

THESIS

AN EXPLORATION OF LATINE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL AND COLLEGE
READINESS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A LATCRIT AND CULTURAL
WEALTH PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

AN EXPLORATION OF LATINE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL AND COLLEGE READINESS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A LATCRIT AND CULTURAL WEALTH PERSPECTIVE

Marginalized communities, including Latine people, have historically been denied access to post-secondary education. This is not surprising when one considers that U.S. institutions of education were not conceived for People of Color. While enrollment trends for Latine college-bound students are promising, disparities persist. Latine communities still have higher rates of school attrition than non-Latine populations and the increase in high school graduation and college enrollment still lags non-Latine communities. While LatCrit and Community Cultural Wealth literature provide a valuable and comprehensive approach to understanding the experience of Communities of Color, cultural and social capital scholarship and deficiency thinking continue to be prevalent in current Latine education and college preparation research. Most research places the dominant (school or program) narrative at the center of studies. Additionally, COVID-19 brought national concern and discourse around accessible childcare, student health, and education loss as well as the exacerbated inequity in these domains on low-income and BIPOC students and families. Given that systematically created education gaps have always existed and disproportionately hurt BIPOC communities, it is important to understand the impact of COVID-19 on those established gaps, how BIPOC students and families navigate school during the pandemic, and how communities and institutions are supportive or hostile toward BIPOC students in their pursuit of education. This study used Interpretive

Phenomenological Analysis informed by LatCrit and Community Cultural Wealth frameworks to explore (a) how the pandemic has impacted the lives of Latine high school students, their families, and their communities (b) how the negative effects of the pandemic connect to systemic and historical oppression of the Latine community (c) the students' use of intrapersonal and community strengths to navigate school and post-school plans during the pandemic. The sample of Latine 11th and 12th grade students were predominantly low-income and self-identified as Latine. Data was analyzed by coding for meaning units and themes. Themes were organized using Nvivo software.

Keywords: Latine, High School Students, College Readiness, Culture, Critical Race Theory, LatCrit Theory, Cultural Wealth

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Cultural and Social Capital.....	1
Cultural Capital.....	1
Social Capital.....	3
Limitations of Cultural and Social Capital Theories.....	4
Deficit Model.....	4
Critical Race and LatCrit Theory	6
Critical Race Theory.....	6
LatCrit Theory.....	7
Community Cultural Wealth Theory.....	8
Aspirational Capital.....	9
Linguistic Capital.....	9
Familial Capital.....	9
Social Capital.....	10
Navigational Capital.....	10
Resistance Capital.....	10
Latine Education	11
Latine Education Advocacy and Resistance.....	11
Latine Education Disparities.....	12
Immigration status.....	14
Class.....	15
Gender.....	16
The Role of College Readiness.....	17
Eagle County Context.....	18
Larimer County Context.....	19
School in the Time of COVID.....	21
Current Study.....	22
Chapter 2: Method	26
Procedures	27
Participants	28
Measures	29
Questionnaire.....	29
Interviews.....	29
Analysis	30
Intercoder Agreement.....	31
Strategies for Trustworthiness.....	31
Chapter 3: Results	33
Theme 1: School and school-based relationships are highly valued	33
Theme 2: Family and school are intertwined in a way that makes both resources vital to the other.	36
Theme 3: Economic inequality disproportionately harms Latine students and their families before and during the pandemic.....	40
Theme 4: Expectations for students to separate their lives from schools disproportionately harms Latine students.....	45

Theme 5: COVID highlighted and exacerbated systemic and historical inequities that disproportionately affect Latine students and their community	47
Theme 6: Racism is commonplace in schools and their broader communities.....	53
Theme 7: Student Mental Health Before and During COVID-19.....	62
Theme 8: Appreciation for and utilization of cultural wealth in Latine community.....	67
Chapter 4: Discussion	79
Conclusion.....	82
Limitations	84
Future Directions	85
References.....	87

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Despite increasing enrollment of Latine students in college, it is well known that differences in college enrollment and graduation of ethnic minority students persist (Bauman, 2017; Latino, Stegmann, Radunzel, Way, Sanchez, & Casillos, 2018). College readiness research has explored various factors that relate to these discrepancies (Harvill, Maynard, Nguyen, Robertson-Kraft, & Tognatta, 2012; Knaggs, Sondergeld, & Schardt, 2013). However, there is limited investigation of the role, appropriateness, and effectiveness of external college readiness programs that supplement high school efforts. Multiple theories have been developed to explain the differences in college enrollment and graduation. However, many of the more common theories found in college readiness literature have limitations that are perhaps better addressed with the less frequently used LatCrit and Cultural Wealth theories. These theories directly address deficit thinking and place the student identity and experience at the center of the research.

Cultural and Social Capital

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1996) originally conceptualized cultural capital as cultural knowledge, beliefs, and skills inherited by families. As Villalpando and Solórzano (2005) note, while Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital was strictly class-based, it has commonly been used to describe the inequities of college access experienced by students of color. Lareau and Weininger (2003, p.569) suggested expanding the definition of cultural capital to include "micro-interactional processes whereby individuals' strategic use of knowledge, skills, and competence meets institutionalized standards of evaluation. These specialized skills are transmissible across generations, are subject to monopoly, and may yield advantages or profits." According to this application of cultural capital, college access favors the capital of White, college educated,

middle- and upper-class families thereby aiding families of this demographic to amass college preparation resources and pass down class status and privilege to future generations (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005; Welton & Martinez, 2013; McDonough, 1997; Gonzalez et al., 2003). This theory also asserts that communities without the required cultural capital either drop out of post-secondary education, over-perform to make up for their lack of resources, or go unrecognized and under-compensated for their efforts (Perna, 2006).

Research utilizing cultural capital theory has explored various aspects of academic outcomes and college access. DiMaggio (1982) and Lareau (2000) showed that attainment and application of cultural capital were associated with positive academic outcomes and that teachers reward students who fit the dominant culture norms and expectations. As reviewed by Dumais and Ward (2010), several studies have focused on parents' cultural participation, reading behavior, and interest in their children's schooling (De Graaf, 1986, 1988; De Graaf et al., 2000; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 1996), while others have considered both parents' and children's participation and interest in learning contexts (Aschaffenburg and Mass, 1997; Kaufman and Gabler, 2004). Several studies have found that cultural capital is positively associated with grades (DiMaggio, 1982; Dumais, 2002; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999), test scores (Eitle and Eitle, 2002; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999), high school graduation (De Graaf, 1986; De Graaf et al., 2000; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 1996; Teachman, 1987), and college enrollment (Aschaffenburg and Mass, 1997; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Kaufman and Gabler, 2004) as reviewed by Dumais and Ward (2009). However, De Graaf (1988), Eitle and Eitle (2002), and Katsillis and Rubinson (1990) did not find a consistent cultural capital effect on grades. These mixed results generate concern about how the theory has

been operationalized and its appropriateness to capture the nuances of ethnicity, class, and gender.

Social Capital

Social capital has been used across many fields, from politics, to economics, to education to describe the importance and value of social connections and support (Harris, 2012). According to Perna (2006), the most widely utilized application of social capital in education research was proposed by Coleman in 1988. This approach focuses on the idea that social capital “relays the norms, authority, information, knowledge, trusts, and social controls required for success and upward mobility” (Coleman, 1988, p.97). Social capital literature has conceptualized college access and academic achievement by exploring various relationships. Coleman’s (1988) approach emphasized the child-parent relationship and the parent-school personnel relationship; both of which communicate the requirements for children’s education success. Several studies have found family and teacher relationships to be associated with positive academic outcomes (Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill, 2015; Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006; Wagner, 2015). Similarly, peers relationships have also been found to have a positive relationship with high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Cerna et al., 2009; Rios-Aguilar & Deil-Amen, 2012). More recently, other studies have begun investigating the impact of social media on students’ social capital. Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, (2007; 2011) found that Facebook use by college students effectively supported and expanded their social capital.

There are also several studies that have found community colleges to be a useful tool for acquiring social capital, especially for Latine students, due to lower tuition rates and accommodation of working students (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, &

Klingsmith, 2014). Wells (2008, p.39) found that, for students with lower levels of “traditionally valued” social capital, four-year colleges may undermine student persistence significantly more than community colleges. While community colleges may prove more accessible and may aid students in building their social capital, other researchers have found that community college level degrees can lead to lower-income jobs and a loss of motivation to continue on for a bachelor’s degree (Latino et al., 2018).

Limitations of Cultural and Social Capital Theories

Social capital and cultural capital theories are useful in highlighting the economic and sociological contexts that affect college access across groups (Yosso, 2005; Wells, 2008). Although these approaches capture certain phenomena associated with structural barriers, they do not explicitly acknowledge that US institutions of education actively oppress students of color through the erasure of their histories, languages, and knowledge to create, fortify, and maintain the power and dominance of Whiteness (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005; & Huber, 2009). Capital frameworks have been criticized as overly versatile since they can be utilized in many fields and contexts (Baron, Field, & Schuller, 2000; Welton & Martinez, 2013). Critics also point out that they lack depth in their understanding of college access and sustain deficit thinking by suggesting a lack of the correct cultural knowledge and connection and failing to acknowledge the inheritable assets of communities of color (Yosso, 2005).

Deficit Model

According to Valencia (1997), the deficit model, or deficit thinking, suggests that marginalized communities are responsible for the challenges, barriers, and oppression they experience. In other words, any negative outcome that these communities experience is due to their cultural and personal deficiencies (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005; Smit, 2012). For example, in

education literature, deficit thinking places blame for poor academic outcomes on minority students and their families by assuming that parents do not value or support their children's academic lives (Yosso, 2005). Applied programs developed from a deficit mindset aim to 'fix' these deficiencies as opposed to addressing the systemic roots of inequality (Smit, 2012). Deficit theorizing is often limited in its scope of social, institutional, and historical accounts and places students with dominant and privileged identities as the automatic referent group whose knowledge and experience is more valued.

According to Yosso (2005) and Crenshaw (1988), deficit thinking is commonplace in scholarship and in interventions. This is not to say that education research and programs don't make an effort to move away from deficit models. This can be seen in literature that addresses the history and problem of deficit theorizing (Cotton, Joyner, George & Cotton, 2016; Halverson & Rosenfeld Halverson, 2019; Gilham & Tompkins, 2016; Matos, 2015; Clycq, Ward Nouwen, & Vandenbroucke, 2014) and in programs that have adopted more strength-based frameworks (Hanger, Goldenson, Weinberg, Schmitz-Sciborski, & Monzon, 2011; Mitchel & Stewart, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.; AVID, n.d.). However, Valencia (1997, 2012) wrote that deficit thinking in research has not disappeared, but rather, has evolved over time and adapted to the acceptable thinking of that day. For example, Smit (2012), discusses how commonly used terms like 'at-risk' and 'non-traditional' used to label certain groups of students presumes that there is an ideal and a non-ideal type of student.

Similar to critical race theorists like Crenshaw (1988), Yosso (2005), Yosso & Solorzano (2005), Delgado Bernal (2002), and Fernandez (2002), Valencia (2012) and Smit (2012) suggest that deficit thinking continues in contemporary literature whenever oppression and systemic inequality are not placed at the heart of the research. Delgado Bernal (2002) and Yosso and

Solórzano (2005) discuss how deficit thinking continues through the assumption that knowledge gained through the White academic lens is objective and accurate. Crenshaw (1988) stated that racism, bias, and deficit theorizing enters the research process as early as the formation of the research question(s). Activist and author, Ibram X. Kendi (2019), stated that one cannot simply be ‘not racist’, one is either actively anti-racist or is, at best, passively complicit in racism. This speaks to the point of the theorists listed above; that perhaps it is not enough for researchers to merely acknowledge or include a section about the problem of deficit thinking, but rather researchers must actively fight against it at every step in the research process. In fact, it is this notion that first inspired a body of critical theories (Harris, 2012).

Critical Race & LatCrit Theory

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) originated in American legal scholarship in response to the post-Civil Rights Movement ‘second reconstruction’ period which not only failed to eliminate implicit and systemic racism, but began a period of post racial colorblindness (Crenshaw, 1988; Ansley, 1989; Harris, 2012; Fernandez, 2002; Malagon, Huber, & Velez, 2009). CRT asserts that race and racism are constructed into most, if not all, facets of contemporary human experience and institutions. Solórzano (1997, 1998) developed five basic tenets of CRT that guide CRT scholars in challenging the dominant modes of education scholarship including a) the intersection of race and racism with other forms of subordination b) challenge the dominant narrative c) a commitment to social justice d) the centrality of experiential knowledge and e) the transdisciplinary perspective.

Since CRTs emergence, various fields, including the field of education, have begun adopting CRT frameworks. Ladson-Billings (1998) and Solórzano (1997) were some of the first

scholars to argue for the application of CRT in education. Since then, CRT researchers have brought attention to racism in U.S. education by exploring teacher perceptions of ethnic minority students (Carger, 1997), the distance between the schools' presupposed path to educational success and minority communities actual experience of education systems (Carger, 1997; Valdes, 1996), and strategies students use to successfully graduate from high school (Flores-Gonzalez, 2002; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Lopez (2003) called for the application of CRT to school leadership. More recently, it has been used to examine Whiteness in classrooms (Martell, 2016) and color-blindness, in which acknowledgement of race is all together avoided in school settings (Annamma, Jackson, & Morrison, 2016; Perez & Salter, 2019).

LatCrit Theory

CRT eventually led to a number of subdisciplines including LatCrit, which expands the basic principles of CRT to examine the social and legal position of Latine people, particularly those living in the United States, by expanding beyond the Black/White binary, which was central to CRT (Fernandez, 2002; Harris, 2012; Yosso, 2005). LatCrit scholars argue that several factors, including immigration status, culture, and language are inextricably linked with racism and further intersect with sexism and classism (Yosso, 2005; Delgado Bernal, 2002, Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). LatCrit theory has helped to conceptualize how Latine communities participate in overt and less obvious acts of resistance in school settings (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and maintain a commitment to social justice for their communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Villalpando, 2003). It has also been used to better understand the students' experiences of subtle racism, which research has found is still commonplace (Smith, 2002; Villalpando, 2003). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) were able to show that LatCrit is a useful framework for examining where racism intersects with other forms of subordination and for uncovering how schools

undermine their ability to “emancipate and empower” Students of Color (p. 479). Delgado (1989) and Olivas (1986) and found that students’ sources of knowledge often include storytelling, cuentos (stories), and consejos (advice) from their family and community.

