then a summary of the themes that surfaced across the group.

THEME 1: ROLE OF FAMILY IN FOSTERING EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS AND PROVIDING SOCIAL SUPPORT: "MY FAMILY GAVE ME A SENSE OF LOVE" (JULIA)

All participants cited the important knowledge, skills, and support their parents, especially their mothers, played in their personal and professional journeys instilling within them the importance of education, the value of a hard work ethic, appreciation of their culture, and encouragement to never give up on their dreams. Six out of the seven participants were also first-generation college students, which fostered their aspirations to complete a college degree even though two participants described navigating a nontraditional educational pathway. Two of the participants also described the valuable knowledge and guidance their older siblings provided in their college application and transition process. One participant described the valuable knowledge that her uncle provided in her higher education journey especially with regards to how to navigate discriminatory experiences that she continues to carry with her in her career. Three of the participants also described the vital support their spouse provided to them given the high-level demands of their role as a CSAO/CSSO.

THEME 2: DEVELOPING A CONSCIOUSNESS AND COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE: "I WAS ALREADY AN ACTIVIST" (CATHERINE)

All of the participants described a commitment to social justice and equity, beginning as early as high school. Participants cited their personal background as Latinas, growing up low-income, and being a first-generation college student as a core impetus for their commitment to promoting access and equity in the higher education environment. Their lived experiences provide them with an ability to relate to and empathize with students from these backgrounds, drove them to conduct research on underrepresented populations, and serve in administrative roles in their career where they could carry out their passion and commitment to equity-related efforts. For example, five out of the seven participants held roles advising in or leading multicultural/equity/access-focused programs in their career pathway to the CSAO role. Of the six participants who have completed a doctoral degree, five of them conducted research on underrepresented populations (e.g., Latino students, Latino families, student veterans), expanding the knowledge base in this area. Four participants described their experiences in high school and college with initiatives and groups that were committed to promoting the access and leadership development of Latina/o and underrepresented students. The participants carry their consciousness and commitment to equity and social justice into their everyday work. This commitment to access and equity especially motivated the participants who work in the community college setting to lead and serve in this institutional type since it this is where many Latina/o, first-generation, and low-income students begin their higher education journey.

THEME 3: DIVERSE PATHWAYS TO A CAREER IN STUDENT AFFAIRS: "SO I CAN HANG AROUND WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS MY WHOLE LIFE?" (VALERIE)

Participants found their way to the field of student affairs in a variety of ways. Four participants described a more traditional pathway into student affairs, as a result of their on-campus work experiences and involvement in student clubs/organizations. Two participants found their way to work in higher education and student affairs after working in other industries. One participant served as a faculty member before pursuing a role in student affairs leadership. Across the sample, participants described other career pathways they intended to pursue before deciding to pursue a career in student affairs including: school counselor, therapist, and faculty member. Regardless of what led each participant into pursuing a career in student affairs, what was common for six of the seven participants is the important role that social connections play in providing guidance and knowledge to pursue a career in student affairs as well as providing knowledge about open positions in student affairs. These social connections include: friends, former colleagues, former supervisors, former advisors. and mentors. These participants held a variety of positions in higher education/student affairs before pursuing their role as a CSAO/CSSO including: advisor, counselor, coordinator, assistant director, associate director, director, assistant dean, associate dean, and dean-level roles. Participants held these roles in a variety of areas across student and academic affairs such as: residence life, financial aid, research, assessment, student life, admissions, outreach, academic advising, and state and federal programs serving first-generation and low-income students. Their breadth of experiences along with support, knowledge, and networks from mentors, supervisors, and colleagues in the field fostered their aspirations to pursue a role as a senior student affairs administrator. One participant also described the valuable role her dissertation chair provided in offering her valuable research related experiences that would help her advance to the vice presidency. Three of the participants also aspire to pursue a presidency role in the future.

