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IRVINE

The Influence of Community College Experiences on College Choice of Latina/o Transfer
Students: A Psychosociocultural Approach

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in Social Ecology

by

Susan Guadarrama

Thesis Committee:
Assistant Professor Maria Rendon, Chair
Lecturer with Security of Employment Jeanett Castellanos, Co-chair
Professor Rodolfo Torres

2015

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my little sister Jacqueline.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I thank my family for their love and support as well as the lessons they taught me that made me who I am today. Dad, thank you for showing me the meaning of curiosity. Mom, thank you for showing the meaning of hard work. Bro, thank you for being my educational role model all these years. Fight On! Sis, you show me how to be a better person every day. Golden Bear or Trojan, I will love you just the same.

To my Social Ecology colleagues, I am grateful to have known such brilliant individuals. I learned so much from you all. To the Policy, Planning, and Design department—especially Dr. Richard Matthew and Janet Gallagher—thank you for your support and understanding. To my childhood and college friends—Jasmine, Cynthia, Jessica, Eliana, and Andres—who have cheered me on along the way: thank you. I am beyond grateful for your friendship and support. Additionally, I thank Veronica Gonzalez, my undergraduate research assistant, for volunteering her time to assist me in completing transcriptions and references for this study.

To my thesis committee members, Dr. Maria Rendon, Dr. Jeanett Castellanos, and Dr. Rodolfo Torres, thank you for your guidance, enthusiasm, and support of my work. To my committee chair and advisor, Dr. Maria Rendon, thank you for believing in me when I did not believe in myself and for inviting me to get involved in your research, which ultimately led to my current research interests. To my committee co-chair and mentor, Dr. Jeanett Castellanos, thank you for your inspiration, your direction through the transition from ecological sustainability to higher education, and for training me to take a Latina feminist position.

Last but not least, I thank my respondents for sharing their educational experiences with me. To each of my respondents: I learned so much from you, and I know you will accomplish so much more throughout your educational journey.

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Abstract

The Influence of Community College Experiences on College Choice of Latina/o Transfer

Students: A Psychosociocultural Approach

By

Susan Guadarrama

Master of Arts in Social Ecology

University of California, Irvine, 2015

Assistant Professor Maria Rendon, Chair

Lecturer with Security of Employment Jeanett Castellanos, Co-chair

This study set out to investigate the influence of psychological, social, and cultural experiences during community college on the college choice processes of Latina/o students who transferred to a selective university. Ten interviews with Latina/o respondents who had transferred to a selective university in California were conducted. The sample varied by baccalaureate degree status (five out of the ten respondents were recent college graduates), gender (five out of the ten respondents were female), and age (ranging from 21 to 32). To understand the complex educational experiences of respondents, this study employed the psychosociocultural (PSC) conceptual framework—a strength-based, holistic model used extensively to investigate educational persistence of Latina/o student groups (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). The findings of this study led to the emergence of the following five themes: Motivation and Aspirations Fueled by Familismo, Validation from Faculty and/or Staff, College Knowledge from Faculty, Staff, and/or Peers, Encouragement from Parents, and Transfer Culture Created by the Community College. Additionally, two factors not

currently captured by the PSC conceptual framework—Major Fit and University Prestige—emerged in this study. This research shows that to understand the function of community college on baccalaureate attainment of Latina/o students, a closer investigation into psychological, social, and cultural experiences during community college that contribute to college decision-making processes is necessary. Recommendations for best practices and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: *Latina/os, community college, college choice, transfer, selective university, psychosociocultural model*

Chapter 1

Introduction

The function of community colleges as access points to baccalaureate attainment for low-income, first-generation college students of color has been hotly contested by scholars since the late 1980s (Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Dougherty, 1987; Dougherty & Kienzl, 2006; Dowd, Cheslock, & Melguizo, 2008; Doyle, 2009; Fernandez & Fletcher, 2014; Leigh & Gill, 2003; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Rendon, 1980; Rendon & Nora, 1988; Shaw & London, 2001). These scholars point not only to historically low retention and transfer rates but also to the low rate of low-income, first-generation college students of color who transfer to selective universities. This is important given the well-documented advantages of attending a selective university—including higher rate of baccalaureate attainment, especially for students of color (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Melguizo, 2008).

More recently, the scholarship has explored the function of community college on the baccalaureate attainment of the Latina/o population as a result of a high concentration of Latina/o students in community colleges and nonselective universities (Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Rendon, 1980). Scholars posit that a weak transfer pathway from community college to selective university has adversely affected baccalaureate attainment of Latina/os—who tend to enroll in community colleges even when they qualify for university admission immediately after high school (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Crisp & Nunez, 2014; Rivas, Perez, Alvarez & Solorzano, 2007). These studies suggest that strengthening the community college-to-selective university pathway has significant potential to increase selective university enrollment among Latina/os. However, minimal research has been conducted to examine how

Latina/o community college students decide which universities to apply to and which university to attend (Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, & Solorzano, 2007; Martinez & Fernandez, 2004).

As of 2013, just 15% of Latina/os ages 25 to 29 across the United States have obtained at least a baccalaureate degree, compared with 20% of Black, 40% of White, and 60% of Asian Americans (Krogstad, 2015). In fact, despite remarkable increases in Latina/o high school completion (Murnane, 2013) and college enrollment immediately after high school (Fry & Taylor, 2013) over the past 25 years, baccalaureate attainment has remained relatively stable and is projected to continue to lag behind other racial/ethnic groups. The Latina/o baccalaureate attainment disparity is most evident in California, the state with the largest Latina/o population and one of the largest postsecondary systems in the country (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009; Brown & Lopez, 2013; Chapa & Schink, 2006; Rivas, Perez, Alvarez & Solorzano, 2007).

An overview of the community college-to-selective university transfer pathway for Latina/os in California is provided in the section that follows. The remainder of this chapter reports on the recent data about the transfer pathway for Latina/os in California, introduces the ways scholars have previously examined the experiences of Latina/os in higher education, and presents the research question this study aims to address.

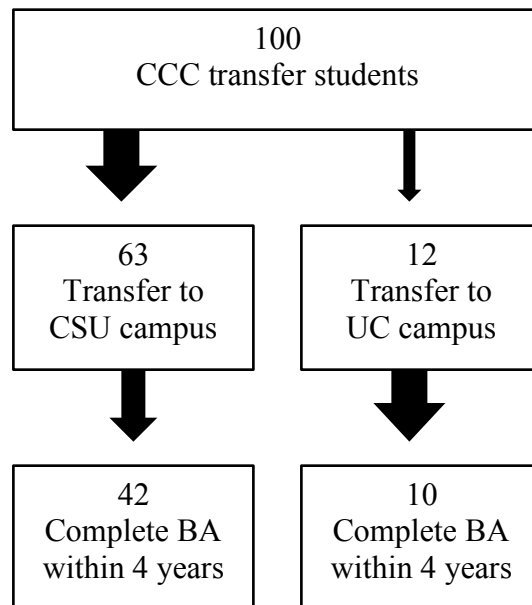
Latina/o Transfer Pathway in California

Latina/os represent 30% of California's adult population; yet, they represent only 10% of the state's baccalaureate degree holders (Huber, Velez, & Solorzano, 2014). As national data would suggest, first-time Latina/o college students tend to enroll in the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, the state's open-access community colleges. Furthermore, most Latina/o transfer students tend to enroll within the California State University (CSU) system, the state's

less selective university system, and only a small segment enrolls within the University of California (UC) system, the state's more selective university system.

Approximately 65% of first-time Latina/o college students in California enroll within the CCC system (Campaign for College Opportunity [CCO], 2015). According to the CCO report, approximately 39% of Latina/o students complete an associate's degree, certificate, or transfer to a university within 6 years, compared to approximately 48% of all students. Among first-time Latina/o students who entered the CCC system during the 2007-2008 academic year, 30% transferred to a university and another 9% completed a certification or associate's degree by fall 2013. Among those who transferred, 63% (about 17,500 students) enrolled in the CSU system and 12% (about 3,500 students) enrolled within the UC system. These findings show that few Latina/o transfer students enroll within the UC system.

Figure 1. UC and CSU Pipeline for Latina/os Transfer Students in California



The UC system also graduates more of its Latina/o transfer students and in less time than the CSU system (CCO, 2015). Among transfer students who entered the UC system in fall 2009, 84% graduated within 4 years. Almost half (49%) of these students graduated in 2 years and the remainder graduated within 3 to 4 years. By contrast, the CSU system graduated 67% of its cohort within 4 years. Less than quarter (23%) of Latina/o transfer students within the CSU system graduated in 2 years and the remainder graduated within 3 to 4 years. These findings show that students have a greater likelihood of baccalaureate attainment within the UC system. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the Latina/o transfer pathway in California.

Statement of the Problem

In California, the majority (63%) of Latina/o transfer students enroll within the CSU system. While the CSU system is an important component of California's postsecondary system, the low (12%) transfer rate within the UC system suggests a weak point of the state's postsecondary system. Furthermore, the likelihood of completing a baccalaureate degree at a CSU campus within 4 years is lower than at a UC campus (67% versus 84%). Together, these findings suggest that a weak CCC to UC transfer pathway has adversely affected the baccalaureate attainment of California's Latina/o population. The paucity of Latina/os UC transfers and baccalaureate degree holders has several negative consequences. First, the paucity of Latina/os with baccalaureate degrees could be detrimental to the state's economy (Johnson & Sengupta, 2009). The Public Policy Institute of California suggests that California will have one million fewer college graduates than it needs in 2025 if recent trends continue and the growing Latina/o population in the state will play an increasingly important role in the labor market. Second, low enrollment in highly selective institutions limits the opportunities for Latina/os to obtain top civic and corporate leadership positions in the state (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006;

Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). Third, the exclusion of Latina/os in selective universities threatens a cornerstone of U.S. higher education policy: to provide students with the opportunity to enroll in a university that is appropriate for their academic ability, regardless of other circumstances (Bowen, Kurzweil & Tobin, 2005).

Key Definitions

Before presenting an overview of the previous research on this topic, it is worth defining some terms used throughout this study. First, the term *college choice* refers to the decision-making processes a student experiences prior to enrollment in a college or university (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Second, the term *educational persistence* refers to a student's "ability to remain in school and matriculate toward degree completion" (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003, p. 77). Educational persistence literature investigates the educational experiences leading to baccalaureate attainment. Third, *Latina/o* is used in this study to describe individuals who trace their indigenous roots to Latin America. The term is used in preference to *Latino*, a gendered terms that "[assume] masculinity and [reproduce] the patriarchal nature of Latino culture" (Moreno, 2012, p. 7). Additionally, the term *Latina/o* is used to refer to female and males, whereas the terms *Latina* and *Latino* are used to differentiate and accentuate a gendered identity.

Literature Review

This study is informed by the college choice literature. Previous research has shown that traditional models of college choice do not accurately explain the college decision-making processes of Latina/o students, as well as other students of color (Bergerson, 2009). For example, although Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) seminal three-phase model of college choice has been widely supported with White student groups, some scholars suggest that its assumption of a sequential set of experiences is not typical for low-income, first-generation college students of

color (Bergerson, 2009)—Latina/os in particular (Perez & Ceja, 2015). In other words, these scholars posit that the college decision-making processes of Latina/o students are more complex than is assumed by this model.

Other models have been employed to investigate Latina/o college choice suggest that affordability and proximity are the primary contributors to college choice (Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, & Solorzano, 2007; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Zarate and Fabienke, 2007; McDonough & Calderon, 2006). Studies suggest that even when Latina/os qualify for and are admitted to universities, they enroll in community college because they are usually closer to home and less expensive than those universities (Nunez, Hoover, Pickett, & Stuart-Carruthers, 2013; Rivas et al., 2007; Santiago, 2007). Other factors such as inadequate academic preparation, limited college knowledge, low educational and career aspirations, minimal guidance from social networks, and lack of institutional resources are considered important but ultimately secondary factors on college choice among Latina/o groups. A more comprehensive review of the college choice literature is provided in Chapter 2.

The majority of what we know about Latina/o college choice comes from studying high school students. Scant research has been conducted to investigate college choice among Latina/o community college students. Additionally, previous studies have done well to describe what factors influence college choice but less about why they do (Perez & Ceja, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

This study is framed by the psychosociocultural (PSC) model (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). The PSC model positions itself along psychological, social, and cultural perspectives to examine the complex educational experiences of Latina/o students. This model has been used extensively to investigate the educational persistence of Latina/o student

groups. Although most studies have applied this approach at the university level, evidence for its applicability at the community college level has been found (Gloria, Castellanos, & Herrera, accepted for publication). Given its multidimensional approach, this model may provide a useful lens for investigating the decision-making processes of Latina/o transfer students. A more comprehensive review of this model is provided in Chapter 2.

Research Question

This qualitative study investigates the influence of psychological, social, and cultural experiences during community college on college choice of Latina/o students who transferred to a selective university by asking the following questions:

1. What were the community college experiences of Latina/o transfer students who navigated the transfer pathway to a selective university?
 - a. To what extent did psychological (e.g., self-efficacy, coping responses) factors influence the decision-making process that led transfer to a selective university?
 - b. To what extent did social (e.g., parental support, faculty and staff support) factors influence the decision-making process that led transfer to a selective university?
 - c. To what extent did cultural (e.g., university fit, transfer culture) factors influence the decision-making process that led transfer to a selective university?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding into what factors influence college choice among Latina/o community college students and how these factors facilitate the community college to selective university transfer pathway. A secondary purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which the psychosociocultural (PSC) model helps to explain the college decision-making processes of Latina/o students.

Significance of the Study

The topic of this study is important to investigate for several reasons. First, an increasing number of beginning college students are enrolling in community college with baccalaureate aspirations (Fernandez & Fletcher, 2014). It is therefore imperative that we examine the ways by which a community college can serve as a low-cost access point to baccalaureate attainment for groups most likely to enter community college. Second, Latina/o transfer students are more likely than other racial/ethnic transfer groups to continue their studies in California (CCO, 2015). Thus, research on this topic has the capacity to offer meaningful insights into how we can begin to strengthen the community college-to-selective university transfer pathway for Latina/o students. Third, studies suggest that college decision-making processes of students of color differ from those of their White counterparts (Bergerson, 2009). College choice among Latina/o students is particularly understudied. Thus, conducting a qualitative study allows Latina/o community college students to share in their own words their multidimensional experiences can shed light on the differences and implications of those differences on college choice.

Overview of the Study

In summary, this chapter provides an overview of the selective university transfer pathway of Latina/os in California, illuminates on the growth of the literature on educational experiences and decision-making processes of Latina/os in higher education, introduces the model that frames this study, and offers reasons for the merit of research on this topic given certain economic and social trends in California.

Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the PSC model as well as review of the components of the PSC model. Chapter 3 will describe the methodology of this qualitative research study through the use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews with participants.

Chapter 4 describes in detail the themes that emerged from the ethnographic interviews, structured using the PSC model. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes the study by discussing the results and implications of the findings, including recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2

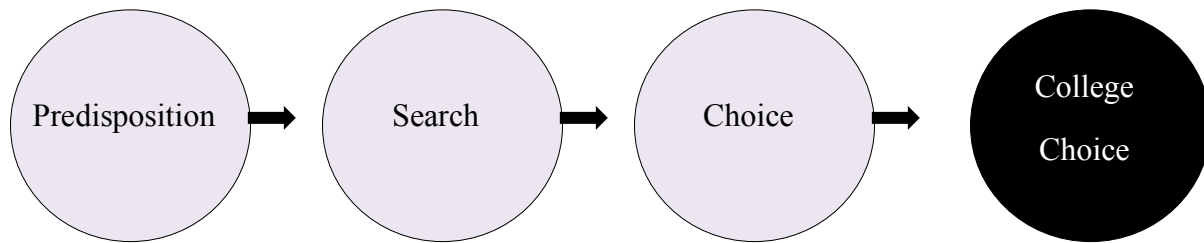
Literature Review

This chapter reviews the literature that informs this study. Before presenting college choice findings, I will provide an overview of the conceptual framework employed in this study. Next, I will present an overview Latina/o college choice literature using the aforementioned conceptual framework. Although the bulk of what we know about college choice among Latina/os comes from studying Latina/o high school students, there is a growing body of literature on the college decision-making processes of Latina/os attending community college; special consideration will be given to findings produced with Latina/o community college students. Finally, I will highlight the gaps and limitations this study aims to address.