Delgado Bernal (2002) points out that LatCrit uniquely lends itself to gender, social, and class analysis that accounts for the range of experiences within the Latine community yet the LatCrit theory remains underutilized. Although it is more predominant in the field of education, it remains almost nonexistent in other research fields such as psychology (Harris, 2012). Furthermore, there are a limited number of publications in which LatCrit theory is employed in research development. Due to its theoretical soundness, commitment to social justice, and the need for a clearer understanding of Latine experiences, LatCrit theory will be a useful tool. By conducting research using a LatCrit framework, scholars can challenge the distorted notions of Latine students and their families while calling attention to the processes in which Latine community knowledge and culture empowers students (Yosso, 2005).

Community Cultural Wealth Theory

Community cultural wealth, is a framework born out of CRT and proposed by Yosso in her 2005 article *Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth*. This theory seeks to challenge racist nativist framing by asserting that communities of color possess extensive knowledge, connections, and resources for surviving and succeeding in inherently racist and oppressive systems (Huber, 2009, Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005; Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). Upon examining capital literature with a critical race theory lens, Yosso (2005) discovered six forms of unaccounted capital cultivated by communities of color. She categorized them as 1. Aspirational capital 2. Linguistic capital 3. Familial capital 4. Social capital 5. Navigational capital 6. Resistant capital all of which

challenge the dominant school narrative that students of color come to the classroom with different deficiencies.

Aspirational capital

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to dream beyond the present circumstances despite challenges and barriers. Gándara's (1995) research on Chicanas/os found that this community maintains high aspirations for their children's and subsequent generations' academic success, despite experiencing the lowest educational outcomes.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital accounts for the necessary skills to converse in more than one language and or style. Faulstich-Orellana's (2003) research on bilingual students found that they have particular strengths in audience, metalinguistic, and cross-cultural awareness, social maturity, and "real world" literacy. Code switching is a related skill that is often employed by ethnic minorities. This skill aids in building connection and promoting a safe environment for communication. Linguistic capital also acknowledges the value and power of storytelling, a skill that is often passed down from one generation to the next in communities of color (Yosso, 2005). Storytelling promotes communal history, tradition, moral and ethical values, inclusion, and connection.

Familial Capital

Familial capital refers to the knowledge, memory, and support within family and kin (Yosso, 2005). It extends beyond the traditional western and heterosexual sense of family to encompass the community with which one shares history and culture. It allows space for and encourages commitment to extended family, neighbors, friends and family who have passed on (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital recognizes that kin act as guides for navigating life by informing

one's moral, education, occupational, and emotional self (Auerbach, 2001, 2004; Lopez, 2003 as cited in Yosso, 2005).

Social Capital

Social capital refers to the social networks and connections within communities of color. These connections are based on the premise of pooled resources and information and mutual support that prove to be invaluable in the face of adversity (Yosso, 2005). Huber (2009) found in her qualitative research with Latina women that social capital manifested as material or emotional support from family, friends, and community members. For example, one of the college women she interviewed talked about how her family and neighbors would host local fundraisers or sales in order to offset her cost of attendance.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to the skills of navigating institutions and systems including those that were not constructed with People of Color in mind, such as academic settings, the job market, and judicial settings (Yosso, 2005). Many of today's institutions were founded by and for dominant groups with little to no intention of opening those spaces up to communities of color. While many of these institutions, such as schools, are legally barred from denying admittance to People of Color and some have made surface level efforts to improve inclusion, such as cultural centers or clubs, it is a far cry being built up from its very foundation by and for People of Color. This inherent systemic barrier highlights the impressive abilities of Communities of Color in maneuvering structures of inequality (Yosso, 2005).

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital accounts for the skills and knowledge earned from challenging inequality and subordination through direct opposition (Yosso, 2005). In their research on

Chicano/a school resistance, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) found that students engage in four types of resistance: 1) Reactionary behavior which is characterized by a lack of critique of oppressive systems and a lack of interest in social justice. This may lead to disruptive classroom behaviors 2) Self-defeating resistance, which is described as some level of critique of oppressive systems, but no motivation for social justice. It is under these circumstances that students experience school attrition 3) Conformist resistance, which is understood as a motivation for social justice, but little to no critique of oppressive systems. This often manifests as blame of one's self, family, and culture for their poor social conditions and 4) Transformational resistance, which is characterized by a motivation for social justice and critique of oppression. Student determination and perseverance to overcome barriers is an example of manifestation of transformational resistance.

Latine Education

Latine Education Advocacy and Resistance

As Fernandez (2002, p.45) pointed out, Latine education has been marred by “crisis talk” that places academic achievement gaps at the forefront of academic conversation. Some research has made a point to highlight chronic poverty, lack of basic needs, and poor health care access as the underlying reasons for poor academic outcomes (Gándara & Mordechay, 2017). Other research has dispelled stereotypes that Latine parents are uninvolved and simply don't care about their children's education (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, & Garnier, 2001; López, 2009). Fewer still investigate systemic subordination of Latine communities and place the oppressed voices at the center of their work (Bondy & Braunstein, 2019; Harris & Leonardo, 2018). This gap in the academic achievement and college readiness literature calls for greater attention to the sociopolitical, historical, and systemic influence on Latine education experiences.

While marginalized communities have historically been denied access to post-secondary education (Fernandez, 2002; Villenas & Deyhle; 1999), Fernandez (2002) and Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) remind education scholarship that Latine education is also marked by a century of activism including walkouts and protests, not to mention numerous legal cases pre-*Brown vs Board of Education*, in response to inadequate and segregated education. Chicana students are documented walking out of schools as a form of protest as early as 1910 (Fernandez, 2002). While Casanova (2019) studied forms of educational resistance of a sample of Latine youth. He found that Latine youth have become deeply engaged in active resistance in the “Trump Era” (p. 163). Zion, York, and Stickney (2017) also described student acts of resistance through a student voice project, which centers the students’ experiences in their own words, as well as the student-teacher partnership in resistance. These examples of Latine student resistance help to dismantle ‘white savior’, ‘learned helplessness’, and other deficit model narratives. Therefore, it is important to include a more comprehensive recount of Latine education experiences when discussing the disparities these communities experience.

Latine Education Disparities

The Latine population is one of the fastest growing communities in the U.S. This growth has also brought growth in the Latine student population at all levels of education. According to the Bauman (2017), the number of all Latine students rose from 8.8 million to 17.9 million between 2010 and 2016, making up 22.7 percent of the student body enrolled in K-12 schools, two-year and four-year colleges and universities. College and university enrollment have also increased for the Latine population, especially for 18-24-year old adults (Bauman, 2017). College-age Latine student enrollment has increased up to 26.4 percentage points, depending on the exact age, since 1996 compared to roughly a 9.1 percentage point increase in non-Latine

communities during the same time frame (Bauman, 2017). Part of this increase is likely contributed to the higher number of Latine students enrolled in two-year colleges (Latino et al., 2018). Although over the past several years there has been a significant uptick in the number of Latine students enrolling in 4-year colleges as well (Bauman, 2017).

While enrollment trends are promising, disparities persist. Latine communities still have higher rates of school attrition than non-Latine populations and the increase in high school graduation and college enrollment still lags behind non-Latine communities. In fact, 11% of Latine students did not graduate high school in 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017). This was the second highest rate of high school attrition after Native American students whereas Black and White students had attrition rates of 8% and 4% respectively (NCES, 2017). As of 2017, Colorado's Latine high school attrition rate was 3.5% (Colorado Department of Education, 2018). However, according to the same report, on time high school graduation rates for "Hispanic" students during the 2017-2018 academic year was only 73%. This rate further decreased to 67% for "Limited English Proficiency" students, 70% for "economically disadvantaged" students, and 66.9% for "migrant" students (Colorado Department of Education, 2018).

Despite the growing number of Latine students enrolling in two year- and four year- colleges, Latine students are less likely to have access to the traditionally required resources for college preparation, including advanced placement (AP) or international baccalaureate (IB) courses. These advanced classes allow for students to receive high school and college credits simultaneously. Speroni (2011) found that participation in advanced placement courses improved likelihood for college enrollment, graduation, and higher first year GPAs for all students independent of ethnicity and college generation status. de Brey et al. (2018) reported that only

12% of “Hispanic” 9th grade students were enrolled in an AP math course and only 10% in an AP science course. Boykin and Noguera (2011) and Kirp (2013) have asserted that the gap in AP course enrollment is likely due to the lack of access that Communities of Color have to high quality schools that offer a wide range of these courses. However, research by Colgren and Sappington (2015, p.31) found that the instruction and curriculum of the most “revered” advanced courses did more to benefit non-low income and White students. This suggests that access may not be the only factor influencing the gap in AP course enrollment.

Immigration Status

According to NCES (2017), “Hispanic” students born outside of the U.S. experience school attrition at a rate of 22%, 14 percentage points greater than the national average for U.S. born “Hispanic” students. A significant body of research such as Beck, Corak, and Tienda (2012), Corak (2012), and Chiswick and DebBurman (2004) support that the older a student is when they enter the U.S. education system, the higher the risk for student attrition. Some research posits that older English Language Learner students have potentially passed the critical period for fluent language acquisition (Kim, Chang, Singh, & Allen, 2015; Böhlmark, 2008; Beck, Corak, and Tienda, 2012; and van den Berg, Lunborg, Nystedt, & Rooth, 2014). This potentially disadvantages immigrant students from the start. However, it is unlikely that language is the sole explanation for the increased risk of high school attrition experienced by Latine immigrant students. There is a great deal of variation in Latine immigrant student attrition based on country of origin as well. Clarke (2018) found that Latine immigrant students from Mexico and Central America had the least average number of years of education across different ages of arrival. This was especially true for male Latine immigrant students. Data provided by NCES (2017) also found that students from Mexico and Central America have lower high school

graduation rates than students from South American countries, supporting Clarke's (2018) findings. This may be due to the unique sociopolitical, geopolitical, historical, and economic contexts of those regions.

A small body of research has begun examining the explanations for the "immigrant paradox" in which immigrant students outperform their U.S. born counterparts (Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009, Aretakis, Ceballo, Suarez, & Camacho, 2015). In 2016, Feliciano and Lanuza found that immigrant students did in fact outperform their U.S. born counterparts across ethnicity. They theorize that the U.S.'s "college-for-all ethos" and higher parent expectations are responsible for this phenomenon (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016). While the observed 'immigrant paradox' does not contradict the alarming attrition rates discussed by Clarke (2018) and de Brey et al. (2018), it does call for further research into how immigration status interplays with the educational lives of students.

Class

Research generally supports that low-income youth experience poorer academic outcomes than their middle- and upper-class peers (Reardon, 2013). Because Latine students are more likely to be low-income (US Census Bureau, 2018b), they are more likely to face additional barriers to academic success. In 2017, the median household income for "Hispanic" families was \$50,486 (US Census Bureau, 2018b). However, the Latine population has the second highest rates of poverty behind the Black community (US Census Bureau, 2019, Table B1).

Adding to this financial gap for Latine families is the disparity in access to financial aid. According to a de Brey (2018) report, only 44% of "Hispanic" students received financial aid grants compared to 65% of White college students. This is in part due to financial aid restrictions

for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) statuses. As discussed by Latino et al. (2018), research has consistently shown that financial aid grants improve the likelihood of bachelor's degree attainment, possibly due to uninterrupted enrollment and reduced financial needs requiring students to work while they study.

Research also shows that Latine students are more likely to be first generation college students (FGCS; Balemian & Feng, 2013) and FGCS are likely to come from lower income households (Latino et al., 2018). Research has shown that FGCS, and particularly "Hispanic" FGCS, are at the least likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree within eight years of completing high school (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Latino et al. (2018) pointed out that the challenges faced by FGCS students and their families place them at high risk of college attrition and defaulting on their student loans.

Gender

We cannot discuss the implications of high school graduation and college preparation on the Latine community without recognizing the significant role that gender plays in the educational experience of Latine students. College attrition literature shows that Latinas graduate high school at higher rates than their male counterparts (NCES, 2017; Clarke, 2018). However, Latinas also have some of the lowest levels of formal education overall in the U.S. (Gonzalez et al., 2003). Latinas also perform lower on all measures of academic achievement than their male counterparts (Dache-Gerbino, Kiyama, & Sapp, 2018). Gonzalez et al., (2003) pointed out that Latina students are rarely studied and that most research on Latine student experiences do not specifically investigate the impact of gender. To date, there is no literature that pays specific attention the intersection of gender queer Latine student experience. Understanding the needs and challenges of gender minority Latine students is imperative.

The Role of College Readiness

High school and college degree attainment gaps are important issues when considering the current economic landscape. According to the NCES (2019) the median income in 2016 for adult workers without a high school degree was \$25,400, significantly lower than adults with a high school degree, whose median annual income was reported at \$31,800 for the same year. Whereas, adults with a four-year college degree earned a median annual income of \$54,800 (NCES, 2019). The report also showed that the unemployment rate in 2016 for adults without a high school degree was 13% compared to 9% for adults with a high school degree. Both of these statistics are vastly different than the 2.5% unemployment rate for college graduates in 2016 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017).

