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Serving Through Understanding: A Person-Centered Ethnographic Case Study Contextualizing the Experiences of One Latinx Family Attending a Los Angeles Independent School

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Serving Through Understanding:

A Person-Centered Ethnographic Case Study Contextualizing the Experiences of One Latinx Family Attending a Los Angeles Independent School

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Carlos Castellanos

2024

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Serving Through Understanding:

A Person-Centered Ethnographic Case Study Contextualizing the Experiences of One Latinx Family Attending a Los Angeles Independent School

by

Carlos Castellanos

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2024

Professor Inmaculada García-Sánchez, Co-Chair

Professor Ananda Maria Marin, Co-Chair

This ethnographic case study employed a person-centered approach to explore the experiences of a Latinx family navigating an elite, predominantly White independent school in Los Angeles. The study aimed to examine how individual and collective identity development were shaped by these experiences, utilizing Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth theory, Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality, and a person-centered ethnographic method. These strength-based frameworks provided a nuanced understanding of Latinx families beyond the stereotypes often present in such school environments.

The participant family, selected purposefully, consists of two immigrant parents (from Mexico and El Salvador) and their four daughters, who have navigated the independent school from 2016 to now. Together, they offered nearly a decade of insights into navigating the independent school system as a first-generation, lower-income Latinx family. The study employed a methodologically rich design influenced by Critical Race Feminista Methodology. The 22 interviews conducted included family interviews, education journey mapping, walking interviews, artifact-driven interviews, and member check interviews. The first research question that guided the study focused on how each member of the Latinx family unit made sense of their educational journey and what they learned along the way. The second research question focused on how each Latinx family member made sense of their overall experience at a Los Angeles elite, predominantly White independent school. The findings underscore the Latinx family's resilience and adaptability amid systemic and cultural challenges. Parents' consistent support and sisters' varied emotional and practical help shaped the daughters' success. Findings about their time at the independent school revealed issues such as microaggressions related to race, class, and gender, inequities in academic placement, and college counseling shortcomings. These challenges, cultural negotiation, and first-generation college barriers deeply affected their identity development. Ultimately, the family concluded that the benefits of independent school education outweighed its difficulties. This study offers L.A.-area independent schools valuable insights to serve first-generation, lower-income Latinx families better while contributing to the limited research on the role of independent schools in fostering or hindering non-dominant forms of capital.

The dissertation of Carlos Castellanos is approved.

Mark P. Hansen

Inmaculada García-Sánchez, Committee Co-Chair

Ananda Maria Marin, Committee Co-Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2024

DEDICATION

I lost my dear grandmother, Alejandrina De La Cruz, a few weeks before I started my doctorate. I have felt her spirit during every stage of this process–her encouraging words echoing in my heart during moments of doubt, telling me to not give up, to keep moving forward *adelante con La Cruz.* This dissertation is first and foremost for her.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the strongest woman I know: my mother Lourdes Castellanos. Mom, we've overcome so much, and I'm honored to share this with you. Thank you for lifting me up, never giving up on me, and shaping me into the man I am today.

Lastly, I dedicate this to all first-generation, Latinx students charting unknown territories while carrying the hopes, dreams, and legacies of their families on their shoulders; and to their parents who believe with an unshakeable faith in the power and potential of their children…and who stop at nothing to help them achieve greatness.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study has been a labor of love and sacrifice, and just like every other major accomplishment in my life, could not have been possible without the help of my community. I would like to start by thanking my amazing co-chairs–Dr. Ananda Marin and Dr. Inmaculada García-Sánchez–and committee member Mark Hansen for their guidance and support throughout this entire process. Thank you for seeing my vision for what this project could be, and for giving me the resources, encouragement, and motivation to carry it out. Working with you has been the hallmark of my ELP journey, and I am a better researcher and person for having worked with you.

This study could not have been possible without the Reyes family. Capturing your individual and collective stories of struggle and triumph has been an honor I will treasure forever. I appreciate you for letting me into your home and into your lives, to bear witness to the many strengths you possess, many of which often get overlooked. I hope you always remember how exceptional you are, not just for surviving, but thriving…and for giving back to the field of education by allowing me to tell your stories.

To my husband, Joe, thank you for keeping the ship moving and above water while I followed this dream. I know it wasn't easy parenting our children when I could not. Your role in all of this does not go unnoticed or unappreciated.

To my Dominic, you have been one of my greatest teachers in life. I am so proud of how far you've come, and being your Papa will always be the greatest accomplishment of my life.

To my Camila, who blessed our family at the end of my first year in this program. Thank you for being a constant light in my life and for reminding me that God works in the most beautiful and mysterious ways.

I would also like to thank the rest of my beloved family. To my mom, for always reminding me of my strengths and for babysitting for us on Saturdays. To my sister Diana, I don't know how I would have navigated this life without you as my little sister. Thank you for always being there to listen. To my strong, intelligent, beautiful niece and goddaughter Mia—Dr. Nino loves you! Thank you for the all the hope and joy you've brought to my life. To my strong posse of *tías, tíos, y primos* for their undying love and support throughout my life and particularly this journey.

También quiero reconocer a Cecilia "Ceci" Tavico. Yo no podría sobrevivir los días en este programa sin tu presencia en nuestra vida. Gracias por el amor y la ternura que has mostrado a nuestra familia durante todos estos años–desde los últimos días de mi querida abuela hasta los primeros años de mi preciosa Camilita.

To my best friend, Diana "Looserface" Hernandez, who has stayed by my side through so many of life's ups and downs, always with laughter, never with judgment. Thank you for running life's marathon with me.

I also want to thank Shakirat Taylor, Rosa Dominguez, and Kathleen Lawton-Trask, who without their mentorship and grace, I could not have worn all the hats that I did during the past three years.

To my dearest *amiga*, Leticia Sánchez-McPherson, thank your constant words of encouragement throughout this journey and for reminding me that there is always a way…*que sí se puede*.

To Lynn Kim-John, thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone and for encouraging me to take risks and follow my heart. To Judy Myoshi, Karen Jarsky, Cindy Kratzer, and everyone else at ELP. Thank you for taking such good care of us along this journey.

To my dearest cohort, Divine 29. What an honor to be a part of such a dynamic, intelligent, and good-hearted group of educational leaders. Thanks for not letting me give up and for making ELP the best educational experience of my life.

VITA

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

When we met on campus on a rainy Saturday morning, she greeted me, saying sarcastically, “Of course it would be raining the day I come back to campus.” It had been nearly five years since Esperanza—a first-generation, lower-income Latina and oldest of four siblings—set foot on the campus of her alma mater. Sunnydale School is an elite, predominantly White independent school in the greater Los Angeles area, and she was the first in her family to attend. As I observed her standing there, arms crossed in nervous anticipation, waiting for us to begin our walking interview, I could tell Sunnydale had left an indelible mark on her. As she began sharing the story of her first interaction with a peer during her first day of school in the ninth grade, it quickly became apparent what kind of mark it was:

> I was at my locker, and a girl came up to me and asked me how I could afford to go there. She’s like, “So what do your parents do? How do you pay to go here?” I was caught off guard, but then I told her my dad was El Chapo (the cartel leader) and that he sold drugs. I thought she would know I was kidding, but she thought I was being so serious. She was White, and she fully believed that just because I was Hispanic that my dad was a drug dealer. I was trying to be funny because it was my first day and I was trying to make a friend. But no, she thought I was being dead serious. And then when I told her the truth, that my dad works in construction installing AC units and that my mom's an assistant, she was like, “Oh, okay,” confused as to how my parents’ real jobs equated to me going there. Then she just walked away, and that’s when it hit me like, oh, that’s not good enough. It was the first time in my life that my parents’ jobs were put under scrutiny, and I was like, whoa, the next four years are going to be bumpy.

In the first 15 minutes of Esperanza's first day at a school vastly different from the public schools she had attended prior, she felt compelled to explain, justify, and defend the facets of her identity that she never really had to before. She couldn't just be a student, nervously trying to figure out how to open a locker or wonder if she'd fit in. It was made very clear to her from the start that she didn't.

The story of the Reyes family's education journey begins with the story of Esperanza. As the first in her family to navigate the independent school system, Esperanza laid the foundation for all the lessons her family would learn and thus implement into the experiences of her three younger siblings. This story of Esperanza's first day attending a predominantly White, elite, independent school, in many ways, captures the complexity of identity development that comes with being the first of a first-generation Latinx family to enter these spaces. Esperanza's first-day experience and the many experiences that followed signal an existential burden that she and many students like her experience as academically high-achieving students of color in the independent school world.

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore one first-generation, lower-income Latinx family's perceptions of their experiences navigating the independent school world. Specifically, the study explores the successes and challenges of Esperanza and her three sisters during their time at an independent school in the Los Angeles area. By contextualizing the first-generation, lower-income, Latinx family experience, we can see how each family member's interpretation of their sociocultural identity and academic experiences shapes the larger familial experience. I draw on Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005), person-centered ethnography, and intersectionality to better understand the unique intersection of their social identities, socioeconomic status, race, and gender in the context of challenges they faced during their time

as an independent school family. The aim of this study is to provide insight to independent school leaders on how best to understand and, therefore support, their Latinx students and families.

Statement of the Problem and Background

As of today, in 2024, California holds the largest Hispanic population of any U.S. state (15.62 million), with Los Angeles County home to the largest Hispanic population (4.8 million) of any county in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). However, despite California's minoritized population being the majority at 61%, independent schools continue to enroll relatively low numbers of Latinx students (NAIS, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). In 2024, independent schools enrolled 6.2% Latinx/Hispanic students nationwide, while California's independent schools reported 7.1% Hispanic enrollment (NAIS, 2024).

Despite the cultural diversity of cities like Los Angeles, independent schools in Southern California still face difficulties in achieving racial representation. According to the 2024 U.S. Census, the racial composition of Latinx/Hispanic school-age children in Los Angeles County is currently around 55%. However, Latinx students remain underrepresented in the area's independent schools, with Latinx/Hispanic students accounting for 6% of enrollment (NAIS, 2024).

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)—the largest membership association for independent schools in the U.S.—acknowledges that with the changing demographics forecasted for the Los Angeles area over the next few years, independent schools will need to significantly increase their efforts to recruit and retain a more diverse student body. To ensure healthy enrollment for the future of independent schools, they suggest that understanding demographic trends among school-aged children is an important step.

As such, many independent schools in California have prioritized the need to serve underrepresented students in more effective ways. Since 2016, the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) has prioritized the need for their schools to serve underrepresented students, particularly Latino students, better so that CAIS member schools could better reflect local, regional, and state populations (California Association of Independent Schools, 2016; California Association of Independent Schools, 2021). Many independent schools, particularly in the greater Los Angeles area, where Latinx students are the largest school-age population, have declared a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work. These DEI efforts include, among other things, the creation of Latinx student and family affinity spaces, the hiring of more Latinx faculty and staff, and evaluations of curricula and pedagogy commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Greene, 2020; Kim-Seda, 2022). However, despite efforts made in the last decade to recruit, support, and retain more Latinx students, Latinx enrollment in L.A.-area independent schools remains relatively low.

Furthermore, extant data reveals that Latinx students who indeed matriculate into independent schools feel like they are in a constant internal battle between fitting into the dominant culture and feeling connected to their racial or cultural group (Blackburn & Wise, 2009). They report that these issues revolve around experiences of marginalization, including microaggressions, stereotypes, alienation, generalizations, and verbal racism that come from students, teachers, and administrators alike (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Johnson, 2014; McGill, 2003; Reyes, 2017). Latinx students also report experiences related to language differences, cultural expectations, gender roles, or immigration.

With so many independent schools still in the nascent stages of their Latinx family recruitment and support efforts, there is still a long way to go in understanding who these

families are and what they need to succeed in the independent school world. Often, when schools try to work with minoritized groups, discussions of culture lead to misrepresentation and tokenism. Therefore, schools need to capture the diversity of experiences within and among the families they serve for their diversity efforts to be more effective. My study offers a contextually grounded way of understanding the complexities of a Latinx family at one independent school. It focuses on the diversity of experiences within a family unit by centering the multifaceted experiences of each family member. Thus, this study offers a nuanced and more complex way of understanding Latinx families that extends beyond cultural platitudes and stereotypes that often persist in these spaces.

While my study provides one contextualized understanding of one Latinx family, it is also important to note that more than one contextualized understanding is needed to understand better the diversity of experiences within and across Latinx families. This multi-contextual approach to understanding Latinx families would thus allow independent school leaders to develop stronger school-family relationships and increase educational outcomes for Latinx students.

Study Overview

For this study, I took an introspective look into one Latinx family's experiences to provide a contextualized perspective of what it takes for them, as a family, to navigate the independent school world in Los Angeles. The family consists of the father, Chris, an immigrant from El Salvador; the mother, Magdalena, an immigrant from Mexico; the oldest daughter, Esperanza, who recently graduated from the University of California, Santa Cruz; Sophie, the second oldest, who is a second-year undergraduate student at San Diego State University; Julia, the third daughter who is a high school senior; and the youngest daughter, Riley, who is in the

ninth grade. I explored commonalities and differences across each of the four daughters and collected data on reported changes in parental involvement over the years. This approach allowed me to understand better how parental and sibling involvement in each daughter's education developed, as well as how the family's educational experiences as a unit have evolved over time.

Specifically, I researched the lived experiences of the family's four daughters in deep and nuanced ways to offer a more complex perspective beyond stereotypes. The positionality of each daughter enabled me to acquire data from the perspective of a college graduate, a second-year undergraduate, a rising senior at the start of the college application process, and a freshman entering high school. These perspectives revealed how the family's involvement in each daughter's education has developed. The study also identified how the oldest daughter's experiences compare to the youngest and thus revealed how the family's educational experiences as a unit have evolved over time. The study also collected data on the change in parental involvement over the years and captured the moments with each daughter that informed the development of the parents' involvement.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does each member of a Latinx family unit make sense of their educational journey and what they are learning along the way?

    1.A. What are they learning about supporting each other?

    1.B. What are they learning about the challenges they faced and how they navigated them?

2. How does each member of the Latinx family make sense of their overall experience at a Los

Angeles-area elite, predominantly White independent school?

2.A. What are the similarities and differences in the siblings' experiences in multiple spaces on campus?

2.B. How did the experience of attending an independent school shape their sense of self and family?

Study Design

To answer these questions, I conducted a person-centered, ethnographic, qualitative case study that centered on the experiences of each member of a Latinx family. I brought together elements of case study research and person-centered ethnography to amplify their voices. This design allowed me to capture the complexity and context of the Reyes family's experiences.

It was important to collect a variety of data to achieve the deep level of inquiry required to understand the Reyes family's experiences fully and to increase the credibility of my findings. To acquire a rich, holistic description of the family's experiences, the study examined and triangulated data from education journey maps, walking or go-along interviews, artifact-driven interviews, and semi-structured group and individual interviews with the family members. The intersectional framework behind this study design ultimately allowed me to see how the family members' individual and family identities are jointly linked to their experiences, which are rooted in (among other things) language, socio-economic status, generation, documentation status, socio-political concerns, trauma (past and/or current), previous school dynamics, and community (Galindo 2021). The specificity of the family experience, from the perspectives of the students and parents, allowed me to identify the nuanced patterns of people (in this case, one Latinx family) to see their constraints and strengths on the ground.

Study Significance

The findings from participants' narratives will provide students, teachers, administrators, and college counseling programs at Los Angeles-area independent schools with the knowledge to better understand and serve first-generation, lower-income, Latinx families. The study provides a much-needed case study that schools can utilize to make informed decisions regarding academics, college counseling, campus culture, and family support. The study also adds to the scant body of research concerned with the cultural wealth of Latinx families and the ways independent schools promote or discourage non-dominant forms of capital. I hope to fill some gaps in the existing literature about Latinx families in predominantly White independent schools, while also contributing to the growing literature that recognizes and uplifts the community cultural wealth of marginalized groups.

Furthermore, such narratives can help independent schools and Latinx families alike frame new ways of conceptualizing their social and academic environments (Galindo, 2021; McGill, 2003). By detailing the challenges one family faces and the strategies they have adopted, I sought to gain deeper insight into what predominantly White independent schools are doing to undermine and/or support the success of Latinx students and families (Bolgatz et al., 2020). This knowledge can help L.A.-area independent schools address Latinx families' diverse needs more honestly and accurately, which will help secure healthier enrollment for their schools in a future that is looking more Latinx.

Conclusion

This study aims to provide an understanding of demographic trends among first-generation, lower-income Latinx students beyond the numbers. To achieve this deeper level of understanding, this study focuses on the experience of one Latinx family receiving financial aid who has sent not just one child through the independent school system but four. The study

utilizes a person-centered, ethnographic approach through the use of variety of methods including family interviews, education journey maps, walking interviews, artifact-driven interviews, and member check interviews. By contextualizing the experiences that one Latinx family has acquired over nearly a decade, we can begin to see the complexities of their individual and family identity development in nuanced ways. The following literature provides a history of independent schools in the United States and their evolving efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion. It also provides an overview of extent data on the experiences of students of color at predominantly White institutions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature begins with a general history of independent schools in the U.S. and gradually hones in on the background of independent schools in the American southwest and Southern California. It also provides a summary of national and regional data on the number of Latinx students in independent schools, followed by an examination of why independent schools matter in the larger school context and specifically for Latinx families. It then explores the perceived and actual benefits of independent school education for Latinx students and families. Next, it shifts to reviewing recent independent school attempts to support Latinx students and synthesizing the challenges Latinx students face in independent schools. The chapter ends with a summary of existing research on Latinx families in independent schools, identifies gaps in existing research, and concludes by highlighting the need for more introspective approaches to understanding the community cultural wealth of the Latinx family in the context of independent school education.

History of Independent Schools in the U.S.

To fully understand the world of independent schools in the U.S. today requires a hard look into their racist past. The history of independent schools can be traced as far back as the 17th and 18th centuries. Most were established as homogenous schools of privilege that served the children of elite American families (Flewelling, 2013; Powell, 1996; Purdy, 2023). From the 1930s to the 1950s, independent schools faced criticism for excluding marginalized groups, promoting cultural elitism, and cultivating White norms. However, independent schools continued participating in state-sanctioned racism and marginalization for much of the 20th century regardless of the criticism. White leaders even created new ones, all without marginalized groups in mind.

Following the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling permitting "separate but equal" accommodations, many independent schools—particularly in the South—remained predominantly White, or even became more segregated (Flewelling, 2013; Powell, 1996; Purdy, 2023). In response to *Brown*, some entirely new White-only preparatory schools were established. However, for other independent schools, the ruling and subsequent federal civil rights legislation of the 1960s sparked a moral reckoning. Leaders of these historically White elite schools grappled with whether to maintain their segregationist roots or align with the desegregation mandates sweeping through public education. For many, the prospect of losing their tax-exempt status added significant pressure to change (Purdy, 2023). By 1970, Black Americans had successfully challenged these segregationist academies, leading the federal government to enforce tax penalties on schools that did not adopt racially inclusive admissions policies (Flewelling, 2013; Powell, 1996; Purdy, 2023). This era marked a turning point, catalyzing widespread diversity initiatives within independent schools. Recognizing the need for change, the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) appointed Dr. William Dandridge, a young Black public-school educator, as its first director of minority affairs in 1970, further underscoring the growing emphasis on equity and inclusion in these institutions (Purdy, 2023).

Why Independent Schools Matter in the Larger Educational Context

Gulla (2021) states that "independent schools have often played an outsized historical role in the development of innovative practices and programs"—from the Advanced Placement program, which started with four independent schools and three universities in the 1950s, to developing systems that allowed independent schools to reopen to in-person learning sooner than many other schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due in large part to their governance by

self-perpetuating boards of trustees and their right to determine their curriculum, educational philosophy, and pedagogical practices without outside interference, independent schools have the ability to be innovative and experiment with new concepts in ways that are not always afforded to public schools. When these innovative experiments work, new approaches to education challenges can emerge, which is why independent schools are critical to the larger educational landscape (Gulla, 2021). In many ways, this study follows the same spirit of innovation—one that I hope will shed more light on the dynamic complexities of the first-generation Latinx families that attend independent schools.

Independent Schools in the Modern Historical Context

Though independent schools have made strides toward inclusivity, the demographic data reveals that certain longstanding challenges persist, reminiscent of the post-*Brown v. Board of Education* era. Take, for instance, the past ten years, during which the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged the world, in addition to the rise of social movements in the U.S. as a result of systemic injustices highlighted by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Aumaud Arbery, and numerous others.

In the summer of 2020, many Black students, alumni, parents, faculty, and staff from predominantly White independent schools across the country took to social media to voice the racism, microaggressions, and structural barriers they had experienced. Over 60 Instagram accounts using the hashtag #BlackAt were created, and the countless testimonials shared on those accounts echoed the experiences of the first Black students to desegregate independent schools over 50 years ago (Spencer, 2020). The #BlackAt movement stemmed from the outpouring of demonstrations and protests supporting the Black Lives Matter movement and provided a real-life bridge between the world at large and the everyday realities Black students

experienced in school (Purdy, 2023; Spencer, 2020). The movement also created a major impetus for independent school leaders to reckon with their schools' racist past and advance DEI efforts. While many independent schools had already claimed a commitment to social justice prior to 2020, the #BlackAt movement highlighted blind spots that still persisted and prompted many independent school leaders to reevaluate and redesign their approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

On a more macro level, the #BlackAt movement, which started with predominantly White independent schools, quickly inspired other schools (charter schools, as well as private and public colleges and universities) to create similar accounts to hold their institutions accountable. The influence that Black independent school students have had on other institutions through the creation of the #BlackAt movement–and the array of institutional changes it has triggered–is yet another example of how independent schools continue to play an outsized role in the larger historical context of education.

Latinx Student Demographics in Southern California Independent Schools

As of today, in 2024, California holds the largest Hispanic population of any U.S. state (15.62 million), with Los Angeles County home to the largest Hispanic population (4.8 million) of any county in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). However, despite California's minoritized population being the majority at 61%, independent schools continue to enroll relatively low numbers of Latinx students (NAIS, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). In 2024, independent schools enrolled 6.2% Latinx/Hispanic students nationwide, while California's independent schools reported 7.1% Hispanic enrollment (NAIS, 2024).

Despite the cultural diversity of cities like Los Angeles, independent schools in Southern California still face difficulties in achieving racial representation. According to the 2024 U.S.

Census, the racial composition of Latinx/Hispanic school-age children in Los Angeles County is currently around 55%. However, Latinx students remain underrepresented in the area's independent schools, with Latinx/Hispanic students accounting for 6% of enrollment (NAIS, 2024).

Some independent schools in Southern California report that 40% or more of their students are from racially diverse backgrounds. While this exceeds the national average of 29%, detailed analysis shows that Latinx/Hispanic students are still underrepresented, with Asian American students representing the largest segment of students of color (NAIS, 2024). This imbalance does not fully mirror the racial diversity of Los Angeles' school-age population.

California Independent School Efforts to Diversify

According to the California Association of Independent School's (CAIS's) Strategic Plan for 2023-2024, a sustained commitment to foster respect for the diversity and dignity of humanity through inclusion, equity, and belonging in CAIS and its member schools was listed fourth in a list of their top six priorities. This is a continuation of the work implemented in the CAIS 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, which prioritized the need for their schools to serve underrepresented students, particularly Latino students better, so that CAIS member schools could better reflect local, regional, and state populations, which were starting to become majority Latinx (CAIS, 2016; CAIS, 2021).

Programs like A Better Chance (ABC) and the Independent School Alliance (ISA) are nonprofit organizations dedicated to increasing access to quality education for students of color. They help talented students from underserved backgrounds find educational opportunities at top independent, private, and sometimes public schools. Founded in 1963, A Better Chance identifies and recruits academically talented students of color (particularly African American,

Latinx, Native American, and Asian American students) and helps place them in competitive middle and high schools (A Better Chance, n.d.). ABC provides support through every stage of the admissions process, including test prep, application assistance, interview coaching, school selection guidance, and even career guidance post-graduation (A Better Chance, n.d.).

The Independent School Alliance works to promote diversity and inclusion in independent schools. It focuses on supporting students of color and families from underrepresented backgrounds in gaining access to independent schools that are typically private, college-preparatory, and offer a rigorous academic environment (Pasadena Now, Independent School Alliance, n.d.-a; Independent School Alliance, n.d.-b). ISA assists families with the application process, providing guidance on financial aid and admissions, and helps students prepare for the academic and social transition to these schools (Independent School Alliance, n.d.-a; Independent School Alliance, n.d.-b). The alliance collaborates with various independent schools to foster a more inclusive environment and often provides workshops, mentorship programs, and networking opportunities to help students and families thrive in their new educational settings (Pasadena Now, Independent School Alliance, n.d.-a; Independent School Alliance, n.d.-b).

Both programs promote diversity within private school environments, foster a supportive network for students of color, and empower families with the resources they need for long-term educational success. However, some critics question the ethical motivations behind such programs. On the one hand, programs like these do offer academic and leadership opportunities to underrepresented students that they otherwise would not have had access to at their local public schools. On the other hand, they run the risk of operating under the assumption of White saviorism–a power structure based on White supremacy that involves the idea that White people

have a duty to save people of color and often do so through patronizing, performative, or intrusive ways. Furthermore, many of these programs carefully select only the most high-achieving underrepresented students that they feel would align closest to independent schools' missions, expected student outcomes, and general campus climate. Being selective about *how* you diversify and *who* you select to achieve "diversity" may discredit what some would consider true diversity. For example, ABC's mission indicates "...to transform independent schools and society" (A Better Chance, n.d.). Their highly selective recruitment efforts suggest that the transformation can only be achieved by selecting the most high-achieving students that they believe would fit traditional White norms of success and achievement at these independent schools. In other words, if the underserved public-school student doesn't fit the profile of an independent school student close enough, then they would not be a part of the transformation of "independent schools and society." It sends the message that "transformation" can only exist one way, as dictated by the independent school and recruitment organization's mutual agreement.

In addition to organizations like these, various states across the U.S. also run independent school voucher programs that allocate funds from the state's general education budget to students of families opting out of public schools for private or independent ones. California currently does not have a state-run independent school voucher program, and previous voucher initiatives in the state have been rejected by voters (Fensterwald, 2017; Gardiner, 2021). The California School Choice Foundation recently attempted to gather support for a 2024 initiative, which if passed, would allocate roughly $15,000 per student for families opting out of public schools (Californians for School Choice, n.d.; Gardiner, 2021). The funds would be drawn from the state's general education budget; and critics, including the California Teachers Association (CTA), argue that these programs may reduce funds for public schools, especially as the

proposed amount may not fully cover private school tuition in California. Additionally, CTA and other opponents point to research indicating that voucher programs in other states have sometimes led to mixed educational outcomes, particularly in math, and concerns over access and equity for students in rural areas where school options are limited. For now, to pass any voucher system in California requires significant political and public support, as the state has historically leaned toward bolstering public-school funding and access instead of moving toward private school funding through vouchers (Californians for School Choice, n.d.; Gardiner, 2021).

Why Independent Schools Matter for Latinx Families

Marginalized families, like Latinx families, are more apt to choose private schools because of factors related to perceived quality of education. They believe that private schools are better than public school alternatives in that they afford their students a wealth of educational resources, smaller class sizes, quality instruction, more rigorous curricula, and increased access to college (Buddin et al., 1998; Datnow & Cooper, 1997; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Goldring & Phillips, 2008; Sander, 2015). Marginalized students and families are often willing to negotiate the challenges of attending elite, predominantly White independent schools for intellectual and social opportunities, higher expectations, prestige, and networking opportunities (Datnow & Cooper, 1997; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007).

Because of the value many Latinx families place on education, many see an independent school education as a worthy investment. In a 1998 study on school choice in California, Buddin et al. (2007) found evidence that Latinx families were more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to choose private schools, providing some support for the view that school choice would benefit minoritized groups at least as much as Whites. Latinx families are likely to choose private schools because they view education as an opportunity to have a better quality of life and access

to things they did not have growing up (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Buddin et al., 1998). For many first-generation students of color, a college degree leads to a better lifestyle that would surpass their past circumstances and break generational cycles of poverty and lack of higher education in their families (Adams & McBrayer, 2020). Therefore, investments in high schools that offer more opportunities for high achievement and, thus, college acceptance are a worthy investment.

While breaking the cycle of multigenerational poverty is certainly a key factor behind Latinx families' desire to apply to private schools, independent schools are not always accessible to them. Data suggests that family income and/or socio-economic status make the biggest difference in selecting private schools, especially in large metropolitan areas (Sander, 2015; Yang & Kayaardi, 2004). In a mixed-methods study that examined how Latinx parents engage in the educational marketplace, Mavrogordato & Stein (2016) found that many Latinx parents with an inability to afford private schools or who expressed issues related to transportation turn to charter schools that mirror private school education in the following ways:

- Smaller class sizes–they equated smaller class sizes with improved learning outcomes and private school education.
- Uniforms may serve as a symbol of a high-quality education, not because they actually translate to a higher quality educational experience, but because they are recognized as symbols of a high-quality education. They are often associated with private schools perceived as "better" than traditional ones.
- Positive physical and social environments–the perception that private schools are safer than public schools. This is supported by other studies that found that Latinx parents rank

school safety and discipline higher than other parents when factoring in school choice (Gastic & Coronado, 2011; Kleitz et al., 2000; Schneider et al., 1998).

All of these factors speak to a perception of academic quality at the root of Latinx parent motivation to seek public school alternatives. Latinx parents become motivated to look for alternatives beyond the traditional public school system because they have become disenchanted by the schooling experience their child is having/would have (Mavrogordato & Stein, 2016).

In 2018, the NAIS conducted a quantitative study to gain further insight into why parents choose independent schools. The data revealed that when Latinx parents have a child who is intelligent, talented, and/or emotionally mature, they seek schools with excellent academic programs that would cultivate those qualities and maximize their student's potential to prepare them for college. The study also revealed that Latinx parents of high-achieving students desired schools with excellent reputations because of the perceived advantages such reputations would have within the college application landscape (NAIS, 2020).

Some studies confirm that attending an independent school can benefit Latinx students. According to Torres (2016), Latinx students enrolled at NAIS-member schools scored 138 points higher on the critical reading section of the 2014-2015 SAT than other Latinx students nationally. For math, Latinx students at NAIS-member schools scored 129 points higher than other Latinx students, and in writing, they scored 144 points higher than other Latinx students (Torres, 2016). Furthermore, Jack (2016) found that lower-income undergraduates who attend independent day high schools experience smoother transitions to college because they have previously navigated elite academic environments laden with unwritten rules. He found that students of color who attend independent schools feel more primed to engage professors and are more proactive (Jack 2016).

On a side note, there also exists a misconception that Latinx students who leave traditional public schools opt for religious schools; however, recent studies show that the percentage of Latinx students in grades 1-12 enrolled in religious schools remained largely unchanged in the past 20 years and that Latinxs (a group that is predominantly Catholic) are not more likely to attend Catholic schools (Gastic & Coronado, 2011; Sander, 2015).

Recent Independent School Attempts to Support Latinx Students

The NAIS recognizes that diversity improves educational outcomes for all students and is integral to their fundamental values (Blackburn & Wise, 2009). Most, if not all, independent schools in the greater Los Angeles area have already made commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work, which emphasizes an appreciation of multiple dimensions of culture and identity. Most DEI statements underscore the importance of every member of their community feeling valued, validated, included, respected, and safe (Blackburn & Wise, 2009).

DEI efforts at these schools include several practices such as regular self-evaluations of curricula, pedagogy, programs, systems, processes, and traditions. Most L.A.-area independent schools also offer Latinx affinity groups for Latinx students, parents, or both. These affinity groups are safe spaces where those identifying as Latinx can meet other Latinxs, share common experiences, increase cultural awareness, and create a stronger sense of community and belonging at school (Greene, 2020). Most schools also have DEI teams of faculty and staff members from various divisions and departments and lead by someone in a Director of Diversity role.

Recruitment of diverse faculty and staff is another way many L.A.-area independent schools are trying to support their students of color. The Southern California Diversity Recruiting Fair, for example, is a networking event intended for faculty, staff, and administrators

from underrepresented groups interested in working in independent schools (*2023 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DIVERSITY RECRUITING FAIR*, n.d.). It allows attendees to learn about working in an independent school while connecting with representatives about open positions. In 2023, approximately 50 L.A.-area independent schools participated in the fair (*2023 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA DIVERSITY RECRUITING FAIR*, n.d.). Despite these current efforts by many independent schools, Latinx students are still experiencing several challenges, which are highlighted in the subsequent section.

Existing Literature on Latinx Students in Independent Schools

Scant research exists about the specific experiences of Latinx students in independent schools. The extant literature in the independent school context either discusses the experiences of students of color (SOC) more generally (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Harris & Marcucci, 2021; Johnson, 2014; McGill, 2003) or focuses explicitly on the African-American/Black student experience (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2012). I will be drawing from both foci in my exploration of the various challenges Latinx students face in independent schools. Specific studies on the Latinx student experience in predominantly White institutions (PWIs) do exist, but mostly in the context of higher education (Alemán, 2018; Lopez, 2005; Reyes, 2017; Yosso et al., 2010), or more generally in the context of students of color in higher education (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Harwood et al., 2018). Since almost all K-12 independent schools are PWIs, I used these studies to supplement this section on Latinx student challenges in predominantly White independent schools.

Students of color in independent schools often feel like they are in a constant internal battle between fitting into the dominant culture and feeling connected to their racial or cultural group (Blackburn & Wise, 2009). They also experience the need to succeed, not only for their

own sake but also for others of color coming after them. Furthermore, students of color bring to school the perspectives their parents have presented to them which they have learned from experience. For Latinx students, this might include a variety of experiences related to language differences, cultural expectations, gender roles, or immigration (Alemán, 2018; Blackburn & Wise, 2009).

McGill (2003) claims that "perhaps the most frequent academic concern expressed by students of color [at independent schools] is that their teachers continue to accept, consciously or otherwise, stereotypical images about what it is to be African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, and so on" (p. 4). As a result, students of color often display strong skepticism about how well the faculty at their school understand student concerns, perspectives, and their lives outside of what they see in class. In the classroom, students of color are often reluctant to share concerns about race for fear that their teachers (especially the ones they like) will feel like they are being accused of racism or of not being good at addressing complex issues. Students of color identified that these issues revolve around experiences of marginalization including microaggressions, alienation, generalizations, and verbal racism that come from students, teachers, and administrators alike (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Johnson, 2014; McGill, 2003; Reyes, 2017).

Students of color also experience surprising amounts of ignorance, intolerance, and hostility from peers (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McGill, 2003). For example, students of color are often stereotyped as being poor and on financial aid, and they may also be presumed less capable and, therefore somehow less deserving (Blackburn & Wise, 2009). For many students of color, the experience of racism is a constant reality that can compromise the quality of their school experience and tax their emotional resources (Arrington et al., 2003).