Conceptual Framework

Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) seminal model on college choice describes three sequential phases—predisposition, search, and choice (see Figure 2). The predisposition phase involves activities that influence an inclination to attend college and is assumed. The predisposition phase is assumed to typically occur in elementary and middle school. The search phase involves identifying and gathering information on specific universities as well as applying those universities. The search phase is assumed to typically occur in high school. The choice phase involves accepting an admission offer. The choice phase is assumed to typically occur in senior year of high school. Although studies have found support for this model with a variety of student groups, some scholars suggest that its assumption of a sequential set of experiences is not typical for low-income, first-generation students of color (Bergerson, 2009)—Latina/os in particular (Perez & Ceja, 2015). In other words, these scholars posit that the decision-making processes of Latina/o students are more complex than is assumed by this model.

Figure 2. Three-Phase Model of College Choice



(Adapted from Hossler and Gallagher, 1987)

A variety of other models and frameworks have been employed to investigate the college decision-making processes of Latina/o student groups. While some scholars have employed models or frameworks that emphasize the influence of individual factors such as resiliency (e.g., Ceja, 2004), others have employed models or frameworks that highlight the influence of environmental factors such support from faculty and staff on campus (e.g., Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). Rivera (2014), however, posits a combination of individual and environmental factors more accurately explains college choice of Latina/os. To exclude individual factors such as personal drive would be to ignore the “deeply held values and hard won experiences” of the Latina/o community, and to exclude environmental factors would be to ignore the impact the opportunities on college choice (Rivera, 2014, p. 286). Few studies, however, have employed an approach to explore the influence of Latina/o students’ complex educational experiences on their college decision-making processes. Fewer studies have employed a holistic approach to explore the interaction of individual and environmental factors on Latina/o college choice (Rivera, 2014), especially among community college students (Crisp & Nora, 2010). Therefore, an investigation

into the college decision-making processes of Latina/o community college students would require a more holistic approach.

In addition to a holistic approach, a college choice study would benefit from employing a strength-based approach. Over 30 years ago, Rendon (1980) called for a closer examination into the function of community colleges on the baccalaureate attainment of Latina/o students, given national trends toward greater community college enrollment among this group. Since then, the literature on baccalaureate attainment of Latina/o students who begin their baccalaureate studies in community college has grown extensively. The bulk of this literature has investigated this group's baccalaureate attainment in terms of their educational persistence.

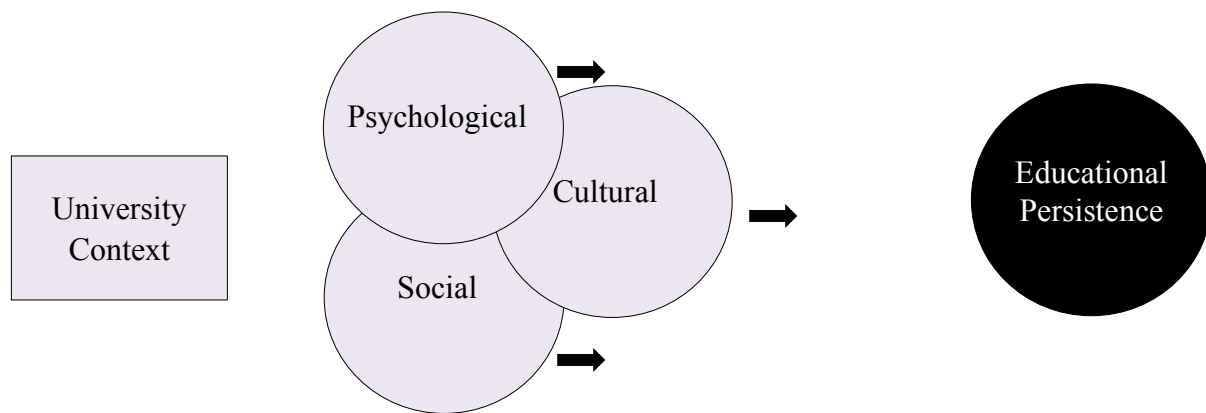
Much of the early research on the educational persistence of Latina/o community college students focused on the identification of barriers to transfer (Perez & Ceja, 2010). For example, Rendon, Justiz, and Resta (1988) identified a number of student-centered as well as institution-centered barriers to transfer at 6 community colleges with high Latina/o student enrollment (including two community colleges in California). Student-center barriers included lack of motivation, lack of rigorous academic preparation, lack of information about the costs and benefits of higher education, lack of family involvement in education, lack of financial assistance, and low academic self-efficacy. Institution-centered barriers included lack of clear articulation agreement with universities, lack of advisement from faculty, and low expectations for student academic achievement among faculty.

More recent research on the educational persistence of Latina/o community college students has shifted from a focus on the identification of transfer barriers to the identification of factors that contribute favorably to transfer (e.g., Perez & Ceja, 2010; Suarez, 2003; Zell, 2010). For example, Zell (2010) found that overcoming personal and social challenges, self-discovery

and college adjustment, and sense of purpose contributed favorably to the persistence decisions of Latina/o community college students. The shift to strength-based framing is a response to conclusions drawn from previous studies, which suggested that by focusing on students who have overcome obstacles, subsequent findings can better show how similar students could navigate the transfer pathway.

One conceptual framework that takes both a holistic and strength-based approach is the psychosociocultural (PSC) model (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). The PSC model positions itself along psychological (P), sociological (S), and cultural (C) perspectives to explore the influences of self-beliefs (P), social support (S) and campus comfort (C) on educational persistence (see Figure 3). Both the holistic and strength-based nature of this model makes it an appropriate model to address this study's research question.

Figure 3. Psychosociocultural Model of Educational Persistence



(Adapted from Castellanos & Gloria, 2007)

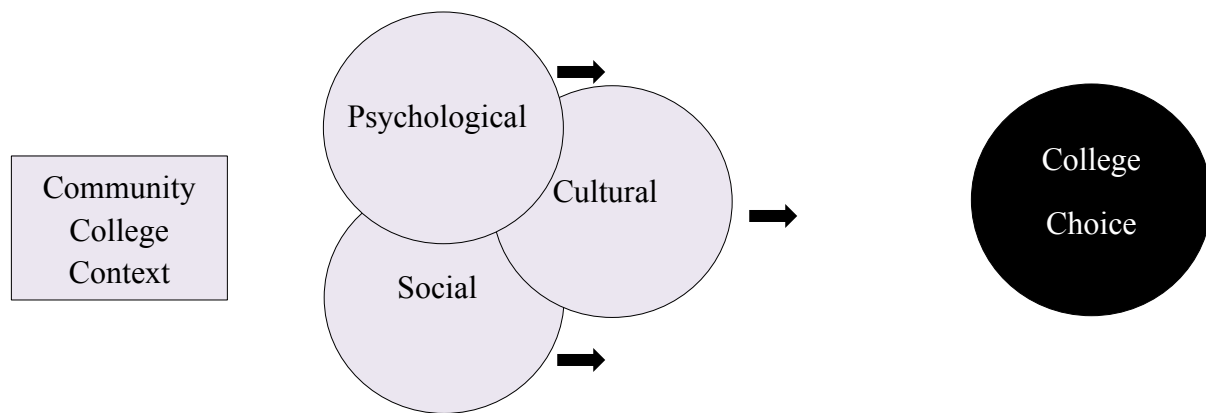
Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) introduced the concept in an article calling for greater attention to the multifaceted counseling needs of Latina/o university students. They argued that university counselors should take into consideration social support and comfort on campus in providing counseling services to Latina/o students to facilitate overall wellbeing. The model has since been employed with a variety of student groups including Latina/o undergraduates (e.g., Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004), Latina/o graduate students (e.g., Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006), and other ethnic/racial minority undergraduates (e.g., Asian Americans, Gloria & Ho, 2003; African Americans, Castellanos & Jones, 2003; Native Americans, Gloria & Robinson-Kurpius, 2001).

Although the framework was developed as a way to assess the counseling needs of Latina/o university students, it inherently addresses Latina/o students' development concerns in higher education (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). For example, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) explored the match between a student's values and those of his or her university (i.e. cultural congruity) using the framework. The study revealed that Latina/o university student experience "invalidating classroom curriculum and pedagogy," thus affecting their academic self-efficacy, "unsupportive and demeaning faculty interactions," thus affecting their relationships with faculty and "daily campus events that discount, devalue, and negate their cultural identities," thus ensuring an unwelcoming or hostile campus environment (pp. 381-382). Castellanos and Gloria concluded that persistence decisions are influenced by cultural incongruity on campus, and therefore, the burden of retention should not solely be on the shoulders of students but alternatively, university professionals at various levels must acknowledge and address these issues to better support persistence. In this way, this conceptual

framework allows for conclusions relevant not only to counseling psychologists but also other professionals in higher education institutions with Latina/o students. Most PSC studies have been conducted at the university level (e.g., Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004), evidence for the appropriateness of the approach with Latina/o community college students has recently found (Gloria, Castellanos, & Herrera, accepted for publication).

The PSC conceptual framework structures the remainder of this chapter and allows this study to view the existing literature on college choice through psychological, sociological, and cultural lenses (see Figure 4). As the bulk of the literature has been conducted with high school students, the reviews will make note of studies conducted at the community college level.

Figure 4. College Choice: Taking a Psychosociocultural Approach



(Adapted from Castellanos & Gloria, 2007)

Demographic Factors

Before presenting literature related to the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of the PSC model, I will begin with a presentation of the demographic variables explored in previous research (e.g., Chapa & De La Rosa, 2004). These variables include gender, low-income status, first-generation college student status, and Latina/o national origin.

Gender

Female students earn baccalaureate degrees at higher rates than their male counterparts, across all race/ethnicities (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006). Given the long history of a female advantage in academic performance, Buchmann and DiPrete (2006) posit that something other than academic performance must be changing in recent decades. They conclude that a decline in gender discrimination and a rise in women's interest in possessing autonomous resources help explain the growing female advantage in baccalaureate attainment. With regard to the Latina population, studies show that indeed a primary motivation among Latinas in higher education is to break "the cycles of oppression of their mothers and grandmothers" (Padilla, 2007, p. 6). Furthermore, studies also suggest that Latinas have consistently reported higher degree aspirations than Latinos (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) suggest that the higher education gap between Latinas and Latinos appears to be widening.

Low-income status

Latina/o families are three times more likely to be considered to be near or below the poverty line than White families, across the United States (Contreras, 2011). In California, 31.7% of Latina/os live in poverty, compared to 20.8% of Black, 18.4% of Asian, and 13.7% of White Americans (Bohn, Danielson, & Bandy, 2015). Thus, Latina/o parents both across the

state and California in particular are more likely to have limited financial means to provide their children in college than other ethnic/racial groups.

A study on Latina/o students who began their baccalaureate studies in Hispanic serving community colleges found that while 82% of students were within the low-income to low-middle income quartiles, only 75% of those who transferred to a university from these community colleges were within these quartiles (Nunez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2012). Furthermore, Nora (1990) found that Latina/o community college students who do not receive on-campus (e.g., work-study) or off-campus (e.g., university grant) financial aid are less likely to persist in community college. Nora and Rendon (1990) similarly found that Latina/o community college students are less likely to transfer to a university, in particular, because of financial necessity to work. Cabrera and her colleagues (1990, 1993) suggest that Latina/os are likely to be pulled off-campus to work. When students can secure an on-campus position, they benefit from the opportunities to interact with faculty members (Nora & Wedham, 1991).

First-generation college student status

Latina/o students are more likely than students of any other race/ethnicity to be the first in their family to attend college (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). Subsequently, many Latina/o students and parents do not possess critical information about accessing higher education (referred to as *college knowledge* in the literature) (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012; McDonough, 1997). College knowledge usually flows from high school counselors to students (McDonough, 1997), but Latina/os tend to attend schools with little opportunity for communication between students and counselors (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). Without knowledge about financial aid and scholarship opportunities for college, the perceived cost of attendance deters many Latina/os from pursuing higher education (Cabrera, Lopez, & Saenz, 2012). Therefore, accessing

college knowledge is a critical component of the college decision-making processes of Latina/o students. Furthermore, studies show that Latina/o first-generation college students and their parents often lack information about financing a college education. Zarate and Fabienke's (2007) national study found that over 70% of Latina/o students and parents had not received financial aid or college cost information while they or their child was enrolled in K-12 schooling.

Rendon and Valdez (1993) found that Latina/o community college students with immigrant parents, in particular, often face substantial challenges accessing and navigating college. With regard to transfer students, Suarez (2003) found that accessing information about the transfer application information is critical to college decision-making processes among Latina/o community college students. In fact, studies on first-generation college students suggest that many transfer-eligible Latina/os with baccalaureate aspirations do not transfer because they do not have a clear picture of the process and requirements (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003).

Latina/o national origin

Previous studies have tended to treat Latina/os as a homogenous group (Zell, 2010). Yet, while Latina/o students of varying Latin American origins encounter similar experiences in in pursuit of higher education and in accessing selective universities, there are a number of distinctions between Latina/o students of different national origins (Ramirez & Hurtado, 2015). For example, Hurtado (2015) argues that there are individual and environmental distinctions specific to students of Mexican descent, which complicate the notion of Latina/o educational progress in higher education. Nonetheless, few studies have investigated the educational experiences of students of Mexican origin. Studies that have investigated the experiences of students of Mexican descent suggest that they encounter unique educational experiences in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree (Gándara, 1995; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Furthermore,

among Latina/o ethnic students, second generation students are more likely to enroll in college than their third- and fourth-generation counterparts (Loya, Hwang, & Oseguera, 2015).

Psychological Factors

The psychological dimension of the PSC model explores the student's self-beliefs (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Self-esteem and motivation are two factors commonly addressed in the literature.

Self-esteem and self-efficacy. Gandara and Contreras (2009) suggest that school-based programs that begin late in secondary studies do little to increase academic achievement. Instead, their primary function is to increase a student's self-confidence and positive sense of self, which then leads to behaviors related to college going, such as completing honors courses and taking college entrance examinations such as the SAT. Taking a PSC perspective, self-confidence here is closely tied to a student's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's confidence in his or her ability to execute a behavior required to produce an outcome (Bandura, 2006). Additionally, the PSC model uses the term self-esteem to describe a positive sense of self.

Motivation or *ganas*. In addition to increase a student's self-confidence and positive sense of self, Gandara and Contreras (2009) suggest that school-based programs that begin late in secondary studies also serve to increase a student's *ganas*. *Ganas* refers to the effort a student implements to achieve his or her goals. Like increase self-efficacy and self-esteem, increased *ganas* also leads to college-going behaviors, such as completing honors courses and taking college entrance examinations such as the SAT. In fact, Rivera (2014) conducted a quantitative study to investigate the factors which are influential in Latina/o students' decision to apply to college. She found that for Latina/o students to successfully apply to college, "they need to do more than take the appropriate courses and get good grades; they must also be agentic in learning

about the college application process” (p. 296). Rivera concluded that motivation is critical to obtaining essential eligibility and application information and other means of support that is more easily accessible to students in schools that have a strong college-going culture and middle and upper income students who acquire this type of knowledge from their parents.

Social Factors

The social dimension of the PSC model explores the student’s social support systems off- and on-campus (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Parental and faculty support are two factors commonly addressed in the literature.

Faculty support. Gildersleeve, Cruz, Madriz, Melendrez-Flores (2015) suggest that teachers have the power to influence a student’s perception of who goes to college and what college opportunities exist for the student who is college-bound. Similarly, Bensimon and Down (2009) posit that community college students’ expectations and aspirations are, for the most part, socially constructed through their interactions with institutional agents.

Stanton-Salazar (2001) suggests institutional agents are critical for students without college knowledgeable parents and peers. According to Stanton-Salazar, relationships with institutional agents and access to institutional support are more complex for low-status youth than for high-status youth. Furthermore, institutional agents can serve as empowerment agents—agents who “carry a vision of a more just, humanistic, and democratic society, deeply committed to an enlightened and fair distribution of societal resources, and to dismantling the structures of class, racial, and gender oppression” and who can thus alter the destinies of low-status students and youth (p. 1098). Of critical importance here is the limited number of Latina/o faculty on educational institutions across the country.