Given what we know about the high school and college graduation gap for ethnic minorities, there is a clear need to understand why this gap exists and how to close it. College readiness programs have been widely implemented as a response to this gap. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education started the program Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs or (GEARUP; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Other common programs include Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID, n.d.), and Upward Bound. All of these programs aim to improve high school graduation rates and help students transition into college (Knaggs et al., 2013). Although unique, these programs, along with many smaller state- and county-level efforts, often share certain components including academic and standardized test support, mentoring, and parent outreach (Knaggs et al., 2013). Most of these programs participate in some form of program evaluation and generally report positive impacts on student outcomes (Knaggs et al., 2013; Perna, 2015). Perna (2015) suggests that, in order for college readiness programs to succeed in closing the academic gap, they must address the built-

in educational inequalities and focus on helping students navigate the educational system. Despite this call for college readiness programs to focus on systemic change, programs continue to focus on direct student application through study assistance, test preparation, and mentoring (e.g., AVID, n.d.; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Villalpando and Solórzano (2015) and Welton & Martinez (2013) have found that most college readiness program designs are built on cultural and social capital frameworks. As reviewed by Villalpando and Solórzano (2015) and Welton & Martinez (2013), these frameworks also remain common in college access and readiness literature, where they are used to conceptualize how some students are prepared to successfully enter the college pipeline, while other students are not able to access the same resources or opportunities as well. These frameworks, while popular, have not gone without criticism. Cultural and social capital frameworks have made significant contributions to our current understanding of college access and readiness challenges and inequities. In many ways they were the beginning of scholarly critique on education systems. However, there are limitations in how comprehensive they are in describing the complexity of barriers to Students of Color. Additionally, both theories have been criticized for endorsing a deficit approach (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005; Welton & Martinez, 2013).

Eagle County Context

Eagle County is located in the Vail Valley of Colorado. This area is an internationally known as a luxury resort town famous for its snow sports, including skiing and snowboarding (“Visit Vail Valley”, n.d.). This attraction brings considerable wealth to the area. However, it also creates a unique bi-modal local economy with great disparity between a wealthy class and the families who struggle to earn a living wage as they work to serve the wealthy families. These

families face significant socio-economic barriers regarding affordable housing, wage gaps, language and culture, childcare, and transportation (Riggs, 2018). Between 2016 and 2017, the population grew by 1.57% from 52,894 to 53,726 people of which 67.3% of the population are White and 29.6% identify as “Hispanic” or “Latino” (Eagle County, CO, n.d.; Bauman, 2017). During this same period, the median household income grew to \$83,803 per year, which is significantly higher than the National median household income of \$60,336 (Eagle County, CO, n.d.; Bauman, 2017). The most common industries, by number of employees, are accommodation and food services, construction, and retail services (Eagle County, CO, n.d.). However, none of these industries were listed in terms of the highest earning industries. As of 2017, the median property value in Eagle County was \$471,100 (Eagle County, CO, n.d.). This is roughly \$250,000 more than the national average. Interestingly, median income and employment industry were not broken down to include the Latine community despite it being the second largest population in the county.

This study recruited from the three main public high schools in Eagle County: Eagle Valley High School, Battle Mountain High School, and Red Canyon High School. Over half of the student body in these three high schools identify as Latine (Public School Review, n.d.). Over a quarter of the total student body at Eagle Valley and Battle Mountain qualify for free or reduced lunch, while more than half of the students at Red Canyon qualify (Public School Review, n.d.). Currently, the Eagle County high school graduation rate is 79.4% with a completion rate of 88.7% (Eagle County Schools, n.d.).

Larimer County Context

Larimer county, located in northwest Colorado, is the sixth most populous county in Colorado. According to the local census, the overall population as of 2021 was estimated at

369,377 with a growth rate ranging from 1.72 - 1.91% over the last four year (“Larimer County, Colorado Population 2021,” n.d.). According to Larimer county 2019 census data, 82% of the population identified as White, 11.9% Hispanic, 2.37% multiracial (non-Hispanic), 1.98% Asian, 0.91% Black, 0.56% Native American/Native Alaskan, 0.13% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.15% “other” (Larimer County, n.d., Race and Ethnicity infographic). Between 2018-2019, income inequality rose 1.78% (Larimer County, n.d., Wage Distribution infographic). However, the data also shows that the overall wage distribution score in 2019 was 0.468, slightly below the national average of 0.478. The median household income was reported as \$71,881 per year with the most common jobs in the areas of management, sales, office administration, and education instruction. As of 2019, the median property value was estimated at \$420,100 with 65% of these homes occupied by the owner (Larimer County, n.d., Property Value Infographic).

Larimer county includes three school districts: Poudre school district, Thompson School District, and Estes Park School District. This study recruited students from a handful of schools in the Poudre and Thompson school districts. These included Poudre High School (PHS), Fort Collins High School (FCHS), and Loveland High School (LHS). Additionally, one participant was involved in an alternative GED school program called Opportunities Unlimited (OU), which is embedded in both PHS and FCHS. PHS’s student body is reported as 68% White, 26% Latine, and 6% other with a 77% graduation rate and 40% eligibility for free or reduced lunch (Public School Review, n.d., *Compare Public Schools Larimer County*, Infographic). According to that same source, FCHS student body is 67% White, 22% Latine, and 11% other with a 82% graduation rate and 32% free or reduced lunch eligible student body. Meanwhile, the LHS student body is reported to be approximately 73% White, 20% Latine, and 7% other. The

graduation rate is listed as approximately 80% and 34% of students qualify for reduced or free lunch.

School in the Time of COVID-19

The first confirmed Covid-19 cases in Colorado occurred in the small mountain ski resort towns including Vail in Eagle County (McCrimmon, K. K., 2020, para 1). By early March, COVID-19 had been confirmed in Larimer County (Larimer County, 2020, para 1). Schools promptly shut down for an undetermined amount of time before eventually reopening through a virtual modality. Masonbrink and Hurley (2020) discussed how COVID-19 brought national concern and discourse around accessible childcare, student health, and education loss as well as the exacerbated inequity in these domains on low-income and BIPOC students and families. Essentially, low-income and BIPOC families are more likely to experience financial stressors (job loss, lack of affordable daycare), decreased access to resources that support online school (time, wifi access, remote work options), and are more reliant on school for providing daily supervision, nutrition, and mental health to their kids (Masonbrink & Hurley, 2020).

These concerns are not unfounded or unique. Time and time again we have seen how disasters fuel racism and have the greatest impact on minoritized racial and ethnic groups. For example, the mining disaster of 2014 in Mexico and 2015 in Brazil led to predominantly low-income Indigenous and Black communities exposed to harmful chemicals (Schwarz-Herion & Omran, 2020). Probably one of the most famous examples of this was Hurricane Katrina, which struck Louisiana in 2005. The overwhelming loss of life, displacement, and financial blow most impacted the Black communities of New Orleans and surrounding suburbs and aid was dramatically slower to reach these communities and neighborhood recovery and rebuilding arguably still has not occurred in many of the poorest areas of the city (Kim-Farley, 2020). A

study by Sovacool, Xu, Zarazua De Rubens, & Chen (2020) found disproportionate racial stereotyping and scapegoating after hurricane Irma and a lack of reporting on the prosocial behaviors occurring throughout communities of color. Anti-Chinese rhetoric, discrimination, and harassment sparked at the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in China (Zhu, 2020) echoing similar discriminatory sentiments in the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa (Pasch, 2020).

Given that systematically created education gaps have always existed and disproportionately hurt BIPOC communities, it is important to understand the impact of COVID-19 on those established gaps, how BIPOC students and families navigate school during the pandemic, and how communities and institutions are supportive or hostile toward BIPOC students in their pursuit of education. This study proposed to explore just that through the perspective of Latine students and families with the hope that the findings may help students reflect on the strengths and resources they draw on in navigating oppressive school systems during the pandemic and their broader communities will have more nuanced and informed responses to the needs and asks of Latine students and families.

Current Study

The proposed study used interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) method and community cultural wealth and LatCrit theories to explore how Latine high school juniors and seniors experience school and college/career preparation during the pandemic. This is a particularly important direction for research in college and career readiness programs considering the previously discussed inequity college access, readiness, and enrollment of Latine adolescents and young adults without the additional burden of a global crisis. Existing research on adolescent experiences in after school and college/career readiness programs often do not capture the richness and diversity of Latine adolescent experiences in their own words. Much

research in this area continues to perpetuate deficit thinking on Latine education and culture. Therefore, exploratory qualitative studies informed by the integration of community cultural wealth and LatCrit frameworks, could be particularly useful in decolonizing the dominant narrative about Latine adolescent experiences of college access and readiness and “reclaim the humanity” of Latine people that racist and nativist rhetoric erases (Huber, 2009, p.706).

CRT and cultural wealth frameworks have helped researchers to conceptualize student of color college preparation experiences. This research has given us an understanding of the challenges and barriers students’ face, the beliefs, attitudes, and aspirations that students and their families hold about higher education, and how students’ resist school oppression. However, illness, loss of community, loss of jobs, and institutions shutting down and moving online changed the context of students’ school and college preparation. The pandemic continues to shift and impact people’s lives and it remains unclear if and when it will ever cease. Given that Latine students face several barriers and challenges when operating in oppressive school systems, research is needed to better understand how major events or crises, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic affects their experiences in school and their communities.

Research on Latine communities across all fields have traditionally focused on urban and rural populations. While Eagle County, CO is considered remote (publicschoolreview.com) and therefore may share some challenges similar to rural communities, it is unique in that (a) it is a luxury resort community with a bimodal socioeconomic landscape, (b) its industries and required skills are different, and (c) it thrives on a transient tourist population. These elements of the Eagle County context may put the Latine communities at greater risk and even more invisible than in other settings. Members of Eagle County schools and programs have expressed concern that they are trying to improve outcomes and well-being of the growing Latine community

without a deep understanding of their needs and challenges. Larimer county is different in that it is a historically agriculture-dependent area undergoing rapid urbanization and growth (Larimer County, 2019, p.10). With this growth has come shifts in its politics, wealth, and industry. However, it is this research team's observation that many of the Latine families, some of whom have occupied this area for generations, have been pushed out to lower-income areas where growth and prosperity has been slower. This, in many ways, mimics the isolation, invisibility, and risk of Latine communities in Eagle and Larimer counties. It is my hope that this study can help elucidate the challenges and barriers experienced by the Latine communities before and during the pandemic along with the cultural wealth and strengths of this population. An accurate and robust comprehension of the Eagle County and Larimer County Latine communities is essential to changing the deficit thinking that undermines community efforts to serve this population.

Lastly, the information gathered through this methodology could inform more appropriate and sensitive school and college/career readiness interventions that build upon the assumption of Latine cultural wealth and continuity. It is also possible that the qualitative data gathered in this study can elucidate future research by generating testable hypotheses. This qualitative method allowed for deeper exploration of how Latine adolescents make meaning of themselves and their experiences within their broader cultural contexts and remained true to their experience by preserving their original words.

Research Questions

Due to the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the exploratory nature of this under-researched area in education, there is one broad research question for this study: How are Latine juniors and seniors navigating high school and their post-high school plans during the

pandemic? This question was explored with consideration of three main domains: (a) how the pandemic has impacted the lives of Latine high school students, their families, and their communities (b) how the negative effects of the pandemic connect to systemic and historical oppression of the Latine community (c) the students' use of intrapersonal and community strengths to navigate school and post-school plans during the pandemic. This change allowed for maximum flexibility and gave students the power to determine the direction of the interview by focusing on the areas that felt most important to them.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Design

An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) qualitative research approach was used for this study. Following the IPA approach, I sought to understand meaning in events and in human interactions using a combination of descriptive and interpretive activity (Quinn & Clare, 2008; Smith, 1996). Because it is interpretive, the research assistants' and my own understanding entered the analysis. It is important to note that IPA is not hypothesis driven; rather it is used to investigate broader concepts and further explore existing knowledge and research (Quinn & Clare, 2008). Unlike other forms of qualitative research, which aim to develop a theory of a particular concept or phenomenon, IPA aims to provide an account of people's beliefs, behaviors, and experiences (Quinn & Clare, 2008). IPA emphasizes the meaning people attribute to their subjective experiences and that the accounts people share in interviews relates to these meanings (Smith, 1996). Therefore, research using IPA is thematic, describing shared experiences across individuals' accounts (Quinn & Clare, 2008).

Data collection and analysis typically occur sequentially using the IPA framework. In fact, it is standard for the three IPA processes of data collection, coding, and data analysis, to blend and overlap throughout the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967): This approach encourages the kind of flexibility so important to the qualitative researcher who can change a line of inquiry and move in new directions, as more information and a better understanding of what relevant data are acquired (Blumer, 1999).

Procedures

This study recruited 12 Latine junior or senior level high school students, 7 of whom lived in Eagle County and 5 who lived in Larimer County using a snowball recruitment method.

Participation was open to all gender identities, Latine heritage, immigration status, and generation status students. This study focused on 11th and 12th grade students to ensure a greater depth of information from students drawing nearer to graduation and planning for entering higher education or the workforce. This also allowed us an intimate picture of how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the students transitioning from high school into early adulthood and their vision for their future. This study was part of a larger community needs assessment proposed by the Vail Valley Foundation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recruitment involved distribution of electronic and paper bilingual flyers among various community stakeholders including students, local businesses, and after school programs. Once a few initial seed participants were identified and recruited in each county, this study continued recruitment using snowball sampling. Each participant was compensated with a gift card or cash transfer at a rate of \$20 per hour. Additionally, they were offered \$10 extra for each additional participant they recruited into the study.

Students and their legal guardians were given the option to consent to participating in the project prior to completing the survey and interview. Additionally, they were instructed that they could discontinue participation at any time without penalty, as well as skip any questions they did not wish to answer. Participants were also informed of the confidential nature of the survey and interview; for example, participants were informed that their individual responses would not be shared with community stakeholders, teachers, etc. To aid in confidentiality, all students were given a participant ID and an alias used in the interview recordings. Following participation, individuals were given written debriefing information that included contact information for counseling services. Due to the nature of the pandemic, the study was conducted via telephone interviews

Transcription and coding were completed by a team of undergraduate research assistants (URAs) and this graduate student researcher. URAs were recruited through an open, department-wide advertisement at Colorado State University. Latine URAs with an interest and understanding of racial justice and research were especially encouraged to apply independent of race, language, gender, and immigration status.