Students of color also report that some teachers and administrators fail to recognize that additional support is needed for students of color to succeed in these spaces; they operate under the belief that access to these schools is sufficient (McGill, 2003). Helping all students find academic success is a central tenet of independent schools, yet a persistent achievement gap exists between White and Asian-American students and their Latinx and African-American counterparts (Harris & Marcucci, 2021; Johnson, 2014). Johnson (2014) explains that at one independent school in the Boston area, Latinx students' GPAs are at least .2 points lower than White and Asian-American students and that their SAT scores from 2004 to 2007 did not fare as well as White and Asian-American students in the areas of Critical Reading and Quantitative Reasoning. Harris & Marcucci (2021) also report national trends in standardized testing, which suggest that Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth score lower than their White and Asian counterparts. The data notes that low GPAs for Black and Latinx students are partly because those students get placed into standard-level math and science classes at much higher rates than their White or Asian-American counterparts (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Johnson, 2014). Harris & Marcucci (2021) also found that students receiving financial aid had lower GPAs than their full-paying, non-SOC peers partially due to their negative statistically significant relationship with the number of AP tests taken.

The data also point to other curricular and pedagogical factors that may play a significant role in low GPAs and test scores: inappropriate instructional approaches, culturally unresponsive curricula, and social contexts that are not conducive to learning for all racial and class groups (Arrington et al., 2003; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Johnson, 2014; McGill, 2003). For example, DeCuir & Dixson (2004) found that at predominantly White schools, the voices of African-American students were often ignored or othered in class. Students of color also report feeling a

significant divide in student-teacher relationships due to only feeling somewhat comfortable when they ask for help (Johnson, 2014). Overall, these studies highlighted the atmosphere of White cultural hegemony that favors the upper class where students of color often feel they have to negotiate a positive sense of their race-related identity at predominantly White, elite, independent schools (DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby, 2012; Harwood et al., 2018; Lopez 2005; Reyes, 2017).

The Impact of Predominantly White Institutions on Latinx Identity Development

For Latinx students, predominantly White schools often prove to be hostile racial climates and may amplify one's awareness of racial and socioeconomic dynamics (DeCuir-Gunby, 2012; Yosso et al., 2010). In a mixed-methods study of racial climates and identity-formation processes among Latinx students, Reyes (2017) found that for Latinx students in predominantly White learning environments, the burden of being one of the few Latinx students on campus, coupled with the wealth and privilege on campus, bred feelings of tokenization. Tokenism is the practice of making a superficial or symbolic effort to include individuals from underrepresented or marginalized groups, often to give the appearance of equality while failing to address systemic inequalities or provide meaningful opportunities for inclusion (Kanter, 1977; Yoder, 1991). This concept frequently involves selecting a minimal number of individuals to represent diversity, which can perpetuate stereotypes and reinforce existing power dynamics within institutions or organizations. Reyes (2017) also found that the underrepresentation of Latinxs gave students a feeling of not belonging. This coincides with other data that confirm that at predominantly White institutions where Latinxs are a small minority of the population, their experiences with isolation, discrimination, and minority race stress remind them that they do not

belong and, thus, hinder healthy identity development (Alemán, 2018; Hurtado, 1992; Lopez, 2005; Yosso et al., 2010).

The data also suggest that the more selective or "elite" the institution, the more likely Latinx students will experience a hostile campus racial climate during their time there (Lopez, 2005; Reyes, 2017; Yosso et al., 2010). Microaggressions, which I discussed in previous paragraphs within the context of independent schools, also appear quite frequently in higher education. In their research on microaggressions at three selective universities, Yosso et al. (2010) explore three types of racial microaggressions—interpersonal microaggressions, racial jokes, and institutional microaggressions. Their findings revealed that all forms of microaggressions significantly impact Latinxs' self-perceptions. According to Yosso et al. (2010), interpersonal microaggressions—verbal and nonverbal racial affronts directed at Latinx individuals in academic spaces—"lead Latinxs to feel that their presence disrupts the 'natural' state of being on campus" (p. 667). Racial jokes increased race-based stress while also damaging Latinx sense of belonging (Yosso et al., 2010). Institutional microaggressions—racial marginalization evidenced in "structures, practices, and discourses that endorse a campus racial climate hostile to People of Color"—were also found to diminish the value of Latinx students on campus (Yosso et al., 2010, p. 673).

Hartwood et al. (2018) also studied microaggressions in the context of everyday racism in integrated spaces for students of color at a predominantly White institution. Their findings coincided with Yosso et al. (2010) in that racial microaggressions directly and negatively influence Latinx students' sense of belonging and participation in their learning. In the Hartwood et al. (2018) study, students of color also sensed that their presence disrupted a sense of "normalcy" or Whiteness. Like Yosso et al. (2010), they also felt like predominantly White

spaces rendered them invisible or hyper-visible (Hartwood et al., 2018). While both of these studies were conducted within the context of higher education, the experiences that Latinx students endured in those PWIs mirror those that many Latinx students face daily at L.A.-area independent schools today.

Existing Research on Latinx Families at Independent Schools

There is limited research about the experiences of Latinx families in predominantly White independent schools (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Sander, 2015). Some literature exists about the experiences of Black families in independent schools (Bolgatz et al., 2020; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2012), which some of this section will draw from. Other sources I found discuss the role of Latinx families in their students' learning development in a broader K-12 context (De Gaetano, 2007; Lara-Alecio et al., 1997; Ryan et al., 2010; Sanchez et al., 2010; Terriquez, 2013).

Families of color may be less familiar with the independent school world and may be unfamiliar with the steps involved in the application process (Blackburn & Wise, 2009). As a result, they may be less inclined to apply or face anxiety about accepting offers to attend because they may feel significantly underrepresented in those spaces (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Bolgatz et al., 2020). Many families of color are also subject to many stereotypes by members of the community, like the assumption that they are on financial aid or were admitted solely to fulfill a diversity agenda (Blackburn & Wise, 2009).

Latinx families in predominantly White environments might face unique cultural challenges that may impact their perceived level of involvement in their children's education. For example, there may be a misunderstanding about what schools expect from them, or they may have different attitudes about schools tied to transnationalism, postcoloniality, and

neoliberalism (Alemán, 2018; De Gaetano, 2007; Gonzalez, 2023). For example, many generations of Latinx families have suffered displacement in their countries of origin as a result of continued colonization, and the impacts of such trauma can stay ingrained in the Latinx family for generations (Alemán, 2018; Gonzalez, 2023). With independent schools being mostly White and privileged spaces, they are ideal environments for racist nativism and internalized racist nativism (the ways members of Latinx communities adopt racist nativist logics) (Alemán, 2018).

Language issues could also impact Latinx families' relationships with schools (Sanchez et al., 2010). Spanish-speaking families are more vulnerable to becoming alienated from schools (De Gaetano, 2007; Sanchez et al., 2010). As a form of linguistic capital, *dichos*, or popular sayings are commonly used by Spanish-speaking or bilingual Latinx families to communicate values, lessons, advice, and/or motivation (Delgado-Gaitán, 2004; Sánchez et al., 2010; Yosso, 2005). Sánchez et al. (2010) identify the importance of incorporating *dichos* into Latinx parental involvement programs to increase their students' success in school.

Lara-Alecio et al. (1997) found that Latinx parents of high-achieving, low-income, educationally disadvantaged children hold high expectations of their children, firmly believe in the educational system, and desire a strong link with their children's schools. High expectations align with the aspirational capital tenet of Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth and support the fact that Latinx families generally care deeply about educational pursuits, contrary to popular belief (De Gaetano, 2007).

Gaps in the Research Literature

As mentioned in the previous sections, the research on Latinx students and families in independent schools is very limited. Research that is specific to independent schools ranges from a general focus on students of color (Harris & Marcucci, 2021; Johnson, 2014; McGill, 2003) to

an exclusive focus on African-American students (Arrington et al., 2003; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2012); but it fails to focus specifically on the Latinx community. Studies that focus on Latinx student experiences in predominantly White institutions do so in the context of higher education (Alemán, 2018; Lopez, 2005; Reyes, 2017; Yosso et al., 2010). Other studies focusing on predominantly White institutions in higher education do so with a general focus on students of color (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Harwood et al., 2018).

Similar to the literature on Latinx students, the literature on Latinx independent school families was also incredibly scarce. The literature I was able to find either focused generally on families of color (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; Sander, 2015) or only focused on African-American families (Bolgatz et al., 2020; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2012). The remaining studies I found on Latinx families explored parent involvement in the contexts of K-12 public education or higher education (De Gaetano, 2007; Lara-Alecio et al., 1997; Ryan et al., 2010; Terriquez, 2013). While those studies helped understand the role of Latinx families in their students' educational experiences, they failed to capture the particular challenges Latinx families face in L.A.-area independent schools. Thus, the scant amount of literature specific to Latinx students and families in L.A.-area independent schools only reinforced my desire to conduct this study.

Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that will guide my work are Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW), person-centered ethnography, and Crenshaw's (1991) Intersectionality. Using these strength-based frameworks allowed me to recognize the Reyes family's multifaceted diversity and gain a nuanced understanding of their independent schooling experiences so that

independent schools and their various stakeholders can better understand and address educational inequities specific to their institutions.

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)

Drawing from a Critical Race Theory framework, Community Cultural Wealth aims to shift the center of focus from notions of White, middle-class culture to the culture of communities of color. By centering the research lens on the experiences of communities of color, CCW aims to reveal accumulated assets and resources in their histories and lives. According to Yosso (2005), "cultural capital is not just inherited or possessed by the middle class, but rather it refers to an accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are valued by privileged groups in society" (p. 76). Thus, it aims to acknowledge and celebrate the accumulation of specific forms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are not always valued by privileged groups in traditional spaces. Community Cultural Wealth (and by extension CRT) provides a lens that allows others to see the ways communities of color nurture cultural wealth through the following six forms of capital:

1. Aspirational: "...the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (Yosso 2005, p. 77)
2. Linguistic: "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso 2005, p. 78)
3. Familial: "...those cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition" (Yosso 2005, p. 78)
4. Social: "...networks of people and community resources" (Yosso 2005, p. 78)
5. Navigational: "...skills of maneuvering through social institutions…not created with communities of color in mind" (Yosso 2005, p. 78)

6. Resistant: "...knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso 2005, p. 78)

Community cultural wealth offers a framework for understanding the many strengths Latinx families possess—strengths that influence nearly every aspect of the Latinx student's academic success. To leverage the community cultural wealth of Latinx families for an improved educational experience, independent schools need a more in-depth understanding of the elements of community cultural wealth in action. For example, community cultural wealth would allow schools to recognize Latinx students' linguistic capital—the multiple language and communication skills that allow Latinx families to navigate "private school speak" (Bolgatz et al., 2020). Understanding the familial capital of Latinx families would also help independent schools understand that education is a group effort, especially in the context of navigating predominantly White spaces. It is just as important for independent schools to understand the Latinx family's social capital—the networks of people and community resources—which may look significantly different than the networks of people and community resources that traditional independent school families utilize. A Latinx family's navigational capital—the skills of maneuvering through social institutions not designed for Latinx families, like independent schools—would allow independent schools to see the many ways Latinx families often have to work harder to achieve the same results as other families. Lastly, the Latinx family's presence at independent schools is a form of resistant capital; through the points of tension throughout their experience, they are pushing back against traditional ways of knowing and doing things.

An independent school's ability to understand the community cultural wealth of Latinx families is the key to forming more meaningful relationships with them. It is important to note that while community cultural wealth offers a framework for understanding Latinx family

experiences, many families may not categorize their experiences in this way. Therefore, it is just as important—from a qualitative and ethnographic perspective—to listen to how families describe and name their experiences. Understanding the diversity of experiences within and across Latinx families will support independent schools in better attending to familial needs, developing a curriculum that supports sociocultural identities, and enhancing the overall educational experiences and outcomes of Latinx students (Galindo, 2021).

Person-Centered Ethnography

This study also uses person-centered ethnography to capture the way the family members themselves contextualize their experiences. While CCW offers a framework for understanding the family members' experiences within a particular cultural milieu, person-centered ethnography highlights multiple, sometimes conflicting, cultural models and the family's complicated attachments to them (Levy & Hollan, 2015; Lowe & Strauss, 2018). The family members' discursive consciousness may exist at varying levels, so it is especially important to use a person-centered ethnographic approach. Doing so allows each member to label their own experiences in their own words, complete with the details of their interpretations, feelings, and actions (Lowe & Strauss 2018). Additionally, a person-centered approach emphasizes the theoretical challenge of understanding how individuals internalize culture dynamically, offering a way to connect socially shared cultural frameworks with personal experiences and perspectives (Levy & Hollan, 2015). This means that even though CCW provides a template for understanding the various forms of wealth Latinx families may possess, a person-centered approach allowed me to highlight the "multiple, often psychodynamic, processes or phenomenological aspects of experience that might lead to the differential internalization and

enactments of cultural models among individuals, including siblings raised in the same households," much like the four sisters in this study (Lowe & Strauss, 2018, p. 307).

Intersectionality

The third theoretical framework selected for this study is Kimberle Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw used intersectionality to describe how different forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) intersect and overlap, particularly in the lives of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991; Steinmetz, 2020). While her work originated from her exploration of violence toward women of color in a mostly social, legal, and political context, intersectionality has become widely applied to other fields that explore the unique ways in which dimensions of identity intersect and, therefore, influence the experiences of marginalized groups. Since this study focuses on a first-generation, Latinx, lower-income family that consists of four daughters, the concept of intersectionality becomes especially important to help denote the various ways in which race, gender, class, and sociopolitical identities intersect to shape the multiple dimensions of the Latina student experience navigating an elite, predominantly-White independent school in Los Angeles.

Conclusion

Traditionally, independent schools derived from a direct response to desegregation efforts after *Brown vs. Board of Education*. Thus, they were not created with students or families of color in mind. Despite the growing wave of efforts across the nation to make these spaces more diverse and inclusive, the extant literature suggests that there is still a long way to go for these schools to achieve desired levels of diversity, equity, inclusion (*NAIS*). By placing Latinx educational experiences at the center of educational research about them in the context of independent schools, I hope to provide a richer understanding of independent schools in Los

Angeles (Fernández, 2002). In my work exploring the community cultural wealth of one family, I aim to provide L.A.-area independent schools with a model for how to learn about and engage with their Latinx families. Doing so will help move independent schools away from monolithic understandings of Latinx people and take stock of the multiple strengths of their Latinx students and families (Galindo, 2021).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

My goal for this study was to gain deeper insight into the perceptions of education, particularly the perceptions of independent school education, held by members of one Latinx family. I was interested in understanding how each student in the family interprets their experiences in creating their educational identity and sense of self. I was also interested in how the parents interpret their individual experiences in their daughters' educational experiences—particularly during their time as an independent school family. Understanding the perceptions, needs, hopes, and fears of the parents was just as important as understanding the perspectives of the students.

It is worth noting that one Latinx family cannot possibly be representative of all Latinx families who navigate elite, predominantly White, independent schools. Generalizability was never a goal. Instead, this study was specifically designed to center one Latinx family at one elite independent school to contextualize their individual experiences and, therefore, better understand the complexities of Latinx family identity development in the independent school context. That is why a person-centered, ethnographic approach was selected—to avoid contributing to a tokenized "one-size fits all" approach to understanding Latinx families.

This chapter includes the study's research questions and outlines the research design and methodology employed to address them. It provides a detailed explanation of the approaches used to collect and analyze data, a description of the research process, and a rationale for site and participant selection. Overall, this chapter establishes the foundation for interpreting and discussing the findings presented in subsequent chapters.

Research Questions

1. How does each member of a Latinx family unit make sense of their educational journey and

what they are learning along the way?

1.A. What are they learning about supporting each other?

1.B. What are they learning about the challenges they faced and how they navigated them?

2. How does each member of the Latinx family make sense of their overall experience at a Los Angeles-area elite, predominantly White independent school?

2.A. What are the similarities and differences in the siblings' experiences in multiple spaces on campus?

2.B. How did the experience of attending an independent school shape their sense of self and family?

Research Design and Rationale

To answer these questions, this study centered on one particular family's experiences and amplified their voices through a person-centered approach to qualitative research. Performing a qualitative case study that employed person-centered methods allowed me to understand the individual and group perspectives, views, and feelings of the Latinx family over time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A qualitative design was chosen because the study sought to provide a rich, holistic description of the experiences of one Latinx family at an elite independent school. A case study allowed me to capture the complexity of the family's experiences and gather each family member's perspectives through deeply personal face-to-face interactions. Furthermore, the collective, communal, and cultural nature of Latinx families and their relationship to education (or perceptions of education) required a qualitative approach incorporating intersections of grounded theory, narrative, and case study (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). A quantitative approach

(namely survey) would have been insufficient because the small, nonrepresentative sample would not yield meaningful, significant results. Furthermore, a quantitative approach to this study would limit the variety of unique responses that may be shared through learning about individual experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Critical Race Feminista Methodology (CRFM) is a research approach that incorporates an anticolonial perspective, challenges the supposed objectivity of the research process, fosters collaborative relationships between researchers and participants, and demands genuine involvement (Delgado Bernal et al., 2019). For this study, it was important to disrupt the claimed neutrality of the research process. Traditional research methodologies often assume that the researcher is in a position of power and that the participants are vehicles for providing information that would benefit learning institutions. However, for this particular study, the extraction of data from my participants, in the form of their lived experiences and narratives, wasn't solely to better the independent school. Yes, much of the data provided can be used to inform best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts by the institution for underrepresented communities, but what quickly became apparent was the element of healing and transformation that occurred for my participants as a result of their participation and co-partnership with me on this journey. Without the authentic engagements that transpired between us at every phase of this study, I would not have been able to achieve the level of depth and nuance this study accomplished. Furthermore, my participants would not have been able to contextualize their experiences, reflect on their strengths to navigate the multiple challenges of navigating the independent school world, and heal from the individual and collective traumas they caused. A Critical Race Feminista methodological approach allowed me to center the

Brown body by introducing nuanced modes of inquiry focusing on epistemological wholeness, healing, and transformation (Huber et al., 2004).

As a result, this case study examined and triangulated data from education journey maps, walking or go-along interviews, artifact driven interviews, and semi-structured group and individual interviews with the family members. This design gave my participants autonomy over their stories while also validating their role as experts in their experiences. As a "researcher," I merely created the framework for this storytelling, gave them the tools they needed to conceptualize their narratives, and (most importantly) listened intently to the stories they shared with me. During the process, I was met with phrases like, "I'm not sure if I did this right, but…" or disclaimers such as, "Just so you know, when I did this, I tried to…". These phrases revealed underlying insecurities that my participants felt–a questioning of whether or not they had done the "assignment" correctly. CRFM helped me realize that these insecurities were deeply rooted in colonial perspectives of trying to achieve Eurocentric standards of validity, worth, and acceptance. For many generations of people of color, Latinx specifically, who were raised in the postcolonial U.S., these beliefs that we may not be "doing it right" run deep. Thus, it maybe shouldn't have been such a surprise that my study would trigger the same thoughts. After all, my title of "researcher" representing the University of California, Los Angeles, carries a certain colonial understanding of the field for most. And for a lower-income, first-generation, Latinx family, the idea of being the focus of a study from UCLA perhaps came (intentionally or not) with the added weight of yet another institution they had to "figure out" or navigate. For these reasons, much careful thought and planning went into designing a study to dismantle those insecurities about and preconceived notions of what research is. I have to admit as a first-generation Latinx researcher at this university, the dismantling of those insecurities was a task I

had at almost every turn. I knew, fundamentally, that for me to accomplish the kind of study I wanted–one rooted in coexistence between myself and my participants and one that cultivated their dignity–a Critical Race Feminista Methodology was paramount.

This section highlights and explains in detail the multiple components of the study methodology, a methodology rooted in Critical Race Feminista Methodology–the research questions used to achieve the study's goals, the research design and rationale, and the analytical process. Before data collection, I gathered appropriate permissions from the parents and assent from the daughters. The following figure illustrates each family member's involvement in the project during the five phases.

Table 1

Family Member Involvement: Total Number of Interviews Per Phase, Per Participant

	Phase 2	Phase 2	Phase 3.a.	Phase 3.b.	Phase 4	Phase 5	**Total # of interviews per participant**
	Initial Family Interview (Group)	Education Journey Map Interview (Individual)	Walking Interview (Individual)	Artifact-Driven Interview (Parent Pair)	Individual Wrap-Up Interview (Individual)	Final Family Interview (Group)	
Mother	1	1		4	1	1	**8**
Father	1	1		4	1	1	**8**
Daughter 1	1	1	1		1	1	**5**
Daughter 2	1	1	1		1	1	**5**
Daughter 3	1	1	1		1	1	**5**
Daughter 4	1	1	1		1	1	**5**
Total # of interviews per phase	**1**	**6**	**4**	**4**	**6**	**1**	

Phase 1: Initial Family Interview

At the start of the study, I conducted an in-person initial group interview with the family at their home to discuss the details of the study and the family's role within it. There, I explained

the study's purpose, discussed data collection methods for each member, and initiated the larger ongoing conversation about their experiences as an independent school family. I also gathered appropriate consent from the parents and adult children as well as the necessary assent from the minor daughters. This interview was conducted in person at the Reyes' home and lasted approximately 90 minutes. Mom Magdalena, Julia (daughter 3), and Riley (daughter 4) were present in person while Dad Chris, Esperanza (daughter 1), and Sophie (daughter 2) joined the family interview via Zoom.

After I explained the details of the study and acquired all required consent, we transitioned to the interview portion of the meeting. I passed out a set of 5x7 notecards to each family member and explained that I wanted them to think about their answers to each question first and then write their responses on the notecards. We started with a simple one: If you had to create a title for a movie or book about your family, what would it be? Allowing each family member to write down their answers allowed me to capture their responses in a way that would then give them a choice to share or not. Doing this allowed each member to participate at their own pace, or if they didn't want to participate, then at least I would have their response to refer back to later during a one-on-one session. I was pleasantly surprised to see how quickly the family members felt comfortable sharing their responses. By the second round of questions, the family members were jumping in willingly to share their responses. Not a single person passed on the opportunity to share. This adjustment to the initial family interview provided a low-stakes, inviting way for me to get their participation going, and their responses opened the door to topics I would then be able to revisit with each of them during subsequent phases of the study. The family interview was recorded on my iPhone, with an audio recorder used as a backup.

Phase 2: Educational Journey Mapping

Education journey mapping was also used to capture each family member's journey through their school experience, with particular attention to their time as an independent school family. The maps, in essence, served as visual representations that provided information about how each family member sees themselves in their educational journeys. The daughters' journey maps focused on their role as students. On the other hand, the parents' journey maps focused on their role as parents and highlighted two things: their individual moments of importance as parents and the most significant moments they experienced as a family (which may or may not have been daughter-specific). The maps gave each family member time before their subsequent individual interviews to reflect, prime their memories, and create their narrative about their educational journey. That way, during their individual interviews, they could start talking about things that were most important to them rather than talking about the things that first came to their mind, as is typically the case with traditional interviews.

Furthermore, working with this visual representation allowed me to see each family member's educational self-perception across conceptual landscapes (from the individual to the social) and between various contexts and shifting structural conditions (Futch & Fine, 2014). Capturing this trajectory over time, instead of asking them to describe single moments, allowed me to identify trends and explore shifts in capital developed over time and space. Lastly, the education journey maps gave my participants opportunities for ownership since they re-centered authority and drew focus toward the participant and away from me, the facilitator (Futch & Fine, 2014). My participants could visually and orally construct their narratives about their perceptions of themselves as learners. Doing so put the onus on them to tell their story the best way they saw fit. All interviews were recorded on my iPhone, with an audio recorder used as a backup.

Education Journey Mapping: Student Participants

According to Futch & Fine (2014, p. 44), "…mapping invites respondents to narrate and represent their varied relationships to place, people and time; to visualize the tensions of agency and structure; and to document shifts, contradictions, continuities and ruptures within self over time and space." In this sense, by capturing the trajectory of each daughter from their time before attending Sunnydale School and through their present day, I could see what major changes each daughter experienced as a result of starting an independent school. Since students of color often encounter complex dynamics within the independent school context, this method became especially important because doing so allowed me to capture those complexities through image-based data that worked dialogically with the subsequent data collection methods that this study incorporated: walking (or go-along interviews), individual interviews, artifact-driven interviews, and a final family interview. Lastly, educational mapping served as a way for each daughter to have agency over her narrative and highlight the information *they* deemed vital versus the information they thought I wanted to hear.

Before each of the daughters created her education journey map, I shared a sample education journey map that I had created based on my own experiences in the hopes that doing so would establish more trust with my participants. Allowing them to see my journey navigating the U.S. independent school system as a first-generation Latinx student modeled for them how I see my own identity in the context of my varied relationships to place, people, and time in the independent school world. Then, I provided them with the following instructions for creating their own educational journey map:

Map your educational journey from the time you started school to where you are today. This should be in the form of some kind of visual representation, for example, a picture, timeline, path, collage, drawing, or any other creative representation of your choosing. Your educational

journey map should include people, places, obstacles, and opportunities along the way. You can use different colors to show different feelings or use lines and arrows. These are just suggestions. Be as creative as you like; if you don't want to draw, you can make more of a flow chart. You may use the materials provided or any materials of your own. Please complete this to the best of your ability before our next meeting, which will be one-on-one and scheduled for a date/time that is convenient for you.

I then conducted a one-on-one meeting with each daughter, wherein they shared their educational journey map with me. I used minimal questioning during the share, asking only minor questions to clarify or elaborate on the information shared. The meetings lasted approximately 60 minutes and were conducted in person (though certain logistics called for some Zoom meetings instead). All interviews were recorded on my iPhone, with an audio recorder used as a backup.

Education Journey Mapping: Parent Participants

I also asked each parent to complete an educational journey map for themselves, focusing on moments, events, encounters, etc., that they thought were fundamental to their overall family development. Similar to the daughters' education journey maps, the parent maps allowed each parent to construct their own narrative, which helped anchor the project as we then moved onto phases 3 through 5.

Specifically, I asked each parent to create an education journey map that positioned key moments of their daughters, the family as a whole, and themselves individually as parents. Doing so helped me understand the trajectory of their parental involvement, which was a crucial element for this study.

I provided each parent with the following instructions for creating their educational

journey map:

Map your family's educational journey from the time your daughters started school to where you are as a family today, paying special attention to your family's time at an independent school. This should be in the form of some kind of visual representation, for example, a picture, timeline, path, collage, drawing, or any other creative representation of your choosing. Your educational journey map should include people, places, obstacles, and opportunities along the way. Please position each of your daughters, your family as a collective, and you as a parent along a trajectory that you feel best captures the family's educational journey. You may use different colors to show different feelings or use lines and arrows. These are just suggestions. Be as creative as you like, and if you don't want to draw, you can make more of a flow chart. You may use the materials provided or any materials of your own. Please complete this to the best of your ability before our next meeting, which will be one-on-one and scheduled for a date/time that is convenient for you.

I then conducted individual meetings with each parent, wherein they shared their educational journey map with me. I used minimal questioning during the share, asking only minor questions to clarify or prompt information. The meetings lasted approximately 60 minutes in person and via Zoom (when scheduling logistics called for it). All interviews were recorded on my iPhone, with an audio recorder as a backup.

Phase 3.a.: Walking/Go-Along Interviews (Students Only)

Researchers have discovered that a campus' racial climate directly impacts the sociocultural orientation that students of color experience, especially during transitions to predominantly White institutions (Lopez, 2005; Reyes, 2017). Campuses with the most hostile racial climates often contribute to high levels of culture shock, race-related stress, and negative

cultural identity development for Latinx students (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Alemán, 2018; Harwood et al., 2018; Lopez, 2005; Reyes, 2017; Yosso et al., 2010). It was important for me to explore how Sunnydale—a predominantly-white independent school campus—has impacted the identity development of each of the Reyes daughters. To do so, I needed to find a data collection method that would allow me to tap into the ways the campus holds memory for them. Thus, I decided to implement walking (or go-along) interviews to carry on a more discursive and reflective approach to data collection with the Reyes daughters (Bilsland & Siebert, 2023). I selected walking (or go-along interviews) because the act of walking has the effect of setting the mind in motion and "is said to stimulate certain memories, thoughts, feelings, which may not have been materialized were it not for the cue or stimulus in the immediate environment" (Bilsland & Siebert, 2023, p.8).

Walking interviews also cultivate a greater sensitivity to shifting power relations between interviewer and interviewee (Bilsland & Siebert, 2023; Langford & Crawford, 2022). They encourage participants to take a leading and active role in the research process by allowing them to set the route for the interview. When an interviewee determines their route for walking, the interviews are more empowering and provide opportunities to explore new avenues of thought. The narrative is less constrained by questioning, and the commentary is more free-flowing, allowing the interviewee to own their narrative and steer the conversation (Bilsland & Siebert, 2023; Langford & Crawford, 2022). Essentially, walking interviews can create a more balanced dynamic between participants and researcher, as the interaction feels more like a casual conversation rather than a formal interrogation (Bilsland & Siebert 2023). This method also aligns Critical Race Feminista Methodology in that it fosters authentic engagement and collaboration between researcher and participant, which ultimately fosters a deeper

understanding of the information shared (Delgado Bernal et al., 2019).

To conduct my walking interviews, I provided each daughter with a campus map and asked them to determine the route for their own interview. Each daughter selected the meeting point, time of the meeting, and choice of the route taken. I asked each of them to take me for a walk to the places significant to them for whatever reason or that held specific memories about their experiences at the independent school. I used short, neutral comments to guide our interaction and only asked questions for clarification along the way; however, I let the participants do most of the talking.

On the interview day, I attached wireless microphones to our lapels. The microphones were connected to my iPhone, which I used to record our conversation. The use of lapel microphones was important since I needed access to my hands to record observational notes. I used a notepad and pen to capture any observations that could not be recorded on tape, such as facial expressions, gestures, and emotional reactions to spaces on campus. Each walking interview took approximately 90 minutes, and all recordings were then transcribed using Rev.com's AI transcription feature.

Phase 3.b.: Artifact-Driven Interviews (Parents Only)

In initial conversations I had with Magdalena, the mother, to gauge interest in this study, I learned that Mr. and Mrs. Reyes had been keeping memory boxes—one for each daughter—since their days in preschool and kindergarten. These memory boxes contained writings, drawings, accomplishments, mementos, and miscellaneous items tied to each daughter's educational experience. Personal documents can provide rich data because they reflect a person's attitudes, beliefs, and views of certain things (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Thus, with the parents' permission, we used these memory boxes to conduct four artifact-driven interviews with each

parent. The artifacts revealed narratives about each daughter telling of their educational experiences and their identity as perceived by their parents. These artifact-driven interviews supported and supplemented information provided during the educational journey map meeting from Phase 1. The artifacts acted as guides, allowing each parent to share information they deemed significant about each daughter. More than information about the daughters, the artifacts allowed the parents to reflect on the evolution of their parenting styles over time (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). These reflections provided key insights into their perceptions of themselves as parents and provided rich data about their family as a whole. I used minor guiding questions to keep the conversation moving forward or to ask for clarification, but the parents felt comfortable showing and telling on their own. I probed slightly for more information about specific artifacts along the way as I saw fit, but I mostly let them do the talking.

Each interview was conducted in person and lasted approximately 60 minutes. They were recorded on my iPhone with an audio recorder as a backup. The interviews were then transcribed using Rev.com's AI transcription service and then prepared for coding and analysis.

Phase 4: Individual Wrap-Up Interviews (Member Checks)

During this data collection phase, I conducted one wrap-up semi-structured interview with each family member. These interviews served as member checks and utilized information from phases 1 through 3 to address overall data shared, ask follow-up questions, and highlight things I'd want to revisit in depth. A semi-structured approach was most useful because it allowed me to focus on experience while also offering me flexibility to follow up with probing questions to gain a deeper understanding of the family members' narratives. The follow-up interviews also allowed the respondents to ask any questions or provide additional information omitted from phases 1-3. The interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes and took place in

person (unless logistics called for Zoom interviews). All interviews were recorded on my iPhone, with an audio recorder as a backup. The interviews were transcribed using Rev.com's AI transcription service and then prepared for coding and analysis.

Phase 5: Closing Family Interview

An exit family group interview occurred at the study's conclusion at the family's home, where they reflected on what they had learned about each other and their experiences at the independent school throughout the process. Another focus of this last session was for the entire family to reflect on the community's cultural wealth that was/is being utilized to navigate, survive, and thrive in the independent school world. By the time we had reached this phase of the study, many stories were brought to light, some of which the family had not heard of before. While keeping those stories hidden served its purpose in real time, I asked those participants if they would feel comfortable revealing those details during the final family interview, and they agreed. Bringing these stories to light at the group level for the first time was perhaps the most transformative part of the entire study. Allowing each family member to share in more detail the events that significantly impacted them allowed the family to process and ultimately heal from the trauma collectively said experiences inflicted on those particular members. This nuanced mode of inquiry mirrored CRFM's focus on epistemological wholeness, healing, and transformation in ways I could not have anticipated (Huber et al., 2004). However, because of the careful study design that prioritized collaboration and authentic engagement with my participants, this end result was unsurprising in hindsight. The final family interview was conducted in person at the family's home and lasted approximately 90 minutes. It was recorded on my iPhone, with an audio recorder used as a backup. The recording was then transcribed using Rev.com's AI transcription service, and the transcript was later prepared for coding and

analysis.

Basis/Rationale for Site Selection

Sunnydale School is a K-12 independent school located in the greater Los Angeles area of California. Sunnydale is representative of independent schools in Los Angeles that are trying to recruit and retain more Latinx families to more closely resemble the demographic in LAUSD. Like many L.A.-area independent schools, Sunnydale centers on diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ), yet still lacks a comprehensive understanding of who their first-generation Latinx families are, the strengths they possess, and the best ways to support, celebrate, and collaborate with them. Demographically, they boast 45% of students of color, with Latinx students only being approximately 4% of the total student population. They also currently have 24% of their students receiving financial assistance.

Basis/Rationale for Selecting the Participant Sample

The Reyes family is the ideal family for this research study for various reasons. For starters, the many facets of their identity—Latinx, immigrant, first-generation, receiving financial aid—reflect the kinds of Latinx families that many L.A.-area independent schools want to attract. Both parents are immigrants whose first language is Spanish. The Reyes are a critical case because they have been able to provide an independent school education for four children with varying degrees of parental involvement. The family first joined Sunnydale about nine years ago, when the oldest daughter entered the ninth grade. Thus, their longevity at the school puts them in a position to provide rich data about their experiences over a span of close to a decade. The fact that the daughters are each at different educational milestones, which span across 9th grade to recent college graduate, would allow me to gain a breadth of perspective about the independent school experience's impact on the family unit.

Furthermore, I could capture the progression of parental involvement as the parents navigate each daughter's educational experience. Overall, the Reyes represent something we can learn from, and I want to really understand the family in the context of relationship with the school and each other. Ultimately, the Reyes' unique set of circumstances would allow us to closely and comprehensively understand the unique supports and challenges that an independent school education has provided.