THEME 4: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES PROVIDING KNOWLEDGE AND NETWORKS: "YOU REALLY NEED A PHD IF YOU WANT TO BE A VICE PRESIDENT OF STUDENT AFFAIRS" (MARIA)

Participants described being a member of a variety of national and statewide professional associations. While the level of involvement in professional development experiences varied across the participant sample, all participants described the valuable role professional development opportunities play in providing them with access to knowledge, skills, and networks that have served as resources to them in their career pathway to the CSAO/CSSO role. These networks and experiences provided them with vital support in navigating challenges they have faced in their career. Involvement in professional associations also provided participants opportunities to pursue leadership roles, engage in publishing/writing opportunities, and develop fundraising skills. National and regional conferences and leadership institutes that targeted women, People of Color, and Latinas/os respectively were cited as key to their professional development and growth by providing them with an opportunity to connect with individuals from a similar background and learn from presenters from a similar background. Some of the knowledge that these institutes provided include: leadership development, budgeting, finance, job search guidance, the need to pursue a doctoral degree, and how to navigate gendered or racialized experiences. Two participants described the benefits gained from a statewide conference that provided them with the knowledge to serve as a senior administrator in the community college setting. One participant described an interest in attending national and regional conferences in the future once she has more time that relates to student affairs. However, in the meantime, she has benefited from district-level meetings with other CSAOs/CSSOs as her source of professional development to connect with colleagues who are navigating these cabinet-level positions and challenges that may come up in their daily experiences in this role. Another participant described not being involved in traditional student affairs professional associations but gained support and knowledge through her involvement in a Chicana feminist group which was inspiring.

THEME 5: NAVIGATING MICROAGGRESSIONS AND STRUCTURAL BARRIERS THROUGH RESISTANCE: "OH, I DON'T EVEN THINK OF YOU AS LATINA…YOU'RE JUST SO SMART" (CONNIE)

When discussing the challenges that participants faced in their career pathway the challenges that all participants described centered around contending with structural barriers such as sexism, racism, ageism, and microaggressions in their personal and professional journeys. Three participants also described navigating experiences of tokenization as well in providing additional race-related service, service that their White colleagues are not called upon to provide. Some of these structural barriers and microaggressions participants experienced include: assumptions that a Latino/Hispanic surname provides automatics access to career opportunities, questioning of their credentials because of a Latino/Hispanic name, and assumptions that they did not hold a doctorate. One participant described navigating classism since high school, while another participant described navigating racism in another setting before working in higher education. To navigate these challenges, participants drew strength from within and benefited from words of encouragement and support from family members and colleagues as they dealt with these challenges head on. One participant described also contending with *machismo*, illuminating the patriarchy present within the Latino community. Rather than letting these experiences with structural barriers deter them from pursuing their goals and advancing in their career, they navigated these challenges head on as they pushed forward to resist these microaggressions and stereotypes in their journey through support, spirituality, resilience, and strong coping skills. One participant mentioned that in addition to these external structural barrier challenges, she also contended with internal challenges of self-doubt and recognized that when a Person of Color fails, the community fails and although this is not fair this is the reality in current society.

THEME 6: IMPORTANCE OF LATINA/O ROLE MODELS, MENTORS, AND COLEGAS: "I SAW OTHER LATINAS WHO WERE EITHER COORDINATORS OR PRESIDENTS" (COURECK)

A common theme that came up across the participant sample was the presence of Latina/o support networks and role models. This included a range of role models and supports for the participant sample including: a Latina president, Latina board of trustee member, Latina/o colleagues, Latina supervisor, statewide Latina leadership group, Latina/o colleagues from professional association involvements, and Latina sorority sisters. These Latina/o colleagues and role models offered a variety of support such as: fostering their career aspirations to advance in their career, providing advice on navigating challenges that arise in their career, sharing knowledge about opportunities to pursue and skills needed to be a competitive candidate for future positions, and how to navigate campus politics. One participant also described how since she is the only Latina in senior administration, this has led younger Latina/o colleagues to reach out to her to serve as a support and role model for them. This same participant described how not all Latinas/os innately provide support to her or are as committed to equity efforts, as she has met Latinas/os who have forgotten about where they come from and assimilated. Four participants described their involvement in Latina/o related organizations as an undergraduate and one participant explained how her connections with Latina/o doctoral students helped guide her into a career in higher education administration. Given the limited number of Latina CSAOs/CSSOs in the country, these connections with other Latinas/os in higher education provides the participants with valuable knowledge, skills, and support. For the two participants who benefited from mentoring from a Latina president, seeing a Latina in this role also fostered their career aspirations to become a president.