Participants

Participants for this study included 12 individuals who identified as members of the Latine community. Of those participants, 7 self-identified as a girl or woman, 4 identified as a boy or man, and 1 identified as gender queer. All participants identified as being members of the Latine community. 8 identified as Mexican, one self-identified as Salvadoran, one person identified as both White and Cuban, one identified as both White and Costa Rican, and one participant identified as Chilean and Argentine. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 19 years old. 10 of the 12 participants reported their parents working in essential worker jobs with the majority working in hospitality, home cleaning services, and construction. 9 of the 12 students self-identified as first-generation college students. 11 of the 12 students identified as English- and Spanish-speaking and 1 identified as Spanish-speaking. 4 of the 12 students interviewed were born outside of United States. 3 Students reported at least 1 parent speaking proficient or fluent English. All of the students expressed goals and intentions to continue in higher education after high school with 2 students aspiring to attend community college for a specific vocation. The other 10 participants aspired to a 4-year college degree with 2 already intending on continuing into graduate school after achieving their bachelor's degree.

Measures

Questionnaire.

Participants were asked to fill out a paper survey before they are interviewed. The survey collected demographic information, including sex assigned at birth, gender identity, ethnicity, age, country of origin, parents' countries of origin, immigration generation, and language(s) spoken. The survey also asked a variety of social questions on family employment, close relationships, values, plans after high school, and other identities important to the student. These questions were used to provide context to the students' experiences and perceptions and inform probing questions tailored to the participant during the interview. While most of the items on this survey were quantitative, other demographics items, such as ethnicity, country of origin, and other identities were designed as open-ended questions as a way to reduce limitations on self-identification.

Interviews

The interview explored (a) how the pandemic has impacted the lives of Latine high school students, their families, and their communities (b) how the negative effects of the pandemic connect to systemic and historical oppression of the Latine community (c) the students' use of intrapersonal and community strengths to navigate school and post-school plans during the pandemic. All these areas were explored within the context of COVID in order to assess the impact of COVID on the students' lives. Interviews began with an open-ended question followed by semi-structured follow up questions in the students' preferred language, either Spanish or English. Often, the interviewer employed additional probing questions for clarification. As anticipated, the students talked about a wide variety of topics throughout an extended interview. Core interview questions or prompts included the following:

(1) Tell me the story of how COVID-19 (the pandemic) has affected your life.

Probe: How has COVID-19 affected your school, work, relationships, and family?

Follow up: how has COVID-19 affected the Latine community?

(2) Describe what high school has been like for you.

Follow up: what has your family's and community's experience interacting with school

Follow up: How has this changed with the pandemic?

(3) Describe how you have prepared for your post high school plans.

Follow up: How has this changed with the pandemic?

Analysis

As previously mentioned, 12 phone interviews were conducted at which saturation was reached. All interviews were tape-recorded. Interview length ranged from 40 mins to approximately 2 hours, with the majority having a duration of approximately 1 hour. The interviews were informal and open-ended, and carried out in a conversational style. Each interview was transcribed in the language of the interview (English or Spanish) by a team of URAs recruited by the researcher. Interviews were then quality checked by a different URA or this researcher on the project. All interviews conducted in Spanish were transcribed and coded in Spanish. Codes and meaning units were then translated and back translated into English before being organized into themes and subthemes.

Coding and analysis of the transcripts occurred using Nvivo, a qualitative analysis computer software (NVivo, 2020), for the first and second phase of coding. In the first phase of analysis, the transcriptions were read multiple times and independently free coded by a team member in their own words with their initial phenomenological and interpretive notes (Smith, Thompson, and Larkin, 2012, pp. 82-83). Phenomenological coding and notes are primarily

descriptive whereas the interpretive coding and notes are concerned with the how and why of the participant's experience (Thompson, and Larkin, 2012, pp. 82-83). Researcher notes were linked to the appropriate coded unit of text. Each note provided impressions, interpretations, and perspectives on their respective sections of dialogue. These notes provide the foundation for our translation of codes into a more systematic and consistent meaning unit labels.

The second phase of analysis focused on coding the researcher notes into meaning units. Meaning units are short phrases that aim to encompass how participants make meaning of their experiences (Thompson, and Larkin, 2012, pp. 82-83). The third phase of coding involved organizing the meaning units into themes and subthemes for each interview. These themes and subthemes were then compiled and organized across all twelve interviews. Due to limitations within the Nvivo software, the third phase of coding was completed in Microsoft Excel where it was easier to visualize and organize the various meaning units within one window.

Intercoder Agreement

As previously mentioned, data transcribing, coding, and analysis was completed by me and a small team of URAs. Employing a team of researchers for the analysis allowed for rich discussion on a variety of perspectives before determining the meaning of students' stories and experiences. Due to the range of experiences and perspectives within the research team, it was important to establish intercoder agreement as a means of achieving consistency and consensus in our understanding of the theoretical background of this project and how we use that as a lens to understand the students' experiences (Berends & Johnston, 2005).

Strategies for Trustworthiness

Strategies for trustworthiness were implemented to strengthen the study. From the onset, IPA research has higher quality when appropriate data is collected from appropriately selected

informants (Larkin & Thompson, 2012, p. 112). Additionally, peer validation, in the form of multiple researchers, is an important strategy for trustworthiness in IPA and was employed in this study. Assuring quality reporting and interpretation of the data was established by analyzing the data extensively and cyclically as well as discussing and exploring researcher perspectives through a critical and liberation lens (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Further, the research team used member checking in order to ensure the accuracy and co-construction of the results. Member checking is considered an important step in validating qualitative data and inviting participants to correct, clarify, and expand on the researchers' interpretations and conclusions (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). However, in anticipation that students might not be easily reached at the completion of the coding process, member checking was used throughout the course of the interview. This included this researcher reflecting on the students' stories and statements and asking participants to confirm, correct, or expand on this researcher's reflection.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

The results of this study were determined through the use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) of 12 interviews lasting from 1-2 hours in length. This study focused on the phenomenological aspects of IPA to better understand the meaning and experience of each participant. The results include 8 major themes describing the experience of Latine high school juniors and seniors as they navigate high school and prepare for their post high school plans during a pandemic.

Theme 1: School and school-based relationships are highly valued

All the students expressed positive feelings toward teachers and school staff who they perceived as invested, empowering, and supportive. For example, this student expressed deep appreciation for their teachers and saw them as knowledgeable and supportive figures in their education journey.

“Yeah, so um, [name of GED program], it's a really cool program because you get a lot of one on one with teachers, which is what you really can't get in a classroom. And it's more of a, the whole class doesn't work at one pace. You get to work at your own pace. It kind of just feels like a second home when you're there because you know everybody so well. Teachers are really interactive; they tell you how they feel about something and you can feel free to talk about whatever to them. And it's just, it feels good being in a room where teachers actually take the time to talk to one student, explain how they learn; because not everybody learns the same way, so that's a good thing - being able to work at your own pace. You can work on how you know how to learn, and the teacher will gladly help you [based on] how you learn.”

Many students also expressed concern for their teachers' wellbeing during the pandemic. They offered flexible expectations for teachers with the understanding that teachers and staff were also facing challenges and stress due to the pandemic. For example, one student stated,

“I mean, it's not just us that went through COVID, it's also the teachers. I guess they've gone through things too, like on their own. Maybe one of their family got COVID or something. But in terms of COVID affects all of us, even though I didn't get COVID, it still affects you because... well, just look at what's happening, I mean everything's stressful. So [teachers] get, I don't know, stressed a lot too. Especially because they have

to teach. [They have] like, I don't know, 200 students and need to make sure [the students] all get the work and concepts.”

Several students also described particularly close and supportive relationships with Spanish language teachers, college counselors, and Latine teachers. These teachers were often seen as having a deeper understanding of the concerns and barriers these students were having to overcome as well as an appreciation for the students' culture and language. It seemed that these staff members went beyond their teaching role and showed genuine interest in knowing and understanding the students. For example, in the quote below, the student described the support he received from his college counselor while he tried to navigate scholarship applications as an undocumented student.

“Since my freshman year, I went in and I told [my school counselor] ‘hey, you know I'm illegal, but I want to continue my education, how can you help me?’ And he began creating a plan for me...and my junior year he was telling me about Colorado's 1st Generation Scholarship. He's like, ‘hey, you should apply to this.’ I'm always his number one person to go to regarding that because he knows a lot about me and I've created a really good relationship with him. He's calling me letting me know of options for me as an undocumented student. Or sometimes I find scholarships and I'm like, ‘hey, I don't know if this is legit or not.’ and I go to him and he's like ‘I'll investigate for you and then I'll let you know what I find out and if it's worth the while for you to sign up for it.”

For this student, her Spanish teacher helped empower her to think critically about the negative stereotypes of Latine girls and women.

“I remember one of my teachers especially, my Spanish teacher, would help empower me. She was a, a female teacher and she would just help me realize that, our race and gender should..., are able to do more, are capable of more and we shouldn't be like tied down by our stereotypes. [We should] dismantle those.”

While in the following quote, the student discussed how her Spanish-language teacher advocated for improved language access in the school.

“I think at my school, the teachers are like great about it. Like I know my... I've had class with [a teacher] for three years for like a college class for Spanish and she tried to organize so many things for Spanish speaking students, so that they could understand [each other] and like see what they actually need help with, and I think...that's really

taking a toll on my school in a positive way. Like everyone is like accounted for, we understand everyone better.”

A common thread through all these stories, was that the counselor, Latine, and or Spanish language teacher seemed to assist or engage their students beyond academics. Students expressed feeling seen and heard by each of these school staff members. This sense of connection and care between student and staff member left a notable impression on the participants' feelings and experience of school.

Students described school as an important space for feeling connected to the peers and staff who played important roles in their day-to-day lives. Many students shared the sentiment that school was an important space for students to feel motivated, active, and involved with others who shared their interests and goals. In the first two quotes the students expressed the positive effect of school involvement as well as the emotional impact of losing and then returning to school. In the last quote, the students expressed how it was hard to stay motivated and retain information once schools were no longer in person.

“Honestly, I felt like my mental health was at its highest when I was still in school. I was very social, I didn't have any sadness at all or anything, I was fine. I was having fun with friends, I was doing lots of active things, I had club volleyball at the time. And then, this virus came, and it dropped out of nowhere and it just felt like, slowly, like time by time, little by little, the happiness was taken away because of all of the activities that were taken away.”

“I mean, it felt great 'cause I missed the teachers, I missed all my friends and we all saw each other. We were really happy to be together again. And yeah, the whole Covid rules are still are up, six feet apart, all that stuff, which kind of sucks but, I mean being able to be in the same room and learn together just feels really good.”

“At the beginning I was kind of happy because I didn't have to go to school any more. But then, I don't know, it just really hurt me because working from school didn't really feel the same as in physical [school] and it was a difficult to keep up and to learn things. Nothing really stuck with me [while online].”

Lastly, the great majority of the participants reported COVID-19 having a negative impact on their school-based friendships leading them to feel more isolated. Students mostly believed this was due to the loss of the school space which was a place of connecting with their peers in ways that social media could not replace. As expressed in the quotes below, most students yearned for connection and a sense of shared experience with their peers. Students expressed relief when they were able to confirm and validate their experiences with their peers.

“We definitely kind of [went] our separate ways during Covid. Some of us like stopped talking. With others, like we kept in touch, but not as much as before. I think emotionally, I was just really drained and, in a way, felt left out because the only people I had were my family. You know, not that I was tired of them, but I hear from them all day every day and it was just... I guess just repetitive.”

“Because we used to have a group chat on Snapchat and we used to talk in it every day and now it's, we don't talk in it at all... Yeah, I mean me personally, I'm more of a in-person hangout type of person, you know, and I feel like [name of GED program] was a little big part of that because we had to go see each other almost every day. And we would all make plans in person, not just talk about them, we would actually do them and you would see who's on board and who is interested in going. And I feel like just over social media you really can't get that [connection] like you can in person.”

Theme 2: Family and school are intertwined in a way that makes both resources vital to the other.

It was very clear that education was highly valued by the students, their families, and their communities. This contradicts a dominant narrative that Latine parents deprioritize their children's education (Auerbach, 2001 & 2007). Most of the participants described their aspiration for college as a collective aspiration they shared with family and community. They were both inspired and motivated by their family's history and prospective future. Students also seemed to seek out a college and career experience that deepened their connection with their family and community, thus making family and their educational journey inextricable connected. As illustrated in the quote below, many students recognized their families made significant

sacrifices, including immigrating, leaving family and community, and operating in the US despite bias and threat of deportation, all for the dream of the future generations accessing higher education.

“My parents. Because they brought me to a country where, so they so they can't properly speak the language, but they brought my sister and I to get an opportunity at an education we were denied where we're from. And they knew that if we would have stayed in El Salvador, we would not have been anywhere close to the family we are today. And I feel like I owe it to them. And to myself as well to continue my education because I work, I've been working so hard for it, it's only fair enough for me to continue that. And even, and they told me too 'like, regardless of what major you wanna go into, we're always going be there for you, we're never going tell you no and we'll try our very best to help you what we can.”

Not only did the families' sacrifices inspire the student's aspirations for college, they were the primary motivation for students to persevere in school despite various barriers and challenges. This seemed especially true given the challenges they experienced during the pandemic. For example, this student recalled how she would draw on the memory of her mother's strength and resilience whenever she felt she was losing motivation or will during the pandemic.

“I just have faith that, growing up, sorry, a lot of back story is needed [to explain] my thoughts. Bear with me, growing up, I moved a lot and my mom, she's a single mother and she raised 4 kids on her own. And we moved, I think, a total of 17 times. Oh 21 well, my mom by herself, she moved 21 times and while I was alive, we only moved 17 times. So, um, I think that we've evolved a lot and my mom has evolved a lot. We've gotten, I don't know how, it's unexplainable, it's [hard] to understand. I can't describe [or] explain to you how we're still OK and thriving...[The pandemic] definitely did affect my motivation and some days I think it's just too much and it's overwhelming because I have to get on all the assignments super early, which is really hard and it's hard to stay consistent with it, but again, I need to gather motivation from my mom, but I think that [she] helped me build endurance.”