Most families send one or two children through the school, but by the time they learn what their children need, their children have graduated. Once they leave the school, the lessons those families learn evaporate. With the Reyes family, that wisdom has not left yet. It is still relevant, and it applies right back to the family's experiences with the two younger daughters, who are still attending Sunnydale School. They are collecting information about their daughters as they get older, as they mature, and as they go off into college and the real world. They are still learning the lessons and collecting data in real-time.

By studying the Reyes family, we start to see the after-effects of the independent school experience on a Latinx family, how it lingers, what stays with them, and how it influences their sense of self and family. It was especially important for this particular family to be selected for this study. We get to see almost a decade's worth of experiences. This study allowed me to see how these experiences are contextualized and processed and how the lessons learned are reapplied repeatedly through each subsequent daughter's experiences. Studying the Reyes family also provides insight into the extra legwork that Latinx families often utilize behind the scenes to navigate the independent school world.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participants

Role in Family	Pseudonym	Entry Year at Sunnydale	Entry Grade Level at Sunnydale	Current Grade Level
Mother	Magdalena	2016	N/A	N/A
Father	Chris	2016	N/A	N/A
Daughter 1	Esperanza	2016	9th Grade	1st year graduate
Daughter 2	Sophie	2018	7th Grade	2nd year undergraduate
Daughter 3	Julia	2019	7th Grade	12th Grade
Daughter 4	Riley	2022	7th Grade	9th Grade

Access and Recruitment

I am currently a sixth-year teacher and third-year high school dean of students at Sunnydale. Over the years, I have built relationships with Latinx students through classroom interactions and with their families through involvement with the school's Latinx family affinity group. After briefly discussing my research and plans with the assistant principal of the site, they gave their support and provided the names of a few families I might want to consider. I already had the Reyes family in mind, but was glad to see that our assistant principal also mentioned them as a viable family for this study. I already had access to them because I had already taught two of the four Reyes daughters and worked with the oldest during the Sunnydale Summer Scholastic program. I called Mrs. Reyes first to explain my case study and express my interest in focusing on her family's experiences. She expressed great interest, and after speaking with her family, she confirmed that they would be willing to participate.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Process

I transcribed the interviews using Rev.com's AI transcription service to prepare for

analysis. To ensure a deeper connection to the data and maintain the nuances of the conversations, I repeatedly listened to the audio recordings whenever possible. This practice allowed me to immerse myself in the data and identify resonances or emerging themes during routine activities, such as driving, walking, or working in my office.

Throughout this process, I documented my initial thoughts and reflections through analytic memos. These written memos served as a tool for capturing emergent insights and identifying potential biases in my interpretations. Additionally, I recorded verbal analytic memos using my iPhone whenever thoughts or connections arose spontaneously. The analytical memos also allowed me to note any changes or improvements to my interview protocol as I moved forward with my findings and implications.

After receiving the transcripts, I conducted an initial review to clean and refine them. This involved correcting transcription errors and addressing instances where Spanish phrases were inaccurately transcribed, as Rev.com's AI transcription service is limited to English. Once the transcripts were cleaned and verified for accuracy, I proceeded to the analysis phase, utilizing the methods detailed in the subsequent section.

Data Analysis Methods

Most of my beginning analysis was conducted inductively, generating multiple tentative categories from my participants' exact words. Segments of the data were clustered and given a name, category, or theme. I created a series of Excel documents for each phase of the study to map out key themes as they emerged from the data. The actual names of my categories/themes/findings came from a combination of sources: (1) myself, the researcher, (2) the participants' exact words, (3) themes in the literature, and (4) the six tenets Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth (one of the study's theoretical frameworks). I paid close attention to

the classification schemes I borrowed from the extant literature and Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth to avoid them creating too much bias in my data analysis. While those classifications were helpful at the start of my analytical process, I remained open to the nuances, tensions, and complexities that my data could potentially reveal within those schemes.

As I progressed through the multiple phases of the study, I subtly shifted from a largely inductive mode of thought toward a more deductive one. As certain categories/themes became more apparent, I began trying to see if those categories existed in subsequent data. By the end of my study, I was operating from a deductive stance in that I was looking for more evidence in support of my final set of categories.

Positionality and Role Management

Since I am a dean and English teacher in the same school as those I interviewed, it was important that I first position myself as a researcher and UCLA student before that as a teacher and dean. I kept this study voluntary and confidential to ensure that participants did not feel pressured to participate.

My relationship with the family was a major contributing factor to this study's success. Because I had already worked with three of the four daughters in some capacity, trust between us had already been established. The Reyes family identified me as someone on campus they could turn to for help or guidance, and their familiarity with me played a fundamental role in how they opened up about their experiences navigating the independent school world. Nonetheless, asserting myself as a UCLA researcher first and not as a school administrator was important, as that might have limited participants' candidness. That is not to say that a study like this cannot be achieved without such a relationship with participants, but there is an added benefit when it does exist. Therefore, I encourage future researchers to lean into relationships they may already have

with potential participants of similar studies. Regardless of whether or not such a connection already exists, incorporating a Critical Race Feminista Methodological approach–through the implementation of methods like education journey mapping, walking (or go-along) interviews, artifact-driven interviews, and member checks–can help any researcher establish collaboration with participants through authentic engagement (Delgado Bernal et al., 2019). The intentional design of this particular study allowed the Reyes family to be the crafters and tellers of their narratives. Without this piece, the study would not have been as successful.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

My study faces potential credibility threats of bias, reactivity, and insufficient evidence to support my conclusions because of my small sample size. As a first-generation Latinx graduate of a private high school myself, I might carry certain biases about the Latinx family experience at independent schools. To address this personal bias, I collected and triangulated data from multiple sources and used direct quotes from transcripts to help confirm or contradict my biases. As mentioned in my "Analytical Process" section, I also incorporated written and audio-recorded analytic memos to help me identify potential biases in my interpretations. Using standardized protocols and coding procedures also helped me avoid cherry-picking favorite or preferred quotes.

Because I have developed a rapport with the family over the past five years, I did not think they would necessarily tell me what I wanted to hear. I trusted that they would stay true to their experiences. However, because of my administrative role within the school and since I had taught two of the students previously, there was a chance they would change their behavior around me. To address this potential level of participant reactivity, I was prepared to hire ethnographers or interviewers to ensure that I did not influence them (specifically the two

students currently enrolled at the site). I did not, however, need to use outside ethnographers or interviewers since my exchanges with the participants were so collaborative and, therefore, organic and genuine.

Furthermore, using systematic data collection ensured that all participants were asked the questions, regardless of my relationship with them. The triangulation of data–with the family's educational journey maps, the daughters' walking interviews, and the parents' artifact-driven interviews–allowed me to capture a more comprehensive, complete, and accurate story of the family's experiences. In addition, careful thought was put into implementing member checks as part of my study. The member checks, or "Wrap-Up Interviews," as they are referred to in Phase 4, allowed me to take tentative interpretations and/or findings back to the participants from whom they were derived and ask if they are plausible (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Similarly, because my sample size was so small, the quality of my data needed to be especially rich. Thus, my transcripts and observational notes at each phase needed to be detailed and provide both depth and specificity so that readers could determine the extent to which my findings would be transferable to their own research contexts. The use of detailed descriptions, standardized protocols, and detailed coding procedures also helped me achieve the desired level of quality my study produced.

Lastly, as an added measure to ensure the quality of data collected, I practiced my interviewing skills before the study so that I would be more adept at asking probing and follow-up questions, which would produce more substantial details and examples from my participants.

Ethical Issues

The primary ethical considerations from this study were confidentiality and the potential for participants' responses to adversely affect their reputation with the school (namely with

teachers, administrators, and financial aid personnel). There was potential for participants to provide critical viewpoints about the school, so to address participants' fear of retaliation, I constantly emphasized the confidential nature of this study. Transcripts and recordings of the collective and individual interviews were stored online in a password-protected cloud folder. Participants' real names were not included in any write-ups of the study; instead, participants chose their own pseudonyms, which were used to protect their identity. The site's name was also changed to decrease the likelihood that readers would ascertain the true identity of the participants.

Another ethical issue that this study posed was my administrative role as a high school dean. I needed to regularly remind participants that their participation was completely voluntary and they were not obligated to be involved. Participants also signed an informed consent to participate in the study, reminding them of the confidentiality of their involvement in the study.

Study Limitations

Due to the nature of the study, which took place at one school site, there was the threat of non-generalizability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Naturally, the implications of this research are for Los Angeles-area independent schools. However, within the study, I do not suggest or argue that the intent is for findings to be generalizable beyond similar schools and the population at hand: first-generation Latinx families with lower-income backgrounds. Furthermore, since each school site and its culture of both tradition and learning are unique to their school, I caution sweeping application of this study's findings without doing research first at the school site itself. Although many of the findings for this study will apply to Latinx families generally, others are specific to the Latina experiences and should be understood within the context of the school site, as should the stories of other non-female Latinx students.

On the other hand, the potential for generalizability is present in the findings related to forms of cultural wealth used by Latinx families to persist and graduate their children from independent secondary education. These findings have far-reaching cultural implications that can benefit Latinx families and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts at large. This study is also of particular importance to independent school administrators as recent research points to the movement away from a deficit-oriented approach to Latinx family support and toward a cultural wealth lens that focuses on and learns from their cultural assets (Martinez et al., 2020).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

When a first-generation, lower-income Latinx student attends an elite independent school, their entire family embarks on the journey with them. This ethnographic case study explores the experiences of the Reyes family— the parents, Magdalena and Chris, and their four daughters, Esperanza, Sophie, Julia, and Riley—navigating the educational challenges and opportunities presented by an elite, predominantly White independent school.

Chapter 4 begins by providing an overview of the Reyes family's educational journey, spanning their daughters' early public-school years to their current experiences. It then delves into their unique challenges within the independent school environment. Key findings highlight the family's resilience, love, and mutual support as essential for overcoming obstacles. For the parents, this manifested as unwavering presence and guidance. The sisters' support varied from daily encouragement to unspoken solidarity, particularly from the eldest sibling.

Throughout their journey, the family negotiated conflicting cultural values and practices. The daughters grappled with tensions between aspirational and familial capital, while the parents worked to break generational cycles of trauma and shed outdated cultural ideologies. The chapter

also examines the impact of the independent school experience on each family member's sense of self and family dynamics, with themes such as limited belonging, shifts in self-perception as learners, and struggles to navigate the first-generation college-going process.

Further findings reveal shared challenges, including the abrupt shift in course placements that undermined confidence and insufficient college counseling support. Differences in sibling experiences underscore the significant influence of birth order, with the eldest daughter facing greater obstacles in acclimation and identity development than her younger siblings.
These findings illuminate the Reyes family's encounters with microaggressions, cultural tokenization, and toxic campus norms, offering insights into the costs and complexities of pursuing an independent school education.

Finding 1: Throughout Their Collective and Individual Educational Journeys, the Latinx Family had to Negotiate Conflicting Cultural Models and Their Attachment to Them.

At various moments throughout their collective and individual educational journeys, the Reyes family had to negotiate conflicting cultural models and practices and their attachments to them.

"I Cannot Fail": Daughter Tensions With Parent Aspirations

The narratives shared by each of the daughters reveal that their parents' expectations for them to "be better than previous generations" served as both a source of inspiration and stress. On the one hand, the hopes and dreams for the future that Chris and Magdalena had for their daughters inspired a deeper sense of purpose to keep going. On the other hand, the daughters were met with the added weight of meeting expectations and feelings of disappointment if they perceived their efforts as "not good enough." According to the oldest daughter, Esperanza:

> I felt the oldest-child burden of like, "You have to make it." Even though my parents have never ever told me that, in my own mind, even in college, I was like, I cannot fail. I'm the first to do this. If I fail, what example does that set for my sisters?

A similar sentiment was shared by Julia (daughter 3), who felt the weight of her parents' expectations mostly during the college counseling process in 11th grade:

> I think specifically for me being a first-generation student, I feel a constant pressure to go to college, go to a good one, do better than what my parents did. It's just a constant pressure. Nobody in my [extended] family has gone to college, so we're the first wave of new generations to come, and that's just a big pressure to me. I feel like I have to go.

Both Esperanza and Julia's stories highlight the complex ways in which familial and aspirational capital can cause tension for them. In both examples, the daughters recognize the importance of formal education to their families and communities and, in many ways, contribute to their drive to keep going; the downside, however, was the added weight placed upon them and having to negotiate the pressure at various points throughout their educational journeys.

"I'm in a Fishbowl and Everybody's Watching": Tensions With Extended Family

Sometimes, the Reyes daughters felt the pressures of aspirational capital overlapped with and were exacerbated by tensions with their extended family. Esperanza shared that as the first grandchild to attend college, she often felt the added pressure of carrying her family's history and future on her shoulders:

> If I fail, what example am I setting? I have an older cousin who didn't go to school. He just took a completely different path in life, and unintentionally, my [extended] family would make comments about me being in school in front of him and he would feel bad. Granted, he's still doing very well for himself. He went to trade school and has two kids.

> But it made me feel like I was in a fishbowl, and everybody is watching me, like I have to perform. My *tías* (aunts) said things like, "You're finishing in three years! Wow, it must be so easy!" They make me feel like there's no room for failure, and I spent a lot of nights crying feeling like I can't do it anymore.

In her extended family's eyes, Esperanza was not only succeeding; she was excelling because she had finished in three years. The comment "It must be so easy," while perhaps intended as a compliment at the moment, landed quite differently for Esperanza. She saw it as dismissive of all the mental, emotional, and physical sacrifice it had taken her to get to that point. Her extended family's praise not only carried with it the added pressure to achieve success as they viewed it, but it also created (whether intentionally or not) a divide between Esperanza and her cousin. The comparison between the two relayed the message that Esperanza's educational choices–which were more closely aligned with traditional American educational pathways–were preferred and worth celebrating, while her cousins were not. Furthermore, the fact that Esperanza both recognized and commended her cousin's choices to attend trade school and provide for his family speaks to an internalized rationalization that Esperanza had to navigate–a compliment at the expense of her cousin's shame. This example highlights that even in the most unintended ways, family opinion (even the seemingly positive) can complexify the first-generation family member's mental health and sense of belonging in the larger familial context.

"We Didn't Have That Growing up": The Pursuit of "Better" Educational Opportunities

All participants, daughters and parents alike, indicated that the Reyes daughters were often moved to different schools to pursue academic opportunities that Chris and Magdalena perceived to be better. The first trend Esperanza (daughter 1) identified during her education

journey map interview was that she was often pulled out of schools to attend other schools her mom thought would offer her better academic opportunities. According to Magdalena:

> I've always wanted to make sure that I put my girls in schools that were worthy of them, that were going to challenge them and provide opportunities for them to be better people. We didn't have that growing up. You went to the school that was assigned to you based on where you lived. My parents didn't know how to navigate the education system. It was kind of like, well, this is the closest school. This is where you're going.

Magdalena's reasoning highlights the importance of educational opportunities for the Latinx family. Every move was intentional and rooted in many Latinx parents' belief that their children deserved better opportunities than they had growing up.

The transition from public schooling to independent schooling was a major event for all the Reyes siblings along their collective and individual educational journeys. This transition marked a significant shift in the sense of belonging for all participants. In their public schools, which were predominantly Latinx, all daughters indicated that the cultural environment mirrored many aspects of their home life and that public school was where they felt the greatest sense of belonging. All four daughters shared sentiments similar to their sister Julia (daughter 3):

> Every school I've been to prior to Sunnydale was majority Latino. It was a very homey feeling. It felt right. I just felt like I belonged because everybody else looked like me. It just felt very much like a family.

Sophie (daughter 2) also added, "Our socioeconomic backgrounds were the same. You would hear Spanish and English. It was an extension of my home life." The idea that these schools mirrored an "extension of [their] home life" underscores the importance of continuity between home and school environments for the Reyes. The bilingual atmosphere ("You would hear

Spanish and English") further enriches this sense of familiarity by validating their cultural identity as bilingual students.

Though difficult, the decision to leave the public school system in pursuit of independent schools was ultimately what parents Magdalena and Chris decided would be in their daughters' best long-term interest. Magdalena described her rationale as:

> [My children] were all smart kids, but they got bored. [Victory Academy] had great resources for kids who were struggling, but they didn't have honors programs or advanced classes. And I struggled with that because I always wanted my kids to be challenged academically. I've always had their best interest at heart, and that I knew that these public schools were not going to challenge them in the way that they needed to be challenged.

The examples above from both daughters and parents highlight the tension between two conflicting cultural models: the importance of belonging to a community versus aspirations to attain "better" educational opportunities. Magdalena and Chris ultimately decided that moving their daughters from public to private education was the best decision for them and aligned with their goal that their children would be "better than [them]." The decision, however, was met with resistance from the daughters, who at the time of their transition, had not yet realized the long-term goals to which their parents were aspiring. Esperanza (daughter 1) describes the moment her parents decided to make the switch:

> They said, "The opportunities here are vastly more expansive than anything you're going to get in the public school system." That I'd be so prepared for college. In the end, it was worth it. But in the moment, I felt like my life was ending.

While Esperanza mentioned, “in the end, it was worth it,” the intense nature of her initial reaction–feeling like her life was ending–emphasizes the tension such a decision can cause in the relationship between parents and children. The siblings navigated this tension to varying degrees. As the previous example shows, Esperanza (daughter 1) had the strongest emotional response. Sophie’s (daughter 2) disappointment stemmed mostly from having to switch to yet another school (Sunnydale was her third school switch overall), and Julia (daughter 3) expressed, “I never felt like I had a choice to come [to Sunnydale], but I never wanted to say it out loud to my parents.” Riley, the fourth daughter, recalls feeling “super upset about leaving Victory and feeling like [she] didn’t have a choice” in the matter.

While tensions between parents and children surrounding school choice are not unique to Latinx families, such tensions do bear additional weight given the cultural ties to education that many first-generation Latinx families have. The Reyes’ experience coincides with the extent data that supports that Latinx families are likely to choose private schools because they view education as an opportunity to attain a college degree, a better quality of life, and access to things that parents did not have growing up (Adams & McBrayer, 2020; Buddin et al., 2007). However, the findings in this study reveal that the buy-in for such efforts is not identical across all members within a multi-sibling Latinx family unit. While aspirational capital is often used to pursue better educational opportunities as a whole, each family member has their unique relationship with it within the larger family context.

“It’s Hard to Move Past our Past”: Parents Reconsider Cultural Ideologies and Break Cycles of Generational Trauma

This study, which focused on the Latinx family unit, also included multiple perspectives from the parents that shed light on their influence on the family’s educational journey. The

evolution of Chris and Magdalena as parents was especially important because it allowed me to explore the factors at play when deciding the best course of action for each of their daughters. The stories they shared reflected a pattern of reconsidering ties to cultural ideologies and, at times, breaking cycles of generational trauma. In the narratives below, Magdalena describes how she has had to reckon with parenting strategies that were used on her (ruling with an iron fist and sacrificing personal well-being for work) and how those strategies do not work for her daughters. The dad, Chris, shares similar stories, though his are more focused on breaking cycles of generational trauma from his parents rooted in their lack of presence during much of his own schooling. What Magdalena and Chris have in common in the following narratives is an awareness of these cultural models that no longer serve them and a willingness to change to meet the needs of their daughters' individual needs.

"En Esta Casa yo Mando": Parenting First-Generation Kids as a Parent of Color

During our education journey map interview, Magdalena reflected on a critical lesson that her oldest daughter, Esperanza, taught her—the importance of listening and navigating the challenges of parenting students as a parent of color:

> [Esperanza] taught us how to be better listeners because we were just doing what was done to us, which was *"en esta casa yo mando"* (in this house, I rule). It was hard trying to navigate on our own. Sometimes as parents, especially parents of color and parents of first-generation kids, that trauma that we're trying to get over is real. It's very hard to move past our past and parent these children in their present form, for their future. We don't have a book for that. Our parents can't show us. We can't lead by what they did. So that's challenging. But I think [Chris and I] leaning on each other, and again, showing up

> and surrounding [ourselves] with people who are going to help [us] and help the cause is incredibly important.

What Magdalena articulated in this example is a phenomenon common to the cultural adaptation many generations of immigrants and immigrant children often face. Older generations set goals of upward mobility, and when younger generations reach those goals, they are often left figuring out how to navigate new landscapes independently. Magdalena's reliance on her husband and a community of people to help reveal a use of social and navigational capital to navigate the challenge of parenting first-generation children. Esperanza then added:

> I didn't go to college, but my kids know that I am willing to do the work with them and not just send them to the wolves saying, "You figure it out on your own."

This acknowledgment that her daughters are now navigating things that are unfamiliar to her and that she's willing to do the work with them indicates an adjustment to traditional models of parenting she had been taught—that getting one's children to the next level isn't enough; one needs to walk alongside them and continue to grow with them once they enter that next level.

"My Parents are Still Not Around": Working Through Parent Absence

Like his wife, Chris, understood that the parenting style that may have worked for his parents growing up was not going to work for him when raising his daughters. This reckoning with the messages about parenting he received during his upbringing did not come easily. Chris acknowledged that he had to put in the work to change his perceptions of parenthood to better suit his daughters' individual needs:

> I'm a very cold person. Growing up, my parents didn't go to award ceremonies, parent-teacher conferences, or anything like that, so that was foreign to me. And my parents are *still* not around. They don't participate in anything the girls or I do. I wasn't a therapy

> person, but my wife has awakened me to it. I've done therapy for the last four years, trying to figure out how to communicate with my kids because that's one of the biggest things for me. I am learning that a lot of the things that the girls might be going through are things that I don't really understand, even though I think that I do.

The self-awareness reflected in Chris' story speaks to the ways in which he grew awareness about the challenges he faced growing up and, even more, about the actions he took to navigate them in service to his family—a trust in his wife's suggestion to seek professional outside help and (most importantly) a willingness to try it.

"If You Were Sick, You Showed up to Work Anyway!": Chasing the Illusion of Perfection

The artifact-driven interviews conducted with Magdalena and Chris allowed them to look closely at their perceptions of each daughter's educational journey (see Appendix S). Most of the artifacts that they shared about each daughter were connected in some way to a facet of their education: writings and artwork produced in class, awards received, report cards, test scores, plants gifted as graduation gifts, newspaper articles where they were mentioned or interviewed, and countless photos capturing the daughters in various school settings (class photos, school sports, graduations, etc.).

As Magdalena and Chris revisited the numerous accolades their daughters received, they found the number of awards given for achieving a level of perfection to be absurd:

> I look at this now and I think, a certificate of perfect attendance, really? Who cares if you're in school every single day? That's just an unrealistic expectation that I set because my parents set it on me. If you were sick, you showed up to work anyway! There is no slacking off. And now I try to be like, if you don't feel good, it's okay for you to stay

> home. Chris and I try to be mindful of their workload and manage, encourage, and empower them to know when to say, "I need a break."

This example highlights another negotiation of cultural ideologies, one rooted in the persistence of work despite the negative impact on personal health. It speaks to an intergenerational expectation of sacrificing one's well-being to maintain employment. While that strategy may have worked for Magdalena's mother and Magdalena herself, she now realizes that the same generational expectation may not be the best approach for her daughters.

Finding 2: Parent Presence Throughout Their Children's Educational Careers has Been a Foundational and Fundamental Source of Support.

As I listened to Magdalena and Chris reflect on their parenting journeys through their education journey map and artifact-driven interviews, I was struck by the multiple examples they shared about the role of presence in their daughters' lives. By working through the generational expectations and traumas described in the previous section, they developed parenting models that both reinforced valuable cultural strengths and fostered new ones.

"Always on Your Sideline": Mom's Constant Presence

When reflecting upon her role in her daughter's educational journey, Magdalena took much pride in describing her constant presence throughout her daughters' educational journeys. Magdalena shared that her mother's presence during her own educational journey was something she wanted to replicate with her daughters:

> I was always super involved with the girls. My mom was very involved in my schooling growing up. Academically, it was hard for her, and she didn't have the resources to help me be able to navigate algebra, for example, but she was always there. She was always at

> school. Despite the fact that she had no [formal] education, she knew that [education] was the way out.

The familial capital demonstrated by her mother, regardless of her mother's own formal education, clearly resonated with Magdalena. She deemed this element of her culture vital to pass on to her daughters. Whenever Magdalena spoke about showing up for her daughters, her eyes would light up, her voice would get louder, and her words carried an undeniable conviction.

In one such moment, she shared how her third daughter, Julia, was confused by her mom's constant presence at her soccer games, even though Julia hardly got much playing time that season. Magdalena explained that her reasons for showing up were to reinforce the unwavering support she felt toward Julia and all her daughters:

> I told her, "You're not always going to be in the game. There may be days where you're off, days when you excel, but I will always be on your sideline. You don't ever have to worry about looking into the stands and wondering who's there for you."

At various phases throughout the study, Magdalena shared countless stories of involvement at her daughter's schools: providing materials for events, supplying food for fundraisers, volunteering for trips, and attending multiple award ceremonies, to name a few.

During oldest daughter Esperanza's education journey map interview, she revealed that many of her public-school friends didn't have parents as involved as hers. She credited much of her academic success to their presence, especially mom's in the early years: "My mom knew all my teachers personally. She would look over my homework personally. She was very much integrated into my schooling."

"She Walked a Little Taller": Magdalena Joins Board of Directors at Sunnydale

Magdalena's pattern of involvement followed the daughters as they transitioned to Sunnydale School, even though the campus culture (which I will describe in detail in subsequent sections) was vastly different. Magdalena explained:

> Slowly, I've developed this sense of, "I'm going to take up space here; I'm going to own the space and make my name known." And it was one of these things that my mom always did. She just showed up. When you show up enough, people will start to recognize your face and eventually learn your name.

Her involvement efforts throughout her daughter's time at Sunnydale eventually garnered the attention of the administration, and in 2021, she was invited to join Sunnydale's Board of Directors:

> One of the biggest accomplishments that came out of that year was I got inducted into the board. This is where, finally, our people have a seat at the table. And because I was a board member, I was able to give Sophie her diploma on stage, which was another [pivotal] moment.

For Magdalena and the Reyeses, this moment was, in many ways, a culmination of Magdalena's efforts. As mentioned in the opening story of this dissertation, the transition to independent school was incredibly rough for Esperanza and the entire family. As chronicled in subsequent sections of this study that focus on the family's time at Sunnydale, their individual and collective experiences were marked by multiple microaggressions of race, class, and gender—all of which significantly impacted their sense of self and family. Thus, for Magdalena and her children to overcome those hardships and make their presence known, being invited to serve on the school's board of directors was an honor worth more than its weight in gold. Magdalena shared that her

daughters “stood a little taller because [their] mom was now on the board. [They] now had a seat at that table.”

“I am Their Ears Now”: Dad’s Journey Toward Realizing the Role of His Presence

Throughout the study, the dad, Chris Reyes, highlighted the importance of his role in his daughters’ lives. Unlike his wife Magdalena, whose mom had instilled in her the value of showing up for her children, Chris had to learn that lesson on his own. In one touching story, he identified crucial moments where his presence left an indelible impression on him and his second oldest, Sophie:

> I remember I went to one of Sophie's award ceremonies in the second grade. She turns around, runs to me, and says, “I can’t believe you’re here!” I said, “Well, I got out early.” She starts crying, gives me a hug, and I think that’s the moment where I realized I’ve got to make myself more available because this seems to be very important to them.

Chris’ voice became a little shaky as he recalled this story during our education journey map interview, as if the power behind Sophie’s hug still reverberated in his heart all these years later. It was clear that Sophie’s reaction to his appearance at her award ceremony was a turning point in his parental development. It was the moment that sparked awareness that his presence in his daughter’s lives was important, and it was the catalyst that inspired him to put in the work to heal from his generational trauma of not having his parents around during his educational journey (which directly connects to Finding 2). Chris explained:

> In the first four years of my kids’ lives, I wasn’t really present; I was working two jobs. When I sat down to create my [journey map] I really didn’t have any reference to what happened in those four years. It’s been a very slow grind, and it’s been getting much better with me having more time on my hands and being more involved.

Chris' story echoes that of many Latinx, lower-income parents who often need to make the difficult yet important decision to prioritize work over involvement in their children's education. During the rest of our conversation, Chris elaborated on how he worked through letting go of preconceived notions of how a Latino father was supposed to show up for his family. As described in the previous section on breaking cycles of generational trauma, Chris had never witnessed his own parents' presence during his school activities; and while he seemed to make peace with their long-standing distance, he also recognized the importance of doing things differently for his children. Now in his forties, he has realized that the role in his family extends far beyond being a financial provider:

> I realize that I am their ears now. They have somebody to come talk to now because I am more willing to listen to those conversations. Before, I wasn't. My role was to go to work, earn whatever money I needed to earn, come back, and provide. But now it's, "If there's anything you want to talk about, I'm here. If you need me to say something, I will. If not, I'll stay quiet and just hear you out."

For Chris and Magdalena, the biggest thing they hope their daughters have taken away from all they have done is that they will always be there. After our artifact-driven interviews, both parents shared, "We are a safe space for them to make mistakes; they will always have a safety net if they need to come home."

Finding 3: For the Sisters, Support Ranged From the Up-close Daily Sources of Support to Supporting From Afar.

The multiple interviews with the sisters revealed that the level of support they gave each other ranged from sister to sister. Most notably, there appeared to be a stronger connection and more direct and immediate support between the younger three sisters. The findings suggest that

this is due to the younger three being closer in age. On the other hand, support from the oldest sister, Esperanza, seemed to take place from a distance. The findings also revealed that the mental and emotional toll of being the very first sibling to enter Sunnydale had played a major role in the separation between Esperanza and her sisters.

Sister Supports up Close

The younger three siblings—Sophie, Julia, and Riley—shared examples of how supports from each other came in the form of daily and more direct interactions. For example, Julia (daughter 3) shared how car rides to and from school with Riley (daughter 4) provided opportunities for them to share the highs and lows of their day. Julia also shared that Riley usually goes into her room at home in the evenings to "share what happened at school." These daily interactions between Julia and Riley provided valuable opportunities to process conflicts with peers, teachers, or other aspects of their independent school education together in real-time.

The sisters reported that support from Sophie (daughter 2) usually comes as advice. At the time of data collection for this study, Julia (daughter 3) was a junior in high school and had just started the college counseling process at Sunnydale. Since Sophie had just graduated from Sunnydale a year prior, her insight into navigating the college application process as a Sunnydale student was especially relevant for Julia. Sophie explained:

> Julia is so concerned about where she's going to end up and how that is going to look, especially compared to me and Esperanza. I reassured her that she was going to end up at a great school no matter what. "You're going to graduate. Everything will work out the way it needs to, and you're going to be okay."

Sophie's role as a mentor to Julia stems from her close proximity to the shared educational experience of navigating the college application process at Sunnydale, allowing her to offer

procedural insights and emotional reassurance. By emphasizing the inevitability of Julia's success, Sophie acknowledged Julia's unique circumstances while affirming her potential.

My conversations with Sophie, Julia, and Riley indicated that their proximity in age is key to why they are so close. Sophie mentioned, "My younger sister and I are only one year and a half apart. We were always at the same schools at the same time." Julia indicated a similar sentiment, sharing:

> Esperanza is older, and I think it's a little weird talking to her about high school drama that she probably doesn't care about. Riley is my little sister; she looks up to me, and it's fun bonding with her about her middle school drama.

Sophie and Julia's reflections suggest that age closeness fosters shared experiences and a heightened sense of relatability, strengthening their emotional bonds. Julia's remarks introduce an additional layer of complexity to sibling relationships by highlighting how differences in age influence communication and the perceived relevance of shared experiences. For instance, Julia describes a relational gap with Esperanza, the oldest sister, due to the latter's distance from high school-related concerns. This suggests that as siblings age and occupy distinct developmental stages, their shared points of reference may diminish, potentially creating emotional or conversational divides. Conversely, Julia's bond with Riley, her younger sister, is framed in terms of mentorship and enjoyment, reflecting the natural alignment of their current experiences. Julia's ability to relate to Riley's "middle school drama" while finding it "weird" to discuss her own concerns with Esperanza illustrates how siblings navigate these relational shifts. These examples reflect the nuanced interplay of age, shared experiences, and evolving roles that define sibling relationships over time.

"This Grass has Already Been Trampled on, But Don't Hurt the Flowers": A Sister Supports From Afar

Through my various interviews with the family, I learned that the negative impact Sunnydale had on Esperanza's (daughter 1) mental health was a major reason for the divide that existed between Esperanza and her younger sisters. One of the findings from this study (described in a later section) revealed that Esperanza, as the oldest and first to navigate Sunnydale, experienced the most trauma. Navigating many of the "firsts" of the independent school world on her own, Esperanza was often left feeling isolated and depressed, with no one at home or school to talk to. Mom Magdalena affirmed, "Esperanza's experience at Sunnydale definitely played a part in how unhappy and angry she was with everyone at home." Mom shared that Esperanza would cry every day after school and beg to be pulled out. Feeling like she was trapped, Esperanza often took to lashing out at her family. Many arguments ensued, including an especially contentious one between Esperanza and Sophie (daughter 2) while Esperanza was in her first year at Sunnydale. I learned that the distant relationship between Esperanza and her three younger sisters stemmed mostly from this particular argument and the lingering effects it had on all who witnessed it.

The details of the argument were rather personal in nature, so I did not include them here. However, what is important to know now is that despite the distance that this argument created, Esperanza still found ways to support her younger sisters from afar. She shared stories about watching Sophie from a distance and doing what she could from afar to ensure that her younger sister didn't suffer the same way she did. In one example, she described:

> I don't know if she knew it, but from two grades above, I was very protective [of Sophie]. Anytime somebody made a comment about her, I was very much ready to fight that

> person, and I mean physically. I was like, I don't care. You are not going to do what you did to me. You can mess with me all you want to. You've already done it. This grass has already been trampled on, but leave the flowers alone.

Esperanza's narrative highlights how care and protection are not always physical but can occur from afar. Despite her own suffering, Esperanza channeled her pain into a protective instinct for Sophie, which illustrates how Esperanza has transformed her past trauma into a source of agency and strength. Her metaphorical statement, "This grass has already been trampled on, but leave the flowers alone," represents her self-sacrifice and resilience as a foundation for safeguarding her sister's wellbeing. This notion reflects the idea that emotional support transcends immediate presence, an important theme in the Reyeses family dynamics and intergenerational support.

When interviewing Esperanza's younger sisters, I asked them if they were aware of Esperanza's challenges at Sunnydale, and they shared that they only possessed a superficial understanding of them. Julia (daughter 3) stated, "I knew she hated it, but that's about it. We never really talked about it." Similarly, the youngest sibling Riley said, "I just heard it wasn't easy for her, but I was so young when she started Sunnydale." During our individual wrap-up interview toward the end of the study, I asked Esperanza to elaborate on the reasons why she withheld so much about her experiences at Sunnydale from her sisters. She explained: "They had to believe it was going well for me; that way it could go well for them. And thankfully, they had a better time at Sunnydale." Her explanation reveals a protective motivation: withholding the details of her experiences, she tried to ensure her sisters approached Sunnydale more optimistically and confidently. By curating her narrative, she attempted to influence her sisters' mindset and, indirectly, their outcomes at Sunnydale.