Parental support. Although Latina/o parents are less likely than other ethnic/racial parental to be able to provide critical knowledge about accessing college, Latina/o parents play an important role in the college decision-making processes of their students. Alvarez (2015) suggests that the college choice for Latina/os is a family process rather than an individual one. Therefore, parental involvement in the college decision-making processes of Latina/os is key. Whereas Latina/o parents cannot typically provide information about accessing college, they can provide their students with the encouragement and support to obtain that information themselves. In fact, studies show that the support from mothers is especially important for Latinas, whereas the support from fathers is especially important for Latinos (Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, & Bamaca, 2006). Strayhorn (2010) suggests that Latina/o students, especially males, who talk to their parents about college have more realistic expectations about higher education and as a result are better prepared for the academic and social demands of college. The assumption here is that the discussion implies a parental encouragement of student's postsecondary goals, which affect their academic performance. Furthermore, studies show that providing financial aid information to parents as been shown to positively influence the decision to attend college (Munoz & Rincon, 2015).

Cultural Factors

The cultural dimension of the PSC model explores the student's cultural values, the culture on the campus, and a student's comfort on campus (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). College culture, familismo, and university fit are two factors commonly addressed in the literature.

College culture. McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez (2002) define college culture as "a school culture that encourages all students to consider college as an option after high school

and prepares all students to make informed decisions about available postsecondary options” (p. 1). College culture has been found to foster the college-going behavior of low socioeconomic students who attend high schools in low socioeconomic communities (McDonough, 1997). Gildersleeve, Cruz, and Madriz (2015) suggest that schools have the power to promote a college-going culture on high school campuses. Teachers and staff at these schools “develop the appropriate structural mechanisms to promote greater college opportunity” to develop and sustain college culture on campus (Ceja & Perez, 2015, p. 192).

The same way a college culture can contribute to the college-going behavior of high school students, a college culture can contribute to the four-year college-going behavior of community college students. College culture at the community college level is sometimes referred to as *transfer culture* in the literature. Perez and Ceja (2010) identify and recommend several promising practices to the cultivation of transfer culture for Latina/os. First, they recommend faculty and staff reflect the Latina/o student population. Higher education campuses with high enrollment of Latina/o students should therefore have a similarly high presentation of Latina/o faculty and staff who should then serve as transfer agents for Latina/o students. Second, they recommend higher education institutions begin to prepare Latina/o students early for college. In the case of community colleges, this would support the enrollment of Latina/os in development courses that improve the academic skills necessary at the university level. Third, they recommend community colleges present clear instructions for transfer to a university; for instance, by presenting well-defined articulation agreements with universities. Fourth, they recommend that community colleges provide college outreach programs that not only promote college-going behavior but also “instill in participants a sense of pride in their heritage” (p.16). The remaining recommendations discussed the importance of financial assistance for Latina/o

students. All together, these practices would provide a transfer culture on community college campuses that would contribute favorably to the transfer experiences and college choice of Latina/o students.

Familismo. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) indicate that one of the strongest cultural values Latina/os hold is *familismo*, which involves the strong identification and attachment to immediate and extended family. This concept differs from parental support and familial support in that it derives from the student rather than from family. In other words, the decision-making processes are influenced by the student's internal identification to the family rather than the family's external support of the student. For many Latina/o students who come from low-income families—especially Latino males—familismo generates a sense of obligation to provide financial and/or emotional support to family members (Bachmeier & Bean, 2011). With regard to college choice, a community college allows them to remain home or close to home and hold jobs that will allow them to provide for their families.

Proximity and affordability are two of most commonly reported influences of college choice. Taking a PSC approach, these factors can be viewed as key influences that are negotiated by the family unit. According to Alvarez (2015), college choice for Latina/o students is a family process rather than an individual process. Latina/o students and their family are “constantly negotiating and renegotiating key influences in order to assess the benefits and risks of going to college” (Perez & Ceja, 2015, p. 192). The decision to stay closer to home or attend a less expensive (and less selective college or university) are made by the family unit and show the importance of familismo on the student's college decision-making processes.

University fit. Ceja and Perez (2015) note that in addition to a welcoming culture of college on campus, school teachers and staff must also work to promote “quality and fit” of

college options in order to ensure college completion; the PSC literature refer to this as *university fit*. Gloria & Robinson Kurpius (1996) define university fit as the extent to which students feel welcome and comfortable within the university. Support for the influence of university fit among community college students has been found (Gloria, Castellanos, & Herrera, accepted for publication). Furthermore, experiences and perceptions of discrimination bring a level of uncertainty to college choice (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). For example, the underrepresentation of Latina/os in selective universities can suggest that it is not an environment where Latina/os are welcomed and can therefore deter some from considering it an option available to them.

Gaps and Limitations

This study seeks to address three gaps and limitations in the literature. First, previous studies have employed a range of conceptual and theoretical frameworks to understand the college decision-making processes of Latina/o students. These frameworks have either examined individual factors or environmental factors. However, few studies have employed a framework that explores a combination of individual and environmental factors. This study employs the PSC conceptual framework to examine the combination of psychological, social, and cultural influences on college choice. Additionally, this framework takes a strength-based approach that is not frequently seen in the existing literature. Second, previous studies have focused more on what factors influence college choice rather than why these factors influence college choice. This study seeks to understand why certain PSC factors influence decision-making processes of Latina/o students by using a qualitative research method. Third, previous studies have focuses college choice at the high school level; few studies have examined college choice at the community college level. Given college enrollment and transfer trends, research into the

influence of PSC factors on college choice at the community college level is warranted.

Additionally, scant research has been conducted to understand transfer to selective universities among Latina/o students. This study, therefore, seeks to add to the literature by examining transfer to selective universities among Latina/o community college students.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of experiences during community college on college choice of Latina/o students who transferred to a selective university. Specifically, this study seeks examines the extent to which psychological (e.g., self-efficacy, coping strategies), social (e.g., parental support, faculty and/or staff support), and/or cultural (e.g., transfer culture, university fit) factors influence Latina/o students' transfer from a community college to a selective university. Conducting this research is crucial due to the lack of research on the educational experiences of Latina/o transfer students. In fact, much of what is known about Latina/os' college choice processes from studying high school students, despite the fact that more than half of first-generation Latina/o college students attend a community college. Furthermore, little is known about the factors that can contribute favorably to transfer from community college to a selective university among Latina/o students. To accomplish the purpose of this study, the following research questions were used to guide this qualitative study:

1. What were the community college experiences of Latina/o transfer students who navigated the transfer pathway to a selective university?
 - a. To what extent did psychological (e.g., self-efficacy, coping responses) factors influence the decision-making process that led transfer to a selective university?
 - b. To what extent did social (e.g., parental support, faculty and staff support) factors influence the decision-making process that led transfer to a selective university?
 - c. To what extent did cultural (e.g., university fit, transfer culture) factors influence the decision-making process that led transfer to a selective university?

The exploratory nature of this study, investigation of a process, and the limited research on this particular population makes qualitative research methods the most suitable research design for this study (Weiss, 1994). In addition, this study lends itself to qualitative research methods because of its focus on shedding light on the lived experiences of respondents. The remainder of this chapter will provide information on the study's research design, respondent demographics, data collection and analysis procedures as well as the role of the researcher on the design and implementation of this study.

Research Design

This qualitative research study uses an interview method to accomplish its purpose. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted to collect data from the 10 Latina/o students who transferred from a community college to a selective university in California. Consistent with qualitative methodology, the foci of the interviews were to capture the essence of respondents' experiences (Creswell, 2007) and shed light on their daily experiences (Weiss, 1994). A semi-structured interview format allowed respondents to share their voice and views on their educational experiences while simultaneously allowing the researcher to guide the conversation to answer the research questions. Understanding the experiences of respondents was essential to the purpose of this study, which sought to explore the factors that contribute favorably to transfer from a community college to a selective university.

Setting

Respondents were recruited from a university within the University of California (UC) system, the state's most selective university system. The university is identified as UC Southwest (UCS) for purposes of confidentiality. UCS is a comprehensive public university offering more than 80 undergraduate degrees and over 100 graduate and professional degrees in liberal arts and

sciences as well as in professionally-oriented fields such as business, engineering, fine arts, and law (UCS Office of Admission, n.d.).

UCS is located in a suburban city in the southwestern region of California. The city's ethnic/racial representation differs in many ways from the state's ethnic/racial representation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The city has a smaller representation of Black and Latina/o Americans (1.8% and 9.2%, respectively) than the state (6.2% and 37.6% respectively). The city also has a larger representation of White and Asian Americans (45.1% and 39.2%, respectively) than the state (40.1% and 13%). With the exception of Latina/o representation, the university's undergraduate ethnic/racial representation more closely resembles that of the city.

In fall 2014, the undergraduate student body was 44% Asian, 23.5% Latina/o, 15.6% White, and 2.7% Black (UCS Office of Institutional Research, 2015a). UCS enrolled approximately 6,200 Latina/o undergraduate and graduate students in fall 2014—20.6% of the total student body. The university's relatively high Latina/o undergraduate and graduate student enrollment makes it an emerging Hispanic serving institution, a higher education institution with a minimum 25% Latina/o student enrollment. Additionally, UCS employed approximately 3,317 full-time academic employees. In fall 2014, UCS' pool of full-time academic employees included approximately 2.5% Black, 5.5% Latina/o, 27% Asian, and 54.4% White (UCS Office of Institutional Research, 2015b).

UCS is 1 of 7 campuses within the UC system that participates in the Transfer Admission Guarantee (TAG) program. TAG is a partnership between the CCC and UC systems to guarantee admission to at least one UC campus for students who complete a predetermined curriculum ("Transfer Admission Guarantee," n.d.). UCS also participates in Honors to Honors, a partnership with 15 community colleges in Southern California (UCS Division of Undergraduate

Education, n.d.). The partnership grants early admission to UCS to students who complete the honors program at 1 of the 15 participating community colleges. As a selective university and emerging HSI, UCS was determined to be an appropriate site to recruit this study's sample.

Sampling

This study included 3 qualifications for respondent eligibility: (1) racial/ethnic Latina/o self-identification, (2) enrollment in a community college in California for a minimum of 2 years, (3) transfer from a community college in California to UC Southwest. Due to the limiting qualifications of this study, this study applied two sampling strategies—convenience sampling and snowball sampling—to reach its target sample size of 10 respondents.

Convenience sampling, a common non-probability sampling strategy used in social science research, was employed first. To disseminate information about the study to potential respondents, the researcher contacted the UCS Transfer Center by email. The Transfer Center offers counseling, tutoring, and other student services to transfer students at UCS. Recruitment Letter 1 was used to introduce the study to the Transfer Center supervisor (see Appendix A). With permission from the supervisor, flyers advertising voluntary participation in the study were posted at the Transfer Center. Potential respondents were invited to contact the researcher by email to express an interest in the study. The researcher then followed up with each potential respondent by email to schedule an interview.

Snowball sampling, another common non-probability sampling strategy used in social science research, was employed second. To implement this strategy, the researcher asked a past respondent (recruited through convenience sampling) at the end of the interview if he or she could identify a potential respondent. Most past respondents were able to identify 1 or 2 potential respondents. The past respondent informed potential respondents about the study and was asked

to either contact the research if he/she is interested and eligible for the study, or give the contact person permission to release contact information (name and preferred email address) to the researcher. Once the potential respondent contacted the researcher or authorized permission to release his or her preferred email address to the researcher, the researcher sent the potential respondent a copy of Recruitment Letter 2 (see Appendix A). The potential respondent then contacted the researcher with a preferred date and time for his/her participation. The process continued until the target sample was reached. Every attempt was made to include a balanced representation across the sample with respect to gender and academic major.

Respondent Demographics

Ten respondents were interviewed for this study. Although all respondents were Latina/o students who had been enrolled within the California Community Colleges system for at least 2 years before transferring to UC Southwest, there were several distinctive factors across the sample (see Table 1). The following paragraphs describe the heterogeneity and homogeneity characteristics of the respondents who were interviewed for this study. A vignette for each respondent is provided in Appendix F.

Heterogeneity

The highest parental education level ranged from no formal education to some college; the mode was elementary school. The median age was 23.5 and ranged from 21 to 32. Half of the respondents were offered admission to a university during high school, while the other half did not apply for admission to a university during high school. Respondents had attended 7 different Hispanic serving community colleges in southern California—2 from Orange County, 2 from Los Angeles County, 1 from Riverside County, 1 from Ventura County, and 1 from Santa Barbara County. Pseudonyms are provided for each of these community colleges in Table 1. The

average number of years spent in community college was 3 years and ranged from 2 years to 4 years. Six of the respondents were employed either full-time or part-time while enrolled in community college. And lastly, 5 respondents were enrolled at UCS at the time of the interview while the other 5 respondents had graduated with a baccalaureate degree within the last 2 years.

Homogeneity

All respondents were second-generation Latina/os and first-generation college students. All respondents were within the low to low-middle income range. All respondents had attended Hispanic serving community colleges in southern California. None of the respondents took enrollments breaks, were married or had dependents while attending community college. Lastly, all respondents identified as racially/ethnically Latina/o, and all respondents identified as being of Mexican descent—1 respondent identified as being of Salvadorian descent in addition to Mexican descent.

The unanimous identification of Mexican heritage among the respondents provided an opportunity to study an understudied Latina/o population. Previous studies have tended to treat Latina/os as a homogenous group (Zell, 2010). Yet, while Latina/o students of varying Latin American origins encounter similar experiences in in pursuit of higher education and in accessing selective universities, there are a number of distinctions between students of different national origins and ethnic cultures (Ramirez & Hurtado, 2015). For example, Hurtado (2015) argues that there are individual and environmental distinctions specific to Chicana/os, which complicate the notion of Latina/o educational progress in higher education. Nonetheless, few studies have investigated the educational experiences of the Chicana/o student group; those that have suggest that Chicana/os encounter unique educational experiences in their pursuit of a baccalaureate degree (Gándara, 1995; Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). Furthermore, among first-time

Latina/o college students in California, Chicana/os are the most likely to attend a community college (Yosso & Solorzano, 2006). While Chicana/os represent 64% of the national Latina/o population, they represent 83% of California's Latina/o population (Brown & Lopez, 2013; Lopez, 2015). Subsequently, the sample produced in this study provided an opportunity to contribute to the literature on Chicana/os in higher education.

In summary, all respondents were low-income, first-generation college students of Mexican descent who enrolled in a Hispanic serving community college for reasons other than university admission ineligibility. And although respondents differed in a number of characteristics, they shared a similar experience of transferring from a CCC to UCS.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age***	Ethnicity	First-generation college student	Dependent(s)**	Marital Status**	Highest parental education level	Admitted to a university*
Anthony	Male	21	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	Elementary (F) Middle School (M)	No
Rene	Male	23	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	Some college (F) Middle school (M)	Yes
Penelope	Female	23	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	Elementary school (M and F)	Yes
Isabel	Female	32	Mexican	Yes	None	Divorced	Elementary school (M and F)	No
Miriam	Female	25	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	No formal education (M and F)	No
Lourdes	Female	23	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	No formal education (M and F)	Yes
Felipe	Male	24	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	High school (M and F)	Yes
Daisy	Female	23	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	Elementary school (M and F)	Yes
Gabriel	Male	24	Mexican / Salvadorian	Yes	None	Single	Middle school (M and F)	No
Julian	Male	24	Mexican	Yes	None	Single	High school (M and F)	No

*during high school **during community college ***at the time of the interview F= Father M= Mother

Table 1. Respondent Demographics (continued)

Pseudonym	County resided**	Initial community college intention	Enrollment breaks**	Years enrolled**	Employment**	Highest degree expected to earn***
Anthony	Los Angeles	Transfer to CSU	None	3	None	Master's
Rene	Ventura	Transfer to CSU	None	4	Full-time off-campus	Master's
Penelope	Los Angeles	Complete certificate	None	2	Part-time off-campus, part-time on-campus	Ph.D. in education counseling
Isabel	Santa Barbara	Complete certificate	None	3	Full-time off-campus	Ph.D. in psychology
Miriam	Riverside	Complete certificate	None	3	Part-time off-campus, part-time on-campus	Ph.D.
Lourdes	Orange	Transfer to local CSU	None	2	None	Ph.D. in sociology
Felipe	Riverside	Transfer to local CSU	None	2	Part-time off-campus	Master's
Daisy	Orange	Transfer to local CSU	None	2	None	Master's in social work
Gabriel	Riverside	None	None	4	None	Master's in counseling
Julian	Orange	Transfer to a CSU	None	4	Part-time on-campus	Master's

*during high school **during community college ***at the time of the interview

Data Collection

Informed Consent

Respondents were given an Information Sheet prior to data collection (see Appendix B). The Information Sheet provided general overview of the study's purpose and procedures as well as his or her rights as a respondent. Respondents were given an opportunity to review the information sheet and ask for any clarifications. Once this was completed, the researcher reaffirmed that her or his participation was voluntary and she or he could stop the interview or decline to answer any questions at any time without penalty. The researcher then asked respondents to confirm that they understood the procedures and their rights as participants as described in the Information Sheet. Lastly, the researcher asked the respondents to provide verbal consent to participate and allow audio of the interview to be recorded for analysis.