In addition to honoring their family's sacrifice as a motivation for achieving their college and career goals, most students also talked about a desire to make their families proud as a chief motivation for school. Elders could be proud of their journey to help their children reach this

point and younger family members could be proud of the student's efforts which helped open new gateways for them. Below, a student talked about how she wants to accomplish her family's dream of college to make their sacrifices worthwhile as well as giving her younger sister someone to look up to.

“I was so excited. I was, the only thing I've dreamed of was making my parents proud and by doing that I would be doing what they couldn't and that's going to college. Being the first in my family to go to college, accomplishing that dream, making my sister look up to me, being proud of me, giving my parents like, I know they sacrificed so much for me to be in sports, to be in clubs, so expensive, to be, like, a perfect student. Like, they helped me in school and everything and just coming here and with all their sacrifice, it made me so excited and eager to get to college so that I could make them proud.”

For some, education was seen as an essential step on the path to economic stability and mobility for themselves and their families. For some, being financially stable would allow the student to repay their family for the sacrifices and hard work. When discussing her plans to be an entrepreneur, the following student stated her aspiration to have work that allows her to provide for her family.

“I was just going to say that after having a business I will be able to...have more money and have a little bit more than probably others and be able to provide for my own family because I know that they're going through a lot and they work day and night for us, and so I'm trying to be able to give back to them.”

Additionally, parents seemed to inspire a common desire among students to use their education and career as a means to “give back” to their families and communities. Several students listed future careers in helping and healthcare professions. Even those that aspired for something outside of those domains often intended to serve their community within their given career choice.

“It inspires me because I have a visual example of somebody who has so many limitations and so many obstacles against her, but she continues to persevere against all of them and she gives my sisters and I a lot of hope that ‘hey, you know what? Like if I can do this, you can do it 100 times better. If you continue with your education.’ You know, she's always wanting us to get involved and wanting us to give back... she's

always making us realize that perhaps [we] don't know this person, but life can give so many turns and maybe one day you're going to need them. So, you have to make sure you give back to them, you need to make sure you always help somebody else and make sure they're OK. Seeing her do so many things for her community, even with having in the back of her head that she's scared or that something can go wrong, is amazing. But she continues to do what she does because she knows that another day is another opportunity to help a lot more people out. It makes me realize that everything I'm doing is good for my community.”

Several participants saw family as a vital resource for school and college, irrespective of parental college status. Elder family members had valuable lived experience and knowledge that students could tap into as they made decisions about their college and career choices. For example, in this excerpt, the student described how his family’s tradition of ranching and knowledge of animal husbandry informed his desire to be formally trained as a veterinarian. In choosing a field that expanded on his family’s experience, he

“So, my grandpa, on my mom’s side, he has cattle. He has everything, like he has bulls, he has chickens, he has all that and he nurtures them himself, so I kind of grew up into that. I don't know, ever since I was a little kid, I wanted to be one...I really wanted to be a vet and that’s really what pushes me the most. Not only for my parents, but also like I really want to be a vet for some reason, I don't know, just the fact that helping other people, I mean, help other people’s animals, and follow in my family’s footsteps. I’ve always had that idea in my mind, so yeah”

For the few participants who had older siblings, they often relied on their older siblings as guides for navigating the intimidating college process. Older siblings took on the role of helping the student and their parents with financial aid and college entrance applications and giving advice on college culture.

“Not only that, but my brother has also taught me a lot about college just COVID he’s here right now and I've been around him so it just really helps to have another person go there that way I'm not that scared to go by myself.”

Finally, for many, family provided emotional and psychological support and encouragement. For this student, the parents provide emotional support by acting as a sounding board for the student as she considers her vision for her future. They also encouraged her

curiosity about college and helped her solve complex problems. Similarly, the second participant told of her parent's curiosity and encouragement as sources of motivation for her to be more considerate of her college options.

“So, my dad has always encouraged me... He asks me questions like ‘How far away do you want to go? Like what is more of your plan, once you get there?’ Honestly, [my mom] has always been (trails off)...she doesn't really want me to leave the state, but she also gives me a sense of freedom. So, I talked to them about what areas I'd be interested in going to in the US, or how we'd end up I guess paying for college- financial aid and academic scholarships. [My parents] are kind of that guiding and support you kind of role.”

“I think, to be honest, my parents. Like it didn't come out of nowhere, but I really think my parents were the only ones who were like, you start thinking about what you want to do with your life. I'm like, “Yep, maybe a teacher.” I just kept changing like over the years and when I was going into high school they asked, well, it was one of those casual conversations like, ‘oh, so what do you want to be when you grow up?’ but like as I got older it was more like, ‘So looks like you're being serious now and [college] is coming soon, like what do you actually want to do?’ Questions that kind of force you to think. When my parents are like supportive and want something good for me or for me to do good, I think they just really push me to want more.”

Theme 3: Economic inequality disproportionately harms Latine students and their families before and during the pandemic

Participants were open about the economic oppression the Latine community experienced in their respective counties. Most students worried about how the pandemic might make their family's financial insecurity even more precarious. For some, families and the students had to risk potential exposure to keep working. This student discussed how the demand and need for the type of work many Latine people occupy required them to work throughout the pandemic.

“I don't know, I guess, we can say that the stereotype is that Latinos are the ones that work like harder and the most. And you know, so I mean, they're the ones who build houses, they are the ones who paint. They're the ones who pour concrete, they're the ones to put sheetrock daily. Once you do all that, but there's nobody to do that then who's going to do it? And it's not going to get done. So, and it doesn't bring income either, so it just really affects both like the industry and the and the Latinos.”

Whereas for others, family members or neighbors were laid off and subsequently struggled to afford groceries and pay their bills. This was particularly worrisome for students with undocumented parents who already faced financial challenges and limited work opportunities before the pandemic. This student expressed the financial stress her family felt when her father's hours were reduced to part-time and her mother, who was undocumented, was unable to find work or qualify for assistance.

“[My mother] is undocumented and my dad was a full-time construction worker. Well, he just works in construction, but after Covid they told my dad that they were going to cut his hours due to them wanting to avoid the risk and if they felt any kind of symptoms, they would not show up to work for two weeks at least. And if we wanted to return, they had to have gotten a test saying that they were negative. So, we had a lot of difficulty figuring out how we were going to pay our rent and utilities bills. We were just trying to figure out where we're going to get the money from, and it was kind of difficult because my parents, they are both undocumented and so are my siblings, except my younger one. And we were just trying to figure out how we were going to do it, we did a couple yard sales hoping that would earn us a couple of money. Now we started selling food to see if that would provide a little bit, but it just didn't matter. And there wasn't enough. So, it's very difficult to get by. Still, even now, the hours haven't changed for my dad. Still has, he's working as a part time. Um and my mom still unemployed.”

Whereas this student, who works to contribute to his family's financial wellbeing, wondered how the loss of his salary would contribute to their stress.

“Yeah, I agree, I work with a company that makes soccer games for kids. So, schools will cancel. So, like there's no kids to go play so we didn't get paid. We didn't get, I didn't get to rest. I didn't get to do anything, so it really effected like the money come that was coming in. Not only me, but my parents too...I feel like work in general too, cause there's not that many jobs that pay good, there's not going to be enough housing or anything.”

Students also expressed concern about how the pandemic would affect their education prospects. All participants discussed their reliance on scholarships and financial aid to secure their college and career goals. Several students considered if the pandemic would negatively affect the availability of scholarships. For students with an undocumented status, financial

assistance options were already quite limited before the pandemic, and they worried the few options would only continue to decrease.

“Honestly, for a lot of athletes, Covid has allowed like college seniors to repeat their senior year. So, a lot of the sports scholarship money is being used to keep them so that has because a lot of problems in that idea of a sports scholarship, but it has also opened my mind to realizing that I need an academic scholarship. I need to keep my grades up and even refines what I want to do in life.”

“I was not able to apply for scholarships that were only offered to juniors who were undocumented, or DACA recipients because those only are available to junior students, only. And because of Covid, they had to cancel those scholarships, so I couldn't apply for that. I was not able to attend college programs or college visits that would have helped me understand a little bit more of how financial aid works. And how my major works. So anything regarding financial aid or getting financial aid was cancelled for me. So I had to start from scratch once again and figure out OK, where am I going to get the money from? And how am I going to apply for it now? And it kind of ruined my whole process because I was heavily relying on stuff like that that like, OK, like you know, like if I get a scholarship right, this is going to decrease my tuition costs by this much. And stuff like that, but because of Covid my plans have changed completely.”

Due to long-standing financial inequities, low-income Latine families and students were more likely to experience increased burden from school closures and the shift to online school. Parents were required to take a more active role in their child(ren)'s daily schoolwork. For many low-income families, finding time for their children's school while working in less privileged jobs was difficult. Several students mentioned how their families were navigating work and online school. A few families were forced to sacrifice work and income in order to support their children in school.

“I've also seen how some families have been struggling now with the education of their children because, my mom, for example, my mom is not that well educated with technology. And so having to go online and have her log into the computer and help my sister log into our classes was *very* difficult for her and I know that was the case for a lot of moms. Some moms had to leave their jobs to make sure their kids were being merged into their classes because they didn't want to leave them with somebody else. Because they were scared other kids were just not going to go into their classes.”

More than half of the students reported having inequitable access to Wi-Fi. This seemed to be particularly true for students living in “poorer” areas of towns and trailer parks. While Wi-

Fi access had always been hard to come by for these students, it became a huge barrier to their progress when schools are online or in a hybrid format. Students discussed the lengths they would have to go through to access Wi-Fi and complete assignments. They understood that this was not a phenomenon experienced by all students, especially middle-class, upper-class, and White students. They talked about how the schools or counties tried to rectify the Wi-Fi access issue. However, they also discussed the inadequacy of those interventions as a permanent solution. In this quote, the student described the dilemma she faced in trying to access good Wi-Fi for school. Her family considered buying Wi-Fi, but ultimately couldn't afford it. During the height of the pandemic, most public places that offered Wi-Fi were closed, but even as they opened back up, low-income students were expected to put themselves at risk to access their classes.

“As for my education, I live in a low-income neighborhood. Meaning we don't have much Internet signal here and the only like Internet provider that is allowed here is CenturyLink, but CenturyLink is very expensive and not many families can afford it, so it was hard to attend the virtual meetings and turn in assignments on time for the same reason that the Internet was unreliable and the school had no other solution other than to send school provided vans that gave Internet but ended up just being complete garbage for the same reason that they were just as unreliable and the connection was terrible. So, my education definitely went really bad, and I was having terrible grades and so was my sister who's in college. And she was also having trouble completing assignments and so we would constantly have to leave our home and just go to a friend's house who did have Internet. We couldn't go to Starbucks or McDonald's for the same reason that they had their lobbies closed and weren't allowing anybody except employees to be inside the building. So, it's hard to get by. And we were thinking of getting Internet, but we had other bills to cover. So, that was just not an option for us...Um, we called the schools along with other parents, kind of complaining about, you know us not having Internet. And all they could really say for what, for us is go to a friend's house or come to the school because they must be parked outside. And we could go to somebody else's home, but we couldn't assure ourselves that those persons weren't contaminated. And it was just putting ourselves and our families at risk. And if we were to go to the parking lot at school, we would have to be out there by ourselves. Um or a parent would have to be there for us. Or a friend, but you know everybody has something going on. Everybody's always busy.”

Lastly, Latine students had to manage multiple, equally important roles. The most salient roles included being a student, a caregiver to younger siblings, and a contributor to their household income. Many of these students were navigating these roles prior to the pandemic. However, with the pandemic compounding the socio-economic inequalities experienced by the Latine community, these roles became more essential and burdensome than ever. Several participants expressed feelings of stress and overwhelm related to the needs and demands of each role.

For these students, the pandemic highlighted social and economic inequalities that required students to simultaneously care for their families while going to school full time. Both students express the stress and toll of this experience on their well-being. These parts of the conversation were often emotional for the students to describe.

“I guess me being at home as oldest child I had to watch over my siblings in particular. And so being online and also doing homework during the day and this and that, being the oldest child in the house, I had to watch over my siblings and I had to cook and clean so I had a lot of responsibilities. Because I was the oldest and because my parents would go to work while my siblings would stay, I would be juggling between school and I would be juggling between at home chores and responsibilities...it was a big hit and a lot to take in.”

“...For the Latino community, for the Latino students, you know they had to make sure that they were focused on the economical issues or their house responsibilities. Even full responsibility. As one of [the Latino community], you know, it hit me very hard and it really impacted me and I know through other friends it impacted them as well because now their job was the only way to be able to provide for their family because sometimes their parents didn't have jobs anymore and the students themselves had the jobs that were needed and so they were the only ones that were able to even pay off their parents' home or bills. So, I guess for the Latino community, it was really impacted, especially for the students because they had to mature earlier than others.”

This is not to say that Latine students and parents wanted school to remain in-person during the pandemic. At no point did students state that schools and business should have remained open against public safety. Rather, their testimony illustrated how oppression and

inequity created a precarious position for Latine students and how events, like the COVID-19 pandemic, further disrupted the students' ability to navigate school.

Theme 4: Expectations for students to separate their lives from schools disproportionately harms Latine students

While students acknowledged that it was stressful to have several important roles, they generally were resolved, and even proud, to contribute to their family through caregiving and working. There was not a single example of a participant expressing resentment toward their families for relying on them. On the contrary, students found meaning in their contributions to their families and community. Here, this student explained how taking care of his sibling helped him cope with the effects of the pandemic.