Esperanza's relationship with her sisters demonstrates the complexity of the siblings' dynamics and the strategies Esperanza used to protect her loved ones. Her stories reveal that as the older sibling, she often carried an unspoken responsibility to "pave the way" for the younger ones, even if at the cost of her mental and emotional well-being.

Finding 4: The Latinx Family Credits Their Family's Ability to Navigate Challenges to Their Resilience, Strength, and Perseverance.

The Reyeses attributed their ability to navigate challenges along their educational journey to a collective sense of resilience, strength, and perseverance. This finding underscores the interconnectedness of these values within the family structure, as illustrated by the following reflections on personal growth and familial support.

Perseverance: A Commitment to Growth

The dad, Chris, emphasized the importance of forward movement and progress, stating, "We are constantly trying to evolve, constantly trying to put in the work to make today better than it was yesterday." His comment echoes the same sentiment of "the next generation better than the last" as described in the section on tensions with familial capital. Chris' reflection also illustrates the family's focus on continuous improvement, even amidst inevitable setbacks. This theme of perseverance was further highlighted when mom, Magdalena, reflected on how their parenting journey matured over time: "When we had Esperanza, we were 21. When we had Riley, were 29, and now we are in our forties…it is forward movement. It's progress. It's perseverance."

Resilience and Strength: A Shared Willpower

The Reyes daughters, too, describe their parents and siblings as embodying extraordinary resilience and strength. Riley, the youngest, admired her family's determination: "The willpower

they have…it's always go, go, go; they never stop. They're always pushing for the next thing." Riley recognizes that the family's strength lies in their shared capacity to push forward. Similarly, Julia (daughter 3) shared how her understanding of the family's resilience deepened through hearing about the struggles her older sisters, Esperanza and Sophie, endured: "It showed me how strong they really are. My parents, too, because I know it's not nice to see a child hurt. That has to hurt, too." Her remarks reflect an intergenerational exchange of strength, where the pain endured by one family member becomes a source of inspiration for others.

When facing family hardship, Magdalena shared that she would often "focus on the light at the end of the tunnel and pray, '*Ay, diosito*, please, I know this is temporary and it's going to get better.'" This coping strategy conveys an intrinsic belief in progress and the potential for change despite difficulties. The invocation of "*diosito*," a diminutive and affectionate term for God, underscores a personal and intimate relationship with faith and highlights the intersectionality of spiritual, linguistic, and cultural factors in Magdalena's resilience.

Maturity and Family Unity

Across the narratives, there is a continuous throughline of how maturity and unity have played pivotal roles in fostering resilience and perseverance. Chris and Magdalena noted setbacks were met with openness and communication as they matured as parents (which aligns with the evolution of Chris' parenting style in a previous section on breaking cycles of generational trauma.) This evolution suggests that perseverance is intertwined with the family's ability to reflect, adapt, and strengthen their bonds. Similarly, Julia's acknowledgment of her parents' struggles reflects an empathetic awareness of the sacrifices that underpin their family's resilience. Overall, the Reyeses' experiences demonstrate how shared values, such as perseverance and strength, are cultivated through individual and collective challenges.

"Song of the Hummingbird": Grandma's Palpable Influence

Throughout the study, multiple references to (maternal) Grandma Elena were made, which emphasized her critical role in the strength and perseverance the Reyeses possessed. Early memories revealed Elena's presence in small yet significant ways: pick-ups from school or the meticulous ways she cut pomegranates and apples for after-school snacks. All members of the family referenced Elena's passing as a critical moment along their educational journey. Each sibling recalled knowing exactly where they were when it happened. For Esperanza, it was right before she graduated from college. Sophie and Julia described the classes they were in when they heard the news that it was time to rush home. Riley expressed regret for choosing to go to school that day. Elena's passing was significant, both for the obvious grief the loss of a loved one brings but also because it reinforced the family's appreciation for generational love and sacrifice. Julia shared that on the day Elena died, "It was so powerful to see everybody gather in a room for my grandma. It made me proud to be her granddaughter. It showed me the power of family." That "power" was also referenced in previous sections where Elena's influence on Magdalena's parenting style carried over and deeply informed her presence in her daughters' lives.

During our individual wrap-up (member check) interview, Esperanza reflected on the lasting impact her grandma, Elena, had on her:

> I wish I was more like my grandma when I was at Sunnydale. She was always like, "This is who I am, take it or leave it." She never once altered any part of her identity for anyone. She had so much courage.

This reflection highlights a duality that existed within Esperanza. On the one hand, she valued the qualities of unapologetic self-confidence and courage that her grandma embodied. On the other hand, her "wish" to be like her suggests that Esperanza could not channel her grandma

when facing challenges at Sunnydale. However, what Esperanza perhaps hadn't fully realized is that even though her grandma's "courage" looked different than Esperanza's, Esperanza still embodied it in her way. After all, despite the overwhelming pressures to assimilate to the dominant culture at Sunnydale, Esperanza was still able to maintain strong pride in her culture and family, even though her experiences were so traumatizing for her. That alone is courage.

During my walking interviews with Sophie and Julia, they shared how even after Elena passed, they received many signs that their grandmother's presence was still with them. Julia shared that her grandmother "loved hummingbirds," and Sophie explained, "Whenever I think of her on campus, I'll see a hummingbird." Coincidentally, as Sophie was sharing this anecdote during our walking interview, a hummingbird suddenly appeared in front of us.

Finding 5: During Their Time at the Independent School, the Latinx Family Experienced Multiple Microaggressions of Race, Class, and Gender to Varying Degrees Which Limited Their Sense of Belonging and Hindered Healthy Identity Development.

The following findings emerged from discussions surrounding the Reyes' overall experience at Sunnydale School, an elite independent school in Los Angeles County. Their stories illustrate the pervasive nature of microaggressions at Sunnydale and their impact on each member of the family's sense of belonging and identity development. This section begins with a general range of the microaggressions the Reyeses faced during their time at Sunnydale. Subsequent subsections then highlight the more specific (often subtle) forms of discrimination the family experienced based on race, class, gender, and language.

"Go Back to Mexico": Microaggressions From Peers

The opening story in Chapter 1—about Esperanza's first day attending Sunnydale School—is the ideal start because it underscores several dimensions of microaggressions,

including stereotyping and class-based assumptions that she and her family experienced during many of their interactions with the Sunnydale community:

> I was at my locker, and a girl came up to me and asked me how I could afford to go there. She's like, "So what do your parents do? How do you pay to go here?" I was caught off guard, but then I told her my dad was El Chapo (the cartel leader) and that he sold drugs. I thought she would know I was kidding, but she thought I was being so serious. She was White, and she fully believed that just because I was Hispanic that my dad was a drug dealer. I was trying to be funny because it was my first day and I was trying to make a friend. But no, she thought I was being dead serious. And then when I told her the truth, that my dad works in construction installing AC units and that my mom's an assistant, she was like, "Oh, okay," confused as to how my parents' real jobs equated to me going there. Then she just walked away, and that's when it hit me like, "Oh, that's not good enough." It was the first time in my life that my parents' jobs were put under scrutiny, and I was like, whoa, the next four years are going to be bumpy.

The peer's reaction to Esperanza's enrollment at Sunnydale School was rooted in implicit biases about ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and belonging. By referencing El Chapo, Esperanza initially sought humor to diffuse discomfort. Yet, her peer's inability to discern Esperanza's sarcasm reinforces the entrenched stereotype linking Latinx identity with criminality. The peer's questioning—"How do you pay to go here?"—reveals a racial and class-based microaggression. The implicit assumption that Esperanza's family could not afford private education based on their ethnicity exemplifies how economic worth is often racialized. For Esperanza, this interaction was a moment of awakening—a realization that her family's socioeconomic identity would be scrutinized in ways that White peers would likely not experience. Her comment, "The

next four years are going to be bumpy," reflects the emotional labor involved in navigating such a space, where her achievements and presence are constantly questioned.

Esperanza's first-day encounter was not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of microaggressions that her family endured at Sunnydale. The Reyes siblings, though unique in their experiences, share common threads of stereotyping, exclusion, and the erasure of their individuality. During my walking interview with Riley, the youngest of the Reyes daughters, she bluntly stated, "A lot of Sunnydale kids are racist, to put it flat out, whether or not they believe they are." She then shared the following narrative she thought captured her point the best:

> There are very few Brown girls in my grade, maybe five or six. We were all hanging out one day, and [a White kid] told us, "Go back to Mexico!" One of my friends, Yolanda, is Ecuadorian; she's not even Mexican. Yes, we're all Latino, but that doesn't mean we're all from the same place. It's part of our identity, but it's not all we are. Being Latina is the only thing that people know me for, not for my intelligence or my thoughtfulness around school and how I try to keep the campus clean. To them I'm just "that Brown girl over there."

Riley's experience demonstrates how racial microaggressions reduce individuals to monolithic identities. The slur "Go back to Mexico!" not only reflects xenophobic attitudes but also conflates all Latinx identities into a single, reductive stereotype. Furthermore, Riley's statement—"Being Latina is the only thing that people know me for"—reflects the toll of persistent tokenization, which can invisibly marginalize her accomplishments and personhood. Plus, the erasure of her friend Yolanda's Ecuadorian heritage in the encounter reflects the way dominant groups often ignore cultural diversity within the Latinx community.

Julia, the third Reyes sibling, recalled: “Everyone thought Sally and I were sisters or cousins. We look nothing alike. She not even Salvadorian.” Julia’s anecdote highlights another common microaggression faced by marginalized groups: the presumption that individuals who share a racial or ethnic background are inherently connected. This assumption not only dismisses personal and cultural distinctions but also reinforces the reductive view that minority identities are interchangeable.

The oldest sibling, Esperanza, shared an example of a microaggression she experienced during the college application season. She explained that she frequently received comments about affirmative action:

> My classmates would make comments like, “Oh, you’re going to get in because you’re Mexican and you’re on financial aid.” I felt like I was seen as a token poor Latina student by my peers, but I’m also smart. I also have really great grades and a lot of extracurriculars.

Esperanza’s narrative reflects the pervasive myth that affirmative action diminishes meritocracy. Her classmates’ comments illustrate how racial and socioeconomic identities are weaponized to invalidate her hard work and achievements. By attributing her success to affirmative action, her peers dismissed her intelligence, perseverance, and qualifications. Furthermore, being perceived as a “token, poor Latina student,” Esperanza was forced to carry the weight of representation, where her achievements were scrutinized as unearned exceptions rather than deserved accomplishments. This tokenization created a double bind, where she needed to excel to prove her worth but was simultaneously devalued when she succeeded.

“We Look Nothing Alike”: Misnaming From Teachers

The younger three Reyes daughters shared stories about being misnamed by teachers at Sunnydale. Sometimes, they were confused for each other, while other times, they were confused for other Brown female students. Julia (daughter 3) said, "One of my teachers would confuse me and Cindy in class; she's Latina too, but we look nothing alike." In another specific example, the youngest of the Reyes daughters, Riley, recounted in great detail the way being misnamed by one of her teachers left a stain on her middle school experience:

> My Spanish teacher last year kept calling me this other brown girl's name repetitively. She would always call me Susana, even on days when Susanna was absent and not even in the classroom. We don't look similar at all. At my old schools, they would never call me another name even though most of us there were Latina. It was even more upsetting because my Spanish teacher is also a part of our Latinx affinity group. She's met my parents. She knows my name.

The teacher's repeated failure to correctly identify Riley, despite knowing her name and having met her family, reveals a disregard for Riley's individuality and dignity. This oversight becomes even more pronounced in the context of the Latinx affinity group, a setting presumably aimed at celebrating and affirming cultural identity.

I asked Riley if she had ever corrected her teacher, to which she replied, "I corrected her a couple of times where, but I would usually stay silent and let her figure it out so that she could apologize on her own." When I asked Riley how it felt to correct her teacher in class, she shared that it felt uncomfortable because of the existing power dynamic and because she didn't want to turn it into a big deal. She then shared that even when she would call it out, her teacher would trivialize the misnaming and make seemingly light-hearted jokes like, "If you had a dollar every

time I called you Susana, you'd be a millionaire!" Riley then said, "I'd laugh it off, but inside I wouldn't think it was funny."

Riley then explained how, after a while, the trivial manner in which her Spanish teacher handled the misnaming started to trickle down to her peers outside of class:

> A couple of [my classmates] started calling me Susana outside of class. They thought it was funny that my teacher kept doing, so they thought they were in on the joke, but I didn't think that was funny.

With the effects of the misnaming spreading into her social situations outside of the classroom, Riley was often put in a situation where she would have to defend her identity. Doing so triggered feelings of frustration and confusion, and Riley was often left trying to figure out why the microaggression kept happening:

> Some of the eighth graders told me [that she always mixed up] these two Black girls last year, so that gave me almost a little bit of comfort because I thought, *well, at least it's not only me*. But then I thought, *how come you're only mixing up people of color?* Especially since she herself was a person of color! I don't get how that works.

It was clear that these instances in Spanish class took a mental and emotional toll on Riley. There was the initial sting of being misnamed, then the embarrassment of being confused for the other Brown girl in class in front of her peers, followed by the internal questions about how something like that could happen repeatedly, especially when Susana and Riley looked nothing alike. Riley had also had to negotiate whether or not to correct her teacher in front of everyone. Her Spanish teacher was, after all, her teacher and thus in a position of power. The teacher then trivialized those moments ("If you had a dollar…"), which created ripple effects so that Riley's peers then felt comfortable continuing the "joke" by misnaming her outside of the classroom, putting Riley

in yet another situation where she'd have to defend her identity. The mental gymnastics seemed exhausting at best and way too much to navigate for any student who just wanted to show up and learn like everyone else.

Microaggressions Experienced by Parents Chris & Magdalena

Parents, Chris and Magdalena, also shared moments where they experienced microaggressions at Sunnydale. Chris reported that most of the microaggressions he experienced came from other parents. Magdalena also experienced microaggressions from other parents, but she also shared that her position on Sunnydale's Board of Directors lent itself to microaggressions that she felt were rooted in the tokenization of her identity as the only female, lower-income, Latina board member.

"He Didn't Shake my Hand": Chris' Dismissed Attempt to Connect With Another Dad. Chris described an exchange that transpired at a parent social event held at the home of a Sunnydale parent. He had noticed his oldest, Esperanza, talking to a man's son, so he wanted to introduce himself. Chris described:

> I had just seen Esperanza and his son talking, so I thought I'd introduce myself. I stuck my hand out to shake his hand, and he just looked at me from top to bottom, didn't shake my hand, rolled his eyes, and turned around.

This interaction described by Chris is an example of a microaggression rooted in non-verbal communication. Non-verbal cues, such as a lack of acknowledgment or dismissive gestures, often carry implicit messages of superiority or exclusion. The other parent's behavior—not shaking his hand, looking at him dismissively, rolling his eyes—signaled that Chris was not welcomed or regarded as an equal in this social environment. Chris's gesture of introducing himself was an effort to engage with another parent as an equal peer, but the other parent's

dismissive response indicates a rejection of that parity. It is also important to consider how Chris's identity might intersect with factors like race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status in shaping the other parent's behavior. The "look from top to bottom" is especially indicative of judgment based on physical appearance, dress, or other visible markers of identity, further reinforcing the marginalization experienced by those who do not conform to the dominant norms at Sunnydale. The microaggression described affected Chris and had potential ripple effects on his family, particularly his daughter, Esperanza. Chris wondered, "If this is how parents in the school community behaved with me, then what does this say about the way their children will behave with my daughter?"

It is important to note that according to Chris, most of the parents at Sunnydale were wonderful people and that microaggressions like the one described above did not happen too often. However, when they did, they were powerful enough to disrupt feelings of connection to the general parent population and make Chris question his trust in the school environment.

"It Felt Gross": Tokenization of Mom's Position on the Board of Directors. Throughout the study, Magdalena shared many stories about her experiences serving on Sunnydale's Board of Directors. As described in the previous section about parent presence, serving on the Board was an honor she didn't take lightly. As she saw it, it was a pivotal moment for her family and her community to have "a seat at the table." She felt like finally her family would be recognized for all they are. While this was mostly true, sometimes she felt like her family was recognized for the wrong reasons:

> I was asked to say a few words on stage at the annual fundraiser gala about how their donations help families like mine. I don't know if they thought because I was on the board that I would be willing to put our story out there and announce to everyone that my

> family is on full financial aid. But that's very private information. It almost felt like they expected me to do it as a way of "paying my dues." I understand that they were maybe just coming from a fund-raising angle, but even then, it felt gross. I'm glad I said no…and they still surpassed their fundraising goal without me.

Magdalena's role on the Sunnydale Board of Directors gave her a sense of agency and representation for her family and community. However, her experience underscores the delicate balance between genuine inclusion and tokenism. While her position ostensibly offered her "a seat at the table," it became apparent that some may have viewed her presence more as a symbolic gesture than as an opportunity for meaningful engagement. When asked to share personal and private financial details for fundraising purposes, she perceived the request as reducing her and her family to a narrative of financial struggle—a way to fulfill expectations of gratitude or "paying dues."

"A Line of Separation": Financial Culture on Campus

Every family member reported that the marginalization and microaggressions they faced at Sunnydale due to their socio-economic status caused just as much, if not more, damage to their sense of belonging and identity development as those based on race or ethnicity. To provide a sense of how most of the Reyes siblings experienced the culture of wealth at Sunnydale, Julia (daughter 3) explained:

> Once I got [to Sunnydale], I started to really be self-conscious about my economic situation. It wasn't like I felt like I didn't belong because I was Brown and they weren't; most of the time it was the economic differences. And I'm so grateful for what I have. I don't want to not give credit to my parents because I know how hard they worked for all

> this. But sometimes I look around and see everything, like the beautiful cars some of my classmates drive, and it is like a punch in the stomach.

This account struck many of the same chords her older sisters, Esperanza and Sophie, shared in their stories. For all daughters, the financial culture at Sunnydale was apparent in nearly every social dynamic on campus. And while they all expressed immense gratitude for their parents and everything that they've been able to provide, attending a school like Sunnydale also made them hyper-aware of what they didn't have.

This hyper-awareness about their socio-economic status quickly became a new fixation once the family started attending Sunnydale, and it wasn't just the Reyes daughters who felt it. The dad, Chris, also commented on the shift:

> At the public schools, we were the more "affluent parents" I guess, because we were able to do more things than their peers. When we got to Sunnydale, it was the complete opposite. Their friends were doing things that we just couldn't afford. It meant that they weren't invited to certain things, maybe because they couldn't afford it. It didn't put a barrier between the kids and their friends, but it did draw a line of separation.

The Reyes family's transition to Sunnydale reflects a significant shift in their perceived socio-economic status. While they were seen as relatively affluent in the public-school context, Sunnydale repositions them as less affluent than the independent school community. The family's new fixation on their financial disparities suggests a growing internalization of this new socio-economic positioning, affecting the daughters and the parents. This shared awareness points to how socio-economic shifts impact families collectively, altering their self-perception and interactions with others. For example, Magdalena shared the following story of how adjusting to Sunnydale's financial culture affected the way she navigated parent spaces:

> When we first started, I felt completely out of place, but I felt like I had to show up, show face, make sure that there was a Brown person in the room representing the other families that weren't showing up. These events are held in mansions and houses that are completely different zip codes than what we're used to seeing. So, it was awkward and uncomfortable at first. I had to kind of assimilate and do a little bit of code switching. It's one of the biggest reasons why I go by Maggie and not Magdalena…to pacify the White folk because Magdalena would be too hard to say, and it would get butchered.

Magdalena's story reflects how Sunnydale's financial culture triggered a hyper-awareness of Magdalena's otherness. In this space, Esperanza not only felt responsible for representing other Brown families who were not showing up, but also compromised her name to pacify White parents and, in many ways, spare herself the potential pain and embarrassment of hearing her name mispronounced on their tongues.

Chris and Magdalena further conveyed how the financial culture at Sunnydale affected their daughters' identity development. Magdalena recalled a stark conversation with her oldest daughter, Esperanza:

> I asked her once, I said, "Esperanza, you earned your spot. You took the place of a lot of kids who could afford to write the check. Would you rather be a kid whose parents could write the check or the one who earned her way here?" And I'll never forget it. She looked at me without skipping a beat and said, "I'd rather be the kid whose parents could sign the check because then I wouldn't feel so left out." And that gutted me–that my child would completely disregard all of the hard work that she put in just because she didn't want to be ostracized by her peers. That was hard.

As Magdalena's story illustrates, class differences were felt so heavily that in a moment of despair, Esperanza was willing to overlook her accomplishments and reject facets of her identity. It is important to remember that for Esperanza, class-based microaggressions occurred from the very first moment she set foot on campus when a peer asked how she could afford to go there. That initial wound never healed, and every microaggression regarding class that took place from that point on (and there were many) only continued to reinjure that wound until the pain could only be let out in moments like the one Magdalena described above.

During our walking interview, Esperanza reflected on how her financial aid status shaped her sense of belonging and identity within the independent school environment. The following example conveyed the intersection of race, class, and personal perception:

> I felt like an outcast, mostly because of the color of my skin and my background, but also for being on financial aid. Some of my White friends were on financial aid, but once I stepped into that environment, it was hard for me to conceptualize that. For me, it was "all my White peers are rich and wealthy, and all of my fellow peers of color were the poor ones" because everyone I had met that was a student of color was on financial aid just like I was. So, for me, a very distinct line was drawn.

This reflection reveals how institutional and social dynamics can reinforce perceived divides, particularly for students navigating overlapping marginalized identities. Esperanza's account details the emotional labor involved in reconciling these internalized narratives, even in spaces meant to foster equity and inclusion. Although she acknowledged that White students, too, were on financial aid during her time there, the perception was that their financial differences didn't matter as much since they seemed to integrate into the independent school cultural milieu much more easily. However, for Esperanza and her peers of color, their physical appearance served as

the first signal of otherness that then triggered other signals of otherness, like race and socioeconomic status. Because White students at Sunnydale–regardless of their financial situation–don't carry these initial signals of otherness in the same way, they don't get identified as "financial aid kids" as quickly as students of color who wear their otherness on their skin. Thus, even though Esperanza was herself a student of color, she inherited the popular belief on campus that White inherently meant "wealthy" and that "student of color" meant "poor."

Experiences like these highlight the damaging effects that the financial culture at independent schools can have on both students and their families, shaping not only their sense of belonging, but also their perceptions of the decisions they make. During our education journey map interview, Magdalena shared feelings of guilt after reliving Esperanza's hardships, saying, "This wasn't her choice. I made her come here, and she asked me every year to pull her out. She just wanted to be accepted." For the first couple of years as a Sunnydale family, Chris also wondered if they had "made the mistake of sending her there because it was convenient and easy for the family." Magdalena and Chris' reflections highlight the internal conflict many families face when balancing aspirations for quality education with the emotional toll of financial disparity. Their decision to remain at Sunnydale ultimately hinged on the smoother transitions of their younger daughters. Despite the younger three daughters having a smoother transition, the underlying challenges of navigating the school's financial culture persisted.

Obliviousness to Financial Culture. Many other examples from the Reyes siblings hinted at an obliviousness to the financial culture at Sunnydale. The siblings shared many stories that reflect the subtle ways discussions of money crept into conversations with peers and teachers. Questions like, "Where are you traveling to for spring break? Why do you bring a lunch every day?" or "Why don't you just buy food?" often crept up in social situations. For most

Sunnydale students, traveling during breaks and buying food from the student store every day is the norm. While the intentions behind such comments may not have always been to harm, they spotlighted the daughters' socioeconomic status in ways that often made them feel like they had to defend that facet of their identity.

Sometimes, the obliviousness to financial culture came from teachers. These situations, most often innocent in nature and intent, would sometimes create situations where the Reyes sisters would have to justify further or defend their family's limited financial status. Riley (daughter 3) explained this dynamic best:

> One time during an ice-breaker, the teacher asked, "What's the latest concert you've gone to?" When I told them I had never been to one, they were like, "Are you serious? You've never been to a concert?" I had to explain that there was never money to just go to concerts, that for us there were other more important things like our house, food, and soccer.

The example Riley provided was just one of many examples the Reyes family shared about the financial culture on campus. What soon became clear was that many of the microaggressions of class stemmed from an obliviousness to the financial culture that catered to White upper-class norms.

Such obliviousness also crept up in many parent spaces. Dad Chris shared a story about a group of parents who were discussing an upcoming trip to Europe that Sunnydale offered to a select group of students every summer:

> They started talking about how some students that were going on the Europe trip were on financial aid. This lady says, "Well if you can't afford the Europe trip, why are you even at Sunnydale?" I got up, I turned around, and I walked away. I said nothing. I never told

my wife that story because I try to keep all the bad away. I don't want it affecting them either.

The comment, “If you can’t afford the Europe trip, why are you even at Sunnydale?” exemplifies an exclusionary mindset rooted in economic privilege. It suggests that participation in the school’s broader social and extracurricular activities is implicitly tied to financial capability. Chris clarified that the comment was not necessarily directed at him; however, as the parent of a family receiving financial aid, Chris felt the sting all the same. This moment was another reminder that for most parents at Sunnydale, students and families on financial aid did not belong there.

Attitudes Toward Maintenance Staff. Other times, the financial culture at Sunnydale presented itself in the mindset some students have about the maintenance staff on campus. All of the Reyes daughters mentioned that they felt a connection with the maintenance workers because many of them looked like their *tíos* and *primos* (uncles and cousins) and spoke Spanish the same way they did at home. Esperanza (daughter 1) mentioned that during her first and most difficult year at Sunnydale, sometimes the only people she would interact with would be the maintenance staff, who she would often greet in Spanish. Sophie (daughter 2) shared that her own grandparents “cleaned other people’s things” for a living as well. Out of everyone, the maintenance workers mirrored their own cultural and socio-economic identities the most and provided a sense of comfort the daughters rarely felt at Sunnydale.

Riley (daughter 3) expressed that many Sunnydale students “think it’s somebody else’s job to clean up after them.” She shared that a peer once said, “They’re getting paid to do this. Give them something to do so they can earn their pay.” In another example, Sophie (daughter 2)

described a moment at lunch when a group of boys abandoned a mess they had made with ketchup packets on one of the lunch tables:

> I yelled at them and forced them to clean it up. I was like, "You guys are so mean. You made a mess…and you're sitting there next to the maintenance man who is going to have to clean it because that's his job. Don't make his job harder than it needs to be!" And I stood there until they finished. I wouldn't let them leave. The maintenance man was super thankful and said that I didn't need to do all that. But I told him, "It's not fair that they leave trash for you to clean up and so do many other people on this campus."

Sophie and Riley's accounts of student attitudes toward the maintenance staff at Sunnydale reveal both hidden assumptions and explicit views about class structures on campus. Riley's story reveals the explicit belief by some students that maintenance workers *need* trash to pick up to maintain employment. Sophie's story about the boys with ketchup packets illustrates an underlying mindset that someone else is responsible for cleaning up after them. Because the Reyes daughters saw so much of themselves reflected in the maintenance staff, they would feel more protective of them and, therefore, become especially sensitive to the injustices that they experienced on campus. As they saw it, a harm done to the maintenance staff was a harm done to them.

Lost in Translation: The Commodification of Language

Many stories shared by the Reyes siblings revealed that their bilingualism in English and Spanish was often viewed as a commodity in service to others at Sunnydale. The following excerpts highlight instances where language commodification occurred with peers and faculty.

"Can You Help Me With My Spanish Homework?": Language Commodification From Peers. When the oldest sibling, Esperanza, entered the Spanish classroom space, she

noticed a drastic shift in how her peers interacted with her. Outside of class, peers rarely took an interest in her beyond the aforementioned fixations with her appearance and financial situation. In the Spanish classroom, however, students made feigned attempts to get to know her, which were rooted in a hidden agenda to get her to help them with their Spanish work:

> In Spanish class everybody wanted my help. They would say things like, "Your Spanish accent is so good. How did you get it like that?" I just spoke it the way my parents and grandma taught me; I really didn't know any of the grammar. But at the end of every test, they would ask, "Can you help me with the Spanish? Do you tutor?" It was like they only wanted my help when we were in Spanish, but they didn't want me anywhere else.

The assumptions Esperanza's peers made here were twofold: (1) since she spoke Spanish so fluently, she must naturally understand all facets of Spanish grammar, and (2) that she would be willing and able to assist them, especially if she were complimented. It is worth noting that on the surface, the intention behind her peers asking for her help may not have been to cause harm; however, the fact that the same peers paid Esperanza no mind outside of the Spanish space caused her to interpret the exchange as a microaggression.

"Does Anyone Here Speak Spanish?": Language Commodification From School. As soon as we walked into her old math classroom during our walking interview, Esperanza recalled a story about how her bilingualism was spotlighted and later exploited when she volunteered as a translator for one of the school's service-learning trips to Mexico. When the teacher asked, "Does anybody here speak Spanish?" Esperanza did not raise her hand. She explained:

> I know I speak Spanish, but I didn't want to be put on this pedestal just because I was the only Brown kid in the entire room. They were looking for a front-face person to translate

> and talk to the [Mexican] family we were going to build a house for. But that's not the reason I was doing the trip. I saw the family in Mexico as my own family back in Mexico. It was very much a personal thing for me, so I kept quiet. But then one of my classmates shouted, "Esperanza speaks Spanish!" So, they asked me to be the translator, and I felt like I couldn't say no.

In recognizing that she was the only Brown person in the room and then choosing to remain silent after the question was made, Esperanza already knew the spotlight on her was coming. Then there was the element of feeling like she couldn't say no to a request made by a teacher once outed by her peer in a semi-public setting. An innate sense of duty to both her school and the Mexican family further compounded these factors. Ultimately, in what must have taken a matter of a few minutes, she compromised her reasons for attending the trip…and that was just the beginning.

Esperanza revealed that once on the trip, she felt exploited by the constant use of her translation services:

> I wanted to go build a house like the rest of my peers. Instead, I was carted around translating. The family would be on one side, Sunnydale on the other, and I was literally in the middle, going back and forth. They put me in front, and I was just so mortified. I remember being so embarrassed. I felt even worse for them because the Sunnydale kids were asking the exact same questions over and over and over all day. I didn't go [on that trip] ever again after that year.

As Esperanza told this story, the details came to her quickly and quite vividly, as if this experience had happened not too long ago when, in fact, it had occurred over four years ago. This story served as both a literal and figurative example of how Esperanza often found herself

in the middle, between borders, having to navigate belonging to two different worlds while attending Sunnydale. The family represented her past deeply rooted in Mexico, while Sunnydale represented her future, with Esperanza standing there in the present, alone and on display, feeling obligated to translate between both worlds—her skillset unrecognized, or perhaps recognized but not valued, certainly not celebrated or compensated in any way.

Esperanza concluded the story by adding that the school newspaper had also sent a student staffer on the trip to interview the family. Instead of sending their own translator, they asked Esperanza to conduct the entire interview in Spanish and translate it for them. Her recollection of events, moment by moment, indicated that this experience has profoundly impacted her sense of self, even to this day. The final comment Esperanza made after reliving this story was, “I don't know why they didn’t have a teacher or a staff member translate, but it was just me the whole trip.” It lingered in the air for a while as Esperanza’s consciousness returned to the room. That last comment triggered in me a flurry of emotions and thoughts. I wondered if Esperanza had received any special recognition or extra community service hours for her translation services or if she had received translation credit for the newspaper article once it was published. I learned that she, unfortunately, did not earn compensation, in any form, for her role as a translator during the entire school trip. She wasn’t even sure if the school newspaper had given her translation credit for the article once it was published.

As we walked out of her old math classroom, I asked Esperanza how her parents reacted to this story, and I was surprised to learn that she, in fact, had not disclosed the full extent of her experience to them. She told her parents that she had a great time and that it was one of the most meaningful experiences she’d ever had, and while that was mostly true because of the relationship she developed with the family in Mexico, her withholding the part about her

translating suggests that she knew how damaging it would be for them to hear how their daughter was taken advantage of. As I would later find out during our individual wrap-up (member check) interview during Phase 4, Esperanza did not want them to know the full extent of the story for two reasons: it indeed would be too painful to relive, and she wanted to spare them the hurt.

Sophie, daughter 2, did not go on the Mexico trip her junior year because it was canceled due to COVID. However, Julia (daughter 3) did sign up for the trip during her junior year, and the same request to translate was also made of her: "They asked me to translate for the trip, but I said no because my Spanish really isn't that great and there were other students who spoke it better than me." Even though she felt more comfortable saying no than Esperanza did, the assumption that she could translate was still there. Julia also shared that there have been no changes to that trip element since Esperanza's junior year.

"What Number is Your Tan?": Aesthetic Standards & Toxic Body Image Culture

The fact that racism is prevalent in predominantly White institutions is nothing new or groundbreaking. Much of the extant literature on predominantly White institutions indicates that students of color experience often experience racism in many ways on campus. We saw this with Esperanza when, on her first day of school, a student who was struck by her otherness felt compelled to approach her and ask, "How do you pay to go here?" There must have been something about Esperanza's appearance that triggered that response from her peer. Maybe it was her dark brown skin, her black hair, her body type, or her shoes (shoes are the only clothing item in Sunnydale's uniform policy that students can select on their own). Maybe it was all of it. Regardless, there was something about how Esperanza stood out in her peer's mind that signaled "She doesn't belong and I'm entitled to know why." This example, while a microaggression of class, also highlights the unique intersectionality of other elements of identity at play–gender and

phenotype. Esperanza's mom, Magdalena, shared that at Sunnydale, Esperanza was constantly asked about her physical features:

> They would ask her what color her tan was. She came home asking me, "What does that even mean?" And I had to tell her, there are people that go to tanning salons and pay to have a certain color skin tone. She was asked if she had a Brazilian blowout because her hair was so shiny and straight…and she had never heard of that before either. They asked her if she had eyelash extensions because her eyelashes were dark and curly. She felt like she stuck out visibly.

These racial microaggressions not only speak to a "fascination with [her] lifestyle" as Esperanza put it, but are also reflective of the normalized cultural appropriation that exists in our society where ethnic features are exoticized and reduced to features others can simply "try on." The constant questioning of Esperanza's natural features not only suggests that such features can only be acquired superficially, but created a dynamic where Esperanza had to constantly explain why she looked the way she looked. It was as if she had to constantly reply to the feeling of, "We see that you're different; explain to us how this could be."