Demographic Data

Prior to participating in the interview, respondents were asked to complete a Demographic Sheet that provided general information about the respondent's family and education background. The Respondent Demographic Sheet included 32 brief multiple-choice, check-all-that-apply questions, and fill-in-the-blank questions (see Appendix C). For example, respondents were asked to indicate his or her transfer GPA, his or her household income while enrolled in community college, and the highest level of education received by his or her mother, father, and sibling. Respondent names were not collected; a pseudonym was provided at the top of the Respondent Demographic Sheet.

Interview Data

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with 10 respondents. The interviews were 45 to 60 minutes in length and were structured using an interview guide

designed to ask about the respondent's academic and social community college experiences as well as their pre-college experiences and post-college plans. The interview guide was composed of 6 categories: pre-college plans, community college academic experiences, community college social experiences, community college transfer process, university academic and social experiences, and post-college experiences and included 16 questions (see Appendix D).

Interview questions were based on a reviewing the extant literature and thus designed to ask respondents about the role of common PSC factors (i.e., self-efficacy, coping responses, parental support, institutional support, university fit, and campus culture) without forcing respondents to discuss these influences. In other words, the interview guide was designed to guide respondents into discussing their academic and social experiences on campus rather than guiding them to discuss psychological, social, and cultural factors specifically. This allowed students to speak freely on the factors influencing their college choice processes in community college.

All but one of the interviews with respondents who were enrolled at the time of data collection was conducted in-person at the UCS campus. The off-campus interview with a respondent who was enrolled at UCS at the time of the interview was conducted over Skype, an online video messaging software. All interviews with respondents who had recently graduated from UCS were conducted in a public location agreed upon by the researcher and the respondent. The interviews were audio recorded with the consent of respondents.

An undergraduate student was recruited to participate as a research assistant for the study. The primary task of the research assistant was to transcribe audio recordings verbatim. Prior to receiving access to the audio recordings, the research assistant was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix E). The research assistant transcribed the audio recording verbatim using Transcriptions, an online audio transcription software.

Data Analysis

Following Creswell's (2007) recommendations, the study's demographic and interview data were analyzed within-case and cross-case. Both within- and cross-case analyses drew on the PSC conceptual framework (Castellanos and Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

Within-case

The first step in the within-case analyses was to identify PSC codes in the data to produce *codes*. The second step was to identify interactions of the PSC codes to produce co-occurrences. The third step was to develop *themes* based on the factors and patterns that emerged from the data. These steps are described in the remainder of this section.

Codes and coding. The first step of the data analysis was to code the data using a concept-driven coding technique (Gibbs, 2007). As described by Gibbs (2007), concept-driven coding begins with the development of codes that represent concepts that come from the research literature (p. 44). The codes developed for this study represented PSC factors often explored in previous PSC studies. These PSC factors included those detailed in Chapter 2 (e.g., self-efficacy, coping responses, parental support, faculty support, university fit, and transfer culture) as well as others (e.g., self-esteem, motivation, peer support, social clubs, familismo, and cultural fit). While codes were drawn from previous studies that have used the PSC approach, I allowed for new codes not captured by previous studies to emerge from the data.

Dedoose, a mixed methods and qualitative data analysis software, was used to code the interview data systematically. Before coding transcriptions, a codebook was generated through Dedoose. The codebook included all possible PSC factors that could be found in the data. Once the codebook was generated, each transcription was coded for PSC factors.

Co-occurrence of codes. The second step of the data analysis was to look for patterns and relationships in the data to “go beyond the descriptive and impressionistic” (Gibbs, 2007, p. 145). To accomplish this, the researcher returned to the interview transcriptions to identify relationships between PSC factors. The patterns were then divided into three types of interactions based on the PSC conceptual framework—sociocultural, psychosocial, and psychocultural.

To accomplish this, interactions between coded PSC factors were identified using Dedoose’s analysis feature; specifically, the “code co-occurrence” table was produced.

Cross-case

Themes. The PSC factors and patterns coded in within-case analyses were revisited to generate two cross-case matrixes. Cross-case matrixes listed the frequency of identification of factors and patterns for the entire sample. Cross-case findings were then used to produce themes that extended on the PSC model. Lastly, quotes were selected to illustrate the emergent themes.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability. No study—neither ethnographic nor experimental—can ever be replicated exactly because human behavior cannot ever be replicated exactly (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Therefore, I took multiple steps recommended by LeCompte and Goetz (1982) to approach rather than attain external and internal reliability. With respect to external reliability, I first assessed my own positionality and personal background and the effect this may have on my interpretation of the data (see Role of the Researcher). Second, I assessed the drawbacks of the sampling strategies used to select respondents and the effect this may have on the data reported (see Limitations of this Study). Third, I defined the psychological, social, and cultural constructs (i.e. PSC codes) used to analyze the data and shared these definitions with the other members of the research team who offered their interpretation of the data. Similarly, I employed techniques

to approach internal reliability. First, interview recording were transcribed verbatim to create low-inference descriptions of the data. Transcriptions included pauses in the audio as well other audible reactions from both the respondent and the researcher (e.g., laughter). Second, using Dedoose's training feature, I created a test to assess the inter-rated reliability of the data. I recruited an undergraduate research assistant (same student who transcribed the interview audio recordings) to complete the test. The results of the test were reported using Cohen's kappa statistic. Dedoose visual indicators use the following criteria for interpreting kappa values: $< .50$ = poor agreement, $.51-.64$ = fair agreement, $.65-.80$ = good agreement, and $> .80$ = excellent agreement. The results of this test showed a pooled kappa statistic of $.88$ —excellent agreement.

Validity. Two strategies were employed to contribute to the trustworthiness of the findings. With respect to internal validity, first, I conducted the interviews in an unstigmatized and semi-private setting to ensure help respondents feel more comfortable sharing their personal experiences with me (see Interview Data). Second, I requested reactions to working analyses from a selected respondent at several stages of the research—a strategy called “member checking” (Creswell, 2008, p. 267). For instance, I asked a selected respondent to assess whether the interpretations were fair and the themes were representative of the sample. Furthermore, as with other ethnographic research, the aim of this study was not provide outright generalizability but instead to provide comparability and translatability of the findings to groups not investigated (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

Role of the Researcher

In ethnographic research, the subjective experiences of both the respondents and the researchers must be addressed (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Whereas experimental researchers go to great lengths to distance themselves from their research, ethnographers take their own

experiences into consideration at all stages of the research because the nature of the work asks them to uncover, interpret, and present the subjective meaning of the lived experiences of others. It is therefore important for the researcher to understand her positionality and personal history (Creswell, 2008). The following paragraph describes my background and interest in the topic.

I am a second-generation, Latina from a city largely populated by low-income Latina/o families, primarily of Mexican descent. The risk my parents took in leaving their home in Mexico in search of better life in the U.S. has long influenced the way I appreciate the opportunities available in this country. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and am working toward a Master of Arts in Social Ecology. Along my educational trajectory, I struggled to see myself as deserving of my many academic accolades, primarily because so few of my classmates were afforded the same resources I was during our K-12 schooling. I was one of few students selected to participate in college readiness programs and invited to join honors programs. Additionally, I had a handful of family members who attended a university and who I saw as role models during high school. Together, these resources and role models influenced my college choice processes. After graduating from high school, I kept in touch with classmates who enrolled in community college; it is from them that I learned about the many challenges specific to Latina/o community college students. Knowing the talent of these students and recognizing the influence of secondary school experiences on my own college choice, I became interested in the influence of community college experiences on the college choice of Latina/o students. My interest in these issues surrounding Latina/o students in higher education grew during my first year in graduate school—where I was one of few Latina/os in the department. During my second year, I transitioned from a research focus on ecological conservation to a focus on educational inequality and immersed myself in sociology of education literature. For these reasons, I see

myself as both an insider and outside to this study's demographic group. Whereas my position as an outsider to the community college experience could have hindered rapport with respondents, it also made me highly receptive to the lived experiences of the respondents. Having not had my own community college experiences, I asked respondents to provide details to pull together a deeper understanding of their own experiences. Furthermore, my insider position helped to build rapport with respondents specifically during the interview procedure (e.g., expressing similar experiences along my own educational trajectory). Given my insider/outsider perspective I believe I can offer a meaningful interpretation of the data.

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of experiences during community college on college choice of Latina/o students who transferred to a selective university. Rather than focus on the individual or environmental barriers to transfer that these students experience as much of the extant literature does, this study set out to investigate how psychological, social, and cultural factors contributed to the college decision-making processes of respondents. Within-case and cross-case analyses were conducted with the interview and demographic data collected from ten respondents. The findings presented in this chapter are framed using the PSC conceptual framework (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).

Within-case analyses identified 22 distinct PSC factors—12 psychological factors, 5 social factors, and 5 cultural factors. However, not all factors are present in every case. For example, while transfer culture influences were identified frequently in Anthony's interview data, they were largely absent from Felipe's. Furthermore, within-case analyses described multiple interactions between PSC factors. For example, whereas Penelope relied on support from staff to cope with stress, Rene relied on parental support to cope with stress. Within-case analysis also showed 41 distinct code co-occurrences—8 co-occurrences between psychological and cultural codes, 30 co-occurrences between social and psychological codes, and 3 co-occurrences between social and cultural codes. To produce thematic findings, cross-case analysis followed by within-case analysis.

Cross-case analysis of the data identified the number of times a distinct positive PSC factor is identified in the entire sample. Table 2 lists the PSC factors identified in the within-case analyses along with the number of times it is identified for each respondent. Psychological

factors were most frequently identified (268 identified), followed by social factors (172 identified) and cultural factors (62 identified). Table 3 shows the number of respondents who demonstrated or reported each of these PSC constructs. Furthermore, Table 4 shows the 31 most common PSC interactions in the sample—6 co-occurrences between psychological and cultural codes, 22 co-occurrences between social and psychological codes, and 3 co-occurrences between social and cultural codes. Each code co-occurrence is shown in Table 4 occurred more than twice in the sample.

Taking all narratives into account, the following five themes emerged: Motivation and Aspirations Fueled by Familismo, Validation from Faculty and/or Staff, College Knowledge from Faculty, Staff, and/or Peers, Encouragement from Parents, and Transfer Culture Created by the Community College. Additionally, two factors not currently captured by the PSC conceptual framework—Major Fit and University Prestige—emerged in this study. The findings are presented in Figure 1 and are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Table 2. Number of times a PSC code is identified

	Total
Psychological	268
Motivation	52
Transfer knowledge	49
Educational and career aspirations	30
College knowledge	25
Financial assistance	21
Major fit	21
Coping responses	15
Academic preparation	14
Academic performance	13
Validation	12
Self-esteem	8
Self-efficacy	8
Social	172
Faculty, staff, and other mentors	75
Transfer-oriented program	40
Transfer-oriented peers	22
Student clubs, team sports, and volunteer programs	18
Parents and other family members	17
Cultural	62
Transfer culture	32
Familismo	13
University prestige	9
University fit	7
Machismo	1
Total	502

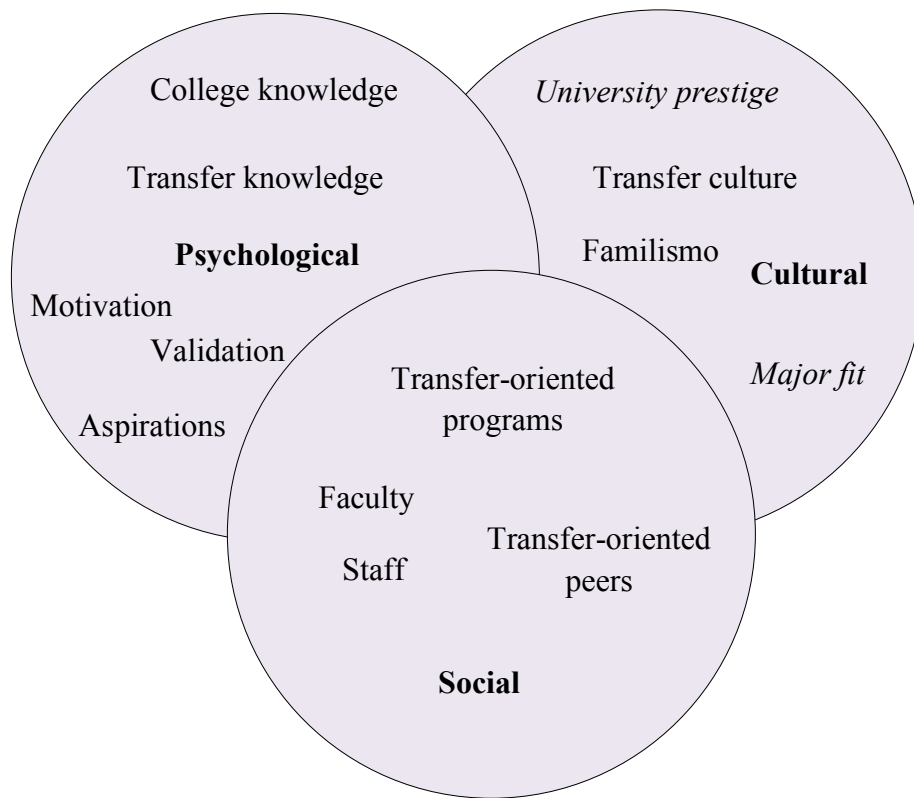
Table 3. Occurrence of PSC code in the sample

	Total
Psychological	
Motivation	10
Transfer knowledge	10
Educational and career aspirations	9
College knowledge	9
Major fit	9
Financial assistance	8
Coping responses	7
Academic preparation	6
Academic performance	6
Self-efficacy	5
Validation	4
Self-esteem	4
Social	
Faculty, staff, and other mentors	9
Transfer-oriented peers	9
Student clubs, team sports, and volunteer programs	8
Transfer-oriented program	7
Parents and other family members	6
Cultural	
Transfer culture	10
Familismo	8
University prestige	7
University fit	5
Machismo	1

Table 4. Number of times a PSC code co-occurrence is identified

	Total
Sociocultural co-occurrences	24
Faculty, staff, and other mentors x transfer culture	15
Transfer-oriented program x transfer culture	6
Transfer-oriented peers x transfer culture	3
Psychosocial co-occurrences	158
Transfer knowledge x faculty, staff, and other mentors	23
Transfer knowledge x transfer-oriented programs	19
College knowledge x faculty, staff, and other mentors	13
Validation x faculty, staff, and other mentors	12
College knowledge x transfer-oriented programs	11
Motivation x parents and other family members	9
Educational and career aspirations x faculty, staff, and other mentors	7
Transfer knowledge x transfer-oriented peers	7
Motivation x faculty, staff, and other mentors	7
Academic preparation x faculty, staff, and other mentors	5
Coping x faculty, staff, and other mentors	5
Coping x transfer-oriented peers	5
Self-esteem x faculty, staff, and other mentors	5
Financial assistance x transfer-oriented programs	4
Academic performance x transfer-oriented programs	4
Academic performance x faculty, staff, and other mentors	4
Major fit x student clubs, team sports, and volunteer programs	3
Academic preparation x transfer-oriented programs	3
Educational and career aspirations x student clubs, team sports, and volunteer programs	3
Coping x transfer-oriented programs	3
Motivation x transfer-oriented programs	3
Motivation x transfer-oriented peers	3
Psychocultural co-occurrences	31
Transfer knowledge x transfer culture	11
Educational and career aspirations x university prestige	5
College knowledge x transfer culture	5
Motivation x familismo	4
Academic performance x transfer culture	3
Educational and career aspirations x familismo	3
Total	213

Figure 5. Psychosociocultural Approach to College Choice of Latina/o Transfer Students



Psychological Themes

Motivation and Aspirations Fueled by Familismo

Four of the five respondents who were employed throughout community college (see Table 1) indicated that they felt a sense of obligation to contribute financially to the household. These respondents suggested that it was their responsibility as either the only child or eldest child to help provide for the family, set an example about the importance of education for their younger siblings, and give meaning to the sacrifices made by their parents. Thus, familismo fueled their motivation to balance their job(s) and schoolwork and also contributed to

respondents' aspiration to earn a baccalaureate degree and/or attend a selective university. Rene, Penelope, Lourdes, and Gabriel provide examples of these interactions on college choice.