“I've coped with COVID by...I don't know trying to keep up in school and in life, my little sister she was born before quarantine, so I've been taking care of her most of the time. Yeah, she's here with me right now. When I'm not in school I'm always taking care of her so that like 5 days out of the week I'm with her. Just trying to help my parents so they can go to work. I want to work too, but I have, I requested [not to work] in the morning so I can help my parents with my sister...It makes me feel good...Just cause you have to be like ready for anything, change her diapers, help her eat, and all that. Other than that, I just work and help my parents pay off the bills and I don't know, yeah.... I'm I'm paying some of the food. I'm paying my stuff on my own. It just saves my parents some money so they can spend it on my other brothers and sister.”

It became clear that for many students, much of the stress around their roles stemmed from operating in a system that demanded their roles be ordered in a hierarchy and occupied one at a time. The idea that students' roles can be neatly contained in distinct silos is based in race- and class-based privilege. For example, most students discussed how their schools were not considerate of, and even tone deaf to the unique challenges and barriers Latine students faced nor were the cultural values of family and community understood or valued. As a result, students were expected to operate as though there was not an increased need for these students to take more active roles in their families and communities during the pandemic.

“but I think teachers are just not being as like lenient on the situation, I guess like, they expect everything and everyone to understand, but a lot of the kids are like still struggling with a lot of stuff and I feel like even if [teachers] are too, they should... it's a whole different situation that they should come into consideration to understand.”

“I feel like what they can do is... educate the staff or at least have them known that, ‘hey, you know what, students go through difficulties.’ They have- it’s not even Internet issues, but I feel like [schools] also need to understand that because of Covid, some students have just had to leave school because they’re just more focused on helping their family out financially. So I think they also need to understand that there’s more issues going on [outside of school].”

Students felt pressured to be adaptable to the ever-changing landscape of school during the pandemic yet expressed that they did not always feel that the school was adaptable to their realities. The pandemic highlighted the schools’ lack of effort to understand participants’ challenges, barriers, and worries. Students described a school environment that was dismissive toward inequity in Wi-Fi access, student stress about college applications, and barriers from students’ ‘returning to normal’ while the effects of the pandemic were ongoing and far-reaching for low-income and Latine participants. In this quote, the student told of the school’s unsympathetic response to families struggling with access to virtual classrooms and forums.

“Um, we called the schools along with other parents, kind of complaining about, you know, us not having Internet. And all they could really say for what, for us is go to a friend's house or come to the school because they must be parked outside. And we could go to somebody else’s home, but we couldn't assure ourselves that those persons weren’t contaminated. It was just putting ourselves and our families at risk. And if we were to go to the parking lot at school, we would have to be out there by ourselves. Um or a parent would have to be there with us... or a friend, but you know everybody has something going on. Everybody's always busy”

This student talked about how he felt unseen and less supported after the pandemic started. He observed school staff direct more attention to students who appeared to adjust easier to new systems. He pointed out that this was likely due to the school’s preoccupation with productivity and returning to normal, noting that teachers became stricter and the course loads

became more burdensome, which negatively impacted students, including himself, for whom it was difficult to manage school and his personal life.

“[Teachers] used to be more supportive, calmer. I used to feel more comfort with them, asking them questions. because I'm usually the shy kid in class, but I definitely felt more supported before this all happened than it is right now. I think now they focus more on kids that are actually participating class than worry about the kids in the shadows. Like I don't want to say people, kids who don't pay attention, but as far as they're concerned, they don't really care about anything else...I don't, I'm not going to say that they haven't been supportive, but they just really aren't. They've been definitely more strict about work being turned in on time, although I don't see a point of it because you're still in class for two hours or three hours a day online and then we still have homework. I don't really see a point of it. There is like double the homework than there was before all of this happened. It was definitely better than it is now.”

Theme 5: COVID highlighted and exacerbated systemic and historical inequities that disproportionately affect Latine students and their community

Many of the participants painted a picture of two lived realities divided by race/ethnicity, class, and documentation status. While many of the examples relate to the students' experiences during the pandemic, they highlight the underlying racism, classism, and xenomisia that is built into US systems, institutions, and interpersonal sentiments long predating the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, three students living in Eagle county discussed the division between those who followed community guidelines during the pandemic and those who felt entitled not to. They noted how mostly White people gathered in touristic spaces like recreational lakes without abiding by mask mandates. This contributed to students feeling a lack of concern for and visibility of their community by White residents and tourists. It also communicated how White people were not necessarily beholden to the same cultural expectations of contributing to the health and safety of the community at large.

“Okay, I live in a very kind of tourist populated place so, when some restaurants started opening up everyone started going because it was like, it's like if you free animals from their cage they're going to start running out. That's how we were pretty much once like some restaurants were starting to open up and with that, I feel like that made it worse because our rates were not that high. And then, once some regulations started being lifted, they started going out and to this day, I don't really see a lot of people wearing masks especially some, some teenagers. Outside of school, things (indiscernible) they don't really wear their masks. So, I don't know how I could help my community with that but that's a big problem here too. Like, going to the lake, like there's like about 30 to 50 cars on the sidewalk. Some families, imagine how many people are there right now with no masks, no protection. I think we went overboard with the limiting; you know? We didn't really limit people or anything, we just kind of went overboard and just did what we had to and then I know by the N. Lake that they started allowing adults being able to drink so I feel like that, those little things, encourage people to get out more. To be out because adults aren't just going to go drink by themselves, they're going to go get their friends and everything. So that just encourages more people at more place at one time giving us all a higher risk of catching the virus.”

“I think Mexican moms have this stereotype of being careful and just really taking care of yourself so this times like nobody was being going out or anything like that. So like Latinos and Mexicans and now these people, they're mostly the ones that stayed home and take care of themselves. Yeah, and followed the regulations. Yeah, unless um, we have like really stressful time with money and they had to go work. well, some, I mean. It was mostly not the Latinos, but there were occasions where they were sometimes. I don't think it was that often compared to other communities.”

Subtheme 5a: Inequity in access to community information and services

Several students also mentioned inequity in how community resources and information was shared and accessed before and during the pandemic. For some students, this involved learning very late about safety net resources in the community. For this student quoted below, the lack of awareness of community support systems reflected the lack of care, interest, and possibly trust earned by their larger community.

“I don't think the community is very much concerned. I feel ... like yes there's a lot of programs that help with this like around where I live. There's like a bus that comes in if you need like to get a test or something, they'll like help you with that. And yes, there's lots of things out there in my community but, not a lot of people know. Like, I could be talking to someone about a specific program, they're like "what is that?". So, yes there is help out there, like from the community, but nobody knows about it.”

In a similar example, this participant talked about two incidents in which her family was seeking information about rental and income assistance as well as school transportation services only to be met with dismissal from the housing and school management.

“The manager here in my neighborhood and the guy who runs the office, he was not giving us answers. We kept asking like hey, like what if we don't have money to pay rent for or like are you guys in charge us late fees if we pay our rent late? Or do you know of any programs that assist low-income families with rent? They just they weren't telling us like we would just ask him, and their answer was always I don't know, I don't know. They just never had a clear answer for us. So, it would have to be taken upon us to figure out how we were going to get through these tough times.”

“Transportation has once again failed the low-income neighborhoods. They are not providing transportation for every student its only for limited students, and so some families, well primarily Latino families have been trying to figure out how they're going to get their kids to school since they don't have one. And so, they've been trying to figure out what they, can we carpool? And they've been calling the school and sending emails and asking, but the school keeps saying no, like this full like we can't give your student transportation, so that's been stressful for them, I know that.”

For some students, accessing services involved real and perceived risks of deportation.

Here a student describes worrying about how her family would stay afloat if one or more of them got sick and could not work since they likely would not have access to safety net services and soliciting help could put them in “jeopardy.”

“I was terrified more for my dad because he was the one that was leaving home more often and I was just scared that something would happen to him. That was more scared for my younger sister as well. I was like, well like, what if what if she gets Covid, like what's going to happen? Who's going to take care of her? Because we're just scared, well my parents are mostly scared because they don't, they don't like putting themselves in situations where they can put their legal status in jeopardy. And so we were just figuring out, like how are we going to do this? And it was very stressful just seeing how my parents didn't have enough money. For the first time, I really started to wonder where my next meal was going to come from.”

Racism, discrimination, persecution, and punitive immigration policies nurture a culture of fear and mistrust of the government and broader community among BIPOC and immigrant people. In the following quote, the participant expands on the impact of this earned fear and mistrust has on

her local community. She describes the risks and challenges people face in order to access information and services, even when they are offered.

“So the [Latino community] would just kind of push themselves back. They might want to reach out for help or ask for help but they don't because they're scared and so, I wish the [larger community] could have helped us out more regarding right now. Yeah, I just wish there could've been more help for us... Yeah, I mean I know growing up in my community, there wasn't a lot of trust between [us and the government]. Well, I think like all communities of color like all the people of color didn't really trust the government, like the local government, which was predominantly white or organizations that were run by pretty much all white people because it was like, yeah, we didn't know if it was like safe or not to do that... and that's still the case now, because sometimes they inform families that the City Council is going to have meetings about something and the meetings would have an interpreter, someone who could speak Spanish, but even then the family were still afraid to join because they thought they were going to get in some kind of trouble. Sometimes [the government or organization] would require for us to participate and Latino people would just be quiet because they were scared that if they said something or ask for something they were going to get in trouble.”

This student even described how previous experiences of racism in healthcare settings exacerbated his worry of contracting COVID because he could not be certain that he and his community would receive the care they needed.

“There are things they're definitely more worried about it than everybody else. But other than that, I think [Latine people] figured it out. What they need to do to survive and not get sick because they definitely don't have as many opportunities for like health wise. Then there is for other people...It is different for everybody who walks into a hospital. Not to say people are racist, but still, it's just different. You can tell it's different walking into a place like that...Just by walking in, the looks you get sometimes. I don't want to say everybody, but you definitely get some looks that concern you and walking out of the hospital and to be safe and be judged everybody judges by looking at different people. But other than that, you just got to deal with it. You can't really change it.”

Subtheme 5b: Inequities and increased isolation

The Latine community's feelings of isolation also became more notable during the pandemic. As discussed in the introduction of this paper, Latine communities were often segregated and isolated to areas on the outskirts of their respective towns. Xenomisia and economic oppression further isolate Latine people from the broader communities. Additionally,

undocumented Latine people are often isolated from family and community living outside of the United States. During the pandemic, Latine families were further isolated from one another due to safety protocols. Those that were undocumented also felt the increased feeling of isolation. They worried about their loved ones' wellbeing from afar knowing they could not do much to help or intervene. For those that lost someone, they could not attend the funeral or grieve as a community. As expressed in the quote below, the feeling of isolation was exacerbated by their worry for family wellbeing and the powerlessness to protect them from COVID-19.

“So, during that time we got news that the virus had spread like, down to like Mexico too, you know? And I have family down there and it was scary because here, like there's like lots of help that we can get but in Mexico it's not so good. So, it was kind of scary like thinking of my family members over there and how it could affect them, and it did affect them. My uncle actually went to a funeral at the time and got the virus, which causes a lot of problems... So, that affected my mom a lot too and like I got like second hand like affect from her too. I didn't like seeing her sad all the time, not working, we had to go down to Denver a couple of times to see if some other family members were going to fly down there to try something. I don't know, it was so scary, like the fact that it was someone close to my family that got the virus...But, it was, it's sad when you see like your mom, like a person that you're so close to, that you love, and then you see her sad all the time over something that you can't control. It's not like you could send like money over there and it could be fixed. No, like there's no vaccine over there at the time or anything. There was nothing you could do about it so you just stood there like what do I do? It was kind of like, I felt helpless towards my mom and then well a bunch of other things happened but in the process, he passed away.”

This student expressed the stress created by the isolation from family members during periods of higher transmissibility. She described how this conflicted with the culture and values of her family. While they clearly made these sacrifices to ensure community safety, there was a sense of loss and isolation.

“Well, I think it's been a little bit rocked I guess, because the majority of the Latino culture do have bigger families and you can't really [be together] during Covid. Especially with my mom's side because most of her family resides in Florida. We haven't been able to go see them. They haven't really been able to come see us. Everyone relying through social media to keep up with what's going on throughout your family. I feel like

most people have that deep bond with their families. They really rely on them. They're very dependent and it's kind of hard to stray away from what you know and the traditions that involve everyone. Even on the Holidays, you can't see everyone because can't do as much as you normally would like to.”

Subtheme 5c: Inequities for students and families in school

The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted inequities in the school environment. This included problems with language access, the reliance on electronic communication, and perceived deprioritization of Latine-specific resources and inclusivity. For many, the lack of language access for Spanish-speaking family members prevented equitable access to school related information. There were several examples of schools providing insufficient language access before and during the pandemic.

“For example, like you’re in a PTA meeting and you're the only Hispanic parent, it feels kind of overwhelming so, you don't want to go anymore. I feel like, we exclude ourselves. Yes, we absence ourselves from those like PTA meetings, but having clubs apart from that where [Latine families] can feel welcomed and get the same information that... the White families do, like you get your information in Spanish because sometimes some Hispanic families they like, the parents don't know English and, getting that information to you without you being such like a technical genius and you don't have to check your email. Them giving you papers physically, it really does help with that barrier but, we need more of that cause we can't just only be one club.”

Receiving full and accurate information always seemed to be challenging, but became even more complicated once communication between schools, students, and parents moved predominantly online. As previously discussed, not all families had access to consistent Wi-Fi at their jobs and in their homes in order to regularly check school communication. A couple students also posited that electronic communication was not an appropriate form of communication for some parents and the prioritization of electronic communication prevented equitable access to information.

“When I went to the counselor, they offered to like email my parents as well, like to talk to them but like offering like as much as like it's an offer like you don't have to take it and I think some kids would just rather not or like their parents don't have an email to like

reach out to. And I know my school has free or reduced lunch. But I think I think that's about it. I don't really. I really think that's about it. Yeah, it's usually that or phone number and like it's like parents are working like double shifts or like working like 3 jobs, they're not always going to answer.”