Esperanza described another story that reflected the culture of beauty on campus rooted in Eurocentric beauty standards. She detailed her relationship with another student, Nancy, who like Esperanza, had matriculated to Sunnydale via the Sunnydale Scholastic Program (SSP). The two of them were the first to make the switch to Sunnydale via SSP. Esperanza shared:

> I remember feeling a lot of resentment towards her because she was very fair skinned, had very light hair, so she essentially blended in with them. I think a lot of my peers thought, "Oh, you look just like us." So, I felt like they accepted her easily, whereas I

> wasn't as accepted as quickly. I didn't realize how hard it [must have been] for her either. She ended up transferring out sophomore year and didn't tell anybody.

This example highlights not only the ways in which the toxic body image culture affected Esperanza individually but also how it got in the way of what could have otherwise been a valuable friendship between both young ladies. After all, they shared more commonalities than differences. Both were first-generation Latina students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Both had attended public schools for most of their lives prior to attending Sunnydale, and both were members of the same Sunnydale Scholastic Program. One might assume that their similarities would create a lasting bond rooted in shared experience and support. Instead, their differences in physical appearance disrupted any chance for connection, with Nancy appearing more White-passing than Esperanza. But it wasn't Nancy's features alone that created the chasm–it was the social benefits that being White-passing affords. In a school where Whiteness is the norm, Nancy's proximity to it brought with it a (perceived) social acceptance from the general student body that Esperanza so desperately craved but was constantly denied.

All the Reyes siblings, to varying degrees, mentioned that their Sunnydale experience was also marked by an acute awareness of the toxic cultures around body image that existed on campus. They recognized that emphasizing appearance as a measure of worth deeply affected their self-perceptions and mental health. The following story by Esperanza illustrates the intersection of body image, cultural expectations, and identity:

> Eating disorders were really prominent [with the girls] in my grade. It was competition for who was the skinniest and prettiest. Girls would skip lunch or have *maybe* a banana for the day. It turned into a self-loathing, like, "Why can't I be skinny like them?" Looking back on it now, I was a healthy weight and there was nothing wrong with my

> body at all. But when I was constantly surrounded by that skinny culture…it was hard not to get wrapped up in the "maybe I'll save my lunch for tomorrow" kind of thing.

Esperanza would often hide during lunch to escape the emotional and psychological toll of existing in a space dominated by unrealistic body standards. The prevalence of eating disorders and the competitive pressure to be "the skinniest" highlights a pervasive culture where self-worth is linked to appearance, particularly thinness. For Esperanza, this led to cycles of self-doubt and unhealthy behaviors (isolating and skipping meals). Viewing this through an intersectional lens reveals additional layers to Esperanza's experience. Her decision to disengage reflects not just resistance to the body image pressures but also an effort to navigate the racial and cultural dimensions of "skinny culture," which often marginalizes bodies that deviate from White, Eurocentric beauty ideals. For someone like Esperanza, who has felt othered for her physical appearance since day one, the pressure to conform to these standards often felt doubly isolating, amplifying her internal conflict.

The pressures of toxic body image culture didn't just affect the Reyes siblings individually in isolation—they also rippled through the entire family. The following reflection Esperanza shared about her youngest sister, Riley, describes the cyclical nature of the struggle with the toxic body image culture at Sunnydale:

> It's hard for Riley now. It's hard being in that environment of where everybody is a size double zero. I wanted to fit in so desperately that I thought that if I looked like them, maybe they'll accept me. So, it's tricky. My parents are aware, and I know she's getting help, which is good. It would've helped me as well to talk to somebody about it, but I was too embarrassed to say that I needed help.

This shared experience underscores how deeply entrenched these issues are and how they persist across generations within the same familial context. Esperanza's reflection on her own struggles, contrasted with Riley's current challenges, also highlights a pattern of internalized body image ideals and the silence that often surrounds them. Esperanza's acknowledgment that Riley is receiving help—and her reflection on the value of having had that support—points to a path forward.

Analyzing body culture on campus through an intersectional lens helps us understand how gender and race intersect in these stories. While body image can easily be seen as a facet of gender identity and societal norms of beauty, there exists the undercurrent of race in all of these examples. Esperanza and Riley are two healthy Latinas who, in the context of a predominantly White space, see their health as a deficit, which then led to unhealthy coping strategies (skipping meals, not eating in public, eating disorders).

To be or Not to be Hispanic? Conflicting Feelings About Affinity Groups

During my walking interview with Esperanza, one of my prompting questions was, "Are there any spaces on campus where you felt you belonged more, like affinity spaces?" Esperanza's answer highlighted the intra-group stratification that often characterized those affinity spaces for her and her sisters:

> I had a hard time with the [affinity groups], but I did join the Latinx student group my freshman year. I thought it would help for me to surround myself with more Latino kids. But then when I got there, I realized that some were considering themselves to be partial Latinos. They were like, "I'm a quarter Hispanic," and for others it was just something for them to put on their extracurricular activities for college–they never actually showed up to the meetings or went to the events. I've always claimed to be fully Hispanic, but my

> peers only wanted to claim that side of themselves within the affinity space, and that was hard for me. As soon as we stepped outside, they stopped associating with it. I couldn't do that….

Esperanza's sentiment about the intra-group stratification was also shared by her sisters Sophie and Julia. They, too, shared how they didn't always feel like they belonged within the student affinity group but instead leaned more toward the Latinx family affinity group, mostly because Magdalena was so heavily involved with it. For the siblings, the Latinx student affinity spaces highlighted the differences in their identities compared to their other Latinx-identifying peers. The daughters shared that many of their peers were "part White, part Latinx" and that many of those peers came from wealthier socioeconomic backgrounds or were not first-generation. As Esperanza mentioned, many of these multi-racial students also seemed to be able to "turn off" their *Latinidad* much more easily among the general population on campus.

Finding 6: The Surprising Academic Rigor and Course Placements at the Independent School Caused the Siblings to Question Their Intellectual Abilities for the First Time.

All four Reyes daughters recalled the challenges of transitioning to Sunnydale's academically rigorous curriculum. All daughters shared that they had been used to being "top of the class" at their public schools for most of their academic careers until they entered Sunnydale. They also shared similar stories about how the drastic shift in course track placement negatively impacted their sense of self as learners. This shift was not merely about adjusting to new curricula; it also involved confrontation with systemic inequities that were initially invisible to them.

The transition from public school to the independent school environment was jarring for the Reyes siblings, particularly since it disrupted their previously established academic identities.

Sophie (daughter 2) described feeling "shocked and out of place" at no longer being at the top of the class once she transitioned to Sunnydale. She explained, "At Sunnydale, I was doing all this work, and no matter how hard I tried or how much work I put in, I was not on top." Her comment signals a disorienting challenge to her previously affirmed sense of academic competence. Similarly, Julia described losing confidence due to lower-than-expected grades:

> When I came to Sunnydale, I was no longer the smartest one with the best grades. I lost a lot of confidence because I wasn't getting a hundred percent on everything anymore. It's a lot to handle and it can feel really suffocating and stressful. It's just so different than anything I had ever done at Victory.

Sophie's initial shock and Julia's need to rationalize the drastic shift in academic rigor reveal that students who transition from public to independent schools do not yet possess the ability to see the systemic structures at play.

All four Reyes daughters also explained how the drastic shift in course track placement from public school to independent school further hindered their healthy identity development as learners. The Reyes daughters' narratives highlight how transitioning into lower-track placements, despite their prior advanced achievements, felt like a diminishment of their academic potential. Sophie's placement in regular tracks, despite excelling in public school, felt like "a slap in the face," while Julia struggled to reconcile her past success in advanced math with her current placement in a standard track:

> I was doing sixth-grade math when I was in fourth grade. But as soon as I got to Sunnydale, I was placed on the normal track, *and* I wasn't doing as well as I did before. I don't know if it's because the teaching styles are different or because I just haven't

> adapted to the difference in difficulty…but it's all been playing with my mindset on [learning].

Only after graduating from Sunnydale and reflecting on the school culture was Sophie able to realize other systemic factors that contributed to the shock of academic rigor:

> It took me a while to realize, but these kids who have been in these private school systems have had access to harder topics than I have, so it makes sense that they're progressing at the rate that they are. I'm sure that if I had started off at the same place that they did, I would also do that. But it felt like I was playing a little bit of catch-up.

Sophie's reflection reveals a growing awareness of structural factors, such as access to more rigorous preparation in earlier education. However, this insight came only after she had navigated the emotionally taxing experience of "playing catch up." At the time of the transition, the siblings were left to internalize these disparities as personal shortcomings.

Finding 7: The Family Lacked Support Specific to Their First-Generation, Latinx Identities During the College Application Process.

The three older sisters–Esperanza, Sophie, and Julia– experienced immense pressure and stress during the college application process at Sunnydale. (Riley, the youngest, was still in middle school during data collection and had not yet begun the college application process at Sunnydale.) Julia (daughter 3) is the one Reyes daughter currently going through the college counseling process. The major tension for her has presented itself as conflict with her parents' aspiration for their daughters to attend college (this tension was discussed in the previous section on tensions with familial and aspirational capital). The stories shared below focus more closely on the three older siblings' experiences navigating the college application process at Sunnydale School.

"¿Qué Dirán?": Toxic College-Going Culture

All members of the Reyes family stressed the toxic college-going culture that exists at Sunnydale. The mom, Magdalena, and daughters, Esperanza, Sophie, and Julia all expressed frustration with the number of times they were asked questions about where the daughters were applying. Magdalena explained that pressures at Sunnydale are not just from the daughters' peers, but also from other parents. She explained, "Everybody was asking, 'Where are you applying? Where is your daughter going?' At every soccer game and every time I was at a school event." Furthermore, Sophie indicated that the culture at Sunnydale revealed a preference for getting into the Ivy League or highly selective colleges over schools like state schools or lesser-known UCs. Magdalena shared: "I even tried to push the community college route to [my daughters], but it was the *¿qué dirán?* (What are they going to say?)"

These examples explore how these pressures manifest at the intersection of peer, parental, and institutional dynamics and contribute to a toxic atmosphere prioritizing prestige over individual fit and well-being. The constant questioning experienced by the Reyes family reflects a pervasive "college as competition" mindset, where the worth of students—and, by extension, their families—is tied to the prestige of the institutions they aspire to attend. Such interactions reveal a performative aspect of college admissions, where decisions are made under the scrutiny of a community obsessed with status and success as defined by narrowly construed metrics. This paradigm discourages exploration of alternative pathways, such as community college, despite their potential alignment with students' personal or financial circumstances. Magdalena's admission of considering the community college route for her daughters underscores her awareness of this issue, but the weight of *"¿qué dirán?"*—a cultural concern about judgment from others—highlights the difficulty of resisting entrenched norms. This speaks to the

intersection of cultural values and societal expectations which complicated the family's ability to navigate choices authentically.

Sophie's observations about the devaluation of state schools and lesser-known universities suggest Sunnydale's culture promotes a hierarchical view of higher education, with Ivy League and top-tier institutions at the pinnacle. Sophie, who ended up attending San Diego State, shared a reflection that demonstrated how she internalized the toxic college-going culture at Sunnydale:

> The social pressure made me feel like, "You are this girl who got into a private school on academic scholarship. You were given this wonderful opportunity, and now you're throwing it away to go to a state school?" Even though that's not the case whatsoever, I did feel that for a brief moment.

Sophie's reflection about attending San Diego State underscores the psychological impact of internalizing Sunnydale's college-going culture. Her perception of "throwing it away to go to a state school" reveals how deeply embedded the expectation for prestige is within this environment. Despite recognizing that this narrative is false, Sophie's brief internal struggle demonstrates the cultural power of these messages.

"I Had to Figure it Out on My Own": First-Gen Struggles

The pressures of a toxic college-going culture become ever more compounded for a first-generation family who also has to contend with other inequities. The following narratives reveal an in-depth look at some of the struggles during the college application process that were specific to the Reyes' first-generation status. Sophie (daughter 2) expressed:

> There were issues with my essays, there were issues with my FAFSA, and there were issues with even how I was supposed to apply to the college. It was hard for me to keep

> track of all the different types of applications out there. It certainly would've been a lot easier if I had someone guiding me through that. I didn't know who to turn to or what to do. My older sister and I weren't talking. [My parents] didn't know how to become doctors, and neither did I. And with that, there's just so much pressure as a first-generation student. I had to figure it out on my own.

Sophie's feelings of isolation, illustrated by her strained relationship with her sister and her parents' inability to offer guidance, emphasize the emotional and psychological toll of being first-generation.

Similarly, her mother, Magdalena, sheds light on the structural barriers that limited Sunnydale's ability to address the needs of her first-generation family:

> Her college counselor at Sunnydale had her best interest at heart, but she wasn't well equipped to help families like ours. She was dealing with families that hired tutors and expensive test prep. First-generation families weren't [their] forte.

While well-intentioned, the college counselor needed to gain the specialized knowledge and resources to support first-generation families effectively. Her focus on families with access to private tutors and test preparation services reveals a bias in the system that caters to those with privilege, leaving marginalized students like Sophie and Esperanza at a disadvantage.

Both narratives reveal how the "toxic college-going culture" disproportionately impacts first-generation students. For families like the Reyeses, the inequities extend beyond financial hurdles, including informational and institutional barriers. These challenges are compounded by the pressure to succeed not just for oneself but also for one's family—a pressure that Sophie articulates as being unique to her first-generation status.

"It's Better for Everyone": Financial & Familial Influences on School Choice

The more Sophie shared about her college application process, the clearer it became that her decision carried the weight of multiple factors, especially how her decisions impacted the family's financial situation. She shared: "I wish my college counselor would've fully understood how strong my relationship is with my family." For Sophie, college choice wasn't solely about finding the best school for herself. She needed to consider the financial strain on her family should she choose a private or out-of-state university versus a public one in California:

> My plan is to graduate early. My parents are paying for all my undergrad, and I'm very fortunate. My mom especially, was like, "Don't worry about the finances." But it definitely altered the decision I made to go to a state school. I forced myself to only look at schools in California because in-state tuition will always be cheaper than out of-state, which is kind of a shame because there are phenomenal programs out of state. I've already placed such a big financial burden on them, so it's better for everyone in the long run if I can be out of college by the time Julia starts.

Sophie's narrative underscores the weight of familial bonds and responsibilities in shaping her academic choices. She acknowledges her parents' financial support for her undergraduate studies while emphasizing her desire to alleviate their burden for future expenses, particularly given the need to support younger siblings. Sophie's acknowledgment of her mother's reassurance, "Don't worry about the finances," contrasts with her internal struggle to balance gratitude and guilt, highlighting the emotional complexity of her decision-making process, where the weight of her parents' sacrifices is ever-present.

Esperanza shared a similar story, wherein she forfeited her dream school in Oregon in exchange for a more practical option:

> I loved Oregon, but the tuition was ridiculous, and that wasn't something I was willing to do to myself or my family. So, I had to put that dream on hold. But honestly, I don't regret it.

Esperanza's decision to forgo her dream school due to financial constraints further reflects the pragmatic approach to higher education that the Reyes embody. Esperanza's acceptance of placing her "dream on hold" similarly illustrates a willingness to compromise for financial stability. Her lack of regret suggests a perspective where the emotional appeal of a dream school is tempered by the rationality of economic sustainability.

These narratives highlight the interplay between individual aspirations and familial responsibilities in the context of college decision-making. For Sophie and Esperanza, their personal desires were not the sole drivers of their decisions; financial considerations and familial obligations significantly shaped their paths.

"Thanks for Pointing it out": Navigating the FAFSA & Application Fee Waivers

Both Esperanza and Sophie also indicated challenges during the college application process related to applying for financial aid, with Esperanza offering a vivid and poignant example. During our walking interview, she recounted a moment when her counselor addressed a classroom of students about financial aid waivers:

> My college counselor gathered all [their] students into one classroom for a meeting on college applications. Then she said, "If you need a financial aid waiver, come pick this flyer up," while making eye contact with certain students—including me. I debated whether to go up and grab one or to ask her later. I needed one, but I knew I'd stand out. My friend Kai, another financial aid student, looked at me and said, "Should we go?" I told him, "I'll go if you go." So, we went up together. Out of 40 kids, we were the only

ones who got waivers. It was so uncomfortable—it felt like a spotlight was on us. I kept thinking, *Thank you for pointing it out; you could've handled this privately.*

This memory illustrates more than a logistical hurdle; it underscores the isolating visibility of financial need. Esperanza's decision to seek the waiver, coupled with Kai's solidarity, reflects resilience and the discomfort of being singled out.

What struck me during our walking interview was how Esperanza recalled this moment: she acted the entire scene in a comedic fashion, complete with tiptoeing around imaginary students who had once overcrowded the now empty classroom, a large smile plastered across her face. She even joked about this being a perfect scene for a sitcom, should one ever be created about her experiences attending Sunnydale. In that moment, her laughter seemed to function as both a coping mechanism and a way to reclaim power over an otherwise alienating memory.

Sophie's experience with financial aid and application waivers differed slightly from Esperanza's. Similar to Esperanza, Sophie indicated that instead of receiving clear guidance on filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), she recalls counselors directing students to complete it online without deeper engagement or assistance. This approach assumes that students possess the digital literacy, time, and contextual knowledge to navigate the FAFSA's complexities individually, which can be particularly burdensome for first-generation or lower-income students. The difference between Sophie's case (compared to her older sister's) was that when it came to application waivers for college applications, Sophie mentioned, "The only reason I knew that I even qualified for a waiver was because my mom would press me about it. She said that it happened with my older sister." Without her mother's intervention, Sophie might not have been aware of her eligibility for fee waivers, underscoring how disparities in familial knowledge and advocacy perpetuate unequal access to financial resources.

Both Esperanza and Sophie's experiences highlight the added challenges that inefficiencies and miscommunication from schools can cause for underserved students. Reflecting on her experiences now as a college graduate, Esperanza shared:

> I've met so many people like me in college who are on financial aid. It's not that big of a deal, but at Sunnydale, it felt like a huge deal. It was mortifying to be labeled a financial aid student.

Esperanza's reflection, "It's not that big of a deal, but at Sunnydale, it felt like a huge deal," reveals how the social context of attending an elite independent school magnified her sense of otherness as a financial aid recipient. While financial aid ultimately became an unremarkable aspect of her college experience, the heightened sensitivity she felt at Sunnydale speaks to the pervasive financial culture on campus discussed in a previous section.

The contrast between Sophie's and Esperanza's experiences also highlights the multifaceted nature of barriers faced by underserved students. For Sophie, the primary struggle was ensuring access to the financial aid she was entitled to; for Esperanza, the issue was more psychological, rooted in the social dynamics of attending a school where wealth was the norm. Together, their stories illustrate the intersection of practical and social challenges at Sunnydale and many other independent schools.

The Conundrum of Independent School Education: Perceived Disadvantages During the College Application Process

The strongest similarity between Sophie's and her older sister Esperanza's experiences navigating the college application process is the conundrum of Sunnydale's impact on their college prospects. On the one hand, the girls felt like Sunnydale prepared them well for the academic rigors of college. However, they thought attending Sunnydale made them appear less

competitive in the college application landscape. Because both girls still maintained contact with friends from their public schools, they often compared their college application process with that of their peers. Both Esperanza and Sophie experienced frustration over finding out that many of their old friends—many of whom were not as academically gifted as they—got into more top-name, competitive schools than they did, and even with more financial assistance. Magdalena illustrated this when describing the college going process for her older two daughters, Esperanza and Sophie:

> They tell me, "If we would've gone to a public school, we would have been the top of our class and gotten into any university that we would've wanted to. And it's true. They talked to their friends from their local middle schools who went off to high schools that they would've been to. Carla was at Victory High School, which is likely where Sophie would've gone. Carla got into USC; they didn't even look at Sophie with her 3.87 GPA. And when they were growing up, Carla wasn't more advanced than Sophie. Esperanza didn't get into UC San Diego, but Nancy did. Nancy was at Sunnydale, but she left to a public school in 10th grade. So, when my kids compared themselves to peers they had grown up with and saw the difference in college admissions, it was a big blow to them.

Magdalena's reflection highlights the paradoxical impact of attending Sunnydale: while it enhances academic preparedness, it seemingly diminishes opportunities to stand out in the college admissions landscape. Sophie and Esperanza's frustrations reveal the subjective weight of institutional reputation in college admissions. The sisters' ongoing connections with public school friends exacerbated their disillusionment. By observing peers with seemingly lesser qualifications gain admission to prestigious institutions, the sisters were forced to confront systemic inequities in evaluating accomplishments.

Finding 8: The Siblings Credit Much of Their Survival and Success at the Independent School to Meaningful Relationships With Faculty.

All of the Reyes siblings shared stories of meaningful relationships with faculty members at Sunnydale. The findings reveal significant relationships developed with teachers of color, most notably Latinx faculty. While this supports extant research on the impact of faculty representation among students of color (especially in predominantly White institutions), the findings from this study also revealed that relationships with White teachers were just as significant for the Reyeses. The siblings generally valued teachers with a "gentler teaching style," an ability to listen authentically, and who incorporated culturally relevant teaching pedagogies in the classroom.

"She Saved Me": Representation, Role Models, and Cultural Brokers Among Faculty

Even though much of Esperanza's experience at Sunnydale was marked by isolation and marginalization, there was one significant difference by the time she had reached junior year—a new teacher, Dr. L, had just started working at Sunnydale. Dr. L would become Esperanza's biggest role model, friend, and cultural broker at Sunnydale; and her classroom would be a place where Esperanza could be herself and unpack the complex social and cultural dynamics that often plagued her:

> Dr. L understood me. She's Latina and a doctor. She was my biggest role model. She was kind and understanding. She saved me, honestly. Whenever I felt alone, her classroom was a place I found solace and, ugh, I could cry (wipes tears). Her being there for me is what made my second half of Sunnydale so tolerable because if I had any issue, she would understand where I came from. I'd be like, "John said this to me today. Isn't that the stupidest thing you ever heard?" And she'd be like, "Yeah, but you need to

> understand. He's from Beverly Hills. He doesn't get where you're coming from." We would have the most honest conversations—she would check me when I needed to be checked and comfort me when I needed to be comforted. She was the best.

My observation of Esperanza during this part of our walking interview made clear the transformative impact her relationship with Dr. L provided. The tears streaming down her face, the way her voice shook and went up in pitch as she described Dr. L's role in her life—there was no doubt that Dr. L had left a positive, lasting impression on Esperanza's sense of self. The safe space Dr. L created allowed Esperanza to not only endure the challenges of her environment but to actively process them in ways that bolstered her sense of identity and self-worth. Dr. L was not merely a teacher; she was a cultural broker and emotional anchor as well. As a Latina with a doctorate, Dr. L also exemplified the possibility of achieving success within the structural constraints of predominantly White institutions. The relationship between Esperanza and Dr. L highlights the transformational intersection of representation, mentorship, and emotional support. Such mentorship goes beyond academic support to foster personal growth and resilience, critical for students Esperanza who navigated intersecting layers of marginalization on a daily basis.

Similar to Esperanza, Sophie (daughter 2) also spoke of the importance of representation at Sunnydale:

> Dr. M got her PhD in neuroscience with her own study and literally did all the research herself. And to talk to her, to learn directly from her, from someone who knows what they're doing, and a Latina no less, was amazing.

Exposure to a neuroscience class, combined with the representation of a Latina with a PhD, provided Sophie with a role model who had not only achieved the highest-level science degree in her field but who also taught at a school like Sunnydale. Dr. M's achievements disrupted the

narrative that Latinas cannot excel in elite academic or scientific spaces, offering Sophie a concrete example of success aligned with her cultural identity. Thus, the significance of representation extended beyond the teacher-student relationship. Dr. M's presence as a Latina scientist in a predominantly White school like Sunnydale challenges systemic stereotypes and biases, making room for students of color to imagine themselves in roles they might have otherwise deemed unattainable. Like Esperanza's relationship with Dr. L, Sophie's relationship with Dr. M modeled that strong, intelligent Latinas could exist and succeed in predominantly White spaces.

At Sunnydale, where the cultural and social dynamics often alienated the Reyes siblings, figures like Dr. L and Dr. M served as anchors. They offered a counter-narrative to the dominant culture and provided tangible proof that success and authenticity are not mutually exclusive for students of color. Moreover, these relationships demonstrated a mentorship rooted in shared identity that profoundly impacted their emotional and academic trajectory. Both Dr. L and Dr. M modeled a form of relational understanding that bridged cultural divides and built resilience. For Esperanza, this meant navigating the complexities of high school with a sense of self intact; for Sophie, it meant envisioning herself in a scientific field traditionally dominated by White men.

Meaningful Relationships With White Teachers

Faculty of color weren't the only teachers the Reyes siblings valued. Esperanza mentioned how a White male teacher, Dr. S, sparked her interest in psychology after taking his AP Psychology class. That class alone played a pivotal role in helping Esperanza determine her desire to major in psychology in college. Similarly, Sophie mentioned that her relationship with a White female art teacher, Mrs. G, is one of the relationships she'd cherish the most from her time at Sunnydale. According to Sophie, Mrs. G's classes were "both informative and practical.

[Sophie] never felt like the teaching was forced; it just happened organically." Julia (daughter 3) praised a White, female, middle school English teacher, Ms. H, for being "so sweet." Youngest sibling, Riley, shared an appreciation for Mr. B, a White, male history teacher who used project-based learning and culturally relevant teaching methods to teach students about cultures in other countries. Riley stated, "Mr. B's projects let us figure things out on our own and they were so fun. Every group got into it."

Finding 9: The Oldest Child of the First-Generation Latinx Family Experienced the Most Discrimination, Which was Detrimental to her Identity Development.

As captured from the opening story about Esperanza's first day at Sunnydale in Chapter 1, the negative impact that Sunnydale had on her was apparent from the start. Of all her sisters, Esperanza, experienced the most discrimination at Sunnydale. She stated that she "cried every day coming home" during her first two years, and mom, Magdalena, shared that Esperanza frequently begged to be taken out. Many of her experiences have already been explored in previous sections: being outcasted by peers; microaggressions of race, class, and body image; tokenization; and commodification of her bilingualism. The following section provides more background on the ways in which Esperanza's experience was unique compared to her sisters. It provides context around the Sunnydale Scholastic Program (the program from which Esperanza and her family first learned about Sunnydale) and delves deeper into the traumatic impact her experiences at Sunnydale left on her as the first in her family to navigate the space.

Sunnydale Scholastic Program

When I asked Esperanza how she and her family first heard about Sunnydale, she shared that she had been involved in the Sunnydale Scholastic Program (SSP). She described SSP as a special program that Sunnydale created for students from underserved schools in the surrounding

greater Los Angeles area. Students enrolled in SSP attend math, science, and language arts classes at Sunnydale School during the summer and are exposed to the various resources Sunnydale offers: state-of-the-art classrooms, science and technology equipment, and Sunnydale teachers (who teach the summer courses in SSP). SSP students receive support services, including tutoring, growth mindset training, and college counseling. Esperanza stated that SSP is for students "who show a lot of promise but who just don't have the resources that Sunnydale has to go to college." To be eligible for SSP, students must be high-achieving, lower-income, and have the recommendation of their teacher. When SSP was established, Esperanza was part of the first cohort of students. She joined in the summer between her sixth and seventh grade, and that is how the Reyeses were first introduced to Sunnydale.

Esperanza was the first and only one of the Reyes daughters to attend SSP. This difference in the siblings' experience is especially significant because Esperanza—in addition to being a member of SSP's first cohort—was also one of only two students who matriculated to Sunnydale from SSP. Most students in SSP typically join in middle school and remain in public school until graduation from high school, though a few do transition to independent schools in the 9th grade. Esperanza was among the first to attend Sunnydale specifically.

For all of the positives SSP provided Esperanza, it also provided her with moments of tokenization and embarrassment. Reflecting on her experience in SSP during our individual wrap-up interview, she shared one of these moments:

> They used to show the SSP promotion video during one of our assemblies at Sunnydale every year, and I remember how uncomfortable it was because that video explicitly states "low-income families, first-generation students," and my face would be plastered up in front of the entire school…emphasizing the fact that I am low income and that I probably

shouldn't be there. I was proud of being in SSP, but being labeled an SSP kid at Sunnydale and seeing that video play every single year was very difficult.

While undoubtedly intended to celebrate SSP's mission and success, the promotion video inadvertently reduced Esperanza to a symbol of need rather than an individual with multifaceted experiences and achievements. By spotlighting her image alongside language emphasizing "low-income families" and "first-generation students," the video reinforced a deficit-based narrative. While the SSP label was intended to signify opportunity and achievement, it simultaneously marked her as "other" within the broader Sunnydale school community, exacerbating feelings of exclusion in a space where she already questioned her belonging. Throughout the study, Esperanza shared numerous stories about wanting to hide and not stick out more than she already did. Thus, when this very public display occurred, it placed one of the biggest unwanted spotlights on her.

Even though the incident had affected her deeply, Esperanza still rationalized that she "couldn't fault them because [she] was one of the firsts" from SSP to matriculate to Sunnydale. "I was their test case," she reasoned. Esperanza, referring to herself as a test case for such a significant institutional cultural leap, suggests a pardoning of SSP's responsibility to ensure her safe transition. Esperanza further reasoned that "SSP didn't know that [she] was struggling so much at Sunnydale because [she] kept a lot to myself; they had to find out through [her] parents."

This same story came up during my artifact-driven interview with Chris and Magdalena, when Magdalena pulled out a few SSP marketing brochures that featured Esperanza. We delved into a conversation about the tokenization of "the poor little Brown kids" (as Magdalena phrased it), and it aroused mixed feelings of anger, exploitation, and confusion. As a Sunnydale Board of

Directors member, Magdalena shared that she understood the importance of marketing efforts to promote and fundraise for these "wonderful programs that bring much good to underserved communities." On the other hand, both she and Chris had many questions about their methods' (lack of) ethical standards.

"I'm Never Going Back There": Esperanza's Lingering Trauma

Of all of the Reyes siblings, Esperanza experienced the highest degrees of social isolation, marginalization, and exploitation at Sunnydale School. Many of the events that contributed to Esperanza's trauma have already been shared in previous sections. While many of the experiences of discrimination and marginalization mirrored those of her sisters, Esperanza seemed to be more deeply affected by them than her siblings. During my initial family interview, I asked all family members to write down the first thing that comes to mind when they think of Sunnydale. Her siblings' responses all reflected a generally positive association with the school (responses ranged from "I love it here" to "great opportunities"). Esperanza's response, however, was, "Hated it. I'm never going back." When we met for our subsequent education journey map interview, she explained that she never goes back to Sunnydale except to see her sisters' soccer games:

> I go straight to the field, but I don't go onto the main campus. I can't tolerate it; it's too triggering. Being there brings up bad memories and just makes me mad. That's why I don't go back, to protect my peace.

It was clear that her experiences had been put behind her and that the distance she had created was a way for her to cope. By "never going back," she wouldn't have to relive all the pain. What also struck me about this excerpt was the fact that Esperanza, in fact, did go back, but only to support her sisters by attending their soccer games. This revealed that despite the trauma,

revisiting the campus was worth it to Esperanza if it meant she would get to support her siblings. There was a compromise there, and a tender one at that. (This connects to the earlier section that details Esperanza supporting her sisters.)

Finding 10: Despite Expressing Mixed Emotions, the Latinx Family Reported That Their Experiences Navigating the Independent School Ultimately Reminded Them of Their Individual and Collective Strengths, Reinforced Their Cultural Identity, and Gave Them a Renewed Sense of Community-Oriented Purpose.

The Latinx family interprets their experience of attending an independent school in complex ways. For some, the challenges they endured were worth it in the end. For others, the answer is not so clear. While the family expressed mixed emotions about their journey, their reflections underscore a duality of gratitude and sacrifice which illustrates the complexity of their experiences. Regardless, the Reyes' experiences navigating Sunnydale reminded them of their individual and collective strengths, reinforced their cultural identity, and gave them a renewed sense of purpose to help other Latinx families like them.

"It was Worth it in the End": Gratitude for Robust Opportunities

Esperanza and Sophie, being the only two Reyes daughters to have graduated from Sunnydale so far, provided reflective insight on the long-term benefits of attending Sunnydale. Esperanza, reflecting on her Sunnydale experience, remarked:

> While I did not particularly enjoy my Sunnydale experience, I am very appreciative of the opportunities I was given. I've never been pushed harder academically, and then in college, I graduated in three years. I came out so much stronger than I thought I could have. It really was for my own benefit.

Similarly, Sophie (daughter 2) emphasized the long-term payoff of her education: "All of that confusion, fear, and hard work definitely was worth it because now I know that when I get into med school or grad school, I can do it."

At the time of her college applications, attending Sunnydale seemed like a hindrance to Sophie, an unfair disadvantage on her college prospects. However, very similar to what Esperanza shared, Sophie is now able to reconcile old feelings of resentment and sees the long-term benefit of attending Sunnydale:

> [Looking back], I would not change it for the world. I am truly thriving now and I do owe a good amount of it to Sunnydale. There was a moment of time where [my family friend] who went to a public high school was really struggling once she got to USC. She was wondering if she had made the wrong decision. I don't think I ever had those thoughts [about San Diego State].

For Esperanza and Sophie, attending Sunnydale was transformative, not necessarily in real-time, but as a retrospective recognition of growth and preparedness. Esperanza's emphasis on "stronger" indicates that all the adversity she experienced shaped her personal and academic development. Sophie reframes her "confusion and fear" as pivotal to her confidence and success in college. Both narratives encapsulate the Latinx family's resilience and the enduring value of the educational opportunities they seized.

"…But at What Cost?": Conflicting Feelings About the "Cost" of Independent Schools

However, these gains are juxtaposed against the emotional costs the family faced. Dad Chris shared the complex feelings he still wrestles with regarding his family's time at Sunnydale:

> They are better prepared academically. That was all Sunnydale's preparation. But the emotional part, the emotional scars, when they're alone and reflecting on things, I don't

> know if it was beneficial because it could go either way. Their experiences could propel them to say, "Hey, I went through this, and I'm stronger for it." Or it could be, "Why did that happen to me?" and spiral downward. That's a hard one. We're very fortunate and very thankful to the school for the opportunities, but there was something to be paid for that. It wasn't free.

Chris's observation that "it wasn't free" metaphorically captures the dual cost of access to independent school education by a Latinx, lower-income family: the financial burden and the emotional toll. Magdalena shared a similar outlook to her husband's:

> The price was worth it because they became better human beings. The price was not worth it because my children suffered immensely. I knew that at the end they would be better for it, but it was hard while we were going through it. Sunnydale exposed them to many things that they would not have gotten exposure to at public schools, but the mental toll maybe wouldn't have been as strong because they probably would've coasted. At public schools, the rigor isn't what it is here, and they would not have had the stressors…but then they wouldn't have been as prepared as they were for college. So, it kind of goes hand in hand. But would I do it all over again? Absolutely.

Magdalena's assertion that "the price was worth it because they became better human beings" highlights the long-term character development Sunnydale instilled in her children. However, her acknowledgment of their "immense suffering" complicates this narrative by offering a candid account of the psychological challenges her children endured. This duality—between growth and hardship—mirrors a broader theme of resilience in the face of systemic inequities that have become characteristic of the Reyes family.