Motivation. Rene grew up in a single-parent household and was an only child for most of his adult life. As an only child in a single-parent household, Rene “took it as my own responsibility to help [his mother] out economically.” Rene suggests that as a member of a traditional Mexican family, financial hardships were meant to stay “within our house and no one needs to worry about it.” His commitment to family fueled his motivation to both work full-time and attend community college full-time. Rene worked forty hours a week in a grocery store while enrolled in twelve or more units to maintain full-time student status. His class-work schedule started at eight in the morning and ended around two in the morning:

Wake up at about 8am. Go to class from about 8:30am or so to about 1pm. Race home.

Eat something. Maybe study a little bit and go in at 4pm. From 4pm to about 1am, maybe 2am in the morning go to work. Maybe study. Maybe eat. And then do it again.

Similarly, some respondents who identified as the eldest child indicated that it was important for them to not only lead the way for their siblings but also provide them with a clear and direct path to reach their goals. For example, at the time of the interview, Penelope had two sisters in community college, a brother in high school, and a brother in elementary school. Penelope worked two part-time jobs while enrolled as a full-time student in community college so that her siblings could focus on doing well in school:

I saw how working and going to school affected me – that’s why I have a really bad GPA and everything. I didn’t want the same for my sisters. I told myself, “Okay, I’d rather take the fall and let them succeed.” [...] That’s why I always took that kind of toll and letting them know like, “We don’t need your help. You go to school, that’s how you help.”

Penelope's goal then and now is for one of her siblings to "do better" than she has. She believes that "at the end of the day [they] all succeed if one of [them] gets out." In other words, they would work as a family to better their lives.

Aspirations. As second-generation children of immigrants, most respondents felt a sense of obligation to give meaning to her parents' sacrifice to come to the United States. Lourdes, for example, considered her parents the greatest motivator in her pursuit of a baccalaureate degree:

I wanted to make them proud. I really do. I think like... my parent's struggled so much. And that's their ultimate dream like they never had the opportunity to do that for themselves. So for me, I'm like, "I need to do it," you know? There was like no option. And then... I don't know I just feel like that was, I really did want to make them proud. I think that was like the main thing.

Lourdes knew early on that she wanted to earn a baccalaureate degree. Her goal at the end was to earn a baccalaureate degree in order to take care of her family financially because "that's what matters to [her] in the end."

For Gabriel, familismo fueled his aspirations to attend a selective university. Specifically, Gabriel chose to apply exclusively to selective universities and his top choice was a UC flagship campus. Although his parents did not push him toward any institution, he believed that they would be most proud of him if he attended a highly selective campus:

I knew I was going to be the only one in my family to actually get a college degree. And it felt like it would be a little bit more for my parents to talk about as far as of like pride. Their son went to [local UC flagship campus], which is worldly recognized. So, there was an inclination there, but ultimately I knew the right choice was [UCS].

Validation from Faculty and/or Staff

Six of the ten respondents reported an intention to transfer to a university prior to their enrollment in community college. Of the four respondents who did not report an initial intention to transfer, all reported validation from faculty and/or staff as key in their decision to switch to the transfer track (see Table 1). These respondents suggested that transfer to a university and specifically transfer to a UC campus became an option only after hearing validating comments from faculty and/or staff. Isabel, Penelope, and Miriam offered examples of the influence of validation on college choice.

Isabel entered community college with the intention of earning “some type of certificate.” Transferring to a university was not at all on her radar until her science professors suggested she had the potential to excel at a university:

I did very well and [my professors] saw potential and they ended up encouraging me to not just go and get a certificate but to go ahead and possibly transfer to a university [...]. They talked to me about what I wanted to do, and kind of gave me higher expectations of myself [...]. They told me, “No, you really could do a whole lot more.” They were kind of pushing me towards sciences which I just didn’t like but them believing in me kind of made me want to explore [...]. It was just like, “You have potential. You can do more. Don’t limit yourself. Don’t cut yourself short.”

Once she received this validation from the professors, she began to see the potential in herself. She became highly motivated to transfer to a university and even started thinking about pursuing an advanced degree:

I think after just, my professors at the community college—after they saw potential in me, I think I started to see potential in me. And not just like to do this, but to do more.

Isabel went on to develop an interest in obtaining a doctoral degree from a UC campus.

Penelope entered community college with the intention of earning a radiology technician certification. After joining a club on campus, she caught the attention of the club advisor who was also an academic counselor at the college. The academic counselor “saw potential” in her and encouraged her to explore the transfer route, and specifically the UC transfer option:

It was just my counselor who told me, he was the one who put the idea on me. Like, “You could get a bachelor’s.” And he’s like, “You can do it, you have potential. I don’t know why you’re putting yourself so low, or don’t think you can reach what others can.” So he’s the one that put the little seed in my brain. Like, “You could transfer and go to a UC. You deserve to go to one.”

What’s more, her professor’s support and validation worked to improve her self-esteem:

So, he was the one, cause we were really close, he became like my father figure, too. Just guiding me throughout the time and just helping with my self-esteem and academics cause I never... I never though of myself like, “I can be smart or I can achieve things.” It was just always “work, work, provide, provide for my family.”

As a result, she dropped her radiology technician major and decided to transfer within three years:

After they planted the little seed, I think I was just like, “I know I can do it.” I think as long as I have someone to guide me, I know the ropes. I’m like full on and I’m not going to look back [...].

Miriam enrolled in community college with the intention of completing a certification program but switched to the CSU transfer route upon receiving information about this option. During her first years, she joined a mentoring program where she was matched up with a

professor who expressed his belief that she was “good enough” to attend a UC campus. At the time, Miriam thought there was no difference between a CSU and UC other than cost of tuition.

This experience prompted her to investigate the differences between a CSU and a UC:

But it wasn't really until one other professor from the student-mentoring program—he just told me... Dr. Smith [pseudonym], he said, “Why don't you apply to a UC? He's like, “You're good enough to apply to a UC.” Because I think it was also that thinking of like, “I'm not good enough to go to school.” So after he said that I started looking into it a little bit more and that's when I started noticing the differences.

Once Miriam enrolled in more advanced classes—offered almost exclusively to honors students and designed to give student “the experience of what it would be like if [they] went off to a university”—she received more validation from her honors program professors:

Dr. Rose [pseudonym] would pull me aside and ask me, “So what are your ideas? What are you planning to do?” [...] And I still remember the day when he [asked], “Why don't you apply to a UC?” And I was like, “Whoa, somebody thinks that I should apply to a UC.” So it was more of that influence.

Again, it is worth noting that among respondents with an initial intention to transfer, none reported validating comments from faculty or staff as a component of their college choice processes. Most notably, Felipe—who was highly motivated to transfer to a CSU—indicated that he did not seek assistance with navigating the transfer route other than visiting the counseling center often enough to verify that he was on the right track. Respondents with an initial intention to transfer more were likely to report access to knowledge about college and the transfer process as influential on their college decision-making processes.

Social Themes

College Knowledge from Faculty, Staff and/or Peers

No respondent had the initial intention to transfer to a UC. Among those who reported an initial intention to transfer, all reported an initial intention to transfer to a CSU. Some respondents suggested that they did not consider themselves academically qualified to attend a UC; others felt that a UC campus would be “too expensive” or “too luxurious” given the cost of attendance. Furthermore, all of the respondents in the sample were first-generation college students and most were the first in their immediate or extended family to attend a university. For this reason, accessing general information about college (i.e., college knowledge) and specifically to information about the transfer application process (i.e., transfer knowledge) was key in respondents’ college choice. Respondents reported receiving this information from faculty, staff, and transfer-oriented peers on campus. For respondents with initial intention to transfer to a CSU, accessing college and transfer knowledge contributed their decision to apply to a UC. Miriam, Gabriel, and Isabel provide examples of this influence on college choice.

Faculty and staff. Miriam was completely new to the American postsecondary system, having spent most of her life in Mexico. None of her immediate or extended family members in California had attended a university and her only friends were those in also attending her community college:

I didn’t have guidance from any other source. Who could I ask about like this application thing? So it was more of a worry like, “Am I doing this right? Am I missing anything? Do I have everything? All the papers were supposed to?”

Miriam relied on the Transfer Center staff to learn about the application process. She sat through workshops, which provided step-by-step guidance through the application:

Well, the good thing is that my community college offered services or workshop series that would help you apply to UCs or Cal States. So I would sit through those and you could literally sit on a computer and they would walk you through the application.

Miriam's professors also informed her that if she had an interest in conducting research, a UC campus would be ideal for her. And furthermore, they explained that if she had an interest in going into research as a career, she should look into doctoral programs:

All of the professors involved in the honors program had a Ph.D., except one of them—I think he was currently in a Ph.D. program; he was working towards it. But most of them already had it. So they already knew what it was, what it meant to be a Ph.D. And some of them did come from UCs, so they really pushed for students to apply to UCs. So that's where I started to like, "Oh okay. I get this now."

Similarly, Gabriel was the only one among his friends who applied for transfer. In fact, he had few friends who had transferred or "even had ambitions to transfer." Without an example to follow, Gabriel relied on his academic counselors to help him navigate the transfer process:

What helped me the most there was like I said the counselors that I knew. I was able to build a rapport with a lot of the counselors there. So, they helped me out when it was my time to leave [...] With what UCs I could go into, what applications to send in. What to write, cause they also helped teach me... how to actually to write the essay [...]. What else you need to include with that application in order to stand out from everyone else [...] that was more the connections that I had.

Gabriel suggests that the transfer application process would have been "a little bit more difficult" had he not had these connections with the academic counselors. In addition, Gabriel received feedback on his personal statements from a former English professor. After he received

notification that he would be graduating, he contacted his former academic counselors and professors who guided him through the process to spread the good news.

Isabel's science professors not only provided validation, they also provided the knowledge that guided her aspirations. Her counselors and science professors explained that if she intended to complete a doctorate program, she would benefit most from attending a research university such as one of the UC campuses:

...my counselors and professors... they were like, "Oh these are more research institutions." And if you're going to go for your Ph.D., this is where you want to go.

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents indicated that an academic counselor provided the critical information they needed to prepare for transfer and "actually apply." For example, academic counselors informed respondents about the articulation agreements between the CCC system and the UC and CSU system, which provided a list of courses they could take in their community college that would transfer to the CSU and/or UC of their choice. Other respondents indicated that their academic counselor was the one who told them about the IGETC, the curriculum the UC and CSU systems suggest for lower-division requirements.

It is worth noting that this was not the case for every respondent. Felipe suggests that there was very little transfer culture at his community college. As a result, he did not feel like he could rely on faculty or staff for assistance with his transfer applications.

Peers. Although most respondents reported that they had no time for a social life while enrolled in community college, respondents expressed the benefit of having other transfer-oriented peers on campus. Most of these relationships were established through participation in a transfer-oriented program or club on campus. Other transfer-oriented peers provided advice for

navigating the transfer route to a selective university. Julian, Lourdes, and Rene provide examples for this interaction on college choice.

Lourdes established close friendships with two other transfer-oriented students. Lourdes' peers offered her not only emotional support, but also key information she help her navigate the transfer pathway. For example, one of Lourdes' friends asked to put together Lourdes' class schedule each semester to tackle the transfer requirements most efficiently. Lourdes suggests that her friend's help was one of the reasons she was able to transfer after 2 years:

And I also had a very good friend her name was, Carolina [pseudonym], she was like, she actually at one point said that she would make my plan. Cause she loved making people's plans like graduation plans. She'd be like, "Hey, can I make your class schedule?" Like she would tell me what class I should take [...] she'd be like, "These are the courses you should take so you can transfer faster." [...] So, I remember she was really helpful. I had friends that were like, I guess helped me and stuff and encouraged me.

Miriam became aware of the community college's honors society in her first year. After her first year, she received an invitation to join and decided she would try it out to "see what [she would] gain" from the experience. Miriam found out quickly that most of the honors society members were highly motivated to transfer. The honors society members provided a social support system that she lacked off-campus as well as highly motivating environment on-campus. More importantly, it also allowed Miriam to ask other transfer-oriented peers about their transfer process and learn about campus resources she would have not been aware of otherwise:

Most of the students had a pretty solid idea of what they wanted to do. So, I liked that. I liked being surrounded by students that were very clear in what they wanted as a goal. Or what they wanted to do after, cause then I would ask them questions or I would try to like

pick their brain about like, “Oh, why do you think that way? Or why are you trying to do it like that? Why not this way?” and then I would see like, “Oh, they were trying it this way and I’ll try it.” Like trying to figure a way out through the educational system. And it was a good support system and it would also provide a lot of resources for students. Like scholarships or like field trips to universities and stuff like that.

Rene entered community college with the intention to transfer to a CSU campus.

Although he received a great amount of support with navigating the transfer process from his cross-country teammates and coaches, Rene suggests that his girlfriend during community college provided the most help in terms of navigating the transfer application process. His girlfriend, for example, helped to clarify discrepancies in the UC applications and his transcripts:

It was really tough. It was... luckily for some reason, somehow my girlfriend at the time she had a much easier time with it for whatever reason. So she was helping me, looking at the transcript and filling in the information. She was the one helping me a lot with it.

Furthermore, his girlfriend was interested in attending many of the same universities as Rene. Together, they visited multiple campuses in California. These campus visits were Rene’s way of researching universities, and ultimately, they helped him make his acceptance decision.

Encouragement from Parents

The majority of the respondents’ in the sample reported that their parent(s) had a middle school education (see Table 1). As a result, respondents indicated that their parents could not provide specific guidance through the transfer application. Nonetheless, they reported that their parents influence their college choice through “encouraging words.” Rene, Felipe, Daisy, and Gabriel provide examples of the different ways parents provided encouragement to do well in their academics throughout community college.

Rene's parents did not instruct him to do "anything specific" in order to transfer out of the community college. Nonetheless, they provided support through encouraging words:

My parents have no education here. Of course they wanted me to go to college but they had no way to instruct me or guide me... It was encouragement to keep going to school, but like I said, they didn't really know what the route was. They just wanted me to keep going to school. "*Echale ganas*" was their support. Not anything specific. "Do this. Take these classes, and hopefully you can get into this or that school," no, no, nothing like that.

When Rene was rejected from his top choice university during his third year and subsequently thought about stopping out and "just keeping [his] job" at the grocery store. However, his mother encouraged him to return, reapply, and accept admission to one of the other universities where he would be sure to be offered admission:

Like I said my mom doesn't know anything much about schools, but she encouraged me a lot. She was like, "Don't let one school that didn't accept you—don't let that determine everything. If it didn't work out, try again or just try somewhere else."

Rene returned to community college the following fall semester with a different mindset, highly motivated to transfer to a university:

I got a lot more serious about my classes and I decided to apply again. Like, "What's the worst thing that could happen? I have to transfer out." For a second I was thinking of just keeping my job and that being it but no. "My goal is to transfer out and wherever I get accepted into I'll go—that's the school I'm going to."