Finally, this student discussed the lack of visibility of a school-based program for Latine student mentors, an experience shared by two other student participants in the study. For these students, there was a sense that they did not learn about these programs early on because the school did not prioritize circulating information and promoting them compared to other types of student programs.

“I didn't even find out about this until like late last year. It's a bilingual TA program. I didn't even know we had it. Again, like we need to emphasize that like, not advertise a class of course but like, get the word around because as soon as I found out about that I was so interested because I didn't even know that was a thing. I wished that, I feel like a lot of students wish that if they came just like two years ago, that would've been so helpful to have. And, having that and not even knowing about it ... is something that we need to change.”

Theme 6: Racism is commonplace in schools and their broader communities

Most students described experiencing racist and xenomistic microaggressions and bias at school, both from school staff and other students. A few students explained how teachers seemed to have different academic expectations for Latine and other BIPOC students compared to White students. For this student, the messaging the Latine students have lower academic potential and therefore require lowered expectations had a significant impact on her self-confidence.

“It lowers my self-esteem because it makes me realize that they had low standards for me... They're kind of putting what they've experienced in the past with other Hispanic students or minority students and putting that into place with their present students. And they kind of just hold the same expectations or accountability for *all* minority students. They never take the time to step out of that ignorance and realize that wow, maybe there are minority students who really do like school or are really going to try hard. But they would rather just label us as a whole and hold all of us accountable for the same actions.”

Another student stated how

“Every single time that a teacher kind of belittled a Hispanic kid in one of my AP classes. You could just see how, it's just disheartening and discouraging to the kid experiencing it firsthand and all the other Hispanic kids watching it... Anytime that a student, a Hispanic student will get a B, the teacher would be just so happy for them. But every time a white student would get a B, the teacher would be disappointed. So, you can definitely see how Hispanic kids have less expectations for them and the teachers just think that they're just there to pass.”

Other students described racist remarks and harassment from White student peers. Here the student discusses a traumatic experience of racism related to the murder of George Floyd. She goes on to criticize the lack of recourse from the school.

“At the school, after George Floyd was killed, there was a student who had made an Instagram post of, you know, him kneeling down over a black cow and you know, said like this is George Floyd, like the cow was George Floyd. You see how it shouldn't be tolerated. And many, many people were angry because he had made that Instagram post and the school had done, I think, a three-day suspension. It was a big deal and many of the students wanted him Expelled because it was just a very very wrong thing to do. You know, like comparing an animal to a man losing his life. It's just not tolerable...Um, I honestly felt very angry because it showed that it was not the first time that the school and the school district haven't really paid attention of how extreme the situation was and how extreme it is that somebody can do something like that. They really took this as not something serious, like just worth a three days recess and didn't give them enough consequences to give him the idea of how bad this is and how bad it affects us because you know many students are people of color or are new students in this country.”

As illustrated in this quote, microaggressions from teachers, staff, and other students about Latine students' accents and mastery of English were not uncommon.

“Two teachers sent me an email with the same phrase saying I was not expecting you to have your work done...And then I was also told that oh “wow you, you write really good for a Spanish speaker.” Or sometimes we would have to send videos or voice recordings and they would tell me, “oh I can't hear your accent.” And I don't know what that has to do with anything you know, like I could be a fluent English speaker and still have an accent.”

Sadly, the majority of the Latine students who participated in this study reported that teachers frequently questioned their integrity on assignments and attendance after school moved online. Students discussed how their teachers would question them if they had trouble logging into the virtual classroom or submitting an assignment, despite students and families being open

about the inequities in Wi-Fi access. Students noted how teachers required the students' parents to corroborate their challenges. Students noted how they felt stereotyped and mistrusted and that this seemed to be a unique experience of low-income BIPOC students.

“And I thought more with Spanish speakers as their first language, we were the ones that were getting targeted the most in a way that we just didn't want to participate in class because I also had a couple of non-Spanish speakers friends who their Internet would go out and teachers would completely understand and sometimes we would have the same teachers and they'd be like “oh it's fine” to them, but when I would say something and be like “Oh well, what are you going to do about it? How are we going to fix this problem? ...Or even high income as well, like the white low income or high income. It was justifiable for them to miss class because of Internet access. But for us it was just seen as plain laziness or not problem solving.”

“...teachers really get mixed up on like who attends class on those days that we're not in school and this recently just happened. A teacher emailed my mom and said that I hadn't gone to class on one of the days that we were home. And I said of course I did. I opened the assignment and I turned it in on time. I even did it before the class even started, like I just I had it done and I can even show you the discussion I finished. Obviously, my mom told her that I had it. [The teacher] believes the adult more than [me], but when I proved to her that I had turned it in and I had gone to class, I feel like that's like a different story.”

Another student described how her school counselor's anti-Latine bias robbed her of the opportunity to apply for a large scholarship because the counselor assumed she was ineligible based on her documentation status.

“I think, personally, the staff can be pretty lazy sometimes because they don't look into things very well. I remember this one time, I wasn't [informed] about a scholarship. You know, some don't have a Social Security number and that can be a barrier. But because I am Mexican American here, I am eligible to apply to most scholarships. But [school staff] had informed my mother that I wasn't eligible for that scholarship, and that scholarship was very powerful. It really angered me because it was a very big one, and it's very competitive, and I would have really wanted to apply for it, but nobody had told me anything about it and I wasn't informed about it. And so, my mom had asked, ‘why didn't they give me this information beforehand?’ And the counselor told her, ‘because she's probably ineligible.’ And I'm pretty sure that scholarship is eligible for anybody. And so for me personally I was eligible for it and I had missed the deadline and I had missed the ability to apply and possibly access that scholarship.”

Subtheme 6a: School environment unwelcoming and hostile to Latine families

There were a considerable number of stories describing a school environment unwelcoming to Latine parents. Many students shared experiences of their parents feeling overwhelmed and unwelcome at school-related events. Students conveyed their parents' stress and isolation due to the school's poor communication with Latine parents. Students conveyed their parents' experiences with the schools' lack of Spanish language access, the students' additional role of translating, and microaggressions against the parents' accent and English-language proficiency. For example, this student discussed how White parents made her mother feel uncomfortable at school meetings when the student would need to translate for her mother after the school did not provide a translator.

“And some like someone find out like well, white moms find that disrespectful, as if I'm interrupting something. But I'm like my mom is here for the same information as you is, you are, but she just needs my help and so she has, she doesn't go anymore to those kinds of things because she's like you know when it's like they don't want being there and it's just awkward being there because there's no one to help me or stuff like that.”

Here, the student considered how the lack of language access and underrepresentation of other Latine students in school sports precluded him from participating in her team activities. She expressed compassion and understanding for his discomfort in spaces predominantly occupied in White people rather than be upset by his absence.

“Well, both. I know my mom speaks some English, like she went to school so she does know some English and I do help her with a lot of stuff too, but my dad doesn't really know English. So, I know he doesn't really like going to those like meetings. For example, in [school sport]. [School sport], especially at my school, or in general really, is a very white dominant sport. So, when we have to [have] parent meetings or team dinners, my dad doesn't like going there because he doesn't feel like he can be a part of it, you know? He like excludes himself because of not knowing the other language that well. You just feel like social pressure I guess. So, I know that from experience because I've seen my dad not show up, he just drops us off and that's it. ... I feel like he's gotten so used to it that it doesn't bother him anymore but, I do feel, that, he wants to learn everything but he's not confident enough to like make jokes. So, when you're like, for example, if you're trying to socialize in one of those meetings or something ... you can't really like crack a joke as you would in Spanish, because it wouldn't make sense and then nobody would be laughing. You just feel awkward.”

Another participant spoke about her anger after her mother experienced microaggression around her proficiency in English from her youngest daughter's teacher at a self-proclaimed bilingual school.

“And most recently, my little sister was in her PE class and my little sister kept trying to like get her teacher's attention, but her teacher was simply not paying attention to her and there was no noise, nobody was talking. She was the only person talking and she was like, ‘Miss miss.’ I don't understand her name, but she was just calling her teacher's name and [the teacher] wasn't paying attention and so my mom got on there, on the meeting mic and with the few English words she knew she told the teacher like ‘hey! Can you not see that my child is trying to like talk to you and ask you for help, but you're just simply ignoring her?’ And obviously my mom is not a fluent English speaker, but she tries her very best and she does have an accent when she speaks it. But it's the fact that she tried to do what she could to help. But her teacher was completely racist towards her and was just telling her, ‘What? I can't understand you. Do need somebody to translate? You need somebody to translate for you because I can't understand you.’ and that completely enraged us. Because we're like wow, you're going to work in my sister's school, which she goes to a bilingual school. So, we're like how are you going to be working at a bilingual school and not know Spanish? Like that's completely ignorant. Like I think you should know that there's gonna be Spanish speaking students and for you to choose not to [learn any Spanish] is crazy.”

Finally, this student, who attended an alternative school program working toward a General Education Development (GED), talked about how his parents were not invited to participate in his education program. This potentially minimizes parents' ability to support their kids in this program.

“We don't really have the whole parent-teacher meeting thing. So they don't really, they're not really involved with [name of GED] program as much as they were when I was at [name of traditional high school originally attended].”

Subtheme 6b: School and College preparation messaging based in White supremacy values

Participants also described more covert and systematic forms of racism. When discussing college preparation, several participants described White-washed messaging around college. This most showed up in the way that school staff promoted college and in the erasure of BIPOC and Latine culture and history from the school curriculum. Students were often presented with a one-

size-fits-all pathway to college entrance that was based on the White middle-class experience of preparing, applying, and entering college. However, that presentation of the college entrance process did not address the very real and unique barriers to college.

In the quote below, the student discussed her concern and doubt after she sought early help with preparing for her college applications. Many times, throughout the interview, she described her need to feel “confident” in the college process. As a first-generation college bound student, she faced significant systemic barriers to college. Understanding the entire college preparation process and early planning gave her more confidence in her ability to overcome those barriers. Sadly, the counselor’s response was dismissive of her reality by suggesting she approach college preparation in a stepwise fashion. She expressed a tension between trusting the counselor as the expert on college preparation and doubting the approach based in her own lived knowledge.

“From my school counselor, like I asked her about it. Um? Yeah, I asked her about it. She like brought it up but she said to not really worry about it yet. Like the first like make sure that I have people of like what is it called? Like references first like to figure everything out and then once like I get closer to that. Then. Like worry about it because. She told me like she's like you look really stressed out like don't worry about stuff that isn't coming till like later. So, I was like ok. So. So I'm hoping she's right because...it seems like a lot to me.”

Other staff attempted to motivate based in White values of capitalism, rugged independence, puritan work ethic, and hierarchy (Okun, T., 2021). There was often a general sense that it could be hard for Latine students to hold this messaging despite its conflict with their values for community, sharing resources, minimizing burden, and contributing to society. In this first example, the student shared his plans to attend community college to save costs for his family. He went on to describe how his counselor encouraged him to matriculate directly into a 4-year college. While the student was encouraged and flattered by the counselor’s belief in his

ability to succeed in a 4-year institution, he was left further conflicted about what he should do. From the researchers' perspective, the counselor comes off tone-deaf to the student's financial concerns. It also demonstrates the White supremacy value of hierarchy, where there is a devaluation of the community college to 4-year college path while giving a superior status to direct entry to a 4-year college. What is additionally notable, is that the college counselor planted this seed and then left the student feeling conflicted.

“But I think that Junior year or even sophomore year, I think I was. I was set on going to a Community College near me. That's just like right next to my high school, actually. For two years, saving some money. And taking some classes there and getting a job also working a job while taking classes at community college and living with my mom. And I was certain of that. But then I think, um after that, after meeting with a college advisor. She kind of told me that I had potential to go to a better school and do more and be exposed to more things. So, I think she mostly kind of inspired me to think outside of my original plan, and now I just don't know. I still haven't made a choice. I think to before, of like wanting to stay for two years saving money. Um, I thought it was going to be fiscally responsible. Who knows if college is actually going to feel more worth it than going to community college first.”

There was also a common thread of school messaging promoting the idea of meritocracy and colorblindness. Often when teachers and staff would discuss college or their own career accomplishments, they would over credit their success to their hard work and effort, ignoring the role that race plays in one's academic and career trajectory. In the following example, the student told of her algebra teacher's story of how he became a teacher. He later leveraged this personal example to convince students that succeeding in his class is merely a matter of effort. It is notable, that the student seemed to buy into this messaging. This speaks to both the pervasiveness of this type of messaging and that Latine students are often at different stages in critically deconstructing messages from people in positions of power.

“my algebra teacher. He's always been one of those I guess, like wise teachers, I said a lot of experiences in a bunch of different things. He was successful. He became a teacher because he wanted to. Even though if he had the money to retire at like 30. And he kind of had that. If you want to succeed, you have to do it on your own. There's going to be no

one pushing it kind of self-motivational type... He would give out the homework and then the next day he give you the answers and he'd always say 'If you're going to fail, that's on your own. You're going to work. You're going to have to work for yourself. Because I want you all to succeed, but I'm not going to, I can't force you into it.' Almost all the participants acknowledged the lack of representation of Latine American

history, politics, contributions, and culture in their school curriculum. This stood out to this researcher and the research assistants given that several of the school included in this study attended schools with a large Latine students body and given the extensive and deeply intertwined geo-political history between the U.S. and Latin America. Even more to this point, is the cultural and ethnic history of southern and western Colorado, which was Mexican territory until the end of the Mexican American war in 1842. However, students seemed more split in their expectations for Latin American inclusion in U.S. high school curriculums.

For example, this student was particularly critical of the lack of Latine representation in his school, especially given that most of the student body identified as Latine.

“The only time I've ever had like exposure to my roots in a school building was last year when I took Spanish literature with my teacher, the one that I talked about previously. She was one that just taught us so much about Hispanic culture and like (indiscernible); just amazing literature by Spanish poets, and that was the only place where I ever got exposure to anything remotely close to my roots. In history classes, obviously, I never get both sides of the story...So even though Hispanic people are the majority, it often times, well mostly, actually all the time, feels like we're minorities.”