Despite this ambivalence, the family emerged with a stronger sense of cultural identity and purpose. Sunnydale not only prepared the children for the rigors of higher education but also fostered a broader appreciation for the sacrifices their family made. Her conclusion—that she would "absolutely" make the same decision again—reflects an acceptance of the sacrifices required to ensure her children's future success. This reflection connects with the themes in an earlier section on the daughters' tensions with aspirational and familial capital. In the end, despite the mixed feelings they expressed, all members of the Reyes family ultimately recognized and appreciated a deeply rooted strength they all possess—a collective resolve to endure temporary discomfort for long-term empowerment.

Lessons Learned and Advice for Other First-Generation, Lower-Income, Latinx Families Navigating the Independent School World

What quickly became apparent to me as I began interviewing the Reyes family was that they always had an eye toward the future, and not just their own. True, much of their immediate focus was on their own futures, but there also existed an underlying understanding that whatever they did would be important for future Latinx families like theirs. Their unique experiences navigating Sunnydale have positioned them as advocates for other Latinx families like theirs considering similar educational paths. The following section articulates their advice, which serves as a blueprint for future first-generation, lower-income Latinx families navigating similar challenges.

"We Belong Here": The Importance of Showing up and Claiming Your Space. Magdalena reflects on the power of perseverance, stating, "Show up! They can't kick you out... You sit in it enough; you show up enough, and it starts to become part of your norm." Her emphasis on "showing up" underscores the necessity of persistence in unfamiliar spaces, where

discomfort is inevitable but can be transformed into empowerment through consistent engagement. Her determination reflects the family's broader commitment to creating a path for others by normalizing their presence in these elite spaces. She further advises that while the journey is challenging and may feel defeating, it is crucial to "be part of the change" for the sake of future generations.

"Don't Dampen Your Light": The Importance of Retaining One's Essence and Individuality. Esperanza and Riley offer advice rooted in their imposter syndrome and self-doubt struggles. Esperanza shares, "Don't dampen your light. You deserve to be here because you earned it… You got in for a reason, and you need to take that and go with it." This sentiment counters the internalized narratives of unworthiness that haunted her throughout most of her time at Sunnydale, and her advice to embrace one's worth reflects her journey from self-doubt to self-assurance.

Similarly, Riley encourages students to "push yourself to try new things" and resist the pressure to conform: "There's a reason that you're Latina, and you should be proud of it." Both reflections highlight the importance of embracing individuality as a source of strength and rejecting expectations to assimilate to the dominant culture at Sunnydale. Julia adds to this by reminding others of their capability: "You may doubt yourself a lot, but you can do more than what you think you can." These reflections collectively urge students to hold on to their cultural identity and affirm that their unique contributions enrich the spaces they occupy.

"We do Have a Voice": The Importance of Speaking up. The Reyes family's experiences also stress the importance of advocacy and speaking up. Chris reflects on his initial hesitation to voice concerns, stating, "I was afraid to be vocal… I should have stood up for [my kids] and gone to the school." His regret underscores parental advocacy's importance in ensuring

students' challenges are addressed and resolved. His message to other parents is, "If they're not going to hear your child, make sure they're going to hear you." This advice serves as Chris' way of overcoming the silencing he experienced due to navigating the independent school world for the first time. Similarly, his advice to "ask the hard questions" and demand accountability from schools serves as a call to action for families to assert their needs unapologetically.

Esperanza echoes this sentiment by emphasizing the need to seek help: "Don't be afraid to ask for help… I internalized so much, and that turned into self-loathing and pure hatred for things I didn't need to have hate for." Her advice reinforces the importance of building support systems and leveraging available resources to overcome the isolation and challenges that can come with attending a school like Sunnydale as a first-generation Latinx student. The collective advice offered by Esperanza and her dad, Chris, reflects the Reyes family's realization that speaking up is essential not only for their own well-being but also for challenging systemic inequities and paving the way for others.

Ultimately, the Reyes' navigation of Sunnydale School is emblematic of the sacrifices and rewards inherent in pursuing opportunity amidst adversity. While the journey was fraught with emotional challenges, it solidified their Latinx cultural identity, strengthened their resilience, and inspired them to serve as sources of support for their community. This dual legacy of empowerment and advocacy underscores the transformative potential of an independent school education while acknowledging the nuanced costs of achieving it.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction

It's important to understand that this work is not about pointing the finger at independent schools but about shedding light on how their systems of policies, practices, and beliefs influence the experiences of first-generation, lower-income, Latinx families (Purdy, 2023). It's clear from the findings that despite the challenges the Reyeses faced while attending Sunnydale, they all showed immense gratitude for the opportunities it afforded them. The Reyeses did not participate in this study to complain or garner sympathy for their woes. They signed on to be a part of the change they feel Sunnydale is capable of making. Everything from their loyalty to Sunnydale despite the hardships to Magdalena agreeing to serve on the board of directors speaks to the genuine love they have for their educational home. With love comes full acceptance of the good and the bad, and their participation in this study is, in many ways, a love letter to Sunnydale.

The biggest takeaway for independent schools to recognize is that when given the opportunity, most Latinx families will rise to the occasion and use everything in their arsenal to make things work for their students. True, not all families can successfully support their children through the rigors of an independent school education. However, what the Reyes family demonstrates is that when the stakes for educational success are so high within the Latinx family unit, they will use all the resources—the community's cultural wealth at their disposal—to make it happen.

It is difficult enough for a first-generation, lower-income Latinx family to send one child through the independent school system, let alone four. That is why I needed to study the Reyeses. Their tenure as a Sunnydale family extends across nearly a decade. Collectively, when we add up the total number of years each of the siblings have attended Sunnydale, Chris and

Esperanza have acquired 17 years of experience. By the time their youngest, Riley, graduates from Sunnydale, they will have acquired 21 years of experience navigating the independent school system. That is a feat only a few Latinx families like theirs can boast. This study tried to capitalize on that collective wisdom to capture, in as much detail, their layered and complex experiences in nuanced ways.

I began this project with a full understanding that the experiences of one Latinx family cannot possibly embody or represent the experiences of all first-generation, lower-income Latinx families navigating the independent school world in Los Angeles. However, I also began this project with a full understanding of the value and power in individual narratives of marginalized individuals who belong to larger cultural groups. I encourage independent schools to recognize that while, yes, there are qualities that pertain to certain cultural groups and the family units within those groups, there are also characteristics of the individuals inside those families that are worth exploring. Like this study demonstrates, cultural models (like Community Cultural Wealth) only go so far in helping schools recognize strengths that marginalized groups possess. It is equally important to understand that within those cultural structures, conflicts, tensions, and changing relationships with tenets of those models can exist at varying degrees and frequencies for the individuals within those groups—both culture *and* the individual need to be recognized simultaneously.

Summary of the Findings

The findings relevant to research question 1—How does each member of a Latinx family unit make sense of their educational journey and what they are learning along the way?—indicated that at various moments throughout their collective and individual educational journeys, the Latinx family had to negotiate conflicting cultural models and practices and their

attachments to them. For the daughters, this often presented itself in the form of tensions within aspirational capital (the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers) and familial capital (cultural knowledge nurtured among kin that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition) (Yosso, 2005). For my parent participants, this negotiation often involved shedding cultural ideologies that no longer served them and breaking cycles of generational trauma.

Other findings tied to research question 1 indicated that all members of the Latinx family credit their family's ability to navigate challenges to their resilience, perseverance, and strength. For the parents, this showed mostly through their consistent presence throughout their children's educational journey, which has been a foundational source of support to which daughters credit much of their success in large part. For the sisters, the findings indicate that the support they received from one another varied from more immediate, every-day supports (especially among the younger three sisters) to the unspoken support from afar (mostly from the oldest sister Esperanza).

The findings relevant to research question 2—How does each member of the Latinx family make sense of their overall experience at a Los Angeles-area elite, predominantly White independent school?—delve deeper into some of the themes introduced in the first section (particularly with the negotiation of conflicting cultural models), though most of the findings shed light on the independent school's influence on each family member's sense of self and family. The themes that emerged from these findings include a limited sense of belonging to the cultural milieu of independent schools, the negative effects of the independent school experience on each daughter's perceptions of selves as learners, struggles specific to the first-generation

experience navigating college-going culture, influential relationships with faculty and staff, and conflicting feelings about the "cost" of independent school education.

With regard to the theme of a limited sense of belonging to the cultural milieu of independent schools, the findings offer a deeper understanding of the family's experiences with microaggressions, campus financial culture, commodification of language, tokenization, and toxic body image culture. A closer look at the similarities across all siblings revealed that they all felt confused by the sudden shift in course track placement once they transitioned to the independent school. All four siblings reported being "top of the class" at their previous public schools while being "middle of the pack" once they transitioned to Sunnydale. Before Sunnydale, daughters were taking advanced-level math, science, and language arts courses. When they transitioned to Sunnydale, they were shocked by standard-level placements into all core academic subjects except Spanish. Such drastic shifts in course placement triggered feelings of self-doubt, imposter phenomenon, and second-guessing their intellectual capability. There were also many similarities in the limited amount of support the family received during the college counseling process.

The most notable differences in the siblings' experiences across multiple spaces on campus (research question 2A) include the fact that for the Latinx family, sibling order plays a significant role in the way students navigate educational challenges. Furthermore, while all daughters experienced challenges with acclimation, a sense of belonging, and a healthy identity development to varying degrees, the first child to attend the independent school faced exponentially more of these challenges than her three younger siblings. These findings ultimately suggest that earlier entry points (starting independent school in the seventh grade versus the ninth) offer students more opportunities for social acclimation and a smoother transition overall.

Discussion of the Findings

The Reyes family's community cultural strength is strong. Their navigational capital stands out the most since every single member has had to navigate through issues that came up at various stages throughout their educational journey, specifically during their time at Sunnydale. The Reyes' aspirational capital served as major driving factor for Chris and Magdalena's pursuit of better educational opportunities and the daughters' drive to become a better generation than their parents. For every member of the family, their ability to navigate the independent school world as a first-generation, lower-income Latinx family demonstrated resistance capital to the extreme. While all forms of community cultural wealth presented themselves in the Reyeses stories, many moments of tension also existed within them. With the motivation that aspirational capital provided, it also brought on overwhelming pressures that the daughters felt. These pressures were exacerbated by being first-generation and often affected their mental and emotional health.

Tensions with Parent Aspirations: Balancing Inspiration and Stress

Lara-Alecio et al. (1997) found that Latinx parents of high-achieving, low-income, educationally disadvantaged children hold high expectations of their children, firmly believe in the educational system, and desire a strong link with their children's schools. High expectations align with the aspirational capital tenet of Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth and support that Latinx families care deeply about educational pursuits, contrary to popular belief (De Gaetano, 2007). This study's findings certainly align with the extant literature; however, the Reyes family's narratives offer a nuanced way of understanding the intersection of cultural expectations, familial aspirations, and individual agency.

The Reyes daughters' experiences reflect a dual-edged nature of aspirational capital. On one hand, the dreams of Chris and Magdalena for their daughters to surpass previous generations serve as a source of inspiration. Esperanza and Julia articulated the profound sense of purpose they derived from their parents' sacrifices and aspirations. For Esperanza, the "oldest-child burden" became an intrinsic motivator, compelling her to succeed not only for herself but as a role model for her younger sisters. Similarly, Julia internalized her parents' expectations that she and her sisters would be "one generation better" and felt the need to embody the success her parents envisioned.

However, these aspirations also became a source of immense pressure. Esperanza's assertion that she "cannot fail" reveals the psychological weight of being the first to attend college, a milestone that comes with implicit responsibilities and high stakes. Julia's accounts also assert that the pressure to excel as a first-generation college student created persistent tension. The daughters' internalization of their parents' goals highlights the powerful and complex interplay between cultural expectations and individual perception.

Tensions with Extended Family: Navigating External Expectations

Furthermore, the Reyes daughters' challenges were not confined to their immediate family. Extended family dynamics further complicated their journeys, revealing another layer of cultural negotiation. Esperanza's experiences as the first grandchild to attend college illustrate the unintended pressures that come with familial visibility. The metaphor of being "in a fishbowl" aptly captures her sense of hypervisibility and the constant scrutiny she felt from her extended family. Comments such as "You're finishing in three years! Wow, it must be so easy!" reflect a lack of understanding of the emotional and physical toll her achievements required.

While likely intended as praise, such remarks minimized her sacrifices and reinforced a sense of isolation.

Additionally, the comparison between Esperanza and her older cousin reveals hierarchies sometimes created within families when educational pathways diverge. Although Esperanza commended her cousin's success in trade school, her extended family's focus on her college journey positioned traditional educational plans as superior. This dynamic placed Esperanza in a difficult position: her accomplishments, while celebrated, unintentionally cast a shadow over her cousin's achievements and created a divide that she had to rationalize internally. Esperanza's ability to empathize with her cousin's path while simultaneously grappling with her pressures reflects the dual identities many first-generation students must negotiate.

Conflicting Cultural Models & the Family's Attachment to Them

On the part of the Latinx parents, successful navigation of the independent school world required a constant balance of breaking cycles of generational trauma while reinforcing various forms of cultural capital. Magdalena and Chris's journey as parents showcases an important theme: the need to adapt cultural parenting models to new generational contexts. For example, Magdalena's reflection on "*en esta casa yo mando*" (in this house, I rule) reflects a break from strict, authoritarian parenting styles in her upbringing. Similarly, Chris's effort to seek therapy and improve communication reflects his willingness to unlearn generational behaviors rooted in emotional distance and absence.

These narratives highlight the evolution of parenting among this first-generation Latinx family. The parents' recognition that traditional models of authority and sacrifice no longer served their daughters demonstrates their commitment to fostering environments of emotional and psychological support for their daughters.

Both parents' acknowledgment of generational trauma demonstrates a deeper understanding of how their past experiences shape present behaviors with their daughters. Chris's statement, "My parents are still not around," reveals the lingering effects of parental absence on his sense of identity and parenting approach. Meanwhile, Magdalena's reflection on the absurdity of "perfect attendance" awards signals a rejection of intergenerational expectations of perfectionism at the expense of well-being.

While they honored traditional Latinx values, such as the importance of family and education, they also sought to break free from ideologies that no longer served their children. For example, Magdalena's decision to empower her daughters to take breaks from schoolwork reflects an acknowledgment that the relentless pursuit of success can be detrimental. This balance between tradition and adaptation reflects the nuanced experience of Latinx families navigating upward mobility. It speaks to their ability to leverage social and navigational capital to chart new paths for their children while remaining grounded in their cultural heritage.

The Importance of Intersectionality in Understanding Microaggressions

The various examples of microaggressions that the Reyeses faced during their time at Sunnydale were sometimes very difficult to disentangle because the discrimination often involved various facets of identity at the same time, to varying degrees. For example, why Esperanza got asked how she could afford to attend a school like Sunnydale—while in many ways a microaggression of class—was also a microaggression of race because the question was asked because of how she looked. Many of the microaggressions she faced were also very gendered (tan color, hair texture, etc.) Therefore, it is important to think about elements of race, gender, and class and how they intersect in a way that elaborates on one another to create structural systems of oppression within the independent school.

Extent data reveals that students of color (SOC) experience surprising amounts of ignorance, intolerance, and hostility from peers (Blackburn & Wise, 2009; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; McGill, 2003). While this held true for the participants in my study, the same was true when they attended predominantly Latinx schools. For example, three of the four daughters reported having experienced some type of bullying in elementary and middle school. For Esperanza, it was for being too smart, loving to read, and not developing (physically) as quickly as some of her peers. For Riley, it was for wearing glasses and for her body type. The "surprise" element for my participants was not necessarily in the amount of ignorance, intolerance, and hostility, but in the different types. Once at Sunnydale, the ignorance, intolerance, and hostility they faced shifted to a hyperfocus on their ethnicity, yes, but also on their lower socioeconomic status.

I was not surprised to learn that issues of race and class exist at Sunnydale. In fact, because of the extant literature—which states that for Latinx students, predominantly White schools often prove to be hostile racial climates and may amplify one's awareness of racial and socioeconomic dynamics—I had come to expect it (DeCuir-Gunby, 2012; Yosso et al., 2010). However, what I found interesting was the fact that the Reyes family appeared to have the hardest time making sense of the financial culture and class differences at Sunnydale. Throughout the study, both mom and dad kept saying "families like ours." When I asked both parents to define specifically the qualities that comprise "families like theirs", both of them immediately mentioned "families of the same socioeconomic background" first before "families who are Latinx." The prioritization of socioeconomic background over ethnic identity suggests that, for Chris and Magdalena, financial or class-based experiences serve as a more immediate lens through which they connect with others. It also suggests that socioeconomic status may feel

more directly impactful in their day-to-day lives at Sunnydale. While the parents highlighted socioeconomic identity first, it is possible that this prioritization does not diminish the importance of their ethnic identity but rather reflects a nuanced integration of the two. For example, shared socioeconomic struggles or successes within the Latinx community could form a cohesive identity where economic status and cultural heritage are interwoven rather than separate.

Similarly, each of the daughters mentioned feeling more out of place because of their class differences than race or ethnicity. The culture played a significant role in their hyper-fixation on class. Since they attended a school where most students come from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, the class divide was thus more visible and became a pressing point of difference compared to race or ethnicity. Esperanza's feelings about the Latinx student affinity group at Sunnydale help underscore this concept further. While she shared an ethnic identity with most students there, the interplay of mixed-racial identities and class differences among her Latinx peers hindered genuine connections with them.

My findings also revealed that reminders of financial disparity are deeply embedded in campus climate and present themselves daily in multiple interactions and spaces on campus. The Reyes siblings experienced multiple injuries of class due to a pervasive layer of obliviousness on the part of teachers, college counselors, and peers. For example, ice breaker questions such as, "Where will your family be traveling for break?" operate under the assumption that most families can and will travel during vacation time, and the fact that students are put on the spot, expected to share with other peers, constitutes a form of public shaming. This obliviousness or lack of sensitivity can cause just as much injury as the more obvious examples of classism, such as the stereotypes around students who are on financial aid.

I noticed two very salient things going on with every story the Reyes daughters shared about financial culture at school. The first was that an exorbitant amount of energy was put into explaining their financial situations on campus, sometimes in semi-public environments like the classroom or lunch areas. The second was that each daughter made sure to remind me, the interviewer (and themselves, really), that they were, in fact, financially secure. It was also heartwarming to hear how each daughter expressed pride in what their parents did for a living and immense gratitude for the many ways they have provided for them over the years. The family's pride in their cultural heritage demonstrates their ability to resist racist and classist messages and stems from a combination of family values, cultural traditions, and a broader sense of Latinx solidarity. The findings here situate the Reyes family's experiences within broader discussions of intersectionality, resilience, and identity that provide a framework for understanding how marginalized families navigate and integrate complex layers of belonging.

The Significance of Sibling Order for First-Generation Multi-Sibling Latinx Families

There is something to the adage: those who are the first to break through barriers receive the most cuts and bruises. This was certainly the case with Esperanza Reyes. She was the first to navigate the many school changes along her educational journey. She was part of the first cohort of students to enroll in the Sunnydale Scholastic Program. She was the first student from that program and her family to attend Sunnydale. My findings suggest that sibling order plays a significant role in the way students navigate the challenges of independent school life. The first child to attend the independent school faces exponentially more challenges with acclimation, sense of belonging, and mental health than younger siblings.

Esperanza's experiences provided her entire family with the first round of data and lessons learned that would benefit each member of her family as they navigated the journeys of

her younger siblings. She also suffered the most discrimination, isolation, frustration, exploitation, and tokenization. Thus, it is not surprising that Esperanza's experience is so polarly opposite to her youngest sister, Riley's. After all, Esperanza began Sunnydale with far less social capital than her sisters. Riley, the youngest, had three sisters who had navigated Sunnydale before she even set foot on campus. Esperanza had no one; she was the very first one. The three younger sisters (Sophie, Julia, and Riley) all supported each other in daily, interpersonal ways such as sharing car rides and processing highs and lows from their day at home. Since Esperanza navigated the first three years of her Sunnydale experience devoid of any sisters familiar with the culture, she had no one at home to process her days with. In turn, she resorted to isolating and keeping many of the details of her experiences hidden. Furthermore, even though Esperanza's younger sisters didn't have the closest relationship with Esperanza, they still benefitted from seeing someone in their family navigate the independent school space before them.

Esperanza's younger siblings, Riley in particular, also benefitted from having a mom on Sunnydale's board of directors. Magdalena's presence on the board provided security in the family's social capital on campus, which Esperanza did without. It's no coincidence that the youngest Reyes sibling, Riley, feels safe to be as outspoken as she wants to be on campus. Riley's narratives reflected a comfort with speaking out against racism from peers or correcting a teacher for misnaming her.

Esperanza, on the other hand, resorted to silence as a coping strategy. She preferred to stay quiet about things to "protect [her] peace." Parents Chris and Magdalena also expressed confusion surrounding their limited ability to help Esperanza. Many times, Esperanza didn't ask for help or begged her parents not to say anything to the school because she didn't want to be noticed any more than she already had been.

Sophie's (daughter 2) educational journey mirrored her older sister's in many ways: both switched schools often at their parents' request to pursue better opportunities, both experienced challenges during the transition to Sunnydale, and both appreciated the opportunities that Sunnydale afforded. However, despite the similarities, there were many differences that are key in understanding the factors that impacted this Latinx family. For starters, they are completely different people. By virtue of their individuality, their perceptions of the experiences they encountered (racism, microaggressions, etc.) are prone to different interpretations. Sophie's natural curiosity for science, combined with a natural inclination for speaking up against injustices, has allowed her to navigate her educational environments much differently than her sisters.

Another major difference between Esperanza's and her younger siblings' experience is that their entry points at Sunnydale differed. Esperanza started in ninth grade, while Sophie, Julia, and Riley entered in seventh. All members of the family acknowledged that Esperanza had the hardest time transitioning to ninth grade. Siblings and parents alike acknowledged that transitioning to Sunnydale in the seventh grade was easier because social dynamics and "cliques" were less solidified in seventh grade than in ninth and therefore easier to navigate.

Lastly, the knowledge that their parents had gained from Esperanza's experiences influenced how they supported the other daughters. For example, after witnessing Esperanza's struggles during the college application process, Magdalena found Sophie an outside tutor to help with SAT prep and general college guidance. She was also able to help Sophie navigate the application fee waiver process after learning from Esperanza's experience.

Sunnydale's Changing Campus Culture & Esperanza's Role in It

It is worth noting that another major difference in Reyes daughter's experiences could be the changing campus culture at Sunnydale. Since 2016 (Esperanza's first year at Sunnydale), the school has invested in multiple DEI efforts. These include hiring more teachers of color, developing a more robust DEI department, and providing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. Many of these efforts stemmed from commitments to DEI work common across many California independent schools at the time, but especially after the waves of social reckoning that swept the nation after the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and countless other people of color at the hands of police authorities in 2020. Compounded by the social inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the social and historical events of the time forced Sunnydale and many other independent schools across the country to take a close, hard look at their racist pasts and inspired them to carve a new path forward. Sunnydale was also one of many independent schools mentioned in the #Blackat social media movement, where many students, parents, alumni, and faculty took to Instagram to document their experiences of racism and discrimination endured at Sunnydale.

When looking at the Reyes family's timeline at Sunnydale along these significant social and historical events, we see that by 2020, Esperanza was graduating from Sunnydale, Sophie was in the 10th grade, Julia was in the 8th grade, Riley had not yet transferred. This data indicates that Esperanza would have benefitted the least from the school's DEI efforts, while Riley (who entered in 2022) would have entered a much different campus culture and climate—one where careful and intentional efforts had been made to address inequities for marginalized students. It's unsurprising, then, to find out that Riley's relationship with the campus was significantly more positive than the rest of her sisters. Regardless, there were still many instances of discrimination that she faced (racial microaggressions from peers, misnaming from teachers, and toxic body

image culture), which hint at the fact that while much progress has been made at Sunnydale since Esperanza's entry year in 2016, there is still a long way to go.

It is also worth noting that Esperanza played a significant role in the cultural shifts at Sunnydale in numerous ways. By belonging to the first cohort of the Sunnydale Scholastic Program and being one of first students from SSP to matriculate to Sunnydale School, she played a fundamental role in changing the culture of the campus not just for her sisters but for every other student like her following in her footsteps. Her SSP peer, Nancy, dropped out of Sunnydale in 10th grade, so in that regard, Esperanza was the first and only (first-generation, lower-income, Latina) SSP public school transfer to graduate from Sunnydale. Esperanza referenced herself as a "test subject" for Sunnydale, and in many ways, she was. Both Sunnydale and SSP benefitted from the cultural enrichment she brought to the school, and they also benefitted from the lessons learned from her experience. Though she (and Sunnydale) may not have realized it then, Esperanza's role in shaping Sunnydale's new, more inclusive campus culture was paramount. I hope Esperanza's narratives and the implications from this study (detailed in a subsequent section) help Sunnydale and SSP recognize what more can be done to ensure a smoother transition and overall experience for other (SSP) students like Esperanza.

Misrecognition vs. Microaggression

Misrecognition is the act of labeling or making assumptions about someone in ways which do not accord with the person's self-identity. Misrecognition is very similar to racism—and sometimes seen as a form of racism—in that both are forms of injustice that thwart identity formation, generate disrespect and humiliation, and communicate that a person does not belong (Xie et al., 2021). Misrecognition played a role in the story about Esperanza being asked to translate for Sunnydale during their entire service-learning trip to Mexico. Because Esperanza

was Latina and bilingual, she was assumed to be the perfect person to translate. This assumption exposed an underlying belief in the trip organizers and her peers that if someone is bilingual, then translation must come naturally to them. Other examples of misrecognition in the Reyes' storied include the misnaming by teachers and the assumptions that the Reyes daughters were related to other Latinx students on campus. These stories do no operate exclusively as either microaggressions or misrecognition; instead, they can be both at the same time. The narratives shared by the Reyes family reveal the complexity and nuance in these forms of discrimination, where the line between the two is hard to see, but the impacts they have hurt just the same.

Educational Shocks: Educational Rigor, Course Track Placement, and Pedagogy

The existing literature explains that students of color are often stereotyped as being poor and on financial aid, and they may also be presumed less capable and, therefore, somehow less deserving (Blackburn & Wise, 2009). The data notes that low GPAs for Black and Latinx students are partly due to the fact that those students get placed into standard-level math and science classes at much higher rates than their White or Asian-American counterparts (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Johnson, 2014). Harris & Marcucci (2021) also found that students receiving financial aid had lower GPAs than their full-paying, non-SOC peers partially due to the relatively lower number of honors, AP, and advanced-level SOC get placed into. The data revealed by the Reyes siblings coincides with this data. All Reyes siblings experienced drastic shifts in course track placements and class ranking once they transitioned from public school to independent school, which significantly altered their perceptions of themselves as learners. One main question that emerged is how those tracks were determined for them upon enrollment, especially since they all reported being in advanced-level tracks in most subject areas prior to attending Sunnydale. A closer look into the placement processes at independent schools

for transfer students might highlight some reasons or equity gaps in current placement practices and policies.

As for the data that revealed that students receiving financial aid had lower GPA's than their full-paying counterparts, this, too, proved to be true across all four siblings. In fact, every member of the Reyes family—daughters and parents alike—reported confusion around the fact that the daughters went from being "top of the class" at their public schools to "middle of the pack" once they arrived at Sunnydale. While this may have to do with underlying institutional stereotypes and biases like the extant data suggests, the Reyes family also reported that their lower economic status played a major part in setting their daughters apart from their full-paying peers. For example, most students at Sunnydale had access to private tutors and individual SAT prep, whereas the Reyes family did not. Magdalena even noted that once at Sunnydale, her daughters competed with peers who had access to a wide range of outside, costly academic support. Furthermore, as a first-generation family navigating the competitive college-going culture of the independent school world for the first time, they reported that they often didn't know what they should do to remain competitive in the college application landscape.

There's also the fact that since the daughters were doing "fine" in their classes, teachers never really saw the need to address any academic concerns. While this might be true, it's important to note that for the Reyes daughters, being in the "middle of the pack" was not the norm, and without anyone at Sunnydale being privy to that knowledge, the family adopted a "this must be how it is here" mentality and accepted it as their new normal. Sophie, the second oldest daughter who started Sunnydale in the seventh grade, mentioned that she eventually earned placement into advanced science and math classes once she transitioned to high school at Sunnydale. However, for the third daughter, Julia, the transition to advanced-level classes did not

happen as she had intended once she transitioned to high school at Sunnydale. Julia and her parents only recently started wondering if learning differences might be why Julia seems to be having a more difficult time academically than the rest of her sisters. But again, because she was doing "fine" and teachers had only known her as such during her time at Sunnydale, the recommendation for testing came mostly from Julia self-reporting to her parents that "the learning wasn't coming to [her] the same way it used to."

Also worth noting is the fact that all of the Reyes daughters did, in fact, earn advanced placement into one class immediately upon enrolling at Sunnydale: Spanish. As explored in Chapter 4 and this chapter, the theme of misrecognition has come up quite a bit in the context of language (Spanish) for most of the Reyes daughters. It's worth noting that misrecognition may have been a factor in the fact that all daughters were so readily placed in advanced-level Spanish classes while they were not placed on advanced tracks in other core academic classes like science, math, and English. In addition to reviewing placement policies and procedures, it would be greatly beneficial for independent schools to closely examine possible underlying biases in placement practices and policies that may contribute to misrecognition and, in effect, inequitable placement practices for incoming Latinx students.

The extant data on students of color at independent schools also point to other curricular and pedagogical factors that may play a significant role in low GPAs and test scores: inappropriate instructional approaches, culturally unresponsive curricula, and social contexts that are not conducive to learning for all racial and class groups (Arrington et al., 2003; DeCuir-Gunby, 2007; Johnson, 2014; McGill, 2003). For example, DeCuir & Dixson (2004) found that at predominantly White schools, the voices of African-American students were often ignored or othered in class. Students of color also report feeling a significant divide in student-teacher

relationships due to only feeling somewhat comfortable when they ask for help (Johnson, 2014). Of my four participants, only one (Julia, the third oldest) felt this way when it came to a male White teacher who had a profound and lasting negative impact when it came to asking for help in math. Otherwise, there wasn't a sense that they felt their voices were ignored in classroom spaces. The younger two daughters, Julia and Riley, did indicate that they had been misnamed by teachers and confused for other Latina students. The misnaming, oftentimes happening in front of other peers in class, resulted in feelings of embarrassment, confusion, and frustration. If they felt uncomfortable, it was because of the multiple layers of identity negotiation with an authority figure (as detailed in Chapter 4) and not necessarily because they felt their voices were not being heard.

The Conundrum of an Independent School Education: Academic Preparation vs. Admissions Outcomes

Sophie and Esperanza's experiences with the college application process highlight a paradox faced by many first-generation Latinx students in elite independent schools. Both students revealed that Sunnydale's rigorous curriculum and academic culture prepared them well for the intellectual demands of higher education. However, they also expressed that attending Sunnydale made them less competitive in the college admissions landscape which heavily weighs factors beyond academic preparedness. This tension highlights an often-overlooked challenge of independent schools: their students, despite being highly capable, may struggle to stand out compared to public school peers who benefit from policies favoring top-ranked students from less-resourced schools.

The sisters' frustration was magnified by their comparisons with peers from public schools, many of whom got into top-tier schools that the Reyes siblings did not. These

comparisons shed light on systemic disparities in evaluating and rewarding accomplishments. For example, using weighted GPAs, school rank, and contextual admissions practices often benefits students from public schools over those from independent institutions where rank may not be reported, and GPAs may not appear as inflated. These systemic differences result in disparities that feel unjust to students like Sophie and Esperanza, who perceive their academic excellence as being overshadowed by institutional context.

The psychological impact of this conundrum is evident in the sisters' experiences. Their continued contact with public school peers made it difficult to reconcile with their parents' decision to send them to Sunnydale. The feelings of disappointment and disillusionment stemming from these comparisons can have long-term implications for students' perceptions of fairness and meritocracy, particularly in the context of educational achievement. The paradox faced by Sophie and Esperanza presents a critical challenge for independent school education. While such schools excel in fostering academic excellence, they must also grapple with the inequities of a college admissions system that does not uniformly value this excellence.

Despite the challenges this paradox presented while the siblings were applying for college, they eventually made peace with it once they had reached college. Both siblings revealed that once they entered the college classroom, learning came easily to them, and they didn't feel like they were "drowning." Sophie reported feeling ahead of most of her peers, and Esperanza credited most of her academic success at UC Santa Cruz to the academic preparation she received at Sunnydale. While their experiences navigating the college application process at Sunnydale drew doubt about their academic competitiveness, the sisters seemed to regain that confidence tenfold once they entered the college environment. The fact that Esperanza graduated

in three years and Sophie is on track to do the same illustrates that the paradox was (as mom Magdalena put it) “worth it in the long run.”

Tokenization in Marketing and Philanthropy Efforts

The story Esperanza shared about the SSP promotional video being shown at a school assembly and Magdalena’s account of being asked to speak at a fundraiser gala provides a rich foundation for analyzing the dynamics of tokenization at Sunnydale, particularly in the context of marketing efforts. Their narratives reveal the dual-edged nature of such practices: while they can amplify awareness of and support programs that do a lot of good, they also risk dehumanizing individuals by reducing them to symbols of need or struggle.

In Esperanza’s experience with the SSP promotional video, SSP undoubtedly sought to celebrate its mission of providing opportunities to underrepresented students. However, the language and imagery in the video inadvertently reinforced a deficit-based narrative. While factually accurate, terms like “low-income families” and “first-generation students” became labels that overshadowed Esperanza’s individuality and achievements. Furthermore, the repeated annual showcasing of video in such a public forum only amplified her sense of exclusion at Sunnydale, a space where she was already navigating feelings of not belonging.

From a marketing perspective, the SSP video serves a strategic function: it underscores the program’s impact and appeals to stakeholders who value its mission. However, framing this impact through Esperanza’s identity highlights the ethical tension in marketing narratives. By centering her face and experience, the video unintentionally positioned her as a “success story” defined primarily by her socioeconomic background, rather than as a multifaceted individual. This type of representation, while effective in evoking emotional responses and support, risks alienating the very individuals it seeks to celebrate.

Magdalena's account of her time on Sunnydale's Board of Directors similarly reveals the complexities of tokenism within institutional inclusion efforts. Her appointment to the Board symbolized progress—a literal and figurative "seat at the table" for her family and community. Yet, the request to share deeply personal financial information for fundraising purposes exposed the limitations of her inclusion. The implied expectation of public gratitude and narrative-sharing positioned her as a representative of need rather than as an equal participant with agency and dignity. This dynamic reflects a broader pattern in which marginalized individuals are included in institutional spaces under conditions that reinforce their perceived differences.