Felipe's parents, like Rene's, were not able to provide specific instruction on how to navigate the transfer path; nonetheless, they provided what encouragement they could. Although

the type of encouragement they provided could have been seen by some as “harsh,” Felipe thought of it as the “tough love” he needed to motivate him to stay motivated:

[At home] it was still kind of a little like, “What the hell? You’re not even supposed to be here [at the house]. [...] It was like tough love. [...] It’s kind of like—it built a fire that definitely made me do what I had to do. So, I felt like it was supportive, like it was supportive for me. It was definitely constructive for me. [...] It was a kick in the butt—in the right direction.

Similarly, Daisy’s parents consistently checked in with her about her transfer status:

My mom was always asking me, “So, when are you going to apply? When are you transferring?” And my dad too. He was very strict. And I feel like he always wanted—he was the one always asking me, “Are you sure you’re enrolled for at least full-time?”

Although she felt “annoyed” with the questions at times, she knew her parents were asking out of love and support for her educational goals. She knew that although they could not guide her on the transfer process or instruct her on class assignments, they could provide the encouragement to push her forward. She knew her parents could not guide her on the transfer process or instruct her on class assignments, but they could provide encouragement to push her forward.

Other parents showed their support by encouraging their children to focus exclusively on their education and discouraged them from working. For example, Gabriel describes his parents doing their best to “keep me away from work” in order to focus on his education:

I wanted to get a job to help out my family and help for pay some bills. But my dad mostly would deny it. He would say, “No, focus on your school. Focus on your studies; I’ll take care of everything. That’s my job, you let me do that and you do your job, which is go to school.” [...] So, the four years I spent at community college I didn’t have a job.

It is worth noting that not all respondents reported parental support. Most notably, Miriam and Penelope's parents discouraged them from continuing their education in order to obtain full-time jobs that would better allow them to provide financially to the household. For these respondents, the support they received from their community college in the form of transfer culture played a greater role in their college choice processes.

Cultural Theme

Transfer Culture Created by the Community College

The perception of culture of transfer at the community college differed across the sample, even for those respondents who attended the same community college. Perceived transfer culture provided a welcoming environment for those who were interested in completing the transfer route but unsure of how to do so. All ten respondents indicated that transfer culture contributed favorably to their college choice processes during community college. In fact, it was the most frequently identified factor in the cultural dimension of the PSC model. Respondents indicated that transfer culture shaped their support systems on campus and gave them access to critical college and transfer knowledge.

Transfer support by way of transfer culture. Transfer culture was established through transfer-oriented courses, events, and programs. These transfer-oriented courses, events, and program helped to form respondents' relationships on campus. Miriam, Lourdes, and Daisy provide examples of the influence of transfer culture on the formation of relationships with faculty, staff, and/or other transfer-oriented students.

Miriam enrolled in community college with the intention to complete a certification program. Given her academic performance in her first semester, she was invited to participate in the college's honors program. As an honors program student, Miriam was eligible to enroll in

advanced level courses that met the GE curriculum. Over the course of her enrollment in these advanced courses, Miriam established relationships with the honors program professors. In addition, Miriam was invited to participate in the community college's mentor program for transfer-oriented students. Her mentor for the program—also an honors professor—was the first person to suggest she had what it took to transfer to a selective university such as a UC. Overall, Miriam suggests the transfer culture at her community college had the greatest influence on her college choice:

It was more of that influence, more of like particular programs within the community college, that really target students to go off and transfer and pursue a BA.

Lourdes enrolled in community college with the intention to transfer to her local CSU campus. The summer before she started, Lourdes visited the campus to register for classes. While waiting to register at the counseling center, a student approached her with a flyer for a transfer-oriented program. The student explained that the community college had a partnership with a local UC campus through this program, and upon completion of the program requirements, she would receive guaranteed admission to her local UC campus. Lourdes joined and enrolled in the program's seminar in the fall. The seminar introduced her to staff including Transfer Center coordinators and TRIO program advisers who would later assist her through the transfer application process as well as classmates who provided motivational support throughout her two years in community college.

Daisy enrolled in community college with the intention to transfer to her local CSU campus. On her first day of the fall semester, Daisy felt "it was a continuation of high school" because of the number of former high school classmates she saw on campus. As the semester went on, however, she saw fewer and fewer of those familiar faces—either because they

“dropped out or they stopped showing up to classes.” But Daisy was determined to stay the course and transfer. Based on her academic performance in her first semester, Daisy was invited to join the college’s honors program. Once she joined the honors program in the spring semester, she began taking classes with other students who were interested in “transferring pretty quickly.” Daisy formed close friendships with three of these students. Together, they joined other clubs on campus and completed their transfer applications.

Transfer knowledge by way of transfer culture. Not only did respondents indicate that transfer culture helped to form crucial on-campus relations but transfer culture also gave respondents access to information that facilitated their transfer process. Transfer-oriented courses, events, and programs offered respondents a better idea of what to expect at a university (i.e., college knowledge, academic preparation) and how to get there (i.e., transfer knowledge). Rene, Miriam, and Anthony provide examples of this interaction on college choice.

During his first semester in community college, Rene took a class with a professor who indicated that she would conduct her class as if she was on a university campus. The professor would treat Rene and his classmates as if they were university students. This was his first exposure to university professor expectations. Later on, Rene enrolled in courses with other professors who were strict with their syllabus. Unlike in high school when he could “sing a sad little song” to a teacher to receive an extension on an assignment, his community college professors did not accept any excuses for late assignments. Rene appreciated these experiences because they gave him a better idea of what to expect at a university. Similarly, Miriam’s advanced courses were designed to provide students with “the experience of what it would be like if [they] went off to a university.” Professors who promoted transfer within the campus often

taught these courses, and the other students enrolled in these classes were often determined to transfer.

Other respondents were invited to join transition program designed to teach beginning college students about the community college's resources as well as the transfer process. For example, Anthony joined the community college's first year success program, which was designed "to guide [respondents] through picking [their] classes, going to counselors [...] and helping [them] start the transfer process." It required him to take a class on "how to navigate [his] schedule through time management." The first year success program also required him to attend field trips to colleges in the area once a semester. The college field trips and all the other transfer activities collectively encouraged him to apply to a UC campus. Once application season started, Anthony felt confident navigating the applications himself because of all he had already learned about the process through the first year success program:

They really informed us a lot in those classes, transferring navigating process in what kind of ... website to use to find everything and to help us gather our portfolio, on creating a resume, a personal transcripts, and how to read your transcript and everything [...]. I already knew about the transferring process.

Together, these honors courses encouraged respondents to prepare for university life.

Other Factors

Although a large portion of the data spoke to the concepts addressed by the PSC model, this study's methodology allowed for new concepts not currently captured by the PSC model to emerge from the data. Two new concepts—*major fit* and *university prestige*—and their influence on college choice are presented in this section.

Major fit

Most respondents entered community college without a major in mind. Nonetheless, they were eager to explore academic fields and find the major that fit their aspirations and interests. In some respects, respondents suggested that declaring a major justified their enrollment in community college and their continued aspiration for higher education. Furthermore, major fit provided a clear pathway for transfer. Once a major was declared, respondents were able to design a transfer plan and stick with it. Isabel, Rene, and Lourdes provide examples of how major fit contribute favorably to college choice.

Isabel was eligible to transfer after a year and a half because of the number of classes she had taken up to then. She had no trouble completing the general education requirements. She knew exactly which courses were required for all transfer students and planned her schedule accordingly. Her primary challenge was choosing a major to pursue after transferring and completing the requirements for transfer under that major:

So I was there for 3 years and just because I really enjoyed—okay so after I went there and I talked to some professors that told me that maybe I should consider transferring to university, then I had to choose what I wanted to study. And just finding out the different subject matters and finding out what interested me that took me a while. Cause at first I did what I knew what I had to do; I did my English, I did my math, I did my sciences, and then it was figuring out my major. And that's why I ended up staying there for a while because I was really interested in the social sciences – all the social sciences, and I just needed to narrow it down into what specific major I wanted to study.

It was not until she found the major that fit her aspirations and interests that she felt “ready” to transfer to a university:

After my sister [transferred], me and my [other] sister—we stayed there for another year and kind of figured out what we wanted to do. And finally figured out it was psychology and then we were ready [...] “Okay, psychology—this is it.” And then that was it.

Rene chose to attend community college because he did not have an idea of what he would major at a university. After enrolling in several “random” classes in his first year to determine what major most interested him, he finally declared history. He recalls, “I really, really enjoyed [my history classes] and I kind of thought, ‘Why not? This is something I want to do.’” Once he declared the major, he could easily find out which specific courses he needed to complete in order to transfer. Additionally, declaring a major promoted him to get “more involved.” Whereas he did not interact with his teachers in high school or professors in community college prior to declaring his major, he started to ask questions in class and establish relationships with his professors during office hours:

So, I started getting more involved with my history professors [...]. Just more talking to [professors] and actually going to their offices... Just being an actual college student getting involved with professors, talking to them, asking questions. In high school, I grew up in...[a] lower poverty kind of area. So, it was—in high school you’re a nerd or you’re not cool [if you] ask questions or to try to actually get involved.

In most other cases, declaring a major set up a clear pathway for respondents to follow. Lourdes, for example, entered community college with the intention of transferring to a university, but undecided on the major she would pursue. She felt “lost” because she “wasn’t exploring” career options before community college. Her biggest challenge was finding the right major to pursue:

[My EOPS advisor and I] would have to change my plan. Cause at first I was a business major, and then I was like “I don’t even know why I did it.” I just thought it would be cool to say that [I was] a business major. And then at one point I wanted to do a math major, but then I’m like, “I hate what I’m doing.” I just wanted to do it. Then I ended up doing psych.

She changed her major and subsequently her transfer plan 3 times in the 2 years she was enrolled. However, once she declared psychology major she could more accurately determine which classes she needed to complete before she could transfer.

It is important to note that although all respondents declared a major (as a requirement for transfer), not all appeared confident in their major fit. Julian, for example, declared a chemistry major only because it would allow him to continue to enroll in other science-related courses. Julian continued to enroll in biology, physics and engineering, in addition to chemistry at UCS.

University prestige

Although most respondents indicated that they were unsure of the core differences between UCs and CSUs during high school, the majority believed that UCs were innately better than CSUs. Much of this belief was based on what they heard from faculty, staff, and peers on campus. For example, Daisy indicates that she entered community college with the impression that the UC system was—for all intents and purposes—“better” than CSU system:

I was always hearing [in high school] that the UC system was better, and that Cal States weren’t as—sometimes they weren’t as good. In the sense that... I guess...the people that I would hang around with, they would say, “Oh, UCs are better. They have better campuses and resources” and things like that. I was... I wasn’t familiar. I think I only...

Actually, I did go... I visited campuses and they were much nicer. So, I think just my friend's belief that UCs were better.

Daisy and other respondents continued to hear statements such as those in community college. Subsequently, they used words like "luxurious" and "fancier than Cal States" to describe UCs.

Respondents reported receiving advice from academic counseling to "just apply" to CSU campuses because they were offered application fee waivers. They explained that doing so was simply a precaution and not a push to attend a CSU campus over a UC campus. Lourdes, for example, was encouraged by her counselors to apply to as many UCs and she could and to CSUs as "safety schools." However, not every respondent applied to a CSU campus. Gabriel suggested that he would not accept admission to a CSU, even if he were denied admission to a UC campus. He had the strongest attitude of any respondent about CSUs:

In my mind, it was more that I didn't want to go for a CSU [...] a CSU always seemed kind of ghetto to me [...]. You could just open the doors and get accepted, especially for someone local [...]. And that's why I stuck exclusively to UCs.

Respondents received this message not only from their friends but also their professors. When Rene was admitted to both a highly competitive CSU campus (his top choice) and UCS, he struggled to decide which to attend. Having heard from his classmates that UCs had "better professors, better everything," he decided to ask his professors for their opinions. His professors unanimously told him to accept his admission offer from the UC campus:

And hands down, all of them said [UC Southwest]. "Yeah, [competitive CSU campus] is recognized, maybe—because who doesn't know [name of city where the competitive CSU is located] but you can never compare that." They're still with the mentality that UCs are better than Cal States. I hear from some people that's not so much the case

anymore, but I kept hearing that from all the older professors I asked. “Oh UCs, UCs they’re the best between Cal States and UCs.”

Rene ultimately decided that he would receive a better education at a UC. Like Rene, Felipe had been intent on transferring to a CSU campus and also ultimately decided he would receive a better education at a UC. Felipe also indicated that he “wanted a “UC under [his] belt,” suggesting that obtaining a degree from a UC campus would be a greater achievement than obtaining a degree from a CSU campus.

It is important to note that not all respondents indicated that the university culture influenced their decision to apply to a selective UC campus. Most notably, Isabel indicated that a campus within the UC system was her only choice given her commitment to participating in research and completing a doctoral program.

Summary of the Findings

Psychosociocultural thematic analysis of the data revealed 5 themes and 2 new factors. The first theme was motivation and aspirations fueled by familismo. Respondents reported feeling motivated to transfer because of their belief that it would benefit their family in the long run. For example, Lourdes explained that her initial interest in attaining a college degree came from her belief that it would justify her parents’ sacrifice in emigrating from Mexico to the United States illegally. Additionally, she explained that once she had a bachelor’s degree she would be able to better provide financially for her family. Thus, both her initial aspiration and motivation to transfer were fueled by her identification and attachment to family.

The second theme was validation from faculty and/or staff. Respondents frequently reported the receiving faculty and/or staff validation to consider the transfer route as a serious option. Frequently the same faculty and/or staff provided the critical knowledge needed to

navigate the transfer process. For example, Penelope began community college with the intention to earn a technical certification—believing transfer to a university to be out of reach. She caught the attention of an academic counselor who served as the advisor to a club she joined in her first year. The counselor suggested that transfer to a selective university was a valid option for her. Once Penelope was on the transfer route, she reached out to the counselor for guidance with navigating the transfer process and in her second year, the transfer applications specifically.

The third theme was college and transfer knowledge from faculty, staff, and transfer-oriented peers. Some respondents reported receiving crucial knowledge for navigating the transfer pathway from their transfer-oriented peers. For example, once Miriam joined the honor's program (a transfer-oriented program) at her community college, she was encouraged to enroll in advanced placement courses with other transfer-oriented peers. Although Miriam could not socialize with them due to her busy school and work schedules, she made the most of her time in classes to ask for advice about the transfer process from these classmates. Among other things, these classmates offered advice on how to complete the transfer curriculum more efficiently.

The fourth theme was encouragement from parents. Some respondents reported receiving “words of encouragement” from their parents that revitalized or sustained motivation to transfer. For example, when Rene was rejected from his top choice university in his third year of community college, his initial decision was to stop out of community college and focus only on his job at the grocery store. Rene's mother, however, reminded Rene that his goal was to transfer to a university and receive a bachelor's degree. Rene returned to community college and for a second time applied for transfer.

The fifth theme was transfer culture create by the community college. Respondents frequently reported building a social support system in part because of the transfer culture on

campus. For example, Daisy was made aware of a transfer-oriented program at her community college because of the active promotion of the program by the community college. Her subsequent participation in the program introduced her to faculty, staff, and students who participated in the transfer culture on campus. For some, transfer culture affected their decision to see themselves at a selective UC campus. For example, Anthony began community college with the intention to transfer to a CSU campus. The transfer culture on campus provided the resources to transfer. Additionally, the frequent presence of CSU and UC representatives on campus made it easy for him to access the admission requirements and thus assess his chances of admission to more selective universities.