THEME 7: ADDITIONAL ASSETS LEVERAGED AS A STUDENT AFFAIRS LEADER: "THAT WAS PROBABLY ONE OF THE BEST DECISIONS I MADE FOR MYSELF" (SELMA)

While participants described a variety of supports and resources they drew from, there were additional strengths that participants mentioned they possess that serve as assets to them as a CSAO/CSSO. For example, once stepping into a management level position, one participant recognized the importance of pursuing an MBA to gain valuable knowledge in supervision and management that would serve her well throughout her career. Another participant pursued a law degree to help prepare her for a career in the community college setting especially given the way that state policies influence public institutions. Four of the participants also had work experience in academic affairs which provided them with valuable knowledge in working with faculty and getting exposed to research, publishing, and grant-writing. Additionally, another participant worked in community non-profits before pursuing higher education administration roles, and this knowledge of community partnerships has allowed her to build connections with local agencies that can provide social services to students. One participant also cited the vital skills and knowledge that she gained from her service in the Marines. While one participant had an innate affinity towards research since her undergraduate experiences, six participants described how pursuing a doctoral degree provided them with added research skills. Lastly, while perseverance and a drive to succeed were qualities that helped participants navigate their own higher education experiences and advance in their career, one participant also described the strengths she brings as a CSAO due to being an introvert.

APPENDIX J

Focus Group Reminder E-mail
(To be Sent Three Days Before Focus Group)

Hello **NAME OF PARTICIPANT**,

Thank you for your participation in my dissertation study. This is a reminder e-mail that the 90-minute videoconference focus group session will take place on **Thursday, August 31st at 10-11:30 a.m. PST/11 a.m.-12:30 p.m. MT/12-1:30 p.m. CT** and accessed using the following link: **https://IU.zoom.us/j/612845992**

Attached you will find a copy of the preliminary findings and themes that emerged from my individual interviews with all the participants that I previously shared. Please take the time to read through this document before the focus group session. During the focus group session, there will be an opportunity to share your reflection and personal reactions to these findings as well as your experiences narrating your *testimonio* to me. My intent is to provide an authentic representation of all participants' experiences as Latina CSAOs.

Thank you – look forward to seeing you at the videoconference session. Have a great day!

Take care,
Molly

Molly F. Morin, M. Ed.
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
Student Affairs Concentration
University of Maryland, College Park

APPENDIX K

Focus Group Overview and Protocol

Description of Study and Pre-Focus Group Procedures Script

Thank you all again for your participation in my dissertation research. I am looking forward to your feedback on the preliminary findings that I shared with you all because it is my goal to represent all of your *testimonios* authentically. Your feedback and insight will help me to shape the findings of this research.

As mentioned in the consent form, this focus group will be recorded. I also recognize that some of you may know one another and, while anonymity cannot be maintained, I ask that everything that is shared in this space is held in confidence and remains confidential.

This focus group is scheduled for approximately 90 minutes and again your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from participating at any time. Are there any questions I may answer before we begin? [after addressing any question(s) I will then let participants know that I am beginning the recording]

Focus Group Procedures Script

The purpose of this virtual focus group is to provide a space for reflection, reaction, and community building. I wanted to bring the larger group of participants for this research together for a collaborative data analysis session to hear your reactions to the preliminary themes. I would like to kick off this session by asking each of you to go around and introduce to yourself to the group and to think about the stories and memories that you shared with me during our interview together. As you introduce yourself, please also take a minute or two to briefly share with the group a story or memory that resonated with you from the individual *testimonio* interview [provide time for each person to go around and share].

[After everyone has the opportunity to share, I will then ask the group]:

- Listening to the stories and memories of your *colegas* [colleagues] here, what thoughts, feelings, or reactions come to mind?
- What was it like for you to share your *testimonio* with me?

Thank you so much. I will now provide a brief overview of the preliminary findings identified in my preliminary analysis of the data that I shared with you all electronically 2 weeks ago [provide overview]. I would like to open the space for personal reactions and feedback to these preliminary findings.

[Pose the following question to the group]:

- To what extent do these preliminary findings and themes align with your own professional and personal pathways as a Latina CSAO?

[Then pose the following question to the group]:

- Can you share with me if you think these themes from my preliminary analysis provide an authentic representation of your lived experiences and career pathways to the CSAO role?

[Provide space for discussion, then ask]:

- Is there anything you would like to add so that the findings are an accurate and authentic representation of your experiences as a Latina CSAO?
- What was it like for you to connect with fellow Latina CSAOs in this way?

Note: Rather than following a semi-structured focus group protocol, I want to leave this space open and flexible for a conversation, a *plática*. However, if the dialogue is slow these are some potential questions I can draw from:

- In what ways do your personal and professional pathways connect to the paths that others here in this space have shared?
- In what ways are you all, as Latina CSAOs, transforming the higher education environment?
- What do you think campus leaders could do or should know about supporting Latinas' career pathways to senior student affairs leadership?