Magdalena's rejection of the request to share her story—a decision ultimately validated by the Board's successful fundraising efforts—highlights the tension between representation and exploitation. Her resistance underscores the importance of ensuring that inclusion efforts are meaningful and respectful, rather than transactional or symbolic. These marketing practices may achieve short-term objectives, but they also risk undermining the principles of equity and inclusion that Sunnydale and programs like SSP aim to uphold.

Methodological Insights

My committee and I put much careful thought and consideration into this study's research design because we knew that this project was going to be deeply personal and had the potential to connect with my participants in profound ways. The methods in this study helped facilitate a research approach that centered the Brown individual by introducing nuanced modes of inquiry that focused on epistemological wholeness, healing, and transformation (Huber et al., 2004). Each carefully selected method helped me take on less of an authoritative role as a researcher and instead cultivated collective engagement with the Reyes family that ultimately produced the multiple deep and meaningful narratives shared on these pages. All of the

methodologies used for this study, rooted in Critical Race Feminista Methodology, worked in tandem with Person-Centered Ethnography to achieve what Magdalena described as a desire to be "[recognized] as a community, but also for our individuality." With each phase, much care was put into constructing experiences in which the Reyes family would be the tellers of their own stories. It was crucial to provide them with as much agency as possible for our collaboration to be genuine and effective. Going into data collection, I expected the method design to produce rich data for this study, but I didn't anticipate how profoundly and personally valuable it would be to the Reyeses as well.

Education Journey Maps

The education journey maps allowed for all members to both reflect and self-discover. Julia (daughter 3) gained so much confidence by revisiting past academic success and realizing her capability despite current academic struggles. Magdalena found reassurance and grace in her parenting journey by reflecting on the family's progress and her learning to accept moments of pain as part of the process. Perhaps the most touching reflection came from dad Chris, who at first didn't think he had the capacity to ever reflect on his family's journey so profoundly. The pride he exuded as he told the story of how he was working to understand his daughters better was palpable, and he articulated that he gained renewed confidence in his ability to support his children: "This exercise has taught me that we're all right. We're going to get through it."

Walking Interviews

The walking interviews allowed me to beautifully capture each daughter's relationship with the campus in ways I don't think I could have achieved with traditional interviews. For example, many of the nuances that surfaced around the campus' financial culture stemmed from these interviews. Similarly, this method allowed the Reyes sisters to physically and emotionally

engage with the campus environment in ways that fostered healing. For example, all four walking interviews elicited stories about their grandmother, Elena, which revealed how the daughters processed their grandmother's passing within the context of their educational experiences.

The walking interview proved to be most impactful for Esperanza, who clearly had the most traumatic relationship with Sunnydale and who had sworn that she'd "never go back there." The recollections of her best moments, such as the role Dr. L played in her life, were met with tears, which I interpreted as happy tears or perhaps tears of gratitude. Nevertheless, the fact that Esperanza laughed when retelling the difficult moments and cried when reliving the good ones suggested that she had gained a newfound perspective on her experiences at Sunnydale or that, at the very least, our walking interview was the first step in helping her achieve catharsis around her experiences there.

Artifact-Driven Interviews

The artifact-driven interviews allowed parents Chris and Esperanza to reflect on their familial and individual growth over time. Many of the findings surrounding parent supports, negotiating cultural models, and breaking cycles of generational trauma were generated during this phase. Furthermore, by connecting past artifacts to present identities, they were able to see connections between the daughters' younger selves and current selves. These connections both affirmed and reaffirmed notions of their daughters that they had identified in earlier years. For example, they noticed that Sophie (daughter 2) had always possessed a natural inclination to speak out against unfair things–a quality they then connected to the ways she spoke up for the maintenance staff at Sunnydale.

Healing

Ultimately, the methods in the study allowed the Reyeses to heal from many of the individual and collective hurts they harbored. Esperanza overcame resentment and gained perspective on her sisters' struggles, finding common ground and reducing feelings of isolation. Chris found validation in his role as a father, achieving a sense of accomplishment and closure through the various reflections. In our individual wrap-up meeting, Magdalena shared: "Every time you leave, I reflect on how therapeutic and insightful this has all been for me." She then joked, "I almost want you to fail so we can continue meeting and talking!"

Recommendations and Implications for Independent Schools

The Complexity of Cultural Negotiation

The Reyes siblings' stories are emblematic of the challenges faced by many first-generation students who must reconcile their heritage values with the demands of a dominant culture that prioritizes certain forms of success. The daughters' journeys illustrate the tension between aspirational capital—derived from the family's hope for upward mobility—and the emotional and mental toll of meeting those aspirations.

Furthermore, these narratives highlight the ways in which cultural capital is not monolithic but deeply contextual. While the Reyes family's values around education propelled the daughters forward, these same values became a source of stress when layered with external expectations and comparisons. This duality underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how cultural capital operates within families and across generations.

The Reyes family's story is a powerful testament to the resilience of first-generation students and the intricate dynamics of family and cultural expectations. For the daughters, education became both a tool of empowerment and a source of tension, requiring them to negotiate multiple identities and allegiances. Their experiences remind us of the importance of

supporting first-generation students academically and emotionally, as they navigate the often invisible pressures of being cultural trailblazers. By understanding these complexities, educators, policymakers, and families can work together to create environments that honor both cultural heritage and individual well-being.

College-Going Culture

The Reyes family's reflections about their college application experience offer a compelling critique of the college-going culture at Sunnydale. Sunnydale's intense college-going culture represents how independent schools, intentionally or not, cultivate high-pressure atmospheres around college admissions. For families like the Reyes, who may hold different cultural perspectives or lack the same resources as their peers, this environment can exacerbate feelings of exclusion or inadequacy. By prioritizing prestige, Sunnydale's culture fosters stress and competition rather than growth and inclusivity, which can limit its potential to serve as a space of equitable opportunity.

Institutional practices, such as the preference for elite placement, likely reinforce these dynamics. Schools are responsible for reframing the narrative around success, promoting diverse pathways, and reducing the stigma around non-traditional choices, like community colleges or financially pragmatic options. Efforts to foster open conversations about fit, affordability, and long-term goals could help mitigate the toxic pressures described by the Reyes family. By interrogating how this culture prioritizes prestige and reinforces inequities, educators and policymakers can begin to dismantle the structures that perpetuate stress and exclusion.

College Counseling Practices

Independent schools are responsible for supporting first-generation, lower-income Latinx families like the Reyeses in navigating the complex college admissions process. The Reyes'

narratives illustrate the need for more robust support structures to promote equitable access to higher education for families like theirs. The findings suggest that schools must adopt proactive, transparent, and inclusive approaches to college counseling, particularly regarding financial aid education. Sophie's story emphasizes the need for robust support structures, such as detailed workshops or step-by-step instruction, to demystify processes like FAFSA and provide clear guidance on accessing financial resources like fee waivers. For many first-generation families, navigating financial aid is as critical as academic preparation, and failing to address these needs exacerbates systemic inequities.

The reflections from mom Magdalena underscore the importance of engaging families in meaningful dialogue. She suggests that independent schools should actively seek feedback, particularly from multi-sibling, first-generation families, to identify gaps in support and refine their counseling strategies. This includes asking reflective, sometimes uncomfortable questions about where the system failed families and tracking long-term outcomes—such as college retention and graduation rates—to ensure students thrive beyond admission. This approach not only fosters trust but also demonstrates an authentic commitment to addressing the unique challenges of first-generation students.

Creating a school culture that explicitly values diversity and inclusivity is vital. Addressing the stigma that financial aid students often face can empower families and students to engage more confidently in the college process. For instance, reducing the sense of shame Esperanza experienced requires fostering an environment where financial aid is normalized and celebrated as part of the school's mission to promote equity rather than an isolated need affecting only a marginalized few.

By integrating systemic reforms like active family engagement and cultural inclusivity, independent schools can better serve first-generation, lower-income Latinx families. This holistic approach ensures that these students are not only admitted to college but are set up for long-term success, both financially and academically.

Community Outreach Programs

Esperanza's experience in SSP illuminates the double-edged nature of programs that support underrepresented or marginalized students. On one hand, SSP provided her with opportunities and support that were critical to her academic growth and development. On the other hand, the public sharing of her identity in relation to her socioeconomic background and first-generation status exposed her to feelings of tokenization and vulnerability. This tension between empowerment and marginalization is emblematic of broader systemic issues in how access-oriented programs are marketed and implemented.

Esperanza's narrative underscores the need for institutions to evaluate how they communicate about access programs critically. Celebrating diversity and achievement must be balanced with sensitivity to the lived experiences of participants. Institutions should consider whether their messaging fosters genuine inclusion or inadvertently reinforces marginalization by framing students in ways that prioritize their background over their individuality. A shift toward more asset-based narratives, where students are celebrated for their unique strengths and contributions rather than solely for overcoming barriers, could mitigate the sense of tokenization and foster a more empowering environment.

Thus, independent schools must understand that when trying to make these efforts to diversify, they need to be ethical about it and not just do it to meet a political agenda. They have to be intentional about how they do it so that then when the "firsts" arrive on campus, they know

exactly what they are walking into. Organizations must do their due diligence by critically assessing whether their marketing strategies align with their stated values of equity and inclusion. This involves asking whether the storytelling practices genuinely honor the dignity and complexity of the individuals involved.

Broader Marketing Efforts

Esperanza's experience with SSP and Magdalena's story about being asked to speak at the Sunnydale fundraising gala also unveil key considerations independent schools might want to consider in their marketing efforts. For one, schools should avoid language and imagery that emphasize challenges or deficits, such as socioeconomic status, but instead develop narratives that celebrate individual strengths, resilience, and achievements. This shift can help avoid reinforcing stereotypes or perpetuating feelings of exclusion. Another recommendation would be for schools to prioritize consent and collaboration when featuring individuals in marketing campaigns. Ensuring that participants have full agency over how their stories are told can mitigate feelings of exploitation and tokenism. Lastly, institutions can adopt a more collective approach to storytelling rather than focusing on a single individual or family to represent an entire program or community. Highlighting diverse experiences can foster a more inclusive and nuanced narrative.

Honoring Linguistic Capital, Not Exploiting It

Esperanza's experience with translating for SS on the Mexico service-learning trip revealed much to be done regarding recognizing and honoring linguistic capital Latinx students bring to independent schools. If the expectation is that they are going to rely on Latinx students to serve in translator roles, then independent schools need to figure out ways to adequately support and compensate them. One example would be to award them extra community service

hours because of the additional labor that translating entails. Esperanza's role far surpassed the level of participation other students were doing, and for her to receive the same number of community hours as the other students seems relatively unfair. Another way schools can honor student translators is by creating leadership positions (such as "language ambassadors") that they would then be able to include on their college applications.

Being bilingual and being able to navigate two different worlds is a special skill that most bilingual Latinx students possess. However, to assume that their bilingualism automatically qualifies them to translate is problematic. Translating is a specialized skill many professionals dedicate years of careful study to master. If opportunities for students to translate at school-sanctioned events exist, then proper supports also need to be implemented. They can range anywhere from faculty mentors who have more experience with translation and can teach practical translation skills, to hiring outside vendors to provide specialized training in translation for students. Understandably, these added measures may not be feasible for all schools (due to logistics, budgets, etc.). In those cases, bilingual students should not be expected to translate, and schools must instead find alternative ways of satisfying that need.

However, if independent schools are willing to invest in the development of language ambassador programs, the benefits for Latinx students would be immeasurable. The mere investment in honoring and developing a student's linguistic capital sends the message (both overtly and subtly) that the school recognizes, respects, and values their bilingualism. It conveys that they matter to the school community in unique and special ways.

Limitations

This study's design, conducted at a single school site, inherently limits its generalizability to broader contexts. While the findings provide rich, contextual insights into the experiences of

one first-generation, lower-income, Latinx family in one Los Angeles-area independent school, these insights are grounded in the unique cultural, social, and institutional dynamics of the particular site studied. Therefore, the implications are primarily intended for similar independent schools within the greater Los Angeles region, and any extrapolation beyond this scope should be approached with caution.

The uniqueness of each school's culture, shaped by its traditions, community, and learning environment, further underscores the need for site-specific research before applying the study's findings to other contexts. A "one-size-fits-all" approach risks oversimplifying or misrepresenting the nuanced realities of Latinx families and students in independent schools. While some findings—particularly those concerning forms of cultural wealth—may resonate with broader Latinx communities, others are deeply tied to the specific experiences of Latina students at this site. It is also critical to recognize that the narratives of the female Latinx students in this study may not fully represent broader gendered experiences within the Latinx community.

Despite these limitations, there is significant potential for broader application of specific findings. For instance, the forms of cultural wealth employed by Latinx families to support their children's persistence and graduation from independent schools have far-reaching implications. These findings benefit Latinx families and contribute to shaping diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in educational contexts. By shifting from a deficit-oriented framework to one that emphasizes cultural assets, this study aligns with and supports emerging research advocating for an asset-based approach to Latinx family engagement in education (Kallio, et al., 2023; Martinez et al., 2020).

This research is particularly relevant for independent school administrators seeking to support first-generation Latinx families better. The focus on cultural wealth offers actionable

insights for fostering inclusive educational environments that respect and integrate the cultural strengths of Latinx families. While the findings from this study are highly contextualized, they offer both localized insights and broader contributions to the field of education. Researchers and practitioners should approach the application of these findings with an understanding of the specific cultural and institutional contexts involved. Further research in diverse school settings will be essential to validate and extend these insights, particularly as they relate to varying Latinx experiences and intersections of identity within the independent school landscape.

Future Research

Several avenues for future research can deepen our understanding of the experiences of Latinx families and other marginalized groups in independent schools. The insights gained from this research highlight the importance of moving beyond broad generalizations and embracing more person-centered, context-specific approaches to educational inquiry. The recommendations outlined below inspire further investigation into the multifaceted challenges and opportunities within independent school environments, focusing on advancing equity and inclusivity for all students and families.

First, I encourage future research that prioritizes understanding the family experience at independent schools through introspective, person-centered studies. Such research, particularly when focused on diverse, marginalized, or minoritized groups, can help school leaders gain a deeper understanding of the complex and multidimensional needs of their student populations. This approach enables leaders to move beyond "one-size-fits-all" solutions and embrace the contradictions and nuances unique to each campus.

Additionally, comparative studies exploring the experiences of Latinx students across different genders could yield valuable insights. While this study amplified the voices of Latina

students, further research could investigate the similarities and differences in experiences across genders, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the Latinx experience in independent schools.

Longitudinal research is also essential. In my study, Esperanza's perception of her independent school education shifted after attending and graduating from college. Long-term studies examining the impact of independent school education on college performance, outcomes, and self-perception among Latinx students would provide critical insights to college counseling departments at independent schools. The data could further inform efforts to support first-generation Latinx students more effectively.

Similarly, research into how college counseling departments understand and support first-generation Latinx students would be valuable. This focus could help independent schools develop more tailored strategies to guide families navigating the competitive college admissions landscape.

Marketing practices at independent schools also warrant exploration. Research examining how schools market to and represent diverse populations, particularly about philanthropic missions, could illuminate the complexities of independent school campuses, especially regarding wealth and class disparities.

Studies that further explore the role of sibling order might also inform schools about the different support needs of siblings within multi-sibling households. The findings from those studies could inform independent schools about the varying support needs of siblings from all families, not just Latinx ones.

Moreover, studies examining the financial culture of independent schools and its impact on lower SES students and families could provide critical insights into how economic disparities

shape student experiences. Such research could uncover ways financial culture unintentionally marginalizes or re-injures lower-income students.

Finally, research into misrecognition as a form of racism within independent school spaces could reveal how racism manifests in subtle, often overlooked ways. Misrecognition, stemming from a lack of awareness rather than deliberate intent, can result in significant harm. For instance, although well-meaning, activities like icebreakers about vacation plans or concerts can unintentionally spotlight students' socioeconomic differences, isolating and othering them. By studying these dynamics, schools can gain a more nuanced understanding of their racial climate and work to mitigate the unintended consequences of misrecognition.

Through these lines of inquiry, future research can contribute to a more equitable and inclusive understanding of the independent school experience, benefiting Latinx families and other marginalized communities navigating similar educational environments.

Conclusion

Individual stories matter, and the most substantial data about how to serve Latinx families lies in those stories, in those details. Independent schools must operate from a place of getting to know our families at this level first before they can declare that they are supporting Latinxs across the board. They cannot start from general (often misguided) perceptions of who Latinx families are and what they need, and then assume that support efforts are going to trickle down and impact individual families in positive ways. They need to start at the individual family level—to understand the hopes, dreams, fears, and needs of the Latinx families who set foot on their campuses—and then work their way up. Only then will they be able to know and declare with certainty that they are indeed serving through understanding.

This entire project has been just as emotional and cathartic for me as it has been for the Reyes family. Every time I left an interview with them, I felt both intellectually invigorated and emotionally exhausted. I saw so much of myself in the Reyes daughters, and their struggles were struggles that I myself endured during my own experiences as a first-generation, lower-income, Latinx student attending a private high school in L.A. over twenty years ago. Their strength, drive, and determination to "make things work" are the same qualities my own family adopted to help me navigate the private school world. There was real beauty in recognizing those shared experiences, but there was also anger and frustration in seeing that the same struggles persist for first-generation, lower-income, Latinx families navigating L.A.-area independent schools today. In high school, I sometimes felt ashamed for being Latino, then felt ashamed for being ashamed—all the layers of shame that a predominantly White school can make a student of color feel. Today, I am filled only with pride in who I am and who I represent. I am my grandmother's grandson and my mother's son, and it is on the shoulders of my ancestors that I was able to reach this milestone. It was an honor and a privilege to end my educational journey with the Reyes family, to capture their stories, and to elevate their voices in the field of education. My success is their success, and their success will be someone else's one day, and so it goes. *Adelante con La Cruz.*

APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email for Participants

Dear [Name],

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at UCLA and an administrator/teacher at Sunnydale School dedicated to improving the educational experiences of our Latino/x/e students and their families.

I am conducting a research study to better understand the experiences of a Latino/x/e family as they navigate the independent school system. My goal for this study twofold:

1. To offer a nuanced way of understanding Latino/x/e families that extends beyond cultural stereotypes that often persist in independent school spaces.
2. To provide insight to independent school leaders on how best to support their Latino/x/e students and families.

I, myself, was a first-generation Latinx student who attended a private school and received financial aid; so this is an experience I personally relate to. Now, as an educator and administrator at another independent school, I recognize that although there have been great strides in independent schools' efforts to serve the Latino/x/e community, many gaps still persist. With this research study, I would like to interview your family to help shed light on those gaps. Your family is ideal for this study because not only have they supported one, but *four,* daughters through the independent school system. Collectively, your family contains approximately ten years' worth of individual and collective knowledge and wisdom that you have acquired over the years. Thus, your family's journey and development along the way–students and parents alike–make you the ideal participants for this study.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary. There are no personal benefits to your participation.

Attached you will find a Study Information Sheet that contains more specifics about the study. If you are interested in participating, please let me know by replying to this email. Feel free to reach out for questions or concerns about the study. I can be reached at (323) 807-1941 or via email at ccastell@g.ucla.edu.

Warm regards,
Carlos Castellanos
Doctoral Candidate, UCLA Educational Leadership Program

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FOR PARENT AND PARENTAL PERMISSION FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

University of California, Los Angeles

Service Through Understanding: An ethnographic case study contextualizing the experiences of one Latinx family attending a Los Angeles independent school

Introduction

Carlos Castellanos, MPW, Ed.D. candidate, and faculty sponsor, Dr. Ananda Marin, Ph.D., from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study. You and your child were selected as possible participants in this study because you are a first-generation, Latino/x/e family, and are attending (or have attended) an independent school in the Los Angeles area and are receiving financial aid. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is about a Latino/x/e, first generation family who attends a Los Angeles-area independent school and is receiving financial aid. The study's aim is to learn about your family's experiences and the challenges they navigated during their educational journeys, especially during their time enrolled in an elite, predominantly White, independent school. The findings from this study are intended to contribute to improved support and experiences for Latino/x/e, first generation students and families who attend Los Angeles independent schools and are receiving financial aid.

What will happen if we take part in this research study?

If you and your child volunteer to participate in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

1. Activities that your child will be asked to do:
    - Participate in one-on-one interviews in a private setting like a room in your home
    - Construct an education journey map and share it with researchers in a private setting like a room in your home (instructions & materials will be provided)
    - Participate in a walking interview on your school's campus (instructions will be provided)
    - Share stories, memories, or other relevant information about your educational experiences

2. Activities that only parents will be asked to do:
    - Participate in artifact-driven interviews (one for each child) in a private setting like a room in your home

- Share stories, memories, or other relevant information about your family's educational experiences

3. Activities that parents and child will do together:
   - Participate in two group/family interviews that will take place in your home—one at the beginning of the study and one at the very end
   - Share stories, memories, or other relevant information about your educational experiences

How long will we be in the research study?

Participation will take a total of about two months from start to finish and will be broken down into the following phases:

- Phase 1: Introductory Family Meeting, 90 minutes
- Phase 2: Individual Interview, "Education Journey Map", 60 minutes
- Phase 3a: Walking (or Go-Along) Interviews, 90 minutes each
- Phase 3b: Artifact-Driven Interviews, 60 minutes each, one for each child
- Phase 4: Individual Wrap-Up Interview, 60 minutes
- Phase 5: Concluding Family Meeting/Interview, 90 minutes

Student/child participants will spend a total of 6.5 to 7.5 hours participating in the study. Parent participants will spend a total of 8 to 9 hours participating in the study.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that we can expect from this study?

- Participants may experience discomfort when asked some of the questions in the interviews, especially those related to personal, school-related experiences.
- Please note that you do not need to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable responding to during any of the interviews.
- Any and all participants may decline to participate or drop out at any time.

Are there any potential benefits if we participate?

There are no personal benefits to participation. However, the results of the research are intended to offer independent school leaders a nuanced way of understanding Latino/x/e families that extends beyond cultural stereotypes. The results of the research may provide independent school leaders with insight on how they can best support their Latino/x/e students and families.

Neither you or your child will receive any added benefit from your school for participating in this study, nor will you receive any repercussions from your school for any information you might share about your experiences attending.

Again, any and all participants may decline to participate or drop out at any time.

Will information about our participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you and your child will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Any identifying information collected through the survey or interview will be removed from datafiles or transcripts used in analysis. Interview responses, quotations, and results will not be shared in ways that would identify your or your child.

Any information collected about you from the study will be stored digitally on encrypted software and any hard copy notes will be kept in a locked cabinet and secure room. Only the principal researcher, Carlos Castellanos, and other members of the research team will have access to your personal identifying information. During the interview, you and your family will be given pseudonyms (fake names that you may choose). The interview recordings will be shared to a transcription service to transcribe the interview, and they will sign a confidentiality agreement. Recordings will be erased after transcription is completed.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You and your child can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you or your child may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you or your child, and no loss of benefits to which you or your child were otherwise entitled.
- You and your child may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

The research team:
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers:

Primary Investigator: Carlos Castellanos
Email: ccastell@g.ucla.edu
Phone: (323) 807-1941

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ananda Marin
Email: amarin1@ucla.edu

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP) by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu; or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN

Name of Child	
Name of Parent or Legal Guardian	
Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian	Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT AND PARENTAL PERMISSION

Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Parental Permission	Contact Number
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent and Parental Permission	Date

APPENDIX C

ADOLESCENT (Ages 13-17) ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

University of California, Los Angeles

Service Through Understanding: An ethnographic case study contextualizing the experiences of one Latinx family attending a Los Angeles independent school

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Carlos Castellanos, MPW, Ed.D. candidate, and faculty sponsor, Dr. Ananda Marin, Ph.D. from the University of California, Los Angeles. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are a member of a first-generation, Latino/x/e family, and are attending (or have attended) an independent school in the Los Angeles area and are receiving financial aid. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

The study's goal is to learn about your family's experiences and the challenges they navigated during their educational journey, especially during their time enrolled at Sunnydale. The findings from this study will help other Latino/x/e, first generation students and families like yours who attend Los Angeles independent schools and are receiving financial aid.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents say "yes" you can still decide not to do this.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in two group/family interviews that will take place in your home—one at the beginning of the study and one at the very end
- Participate in one-on-one interviews in a private setting like a room in your home
- Construct an education journey map and share it with researchers in a private setting like a room in your home (instructions & materials will be provided)
- Participate in a walking interview on your school's campus (instructions will be provided)
- Share stories, memories, or other relevant information about your educational experiences

How long will I be in the research study?

Participation in the study will take a total of about *7.5* hours over a period of two months**.**

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

- Participants may experience discomfort when asked some of the questions in the interviews, especially those related to personal, school-related experiences.
- Please note that you do not need to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable responding to during any of the interviews.
- In addition, you may opt out of the study or any of its phases at any time.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

There are no personal benefits to participation. However, the results of the research may provide independent school leaders with insight on how they can best support their Latino/x/e students and families.

You will not receive any added benefit from your school for participating in this study, nor will you receive any repercussions from your school for any information you might share about your experiences attending.

Will I receive any payment if I participate in this study?

You will receive no payment for your participation.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Any identifying information collected through the survey or interview will be removed from datafiles or transcripts used in analysis. Interview responses, quotations, and results will not be shared in ways that would identify your or your child.

Any information collected about you from the study will be stored digitally on encrypted software and any hard copy notes will be kept in a locked cabinet and secure room. Only the principal investigator, Carlos Castellanos, and other members of the research team will have access to your personal identifying information. During the interview, you and your family will be given pseudonyms (fake names that you may choose). The interview recordings will be shared to a transcription service to transcribe the interview, and they will sign a confidentiality agreement. Recordings will be erased after transcription is completed.

Withdrawal of participation by the investigator

The investigator may withdraw you from participating in this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. If for example you become seriously ill or injured, you may have to drop out, even if you would like to continue. The investigator will make the decision and let you know if it is not possible for you to continue. The decision may be made either to protect your health and safety, or because participation in the study is no longer in your best interest.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

You may withdraw your assent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty or loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.

You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving any of your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

You can choose to participate in this study even if your relatives do not, *and* you can decline to participate even if your relatives agree to participate.

Any and all participants may decline to participate or drop out at any time.

Who can answer questions I might have about this study?

In the event of a research related injury, please immediately contact one of the researchers listed below. If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers:

Primary Investigator: Carlos Castellanos
Email: ccastell@g.ucla.edu
Phone: (323) 807-1941

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ananda Marin
Email: amarin1@ucla.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING ASSENT

In my judgment the participant is voluntarily and knowingly agreeing to participate in this research study.

Name of Person Obtaining Assent	Contact Number
Signature of Person Obtaining Assent	Date

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH (Adult Daughter)

University of California, Los Angeles

Service Through Understanding: An ethnographic case study contextualizing the experiences of one Latinx family attending a Los Angeles independent school

INTRODUCTION

Carlos Castellanos, MPW, Ed.D. candidate, and faculty sponsor, Dr. Ananda Marin, Ph.D., from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) are conducting a research study. You and your family were selected as possible participants in this study because you are a first-generation, Latino/x/e family, and are attending (or have attended) an independent school in the Los Angeles area and are receiving financial aid. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary.

WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT A RESEARCH STUDY?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.
- You can choose to participate in this study even if your relatives do not
- You can decline to participate even if your relatives agree to participate.
- Any and all participants may decline to participate or drop out at any time.

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH BEING DONE?

This study is about a Latino/x/e, first generation family who attends a Los Angeles-area independent school and is receiving financial aid. The study's aim is to learn about your family's experiences and the challenges they navigated during their educational journeys, especially during their time enrolled in an elite, predominantly White, independent school. The findings from this study are intended to contribute to improved support and experiences for Latino/x/e, first generation students and families who attend Los Angeles independent schools and are receiving financial aid.

HOW LONG WILL THE RESEARCH LAST AND WHAT WILL I NEED TO DO?

Participation will take a total of about two months from start to finish and will be broken down into the following phases:

- Phase 1: Introductory Family Meeting, all participants, 90 minutes

- Phase 2: Individual Interview, “Education Journey Map”, all participants, 60 minutes
- Phase 3a: Walking (or Go-Along) Interviews, student participants only, 90 minutes each
- Phase 3b: Artifact-Driven Interviews, parent participants only, 60 minutes each (one for each child)
- Phase 4: Individual Wrap-Up Interview, all participants, 60 minutes
- Phase 5: Concluding Family Meeting/Interview, all participants, 90 minutes

Student participants will spend a total of 6.5 to 7.5 hours participating in the study.

Parent participants will spend a total of 8 to 9 hours participating in the study.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in two group/family interviews, one at the beginning of the two-month window and one at the very end
- Participate in one-on-one interviews in a private setting
- Construct an education journey map and share it with researchers (instructions & materials will be provided)
- Participate in a walking interview on your school’s campus (for student participants only)
- Participate in artifact-driven interviews in a private setting (for parent participants only)
- Share stories, memories, or other relevant information about your educational experiences

ARE THERE ANY RISKS IF I PARTICIPATE?

- Participants may experience discomfort when asked some of the questions in the interviews, especially those related to personal, school-related experiences.
- Please note that you do not need to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable responding to during any of the interviews.
- In addition, you may opt out of the study or any of its phases at any time.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS IF I PARTICIPATE?

There are no personal benefits to participation. However, the results of the research are intended to offer independent school leaders a nuanced way of understanding Latino/x/e families that extends beyond cultural stereotypes. The results of the research may provide independent school leaders with insight on how they can best support their Latino/x/e students and families.

Your alternative to participating in this research study is to not participate.

HOW WILL INFORMATION ABOUT ME AND MY PARTICIPATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

The researchers will do their best to make sure that your private information is kept confidential. Information about you will be handled as confidentially as possible, but participating in research may involve a loss of privacy and the potential for a breach in confidentiality. Study data will be

physically and electronically secured. As with any use of electronic means to store data, there is a risk of breach of data security.

Use of personal information that can identify you:
Any identifying information collected through the survey or interview will be removed from datafiles or transcripts used in analysis. Interview responses, quotations, and results will not be shared in ways that identify study participants.

How information about you will be stored:
Any information collected about you from the study will be stored digitally on encrypted software and any hard copy notes will be kept in a locked cabinet and secure room.

People and agencies that will have access to your information:
Only the principal researcher, Carlos Castellanos, and other members of the research team will have access to your personal identifying information. During the interview, you and your family will be given pseudonyms (fake names that you may choose). The interview recording will be shared to a transcription service to transcribe the interview, and they will sign a confidentiality agreement. Recordings will be erased after transcription is completed.

How long information from the study will be kept:
The information from the study will be kept for the duration of the study, a period of up to 1 year.

USE OF DATA FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
Your data including de-identified data may be kept for use in future research.

WHAT OTHER THINGS SHOULD I CONSIDER BEFORE PARTICIPATION?
Please note that your participation in the study does not affect your relationship with Sunnydale School in any way. You will not receive any added benefit from Sunnydale School for participating in this study, nor will you receive any repercussions from the school for any information you might share about your experiences attending.

WHO CAN I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

The research team:
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers:

Primary Investigator: Carlos Castellanos
Email: ccastell@g.ucla.edu
Phone: (323) 807-1941

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ananda Marin
Email: amarin1@ucla.edu

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP) by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu; or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS IF I TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.
- Any and all participants may decline to participate or drop out at any time.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

HOW DO I INDICATE MY AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE?

If you want to participate in this study, you should sign and date below.

SIGNATURE OF THE PARTICIPANT

_____
Name of Participant

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT

_____ _____
Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

_____ _____
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX E

PHASE 1: Initial Family Interview Protocol

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world.

This interview will last approximately 90 minutes and will be divided into three parts:

> **PART 1: Study Description:** An introduction to discuss the study's key components and each of your roles in the five phases. This will also be an opportunity to address any questions or concerns you may have about the study.
>
> **PART 2: Family Interview:** A 45-60-minute interview to gain some general information about your family as a whole.
>
> **PART 3: Instructions for Next Steps:** A conclusion dedicated to providing Instructions for the next phase of the study: your "Education Journey Map". This is an assignment I would like you all to complete in preparation for Phase 2 of the study.

Everything that you say and do will remain confidential. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If at any time you do not feel comfortable or need to pause, please let me know. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription. There are no right or wrong answers so please feel free to openly engage with me (the researcher) if you have any questions or comments along the way. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

PHASE 1, PART 1: Study Description

You have already received most of the study information on the Study Information Sheet that I attached to my original email to you. However, I would like to spend some time going over some of the key components in more detail.

Why this research being done:
This study is about a Latino/x/e, first generation family who attends a Los Angeles-area independent school and is receiving financial aid. The study's aim is to learn about your family's experiences and the challenges they navigated during their educational journeys, especially during their time enrolled in an elite, predominantly White, independent school. The findings

from this study are intended to contribute to improved support and experiences for Latino/x/e, first generation students and families who attend Los Angeles independent schools and are receiving financial aid.

Why you and your family are the ideal participants:
Your family is ideal for this study because not only have they supported one, but *four* daughters through the independent school system. Collectively, your family contains approximately ten years' worth of individual and collective knowledge and wisdom that you have acquired over the years. Thus, your family's journey and development along the way–students and parents alike–make you the ideal participants for this study.

How long the research will last and what will you need to do:
Participation will take about two months from start to finish and will be broken down into the following phases, which I will now discuss in depth:

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3.a.	Phase 3.b.	Phase 4	Phase 5
	Initial Family Interview (90 mins)	Education Journey Mapping Interviews (60 mins)	Walking / Go-Along Interviews (90 mins)	Artifact Driven Interviews (60 mins)	Individual Wrap-Up Interviews (60 mins)	Final Family Interview (90 mins)
Mother	X	X		4X	X	X
Father		X		4X	X	
Daughter 1		X	X		X	
Daughter 2		X	X		X	
Daughter 3		X	X		X	
Daughter 4		X	X		X	

What will be the process for scheduling interviews?
By the end of today, I will have a general sense of everyone's availability. I will then compare with my own availability and map out some potential interview dates on the Google Bookings website. You will then be able to schedule the various meetings with me using that platform or by emailing me directly.

Where will interviews take place?

Interviews will occur in person or via Zoom and be recorded using password-protected devices (laptop, smart phone, or audio recorder). For in-person interviews, a private room will be secured where interviews will be held for the needed time. Those can be somewhere in your home, on campus, or at a neutral location. For interviews via Zoom, participants will be encouraged to find a private room, and I will conduct the interviews from a home office where conversations will not be heard by others.