Lastly, in addition to the themes, two factors not captured in the existing PSC model emerged from the findings. First, the majority of the respondents described an influence of identifying and declaring a major on their transfer process. For example, Isabel described feeling ready to transfer only once she found psychology to be the ideal major for her. Extending on the PSC terminology, this factor is identified as “major fit” throughout this study. Second, the majority of the respondents described an influence of university system opinions on their decision to attend a selective university. For example, Gabriel had frequently heard that almost anyone could be granted admission to a CSU campus. The belief was engrained in his mind so much so that he believed the CSU system to be “ghetto” and not much of a step up from open-access community colleges. For this reason, Gabriel aspired to attend a UC campus and did not apply for CSU admission. This factor is identified as “university prestige” throughout this study.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This study set out to investigate the influence of psychological, social, and cultural experiences during community college on college choice of Latina/o students who transferred to a selective university. Interviews were conducted with ten respondents who transferred from a community college to a selective university in California. The respondents in this study each had a unique narrative to share, which collectively revealed several commonalities that provide a glimpse into to the extent to which psychological, social and cultural experiences during community college facilitate navigation of the transfer pathway to a selective university among Latina/o students. The findings of this study led to the emergence of the following five themes: Motivation and Aspirations Fueled by Familismo, Validation from Faculty and/or Staff, College Knowledge from Faculty, Staff, and/or Peers, Encouragement from Parents, and Transfer Culture Created by the Community College. In addition, the findings revealed two new factors not currently captured by the PSC conceptual framework but appropriate within the PSC dimensions (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). This research shows that to understand the function of community colleges on baccalaureate attainment of Latina/os, a closer investigation into psychological, social, and cultural experiences during community college that contribute to transfer decision-making processes is necessary.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the five themes that emerged in this study as they relate to the limited scholarship on this topic. A discussion of the two new factors that emerged study as they relate to existing literature follows. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for best practices, a discussion of the limitations of this study, and suggestions for future research as well as an overarching conclusion for this study.

Emerging Themes

Motivation and Aspirations Fueled by Familismo

This study found evidence for the influence of *familismo* on college choice of Latina/o students. Previous research suggests that *familismo* generates a sense of obligation to provide financial and/or emotional support to family members (Bachmeier & Bean, 2011). This sense of obligation often leads students to stay at home and attend community college while working full- or part-time or stay close to home and attend a less expensive and less selective university. While *familismo* did influence some respondents' decision to stay close to home or to accept admission to their least expensive university option, *familismo* also contributed to college choice processes by influencing baccalaureate aspirations and motivation to navigate the transfer pathway.

Lourdes, for example, reported that her baccalaureate aspirations were fueled by a desire to give meaning to her parents' sacrifice in emigrating from Mexico to the United States. Penelope, on the other hand, was motivated to balance a full-time courseload with a full-time job by a desire to instill in her siblings an appreciation for higher education. As a result of its psychological framing, *familismo* was shifted over to the psychological dimension of the model.

Furthermore, this study found support for viewing college choice as a family process rather than an individual one (Alvarez, 2015). Several respondents spoke about their decision to apply to universities because of its proximity to family as well as their decision to accept admission to a university based on their family's concerns of accruing financial debts or placing financial burden on their parents while attending a university. Together, these findings suggest that *familismo* plays a central role in how Latina/o students negotiate their opportunities in community college.

Validation from Faculty and/or Staff

This study supports previous research on the influence of faculty and staff on the college choice processes of Latina/o students. Gildersleeve, Cruz, Madriz, and Melendrez-Flores (2015), for example, suggest that teachers have an influence on Latina/o students' perception of who goes to college and what college opportunities are available for college-bound students in middle and high school. The findings of this study suggest that the same is true for Latina/o students in community college. For the respondents in this study who were initially not on the transfer path, professors and staff played a key role in changing their perception of who transfers to a university by validating their success in community college and potential to succeed in a university. Furthermore, professors and staff offered resources to assist the student as they navigated the transfer pathway, further validating the student's place on the transfer route.

College Knowledge from Faculty, Staff, and/or Peers

This study further contributed to this research by offering evidence of *how* faculty and staff facilitate transfer among Latina/o students. Bensimon and Down (2009) suggest that faculty and staff in community college serve as “transfer agents” because they contribute to the channeling of Latina/o students through the transfer pathway. The findings of this study suggest that by providing key information about college access (e.g. college knowledge) and specifically information about the transfer process (e.g., transfer knowledge), faculty and staff play a key role in the decision of respondents to apply to selective universities and ultimately in their decision to accept admission to a selective university. In fact, college knowledge and transfer knowledge from faculty and/or staff were collectively the most identified co-occurrence of PSC factors in the data. These findings illustrate the method by which transfer agents (i.e., faculty and staff) contribute to the decision-making processes of Latina/o students in community college.

Furthermore, respondents who did not establish strong connections with faculty and/or staff reported receiving similar knowledge from their transfer-oriented peers.

Encouragement from Parents

Previous studies suggest that parents play an important role in the college choice of their Latina/o students. Strayhorn (2010), for example, suggests that Latina/o students who talk to their parents about their college plans are better prepared for the academic and social demands of college. Strayhorn suggests that conversations between parents and their students imply parental encouragement of student's educational goals, which in turn, affects their academic performance. The findings of this study contribute to the literature by offering support of this influence at the community college level. Several respondents reported having conversations with their parents about their college plans. Respondents indicated that these discussions reminded them that their parents supported their goal of transferring to a university. For example, Daisy's parents often inquired about her progress in the transfer process. Although Daisy was "annoyed" by their constant questioning, she recognized that her parents did so out of support for her goals.

Transfer Culture Created by the Community College

This study found evidence for the strong influence of college culture on college decision-making processes of Latina/o students at the community college level. Previous studies show that high schools have a great deal of influence on college choice processes by developing and sustaining a college-going culture on campus (Gildersleeve, Cruz, and Madriz, 2015). The findings of this study suggest that community colleges can promote a similar college culture on campuses through transfer-oriented programming and events as well as faculty and staff who support transfer among their students. Transfer-oriented programs, events, faculty, and staff

worked to increase respondents' access to critical knowledge and supportive environmental in which to navigate the otherwise complex transfer pathway.

Emerging Factors

Major Fit

Although the data was framed using the PSC model, the methodology also allowed for the emergence of PSC factors not currently captured by the PSC constructs. As a result, two new factors emerged from the data: Major Fit and University Prestige. Although the existing PSC studies have not addressed the influence of finding the right fit in major, other studies suggest that such a resulting psychological effect can contribute favorably to college choice of Latina/o community college students. For instance, in her study on persistence of Latina/o community college students, Zell (2010) found that “self-discovery and college adjustment” and “a sense of purpose” contributed favorably to college-going decisions. In this study, discovering the major that “fit” a respondent’s interests influences their decision to transfer to a university and in some cases, to transfer into a specific program at a selective university. For example, Isabel struggled to narrow down a major with the social sciences. Upon reflecting on her personal experiences with psychologists and her interests in helping others (i.e., she went through an experience of self-discovery), she declared psychology as her major. After declaring the major, Isabel felt secure in her decision to pursue her educational goals forward with her plans to transfer (i.e. she gained a sense of purpose). Furthermore, her interest in psychological research helped her to aim for campuses within the UC system because of their status as a high research institution.

University Prestige

In addition to major fit, university prestige emerged as a new factor that fits with the dimensions of the PSC model. Several respondents expressed a belief that the only difference

between a UC campus and a CSU campus was the cost of attendance—with the cost of attending a UC greater than the cost of attending a CSU. Other respondents expressed a belief that the UC system was more competitive simply because its more aesthetically-pleasing campuses relative to CSU campuses. However, few respondents reported knowing the core differences between UC and CSU campuses. Much of what they knew about these systems was gleaned from their peers, faculty, and staff. In some cases, this belief contributed to their decision to apply to and accept admission to a UC. For example, Gabriel decided not to apply to CSU campuses because of this belief in the prestige of UC campuses. Whereas such a belief can contribute to more transfer to the UC system among some respondents, it could potentially also deter other students from applying and accepting admission. In either case, university prestige has a role to play in the decision-making processes of Latina/o students and thus warrants further research.

Recommendations for Best Practices

Based on the psychosociocultural findings that emerged from this study, I offer the following recommendations for practice. First, this study showed the crucial role of transfer culture on college choice processes of Latina/o students. For those respondents who perceived a strong transfer culture on their campus, participating in transfer culture helped establish relationships with faculty, staff, and transfer-oriented peers. These relationships led several positive influences including an increase in transfer knowledge, self-esteem, validation, motivation, and educational and/or career aspirations. Those who did not perceive a strong transfer culture (whether or not it existed) did not reap these benefits. Therefore, creating, sustaining, and promoting an active and highly accessible transfer culture is fundamental.

Second, as past research has shown and as confirmed by this study, faculty and staff support plays a key role for Latina/o students. Community college practitioners would do well in

creating faculty and/or staff mentorships programs that facilitate faculty-student or staff-student interactions. In many cases, faculty and staff offer the validation and transfer knowledge that allows students to consider transfer a realistic and reasonable endeavor.

And third, the findings of this study suggest that major fit is a critical aspect on college choice. Respondents indicated that finding “the right major” was one of the greatest challenges in navigating the transfer pathway. Whereas identifying and completing the general education curriculum was clear-cut in most cases, the major curriculum was ambiguous without a definitive major. To further assist students through navigating the transfer pathway, community college practitioners would do well in designing and implementing programming that allows students to explore a variety of majors and learn about the requirements for the major. Additionally, these programs should allow students to explore career options available after obtaining a baccalaureate degree in that major.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was the half of the respondents had completed their undergraduate degree one to two years prior to the interview whereas the other half were one to two years into their university education. Therefore, respondents varied in number of years since last attending their community college. The students who had more recently attending community college were able to recall much more detail about their experiences on campus; however, the students who had graduated from the university were much more in tune with the ways that their community college influenced their educational trajectory. Moreover, the sample largely consisted of liberal arts and science majors and therefore does not provide a complete picture of all types of students who navigate the transfer pathway to a selective university.

Another limitation of this study was the use of convenience and snowball sampling. To the extent that a qualitative research can and should provide generalizability, the use of these sampling strategies hinders generalizability because they do not allow equal opportunity for recruitment of the total population. However, findings resulting from these strategies are able to provide some comparability and transferability to students not included in the sample and thus can contribute to the literature (Weiss, 1994).

Suggestions for Future Research

Since the focus of this study was on the community college experiences of Latina/o transfer students on their college choice processes, minimal attention was given to the potential carry over effects of their precollege and university experiences. Future research should aim to explore these carry over effects on the college choice of Latina/o transfer students. Such a study would need to employ a longitudinal research design for optimum results. Doing so may shed new light how PSC factors influence not only transfer decision-making processes but also further the scholarship on the educational persistence of Latina/o students. Additionally, the findings of this study produced two factors not defined in the existing literature—major fit and university prestige. Given the evidence that these are distinct constructs, future research on the mechanisms by which these factors influence decision-making processes is warranted.

Finally, this study was consistent with the recent research on Latinos (i.e., men of Latina/o descent) in higher education. Specifically, it shows that although Latinos are underrepresented in higher education and generally report lower educational degree aspirations than their Latina counterparts, they do not lack a value for higher education (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Nonetheless, the findings showed that Latinos reported more psychological factors and fewer social and cultural factors than their Latina counterparts. Future research should explore

the gender differences in perceptions of psychological, social, and cultural experiences of Latina/os to further understand their needs in higher education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as Latina/os are more likely to enroll in community college rather than a university immediately high school, it is imperative that we understand both their needs as well as the means by which community colleges can contribute positively to college choice.

Additionally, as the labor market continues to demand a more educated workforce, it is crucial that we increase the proportion of Latina/os with baccalaureate degrees. Furthermore, given the many documented benefits of attending a selective university, there should be a greater effort to increase the number of Latina/os who transfer to a selective university from the community college. In doing so, we can work to prevent the establishment of a permanent underclass. This study illustrates what community colleges have done right and what can be done better to assist Latina/o students navigate the transfer pathway to a selective university.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Materials

Recruitment Letter 1

Dear [UCS Transfer Center Coordinator],

My name is Susan Guadarrama, and I'm a doctoral student in Planning, Policy, and Design at UC Irvine. I am currently working on a research study about Latina/os community college students' transfer pathways to selective institutions in California.

The purpose of the study is to show why community college experiences are critical to transfer persistence. Another objective of the study is to illustrate how Latina/os navigate the transfer route to a selective UC campus.

To conduct the study, I intend to recruit 10-12 Latina/o transfer students [from UCS]. Eligible participants include any students who self-identify as Latino/Hispanic, transferred from a community college in California to UC Irvine, and are currently enrolled in an undergraduate program or recently graduated with baccalaureate degree. Eligible participants will be asked to complete a demographic sheet (4-6 minutes) and discuss his/her educational experiences with me in a 50-60 minute semi-structured interview. Additionally, participants will be entered into a raffle to win 1 of 2 Amazon gift cards worth \$25; chances of winning are approximately 1 in 5.

To recruit my intended sample, I am reaching out to ask if I may post a flyer in the Transfer Center office and/or if invitations to potential participants may be sent out directly by the Transfer Center.

I would appreciate the opportunity to discuss the study further at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Guadarrama
Doctoral Student
Planning, Policy, and Design
University of California, Irvine
(714) 474-6125
sguadarr@uci.edu

Recruitment Letter 2

Dear [Potential Study Respondent],

Thank you for your interest in the research study. Your [relationship] [study respondent] may have already told you about the study and me. As a reminder, I am a graduate student at UC Irvine currently working on a study on the community college experiences of Latina/o transfer students at [UC Southwest]. The purpose of the study is to show why community college experiences are critical to transfer persistence. Another objective of the study is to illustrate how Latina/os navigate the transfer route to a selective UC campus.

To conduct the study, I intend to recruit 10-12 Latina/o transfer students at [UC Southwest]. Eligible participants include any students who self-identify as Latino/Hispanic, transferred from a community college in California to [UC Southwest], and are currently enrolled in an undergraduate program or recently graduated with baccalaureate degree. Eligible participants will be asked to complete a demographic sheet (4-6 minutes) and discuss his/her educational experiences with me in a 50-60 minute semi-structured interview. Additionally, you will be entered into a raffle to win 1 of 2 Amazon gift cards worth \$25; chances of winning are approximately 1 in 5.

If you are still interested and eligible to participate in the study, please feel free to email me with a preferred date and time to meet. I would appreciate the opportunity to interview you at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Guadarrama
Doctoral Student
Planning, Policy, and Design
University of California, Irvine
(714) 474-6125
sguadarr@uci.edu

Latina/o Transfer Students Needed for Research Study



[UCS Logo]

\$25 Amazon Gift Card Raffles

This research study is on the transfer pathways of Latina/os community college students in California. The purpose of the study is to show why community college experiences are critical to transfer persistence. Another objective of the study is to illustrate how Latina/os navigate the transfer route to a selective UC campus.

Eligible participants include any students who self-identify as Latino/Hispanic, transferred from a community college in California to [UCS], and are currently enrolled in an undergraduate program or recently graduated with bachelor's degree.

Eligible participants will be asked to complete a demographic sheet (4-6 minutes) and discuss his/her educational experiences with me in a 50-60 minute semi-structured interview. Additionally, you will be entered into a raffle to win 1 of 2 Amazon gift cards worth \$25; chances of winning are approximately 1 in 5.

If you are eligible and interested, please feel free to send Susan an email with a preferred date and time for the interview.

Latina/o Transfer Student Study
\$25 Amazon Gift Card Raffles
sguadarr@uci.edu

Latina/o Transfer Student Study
\$25 Amazon Gift Card Raffles
sguadarr@uci.edu

Latina/o Transfer Student Study
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sguadarr@uci.edu

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Appendix B: Study Information Sheet

University of California, Irvine Study Information Sheet

The Influence of Community College on Latina/o Students' Transfer to Selective Universities

Lead Researcher

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Background

You were selected as a potential participant because you are a Latina/o student who transferred from a community college in California to UC [Southwest]. Before you decide to participate, it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation involves. Please take the time to read the following information carefully, and ask the researcher if there is anything that is unclear or if you need additional information. You will be asked to provide verbal consent of your participation prior to the start of the interview.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand how Latina/os community college students navigate the transfer from community college to a selective institution in their pursuit of a bachelor's degree.

Study Procedures

If you provide verbal consent of your involvement in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Complete a demographic sheet and authorize use of the responses.
2. Offer responses to open-ended questions about your academic and social experiences while attending community college and your university in a 50-60 minute semi-structured interview.

Potential Risks and/or Discomforts

This research study involves minimal risks. These risks are similar to those you experience when disclosing personal experiences to others. You may decline to answer any or all question and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

Potential Benefits to Participants and/or Society

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, we hope that the information obtained from the study may contribute to the understanding of the community college experiences of transfer students so that policies may be designed to best suit their needs in pursuit of a bachelor's degree.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Your responses to both the interview and demographic sheet questions will be kept anonymous through the use of a pseudonym. A pseudonym will also be provided to any identifiable person(s) or place(s) mentioned during the interview. You are advised to disclose only information you are comfortable sharing with the research team.