Post-Focus Group Script

Thank you everyone for your time and for sharing your stories with me. It was truly empowering for me to bear witness to your *testimonios* and I feel honored and privileged to share your stories and experiences with others. If you have any questions after today, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail or phone.

If I have not done so already, I will also be reaching out to schedule an individual follow-up interview with each of you for 60 minutes some time over the next two weeks at a date/time that works best for you. Thank you again for your participation and interest in this research. Look forward to talking to you again soon. Have a great rest of your day!

APPENDIX L

Interview Confirmation E-mail for Follow-Up Interview

Hello **NAME OF PARTICIPANT**,

Thank you for participating in the virtual focus group. This e-mail serves as a confirmation of my 60-minute **PHONE/IN-PERSON** follow-up interview with you for my dissertation study titled "*En Su Propia Voz* [In Her Own Voice]: Illuminating the Community Cultural Wealth of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers (CSAOs)."

Thank you again for your interest and participation in my study. We are scheduled to connect at **DATE** **TIME**. For phone interviews, you will call the following number: (641) 715-0632 and then enter the following access code: 242480

This follow-up interview will provide you with an opportunity to provide reactions or feedback on the focus group itself and the preliminary findings, address any clarifying questions that I have as I prepare to complete my final analysis of the data, and serve as an opportunity for you to share any additional information you would like about your experiences.

Please let me know if you have any questions in the meantime. Thank you. Have a great day!

Take care,
Molly

Molly F. Morin, M. Ed.
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education
Student Affairs Concentration
University of Maryland, College Park

APPENDIX M

Interview Protocol for Follow-Up Interview

Pre-Interview Procedures Script

Thank you for taking the time out of your schedule for this follow-up interview with me for my dissertation research focused on the career pathways and lived experiences of Latina Chief Student Affairs Officers. The purpose of this follow-up interview is to provide you with an opportunity to provide reactions or feedback on the focus group itself and the preliminary findings, address any clarifying questions that I have as I prepare to complete my final analysis of the data, and serve as an opportunity for you to share any additional information you would like about your experiences.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes and your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from participating in the interview or answering a specific question at any time. Do you have any questions I may answer before we begin? [once question(s) are addressed, let the participant know to please hold one moment and I will begin recording]

Follow-Up Interview Guide

Group	Directions/Script	Questions to Ask
For participants who did not participate in the focus group	Provide a description of what was discussed during the focus group and then review the preliminary findings with the participant. Then pose the same questions that were posed to the group in the virtual focus group.	1) To what extent do these preliminary findings align with your own professional and personal pathways as a Latina CSAO? [I will remind the participant that my intent is to provide an authentic representation of Latinas' lived experiences and career pathways to the CSAO role.] 2) Can you share with me if you think these themes from my preliminary analysis provide an authentic representation of your lived experiences and career pathways to the CSAO role? 3) What was it like for you to share your *testimonio* with me? 4) If I asked any of the following questions during the focus group, I will also ask them to the participant during this follow-up individual interview to ensure that they have the opportunity to

		provide their insight on these questions as well: a. In what ways does your personal and professional pathways connect to the paths that others in this study have shared? b. In what ways are you, as a Latina CSAO, transforming the higher education environment? c. What do you think campus leaders could do or should know about supporting Latinas' career pathways to senior student affairs leadership?
For participants who participated in the focus group	I will pose the following questions only if they were not discussed during the focus group	1) In what ways do your personal and professional pathways connect to the paths that others shared in the focus group? 2) In what ways are you, as a Latina CSAO, transforming the higher education environment? 3) What do you think campus leaders could do or should know about supporting Latinas' career pathways to senior student affairs leadership?
For all participants, regardless of whether they participated in the focus group or not	I will pose the following questions	1) After reflecting back on our initial interview together, is there anything else you would like to add? a. Follow-up on any clarifying questions I may have for each participant based on what they shared with me to ensure that I represent their *testimonio* and the findings as authentically as possible 2) If you could offer some advice to an aspiring Latina Chief Student Affairs Officer, what advice would you share with her? 3) Before ending this interview, is there anything else you would like to add or share?

Post-Interview Script

Thank you again for taking time out of your day to interview with me. If you have any questions after today, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail or phone. I will be sure to keep you updated on the status of my research and will send you a copy of my dissertation after I complete this research. Have a great rest of your day!

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