The nature of the walking (or go-along) interviews calls for participants to be interviewed and observed during a typical school day on campus if possible. I will try to protect your privacy as much as possible during these interviews by not drawing unnecessary attention to our actions, however, there may be a chance that others will observe us during the process. You will have the option to either opt out of this method completely or to complete it during a time when others are not present.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?
If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the one of the researchers:

Primary Investigator: Carlos Castellanos
Email: ccastell@g.ucla.edu
Phone: (323) 807-1941

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Ananda Marin
Email: amarin1@ucla.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):

Email: participants@research.ucla.edu
Phone: (310) 206-2040
Mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

PHASE 1, PART 2: Family Interview

1.	Do you have any questions about anything I just went over?
2.	I'm going to pass out a set of colored notecards to each of you. We will start with the pink card. I'm going to ask you a question, then give you a minute to think quietly and independently. When you have your answer, write it on the pink notecard. Question: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of your family? Who would like to share first, second, etc.?
3.	Now let's move to the yellow card. Take some time to think of a story or family anecdote that you think encapsulates the very best about your family. Take one minute to reflect. Question: What title would you give this story or anecdote? Write it on the yellow card.
4.	Moving onto the blue card, think about the following question for about a minute before writing down your response: What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about Sunnydale School?
5.	Lastly, the purple card. I'd like you to think of a pseudonym (a nickname or fake name) that you would like to go by during this study. Please write that name on the card.
6.	You can all discuss this next question together, but what pseudonym would you all like to go by as a family for the duration of this study?
7.	As we conclude the interview portion, what is resonating the most with you right now about anything we have discussed or done so far?
8.	Are there any final questions for me about anything we've gone over up to this point?

PHASE 1, PART 3: Instructions for the Next Interview, the "Education Journey Map"

I am now going to provide you with instructions for an assignment I'd like you to complete in preparation for our first individual meetings, which will be called the "Education Journey Map Interviews". Each of you will schedule your interview with me using the Google Booking website or by contacting me directly via email at ccastell@g.ucla.edu.

You each will now receive a bag containing printed instructions as well as some paper and art supplies that you may use to complete the following assignment:

Student Instructions:

Map your educational journey from the time you started school to where you are today. This should be in the form of some kind of visual representation, for example a picture, timeline, path, collage, drawing, or any other creative representation of your choosing. Your educational journey map should include people, places, obstacles, and opportunities along the way. You can use different colors to show different feelings, or use lines and arrows. These are just suggestions. Be as creative as you like, and if you don't want to draw you can make more of a flow chart. You may use the materials provided or any materials of your own. Please complete this to the best of your ability before our next meeting, which will be one-on-one and scheduled for a date/time that is convenient for you.

Parent Instructions:

Map your family's educational journey from the time your daughters started school to where you are as a family today, paying special attention to your family's time at an independent school. This should be in the form of some kind of visual representation, for example a picture, timeline, path, collage, drawing, or any other creative representation of your choosing. Your educational journey map should include people, places, obstacles, and opportunities along the way. Please position each of your daughters, your family as a collective, and you as a parent along a trajectory that you feel best captures the family's educational journey. You may use different colors to show different feelings, or use lines and arrows. These are just suggestions. Be as creative as you like, and if you don't want to draw, you can make more of a flow chart. You may use the materials provided or any materials of your own. Please complete this to the best of your ability before our next meeting, which will be one-on-one and scheduled for a date/time that is convenient for you.

I have brought some of my own educational journey maps as examples of the various ways you can represent yours. These are just some of the ways I see my own identity in the context of my varied relationships to place, people and time along my educational journey. You may use them as a reference, though I encourage you to be as creative, immersive, and original as you'd like with your own. Do you have any questions?

This concludes our initial family meeting/interview. Thank you very much for your time and responses. I will follow up with each of you to schedule our next interview, either through the Google Bookings website or via email.

APPENDIX F

PHASE 2: Education Journey Map Interview Protocol
Student Version

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world.

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription. I would also like to take some pictures of your educational journey map. Like the recording of our conversation, the photos will not be shared with anyone and will be stored in a confidential, password-protected file. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

1.	How was the process of constructing your education journey map?
2.	Can you please share what you created?
3.	You mentioned ____, can you say a little more about it?
4.	When ____ occurred, what supports did you rely on the most to navigate that?
5.	What were your parents' responses to ____?
6.	I noticed you didn't include much (or included a lot of) information about your [middle school, high school, etc.] years. Can you speak to why that may be?
7.	I noticed you included a lot of information about your [middle school, high school, etc.] years. Can you speak to why that may be?
8.	Did you all ever discuss ____ as a family? If so, what did that conversation sound like?
9.	To your knowledge, did any of your sisters go through anything similar?
10.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about yourself?

11.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about your family?
12.	Do you have any follow-up questions, comments, suggestions or concerns? Is there anything you'd like to share that we didn't get a chance to discuss?

Thank you for your responses and for sharing your education journey map with me. Before we end, I would like to review with you the instructions and details for our next interview: the "Walking Interview". You will also receive a printed version of this information for your reference.

Instructions & Details for the "Walking (or Go-Along) Interview"

You will receive a map of your school's campus and will be asked to determine the route for your own walking interview.

You will select the meeting point, time of meeting, and choice of route taken.

On the day of the interview, you and I will be fitted with microphones attached to our lapels and connected to a recorder.

You will then take me for a walk to the places that are/were significant for you, hold a particular memory, or reveal something about your experiences at the school. You will share those memories and/or stories with me as we go.

Some of the locations you select may be more public (such as quads, eating areas, hallways, and common areas), while others may be more private (such as offices, classrooms, and restrooms). For certain locations that you/I/we may not have full access to (such as gender-specific restrooms; private offices; or classrooms in use), we will get as close as we can without violating any school policies or disrupting any regular school day activities (e.g. outside the door or in front of a particular building).

I will use short, neutral comments to guide our interaction and ask questions for clarification, but you will do most of the talking.

The walking interview will take approximately 90 minutes.

I will try to protect your confidentiality as much as possible during the interview by not drawing unnecessary attention to our actions. However, since the nature of the walking interview calls for

participants to be interviewed and observed during a typical school day on campus, there is a chance that others may notice us during the process.

In addition to recording the interview, I will be documenting observations in the form of written field notes (in a notebook) on certain behaviors you may exhibit during the walking interview. These behaviors may include, among other things, facial expressions, gestures, walking pace, or any nonverbal interactions with people on campus. While the walking interview itself will be semi-structured (using some prompting or guiding questions along the way), the field observations will be completely unstructured, allowing you to freely interact with the environment in real time.

Data about non-focal students may be recorded, such as impromptu interactions with peers you may have during the interview; however, this data will be observed in a generalized way and use non-identifiable information. The names of any persons that arise due to your information sharing or your interactions with them during our walk will be changed to general terms (e.g. friend, classmate, peer, teammate, teacher, counselor, coach) immediately following the interview.

If at any time you feel uncomfortable or no longer wish to continue the interview, you may stop at any time. You may also opt out of this interview altogether or choose to complete it during a time when others are not present.

APPENDIX G

Protocol for Phase 2: Education Journey Map Interview
Parent Version

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world.

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

1.	How was the process of constructing your education journey map?
2.	Can you please share what you created?
3.	You mentioned ____, can you say a little more about it?
4.	When ____ occurred, what supports, if any, did you or family rely on the most to navigate that?
5.	How did ____ affect the family, or how did certain members respond?
6.	I noticed you didn't include much information about ____. Can you speak to why that may be?
7.	I noticed you included a lot of information about ____. Can you speak to why that may be?
8.	Did you all ever discuss ____ as a family? If so, what did that conversation sound like?
9.	To your knowledge, did anyone else in the family go through anything similar?
10.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about yourself?

11.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about your family?

Thank you for your responses and for sharing your education journey map with me. Before we end, I would like to review with you the instructions for our next interview: the "Artifact-Driven Interview". You will also receive a printed version of these instructions for your reference.

Instructions for the "Artifact-Driven Interview"

We will be conducting one artifact-driven interview per child, where the focus will be mainly on that particular child.

In preparation for this meeting, please gather artifacts that you feel reveal stories about your child's educational experiences and who they are as people and students. These may be (among other things) writings, drawings, accomplishments, mementos, pictures, or any miscellaneous items tied to your child's entire educational experience in some way.

When we meet again, you will share these items with me and explain why you have selected them.

I may ask you some guiding questions along the way, but you will do most of the sharing.

Each interview will be conducted in person (unless logistics call for Zoom interviews) and last approximately 60 minutes.

APPENDIX H

Protocol for Phase 3.a.: Walking/Go-Along Interview & Observation (Student Only)

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in a walking or "go-along" interview as part of a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world.

This interview will last approximately 90 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. However, please be aware that some of our conversations will be taking place in open and/or shared spaces on campus during the school day, so there may be a chance that others overhear some parts of our conversation or witness our interaction. If at any time you want to move to a more private location or have me (the researcher) depart, please let me know. If at any time you wish to conclude the walking interview, you may do so.

In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription.

In addition to recording the interview, I will be documenting observations in the form of written field notes (in a notebook) on certain behaviors you may exhibit during the walking/go-along interview. These behaviors may include, among other things, facial expressions, gestures, walking pace, or any nonverbal interactions with people on campus. While the walking interview itself will be semi-structured (using some prompting or guiding questions along the way), the field observations will be completely unstructured, allowing you to freely interact with the environment in real time.

Data about non-focal students may be recorded, such as any impromptu interactions with peers during the walking interview; however, this data will be observed in a generalized way and use non-identifiable information. The names of any persons that arise due to your information sharing or your interactions with them during the walking interview will be changed to general terms (e.g. friend, classmate, peer, teammate, teacher, counselor, coach) immediately following the walking interview.

Because you will be guiding me through various locations on campus that you deem significant, you will be observed in any number of locations. Some of these locations may be more public (such as quads, eating areas, hallways, and common areas), while others may be more private (such as offices, classrooms, and restrooms). For certain locations that you/I/we may not have full access to (such as gender-specific restrooms or locker rooms; private offices; or classrooms

in use), we will get as close as we can without violating any school policies or disrupting any regular school day activities (e.g. outside the door or in front of a particular building).

Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, then I will proceed to attach a wireless microphone to your lapel for the interview recording, and then we will begin.

1.	How does it feel to be [on campus, back at campus] right now?
2.	Why did you select this location as our meeting spot?
3.	What memory does this space hold for you?
4.	What feelings are coming up as you tell this story?
5.	I noticed that you _____ when entering the space. Can you tell me why?
6.	I noticed you _____ when telling me this story. Can you speak to why that may be?
7.	You mentioned that _____ took place when this occurred. Can you please say more about that?
8.	If you went through something like this today, what (if anything) do you think would be different?
9.	If you could tell your former self anything in response to this, what would it be and why?
10.	To your knowledge, have any of your sisters gone through anything similar?
11.	Are there any additional memories that were prompted by our walk through campus today, either tied to a specific place or as we walked through campus among your peers?
12.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about yourself?
13.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about your family?
14.	What aspects of this activity, if any, did you find easy or challenging? Please explain.

Thank you very much for sharing. This concludes our interview.

APPENDIX I

Protocol for Phase 3.b.: Artifact-Driven Interview (Parent Only)

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in an artifact-driven interview as part of a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world. For today's interview, we will be focusing primarily on [daughter's name].

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription. I would also like to take pictures of some of the artifacts you will share today. Like the recording of our conversation, these photos will not be shared with anyone and will be stored in a confidential, password-protected file. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

1.	How is [daughter's name] doing today?
2.	Thank you for bringing some artifacts for today's meeting. How often do you collect artifacts about her?
3.	How would you generally describe [daughter's name]?
4.	Can you please share with me the artifacts you chose which best represent who [daugher's name] is as a person and student?
5.	What is it about this particular [artifact] that uniquely captures [daughter]?
6.	You mentioned ____, can you say a little more about it?
7.	You mentioned the word ____. Can you say a little more about that?
8.	I noticed that you ____ when telling this story. Can you speak to why that may be?
9.	What do you think were the main motivating factors behind [daughter's name] winning/writing/creating this?

10.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about [daughter's name]?
11.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about yourselves as parents?

Thank you very much for sharing. This concludes our interview.

APPENDIX J

Protocol for Phase 4: Individual Wrap-Up Interview
Student Version

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in the next phase, the "Individual Wrap-Up Interview", as part of a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world. For today's interview, we will be taking some time to review and reflect upon some of the information you have shared in phases 1-3 of the study. I will be asking you follow-up questions to help me clarify or complete information that you have previously shared, and you will also have the opportunity to ask me any questions or add any additional information you may have previously forgotten or omitted.

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

1.	How are things going at school/work lately?
2.	How are you feeling now that the study is coming to a close?
3.	What, if anything, has been the most memorable part of your experience in this study and why?
4.	During [phase ?], you mentioned ____. Looking back, what if anything, would you have done differently?
5.	During [phase ?], you mentioned ____. Can you say a little more about it?
6.	What, if anything, do you wish the school knew more about you as a student?
7.	What, if anything, do you wish the school knew about your family?
8.	You mentioned/I noticed you ____; can you say more about that?
9.	What, if anything, has this study helped you see or realize about yourself as a student?
10.	What, if anything, has this study helped you see or realize about yourself as a member of this family?
11.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about your family in general?

Thank you very much for sharing. This concludes our interview.

APPENDIX K

Protocol for Phase 4: Individual Wrap-Up Interview
Parent Version

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in the next phase, the "Individual Wrap-Up Interview", as part of a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world. For today's interview, we will be taking some time to review and reflect upon some of the information you have shared in phases 1-3 of the study. I will be asking you follow-up questions to help me clarify or complete information that you have previously shared, and you will also have the opportunity to ask me any questions or add any additional information you may have previously forgotten or omitted.

This interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Everything you discuss with me during this interview is strictly confidential so please feel free to speak openly. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

1.	How are things going at school/work lately?
2.	How are you feeling now that the study is coming to a close?
3.	What, if anything, has been the most memorable part of your experience in this study and why?
4.	During [phase ?], you mentioned ____. Looking back, what if anything, would you have done differently?
5.	During [phase ?], you mentioned ____. Can you say a little more about it?
6.	What, if anything, do you wish the school knew more about you as a parent?
7.	What, if anything, do you wish the school knew about your daughters/family?
8.	You mentioned/I noticed you ____; can you say more about that?
9.	What, if anything, has this study helped you see or realize about yourself as a student?
10.	What, if anything, has this study helped you see or realize about yourself as a member of this family?
11.	What, if anything, did this activity help you see or realize about your family in general?

Thank you very much for sharing. This concludes our interview.

APPENDIX L

Protocol for Phase 5: Final Family Meeting

Good afternoon. Thank you for your willingness to participate in a study that will provide important information about the Latinx family experience navigating the independent school world.

This interview will last approximately 90 minutes. Everything that you say and do will remain confidential. In order for me to accurately record our conversation, I would like to digitally record it so I can later transcribe the interview verbatim. The recording will not be shared with anyone else. If at any time you do not feel comfortable or need to pause, please let me know. If there are points during the interview where you would like to state things off the record, please feel free to let me know and I will strike those comments from the transcription. There are no right or wrong answers so please feel free to openly engage with me (the researcher) if you have any questions or comments along the way. Do you have any questions before we get started? If not, let's begin.

1.	How was everyone's week this week?
2.	How are we feeling about this being the final phase of the study?
3.	Have any of you had conversations with each other about this study (outside of my interviews)? If so, could you share what those conversations were like?
4.	During [phase], [family member(s)] mentioned ____. Can you elaborate on this as a group?
5.	A number of interesting/telling stories came up during various interviews, some of which have not been shared with the group. I acquired the appropriate permissions from those family members. I will now share some of these stories. (Share stories one at a time). What, if anything, is coming up for you as you hear this story?
6.	What advice, if any, would you give to other Latinx families at independent schools who may identify in any of the many ways you do (Latinx, immigrant, first-generation, receiving financial aid, etc.)?
7.	As we conclude this interview, what is resonating the most with you right now about anything we have discussed so far?
8.	In closing, are there any final questions or comments you would like to share with me?

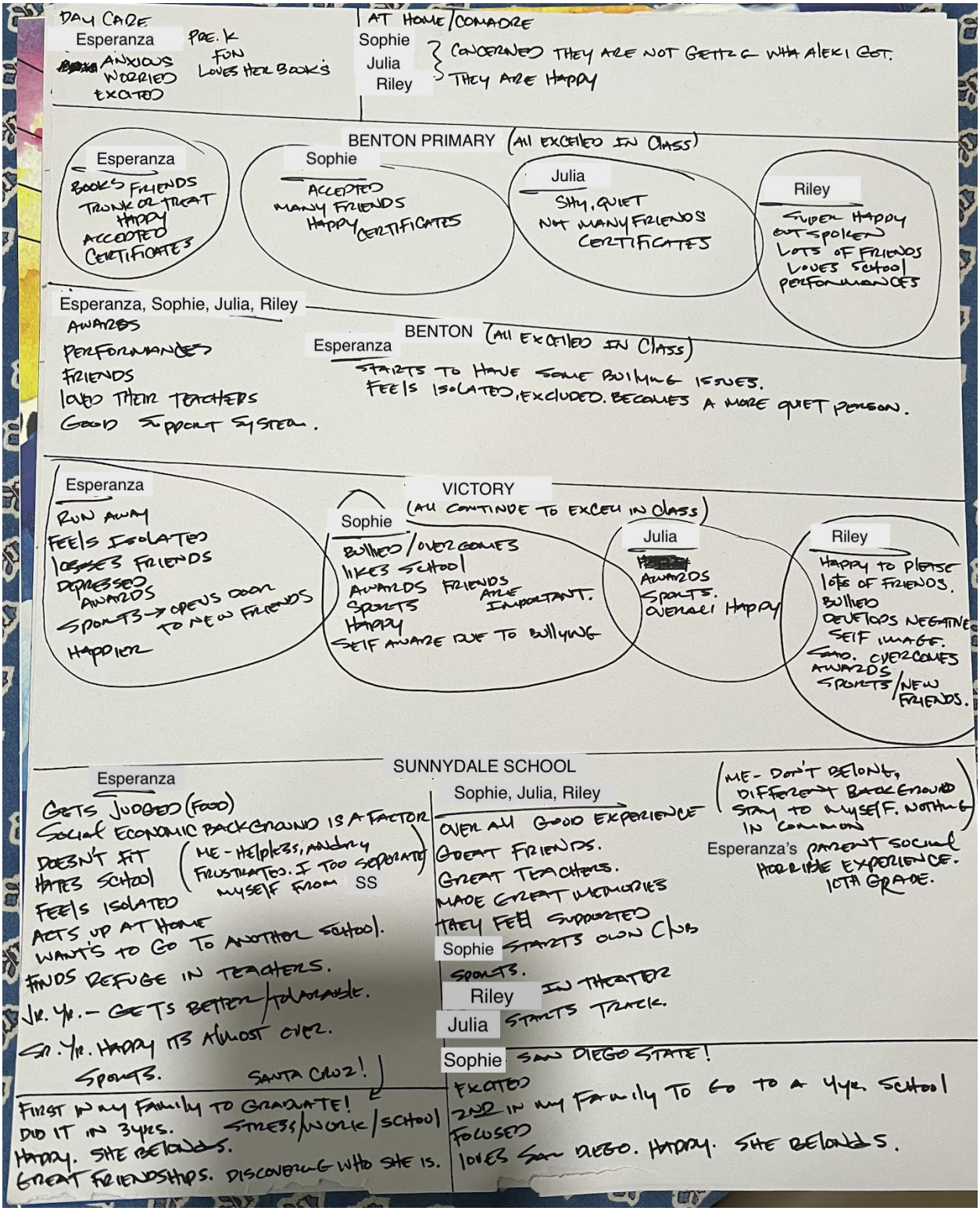
Thank you very much for sharing. This concludes our interview.

APPENDIX M

Education Journey Map: Magdalena (Mom)

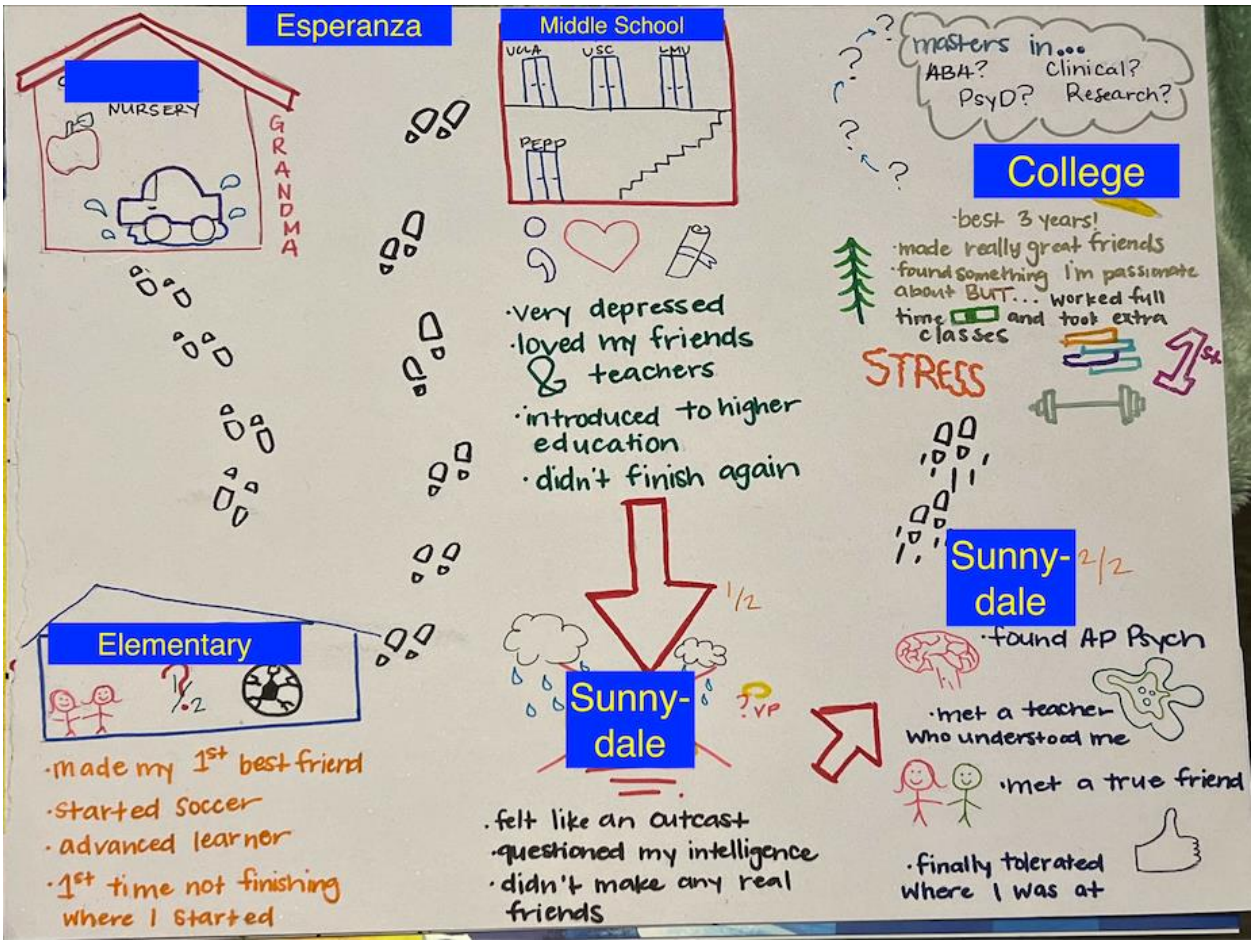
APPENDIX N

Education Journey Map: Chris (Dad)



APPENDIX O

Education Journey Map: Esperanza (Daughter 1)

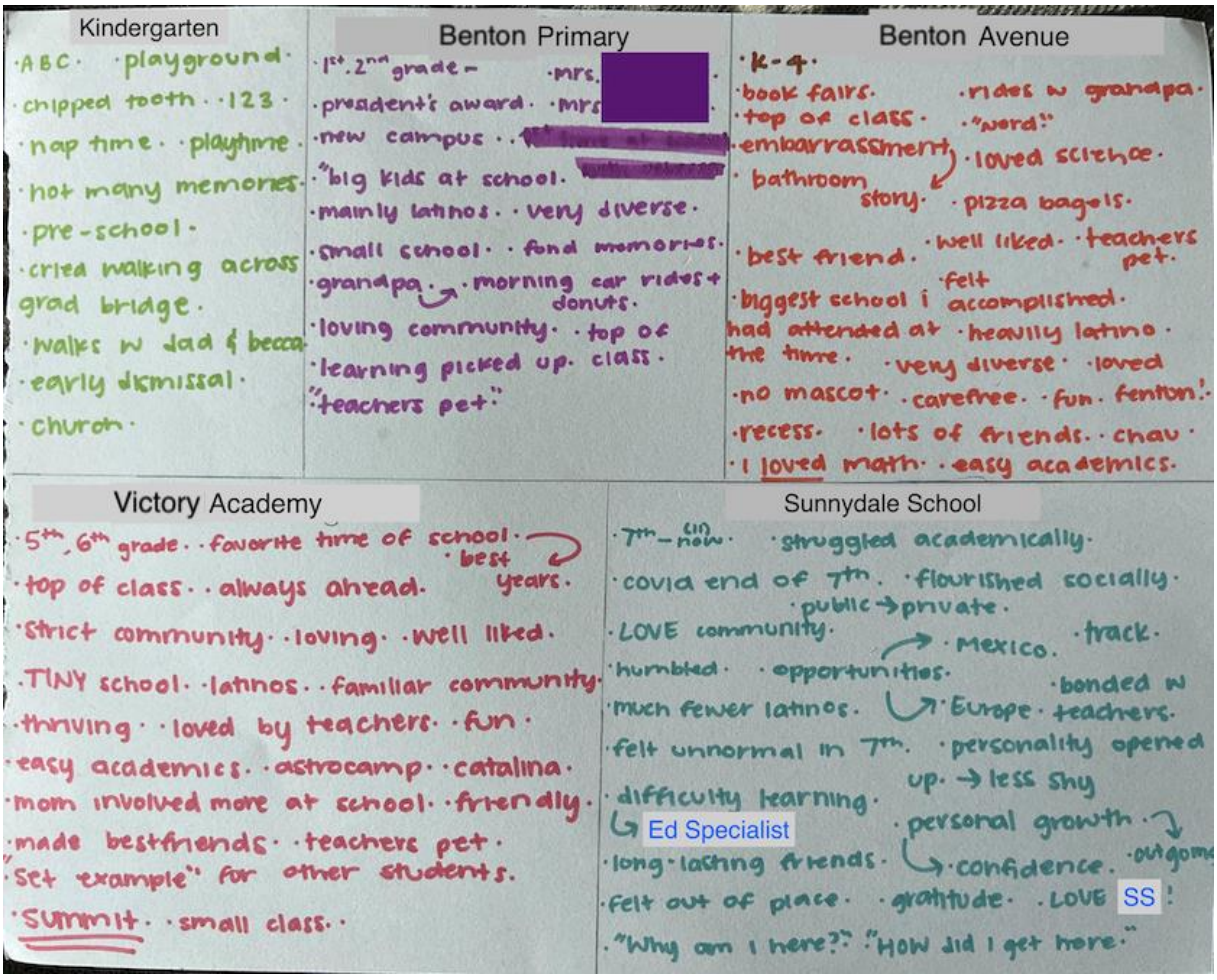


APPENDIX P

Education Journey Map: Sophie (Daughter 2)

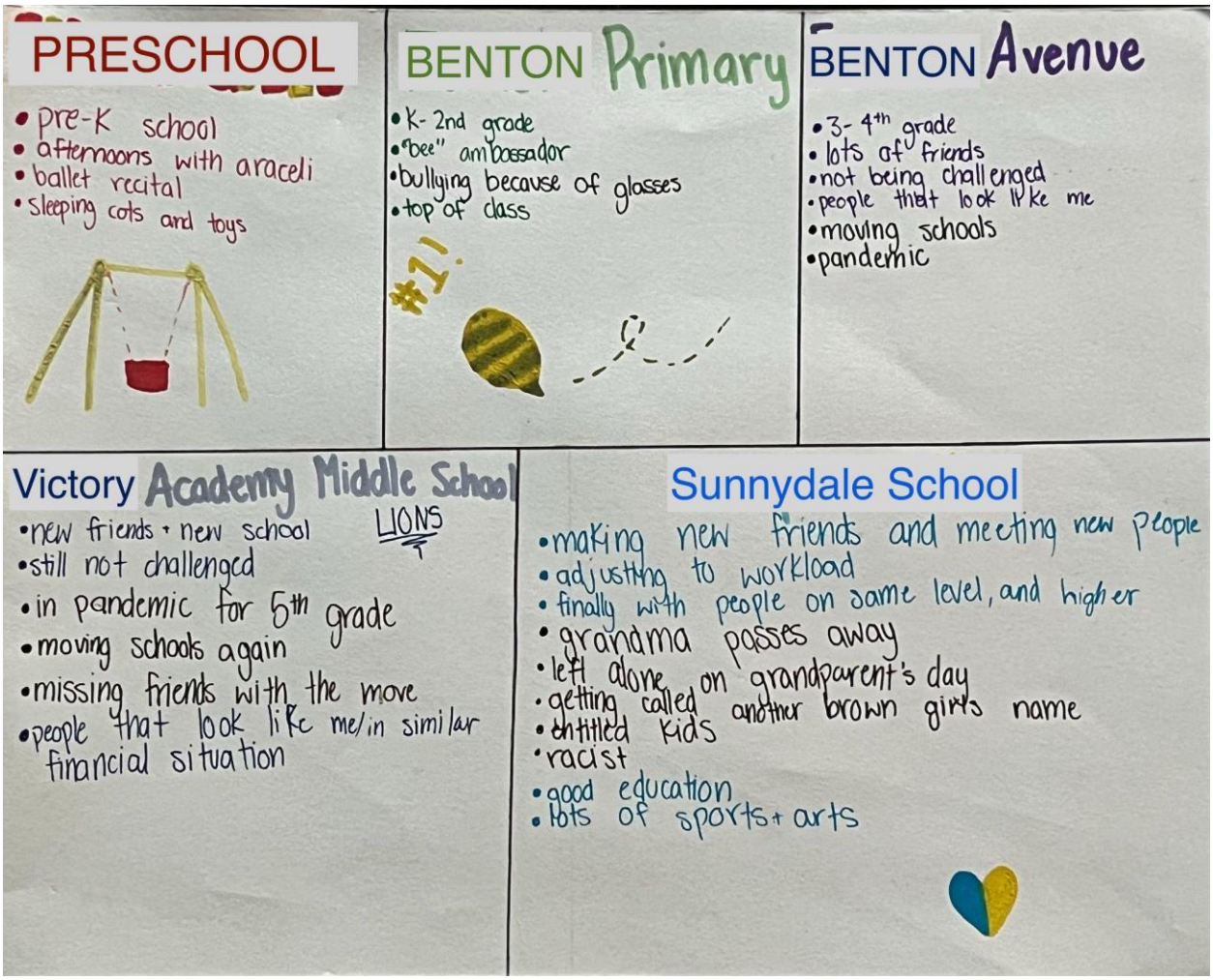
APPENDIX Q

Education Journey Map: Julia (Daughter 3)



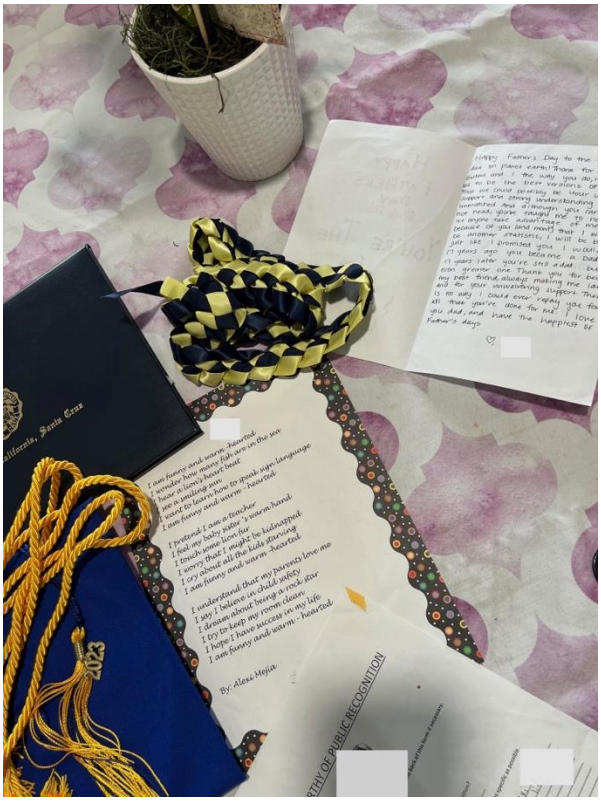
APPENDIX R

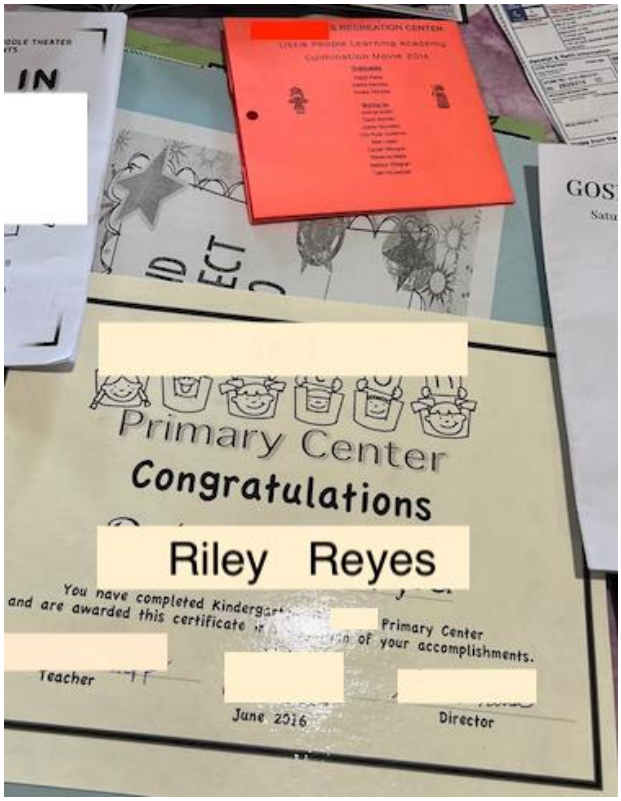
Education Journey Map: Riley (Daughter 4)

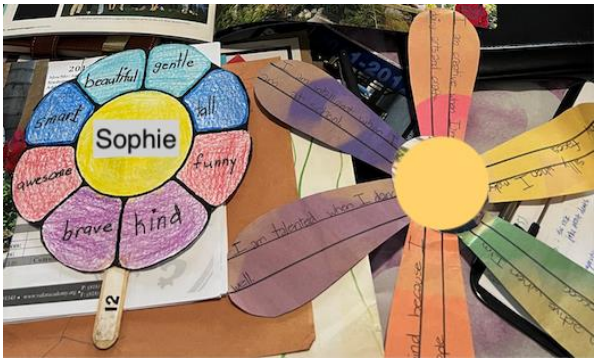


APPENDIX S

Artifacts from Chris & Magdalena's Artifact-Driven Interviews







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