Your name and the email address used to contact the lead researcher will be stored in the lead researcher's password-protected student email account. This information will not be linked to either your demographic sheet or interview responses. Additionally, you will have the option to authorize the use of audio recording before the start of the interview. Audio recordings and any notes taken during the interview will be transcribed within 48 hours of the interview. Audio files will be permanently deleted after a transcription of the interview has been stored.

Audio recordings, transcriptions, and any transcribed notes will be stored in a password-protected flash drive folder in the possession of the lead researcher. Demographic sheets will be stored in a cabinet in a locked office room on-campus. All data will be accessible to the research team. In addition, access to the data may be provided to authorized UCI personnel and/or regulatory entities to protect your safety and welfare. All data will be permanently deleted after publication of the study. Any publication and/or presentation will not include identifiable information.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Responses to any of the interview questions or completion of the study procedures will constitute consent to participant in this research study. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this study. You may withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. This will not affect the relationship you have with the researcher.

Payment/Compensation for Participation

You will be entered into a raffle to win 1 of 2 Amazon gift cards worth \$25; chances of winning are approximately 1 in 5. The raffle will take place once all interviews have been conducted. The winners will be notified immediately via the email address provided to the lead researcher. The winners will be asked to provide a preferred email address to receive the Amazon gift card e-mail delivery. Amazon will email the winners a claim code to be applied to an account. The gift card balance will be available immediately after the code has been claimed.

Person to Contact

Should you have any questions regarding your participation and/or the findings, please contact the lead researcher at sguadarr@uci.edu.

Research Participant Rights

Should you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact the UCI Institutional Review Board Office at IRB@research.uci.edu.

Appendix C: Respondent Demographic Sheet

Pseudonym: _____ **Age:** _____

Are you a first-generation college student? Yes No

What generation American are you?

- 1st: you and your parents are not US-born
- 2nd: your parents are not US-born and you are US-born
- 3rd or over: you and your parents are US-born

Hometown: _____

What is your race/ethnicity? *Check all that apply.*

- Mexican American Central American
- South American African American
- Native American Caucasian
- Other: _____

What is the highest level of education or highest academic degree your parent(s) and/or sibling(s) earned? *Check all that apply.*

	Mother	Father	Sibling(s)
No formal education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elementary	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Middle School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
High School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some college	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Associate's (AA/AS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bachelor's (BA/BS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Master's (MA/MS/MBA)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Academic doctorate (PhD)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional doctorate (MD/JD/DDS)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What is the highest academic degree you expect to earn?

- Bachelor's (BA/BS) Academic doctorate (PhD)
- Master's (MA/MS/MBA) Professional doctorate (JD/MD/DDS)

What was the marital status for each while you were attending community college?

	Parent(s)	Your own
Single	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Married	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Widow	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Separated	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In Committed Partnership	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you have any dependents while you were enrolled in community college?

- Yes No

Where did you live while attending community college?

- On-campus Off-campus with family
 Off-campus with friends Other: _____

How did you finance your community college education? Check all that apply.

- Family Student loans
 Scholarship Personal savings
 Work full-time (off-campus) Work full-time (on-campus)
 Work part-time (off-campus) Work part-time (on-campus)

What was the income for each while you were attending community college?

	Parent(s)	Your own
Less than \$10,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$10,000-\$19,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$20,000-\$29,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$30,000-\$39,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$40,000-\$49,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$50,000-\$59,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$60,000-\$69,000	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$70,000 and above	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Did you apply for admission to a four-year college during your senior year of high school?

- Yes No

Did you receive admission to a four-year college during your senior year of high school?

- Yes No

Which community college(s) did you attend after high school?

Why did you choose to enroll in community college? Check all that apply.

- Affordable tuition Affordable non-tuition expenses
 Less student debt Family obligations
 Did not feel academically prepared
 Did not feel emotionally prepared
 Did not want to attend the four-year college(s) I was admitted to
 Other: _____

Did you intend to pursue a bachelor's degree when you first-enrolled in community college? Yes No

Did you enroll with the intention of transferring? Yes No

Did any of your friends enroll community college immediately after high school?

Yes No

Did any of your friends enroll in a university immediately after high school?

Yes No

How many years were you enrolled in community college?

1 2 3 4 5 6+

Did you take any breaks from school after first enrolling in community college?

Yes No

Were you enrolled in any Advanced Placement (AP) classes during high school?

Yes No

What academic degree are you currently pursuing? BA BS

What is your academic major? _____

High school GPA:

Graduation year:

Transfer GPA:

Graduation year:

University GPA:

Graduation year:

Thank you for taking the time to fill this out ☺

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Pre-College Plans

1. When do you first remember wanting to go to college?
 - a. How much education did your parents want you to receive?
 - b. Did your parents suggest any particular careers/jobs/majors?
 - c. Did your friends share this aspiration to go to college?
2. Did you receive encouragement from any teachers or counselors to go to college?
3. Were you aware of the differences between CSUs and UCs at this time?

Community College Academic Experiences

4. Could you tell me about your first semester at [CCC]?
5. In what ways did [CCC] facilitate your transfer path?
6. In what ways did [CCC] encourage you to apply to UCs?

Community College Social Experiences

7. Could you tell me about the social relationships you formed at community college?
 - a. Were your friends in community college also on the transfer route?
 - b. Did you join any academic or social clubs on campus?
8. What was going on for you outside of school?
 - a. Dependent(s): I see from the demographic sheet that you had dependents while you were in community college. Do you have children?
 - b. Job(s): I see from the demographic sheet that you had a [full/part]-time job at the time. Can you tell me about the job(s) you had at that time?
9. Did you visit any UC or CSU campuses during this time?

Community College Transfer Process

10. Do you recall when you became eligible to transfer?
11. Could you walk me through your transfer application process?
 - a. When did you start working on the applications?
 - b. Where did you decide to apply?
 - c. What emotions were going on at the time for you?
12. If you encountered any difficulties in completing the application, how did you resolve them?

University Academic and Social Experiences

13. Have you kept in touch with friends, professors, or counselors you met at [CCC]?
14. What differences between community college and UCI did you notice in your first quarter?
15. What have you done differently at UCI because of your experiences at [CCC]?

Post-College Plans

16. What are your current plans for [after college or next 5 years]?

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

I, _____, agree to maintain confidentiality in regards to audio recordings, transcriptions, case reports, and any other study-related materials received from Susan Guadarrama related to her research study titled *The Influence of Community College Experiences on College Choice of Latina/o Transfer Students: A Psychosociocultural Approach*. Further, I agree to adhere to the following stipulations:

1. To not make copies of any audio recordings, transcriptions, case reports, or any other study-related materials, unless requested to do so by the researcher, Susan Guadarrama.
2. To store all study-related materials in a safe and secure location as long as they are in my possession.
3. To destroy all electronic study-related materials from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices including software programs at the end of my involvement in the study.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the study-related materials to which I will have access.

Transcriber's Name (Printed):

Transcriber's Signature:

Date:

Appendix F: Respondent Vignettes

Anthony

Anthony started playing baseball for his high school's team in his sophomore year of high school. It was because of his involvement in baseball that he developed an interest in college. Around his junior year, he learned that he could play baseball for a university such as UCLA. But, based on the sticker price he frequently saw and heard about, he worried that his family could not afford to send him to UCLA or any university, and he was not aware of any financial assistance that could help. Additionally, Anthony was concerned that he would not be academically prepared to attend a university—UC or CSU—immediately after high school. He felt he was not “prepared in the sense of being at the level of a four year institution,” in terms of his reading and writing. Consequently, he enrolled in Camino Community College [pseudonym] in 2011 with the intention of transferring to a CSU within no more than 3 years.

Daisy

Daisy's aspiration to attend college began to form in middle school, after she was placed in AVID, a college readiness course. AVID taught her about the process of attending college to establish a career. She expressed her interest in college to her parents who then encouraged her to become “a teacher, or a nurse, or a doctor, or a lawyer;” although, at the end of the day, she knew “they just wanted [her] to go to college.”

The eldest of 3 children, Daisy was expected to lead her siblings by example. She continued to receive encouragement throughout high school, and she was admitted to a less selective UC campus and the local CSU campus in her senior year. It was at this time that her mother became ill, and the family feared she had cancer. Not wanting to be far from her family during this difficult time, she decided to decline her acceptances and attend community college. She enrolled in Camacho Community College [pseudonym] the summer of 2009 with the intention of eventually transferring to her local CSU campus.

Felipe

The youngest of three children, Felipe had been encouraged early on by his parents to follow his older sisters' footsteps in attending college. At the age of 8, he saw his eldest sister—10 years his senior—leave for college. Two years later, he saw his other sister—8 years his senior—do the same. By the age of 10, he had decided that after graduating from high school he would leave for college too. He enrolled in AP and honors classes throughout high school and graduated with a 3.3 GPA and an offer of admission to his local CSU campus (his top choice) as well as “a few UCs.” He proudly announced to his friends and family that he would attend the local CSU in the fall. Unfortunately, he was not aware that he was required to submit a statement of intent to register (SIR) by June. “I remember going to clinics and workshops on scholarships but I really don't remember talking about the SIR,” he recalls. And although his parents and sisters provided emotional support, they did not provide instructional guidance at the time. Most notably, he states that his sisters “paved the path, but they didn't necessarily help [him] walk it.”

Felipe's admission offer had been revoked by the time he learned about the SIR policy, and he was left with “no other choice” but to enroll in community college. He enrolled at City Community College [pseudonym] in 2009, highly motivated to transfer to his local CSU campus within 2 years.

Gabriel

Gabriel declined several invitations to join the AVID program and enroll in AP courses during high school. He saw these invitations not as opportunities to learn more but as invitations to “do more work” when he could otherwise spend time with friends. He treated school as a social environment rather than a learning environment during his freshman and sophomore years. By his junior year, he had a GPA close to 0 and was at risk of not graduating. For the sake of graduating with his class, he began to take school more seriously in his final 2 years. And after graduating—on time—with a 2.7 GPA, Gabriel thought community college was the natural next step. At the time, the closest example he had to follow was his older brother’s. His older brother, 7 years his senior, had attended community college for a few semesters after his own high school graduation. Gabriel’s parents encouraged him to “go to [CCC] because [his] brother went there.” He complied primarily because he did not have any other example to follow. Gabriel enrolled in City Community College [pseudonym] in 2009 without the intention an intention to complete an associate’s degree or certification program or transfer to a university.

Isabel

The eldest of five children, Isabel grew up in a “really traditional home.” Her father worked in agriculture and came to be the owner of a small farm when Isabel was in high school. Her parents expected their two sons to work in the farm alongside their father and their three daughters to become homemakers like their mother. Thus, while they encouraged her to graduate from high school, they did not encourage her to pursue higher education. After graduating from high school with a 3.7 GPA, she married a man who worked in the top, local agriculture company. Her husband made it possible for her to join the company as a clerical worker, and she remained at the company until their divorce ten years later. Not wanting to remain in the same company after their divorce, she began to look into job training in a field outside of agriculture. And in 2011, at the age of 28, Isabel enrolled in Central Community College [pseudonym] with the intention to earn “some kind of certificate” outside the agriculture.

Julian

Julian decided in elementary school that he would attend college after his high school graduation. There was a banner in one of his elementary school classrooms that read, “Class of 2008,” the year he and his classmates would graduate from high school. He remembers thinking, “Oh, okay, so after [2008] I’m going to start college. And I’m going to take courses that I want to study and learn about.” Julian did not know what he would study but he knew he wanted to specialize in something. His parents did not push him toward college or a specific career but they supported him with whatever he wanted to do.

As his high school graduation was approaching, however, Julian was surprised to find out that one of his friends had been accepted to universities. It was at that time that he learned that there was a window to apply for universities and that he had missed it. Still wanting to pursue higher education, Julian spoke to his parents about enrolling in community college. His parents were hesitant because “they were kind of worried about money,” but were on board once Julian explained he would receive financial aid to cover most of the cost. Julian enrolled at Civic Community College [pseudonym] immediately in 2009 with the intention of eventually transferring to a CSU campus.

Lourdes

Lourdes grew up in a household with parents who expected her and her siblings to earn at least a baccalaureate degree. Though she was encouraged to attend college from an early age, she did not seriously think about attending college until she applied in her senior year of high school. Up to that point, she considered college something she was “expected” to do rather than something she “wanted” to do; this, in spite of being enrolled in AP and honors courses as well as participating in college preparation programs such as AVID and Talent Search throughout high school. And though Lourdes was friends with many students who also “assumed” that college was their next step, she did not have “deep conversations” with any of them about what she intended to pursue in college or where she intended to pursue it.

She graduated from high school with a 3.6 GPA and an admission offer to the local CSU. (Due to her placement in the top four percent of her graduating class, she also received guaranteed admission to a moderately selective UC.) Despite receiving admission, Lourdes did not feel prepared to attend a university, “I just didn’t know what I wanted to do, honestly, I just had no idea and I was so lost and I just didn’t feel ready to attend [the local CSU].” She felt less prepared to attend a university than her classmates primarily because, unlike them, she had not identified a potential major by senior year. “They knew what they wanted to do,” she recalls, “For me, when I was in high school, I had no idea what I was going to do. I didn’t know what I was good at, and some of my friends already had an idea.” She decided it would be best for her to figure out what she wanted to pursue while attending community college rather than the more expensive CSU campus she was offered admission into. Lourdes declined her offer and enrolled in Camacho Community College [pseudonym] in 2008 with the intention of eventually transferring to her local CSU campus.

Miriam

Miriam was born in California but grew up and attended secondary schools in Jalisco, Mexico. After graduating from high school, she spent three months working and contemplating her next step. Although she qualified for admission to a university in Mexico, she knew she would not receive the same level of financial assistance that a Mexican citizen would receive; as a United States citizen, however, she knew she would qualify for financial assistance back in California. At the age of 18, she left her parents’ house in Jalisco and moved in with extended family in California.

Having attended secondary schools in Mexico, Miriam was not familiar with the educational system in the United States. Upon her arrival, she decided it would be best to find a job, continue to build on her English-speaking skills, and save money to finance her education, all the while learning about the American education system. During her first year in California, she secured a job and learned about the prospect of earning a certificate from a community college to help her secure a higher-paying job. A year later, in 2008, Miriam enrolled at City Community College [pseudonym] with the intention of earning a certification.

Penelope

Although Penelope was in a magnet program, participated in a college readiness program, and visited selective universities throughout high school, it was not until she was in community college that she could see herself attending a selective university. The eldest of 5 children, she took on many responsibilities to lift some of the burden off her parents. She was a third “parental figure” for her siblings early on. At the age of 15, she saw that her family could not afford to live

off of only her father's income. She got a part-time job after school to help provide for her family. Her after-school job did not leave much time for her to do school work. Her grades suffered and during her senior year, she was rejected from every university where she applied for admission except for the local CSU campus. Penelope was discouraged from going to college at all and decided to work full-time instead. A few months after graduating from high school, however, her mother encouraged her to earn "a little title," meaning a technical certificate or an associate's degree that would help her earn a less labor-intensive and better-paying job. She enrolled at Coastline Community College [pseudonym] in 2012 with the intention of earning a radiology technician certificate and immediately looking for a full-time job.

Rene

Rene grew up in a single-parent household, and although he first identified himself as an only child he later shared that his older sister had passed away from cancer and his older brother had passed away from a gang-related gunshot wound before he graduated from high school. He graduated from high school with a 3.4 GPA in 2010 and was offered admission to 5 universities—4 CSUs and 1 UC. Anticipating accruing less student debt by attending a community college, he declined all 5 offers. He decided to work full-time while attending a more affordable community college full-time and then transfer out; that way, he could help his mother financially and ease his way into college. In addition, Rene was also concerned about "wasting" money by attending a more costly university because he did not have an idea of what he wanted to do in college. He enrolled in Coastal Community College [pseudonym] in 2010 with the intention of eventually transferring to a CSU campus.