This participant expressed the potential positive impact of greater inclusion of Latin America in the school curriculum on Latine and non-Latine students while simultaneously tempering her expectations on the depth to which schools would realistically make those changes.

“Yeah, I wish we could see more of that. But we just don't. We don't see anything of that, it's mainly just Why? Then I'm like American and I understand, you know, like this is the United States, and obviously our curriculum should focus more on America, but it would literally not cost anything to include a couple of lectures. Or perhaps the class is just that just dedicated to our culture. And I feel like it would. Yeah, and I feel like it would be good even for us Hispanics, because it would allow us to know more about where we come from and our ancestors and we would become more educated on that. But we're not

and I feel like that would encourage students more to go to school because it would help them feel more welcome in their education.”

Meanwhile, this student referred to the idea of integrating Latin America into the curriculum as “controversial.” Of course, this student is not wrong, national critiques of White-washed curriculum have sparked debate and even outrage. Given this fact, it seems that the student weighed whether a more representative curriculum is a fight worth fighting for.

“A little bit through history, but I think everything is following a pretty straightforward curriculum without much, I guess I should say a little more controversial topics or like we talked about the Spaniards, on geography, Cuba, Dominican Republic. They kind of just go with what their curriculum tells me to.”

What’s more, is this student was not the only student to respond to the inquiry by mentioning the school’s inclusion of the Spaniard culture, history, and influence nor did this experience stray far from the grade school experiences of this researcher and the research assistants. It is interesting to think how rather than developing relevant and accurate inclusion of Latin America, schools incorporate the cultural history of one of Latin America’s primary colonizing nations disguised as inclusion.

Subtheme 6c: School deprioritization of inclusivity and Latine-centered spaces

Participants also commonly discussed their schools’ lack of effort in creating inclusive and/or safe spaces for BIPOC students at school. All the students referenced their school’s culture week and or culture clubs. For those who had access to one or both important resources, there was an expressed appreciation for them. However, most students were critical of the lack of investment in these spaces, leaving the burden of running them on volunteer BIPOC staff or on the BIPOC students themselves. This sent a clear message to Latine students that their identities, inclusion, and safety is not a priority for the school.

“I can’t be very sure of why, but I can give an idea. Maybe you know, I just think that they don’t support the community or the [BIPOC] community as much as they should,

because I know that there's been many smaller organizations that they try to start, but it never ends well because it's not either well-funded or it's not well supported. Many of us are trying to, you know, at least have a clause or something to try and give out more information on how to respect each other and become more impactful. Many of that can be denied because you know, they're like, oh, you need money to create events or if you need to be financially supported and we don't have that support, we don't have those funds to create impactful events or activities or that can educate other people on the types of things that affect [BIPOC students]. “

She goes on to say that receiving funding and support from the school is not as challenging for other student clubs.

“I understand finding money can be hard, but you know...I mean that you know certain clubs can be funded. Certain clubs can be more supported compared to other clubs. Oh, like for example, the debate club might be a little bit more funded and well supported because they had been there longer, or they have been more well-known compared to maybe a club that I just recently started about the Latinos.”

A couple students considered how schools could work to normalize the various cultures and languages represented in the student body beyond culture week. In the quote below the student pointed out how school dances and events only played music in English despite their school having a majority-Latine student body.

“I would also have more social events where it would be inclusive, like there would be music for everyone. You know, not only just like music in English. (laughs) It would include Hispanics, so they feel more welcome to go to the school dances and events. Like there's many cases where only students that talk Spanish only they can't go to the school dances and have the same experience other high school kids can because they don't know like the some music that's playing and they don't feel welcome there.”

While students felt that it was important to have BIPOC or Latine-specific spaces, they also recognized the value in exposing White, US born students to the cultures of their BIPOC and immigrant peers. By confining their culture to one short period or closed space, White U.S. culture remains the default culture of the school. For these students, true inclusivity involves a mutual exchange and equal exposure.

Theme 7: Student Mental Health Before and During COVID-19

The pandemic took a significant toll on the mental health of the participants and their families. Similar to other themes, students struggling with their mental health was not unique to the pandemic though certainly exacerbated by it. Students often discussed a sense of loneliness created by the pandemic. In the comment below, the student discussed the loneliness and isolation that came with quarantine. However, she also noted that the expectations of her school added to her feelings of overwhelm and depression.

“I, on top of that, having to quarantine by yourself, it made me feel like super alone. And I knew I had my family, it's not even that they weren't supporting, it just felt that way because of such loss of contact because I'm a very social person. So, I like being with my friends, I like them (indiscernible), so when you start losing your school friends, you're like okay I can still contact some friends. But when they... are not available anymore because they're dealing with their own problems, you just feel so alone because you have no one your age. And then, with me being the oldest, I still have to take care of someone apart from myself... so I just felt like depression (indiscernible) from school, from... this, and adding also the pandemic, like, it was very overwhelming. It was a very overwhelming feeling.”

Below a student noted how he felt like he lost out on important events and rites of passage as part of his high school experience. This was a common sentiment among students. Many grieved the loss of typical activities and experiences that made high school exciting while only the responsibilities of school remained.

“I think that will be, I don't think it'll be harder in that aspect. I think it'll be hard in the fact I don't have as much typical stuff as I normally would. I don't have a senior prom. I don't have senior events. I am missing out on a lot.”

As previously detailed under the 3rd, 5th, and 6th themes, Latine students and families experienced increased stress and isolation during the pandemic due to racial and economic inequities and oppression. The participants connected this stress to their struggles with motivation at school, feelings of overwhelm, and persistent worry about the security of their families and peers. For some students, their observation of the larger community's indifference

toward families who were struggling likely compounded their stress. For example, a student shared his community felt forgotten and deprioritized during the pandemic while noting that the broader community seemed split on how and for whom they provided aid.

“It's either you're caring for other people and you want to take care of other people or there's other people that are very worried about their own family in their own little circle and they neglect other people and forget about other people and how other people are being affected by Covid...For one of my friends, her family was really struggling because they had been laid off for some time, and her dad even had to go all the way to Wyoming to get a job. She wouldn't see him for weeks. And I really, I don't think the community helped families with like rent and food and just shelter and stuff like that. I don't think there was any way that they actively try to help Hispanic or low-income families. They kind of just forgot about it and like I said before, some people just tend to uh, worry about themselves and I think they forgot about people that lived in an apartment and trailers and those people that have to like (indiscernible) every month. Latine families kind of depend on that paycheck.”

The student went on to express his doubt in his community's ability to act responsively and with care toward all its members during a crisis when it maintained an individualistic and segregated dominant culture.

“How are we going to get resources when the community seems so different, you know. I feel like it's every man for himself and I don't feel a sense of community at all, even though I live in a small town. I mean it should be easy to, you know, reach out and have and be close with my community and know that my community, like has my back. And I want to know that community, that my community is going to work together to, you know help each other.”

Most students felt that mental health services were hard to find before the pandemic and harder still during the pandemic due to the rise in need, which surpassed availability. Here a participant, who noted that he had mental health insurance coverage, talks about how limited mental health resources are in his community and in his school.

“I mean before I did have a therapist. But there's just very poor resources here in the Valley and places near me and places that accept my insurance. So, there's not really a lot of like, there's only like one place. It's very limited places where I can get good counseling. Uh, just a place to talk. Since I did go since I don't go to school anymore, I don't have the privilege of just going to the counselor's office and talking, but even then I've heard that at school you have to make an appointment, and since everyone wants an

appointment you don't get your time (indiscernible) like later. But that's not what you need of your counselor. So I understand the lack of resources in how everyone needs someone right now and how teachers are frustrated (indiscernible) right now, and so our counselor. But it is, it is hard to get mental help.”

Students also talked about the school’s responses to student mental health needs. Some students stressed the inadequacy of the school’s response. For example, this student talked about how she felt that the school only focused on the logistics of providing classes. She acknowledged that adjusting classes and the curriculum during the pandemic was important but pointed out that students still wouldn’t benefit from the classes if their wellbeing and mental health went ignored.

“I feel like, other people, are just focusing on like, they were really focusing on the 2020 graduates. I feel like they, other people outside of high school are focusing on high school itself, as in the building, and the classes but I don't think that they're very much concerned about teenager's mental health. It's already unstable as it is especially in this small town including that even more but, adding on, I feel like they're only concerned about the classes and the building, but the mental health is a completely different issue that should be addressed but it isn't being addressed... Yes, I feel like they're only concerned about our education. Like yes, it's good that they're concerned about our education ... but they don't realize how different it's going to be on our mental health. It's going back to a completely different environment than we were used to. So, they're focusing on trying to get, trying to get every. I feel like they're so focused on trying to get us back on track that they're missing the mental health area of this.”

A few students also talked about incidents where individual teachers made a significant impact on student wellbeing. In these examples, the teachers would take it upon themselves to provide additional support and assistance to students and their families outside of their role as an educator. In this first quote, the student describes a teacher reaching out to students to offer support. In the second quote, a group of teachers worked with students to discern which families needed financial assistance during quarantine. These incidents were influential on students’ perception of their teachers as part of a larger supportive community.

“[The teachers] always offered that if [I] had any problems, they were available to help with what I needed. They always offered that.”

“I got worried and I thought I should be doing more and I wanted to do more, so anytime the teacher would reach out to ask if I knew anyone that needed help with rent or groceries- I remember one afternoon actually went through my whole contact list and started calling everyone on there and asking if they needed help. I helped gather a list for the teacher of anyone who needed [help].”

Several students also discussed how they met their own mental health needs and coped with a loss of motivation, stress, and anxiety and depression symptoms. What was most notable, was the tendency for students to try and mimic their pre-pandemic routines as much as possible. Other more common forms of coping included journaling and reframing the isolation they were feeling as an opportunity to explore and discover themselves outside of the context of school and their peer relationships. In this first quote the student discusses how she added regular exercise back into her routine, something that was missing the first few weeks of quarantine due to the hold placed on her athletic team’s games and practices.

“[I] started taking care of myself, starting exercising again, started eating better again because I had, I like didn’t even eat at a point of quarantine. It just felt, it felt numb, in a way, you feel like useless, like you didn’t do anything, like you can’t do anything, you can’t go out... And then, with a couple weeks of doing that like, every day, I started like, like an idea just clicked right away.”

Here, the student talks about her experience of journaling.

“I feel like for, for months that I was still isolated, so I felt so alone. I had such horrible, like it was so bad to me personally and then, I just, I’ve always coped with my feelings by writing and by finding different ways of coping with that, it really helped because then I’d be like writing like, what was going on, what was struggling, or what was happening to me... I know that that’s what helped me, writing was my coping way of regaining my mental health which I recommend it to a lot of my friends too because they reached out to me once I stopped like, being isolated. They reached out to me, they’re like, “I’m feeling the exact same way you did,” and I’d be like, “writing really helps me or find something that helps you cope with your own thing.”

Others sought help from community members, including this participant who sought support from community mentors.

“I think I've gotten help mostly from the mentors in my life, like my employer at, or the leadership team for P. Uh, she helped me a lot with all of my anxieties about college.”

There was only one student who was able to obtain therapist-led mental health support. This participant discussed how she was connected to a mental health group for Latine students initiated and led by a local Latine community therapist and advocate. In this group, youth were able to connect with one another and discuss the unique impact of COVID-19 on Latine communities, its intersection with race and racism, and strategies for improving and maintaining their mental health and wellbeing

“And then when they would come to mental health, we were kind of just seeing, she would have like videos of how Covid was affecting other Latino students, or we would just like she would ask questions like “how do you as a Latino students feel that Covid has affected you?” And then that would start discussion among us about you know like what the differences are, what are similarities and just stuff like that...And we were all talking about like how we were just going through this whole thing, or like how we were just making like checking in with our mental health. And I learned about a lot of things people were doing, and then I started doing them like they were telling me how they were doing yoga, or they were meditating. Or they would set up another individual meeting with S. because she's a therapist as well. And like S. would help them out and so there were so many kinds of healthy non face to face ways that people were coping with their anxiety and stress because of Covid”

Theme 8: Appreciation for and utilization of cultural wealth in Latine community

There were many examples of the students and their families using and appreciating the various types of cultural capital that make up community cultural wealth theory, which was described in depth in the introduction of this manuscript. While many of these examples may overlap with areas touched in the previous themes and subthemes, I felt it was important to acknowledge the various forms of cultural capital used by the participants, their families, and their communities for strength and perseverance. The six forms of cultural wealth capital that work together to restore dignity and humanity to oppressed groups.

Subtheme 8a: Aspirational Capital

Through this study, participants highlighted the numerous barriers and challenges they faced in their education and career journey. These included economic, social, racial, and xenomistic oppression, all of which were shown to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, students and their families maintained their aspirations for the students' future. This included the aspiration to pursue higher education or vocational training, a meaningful career, and financial mobility.

“I was planning on going to [name of vocational school] this year and that is, but I've been going. It's been 50/50 in person in class and online class. But [the pandemic] hasn't changed anything. I still have my goals for myself and I'm still going to achieve them somehow.”

“To keep my plan for high school with good classes and everything, keep it going and to keep that going through like my senior year also because then that way even, because if I don't do that, and things do get better, I know I'll regret that. So, by having a good like, sticking to my original plan I guess, through graduation and being very flexible with like schedules or like classes or regulations during school. I feel like with keeping that will really, be like, something that I want to have done because that way, it can actually happen if it does get better. I also have my original plan; I'm trying to stick to that.”

Subtheme 8b: Linguistic Capital

There were many examples of students wielding their linguistic capital. The most common form discussed in these interviews was students acting as translators between their families and the schools or community. Here a student mentions how she often steps into this role at school meetings. She also expresses how she is happy to help her mother in this capacity.

“And so, she thinks like that embarrasses me, that she has to have me to go and help her, but I don't find anything wrong with that. If anything, I admire her for continuing to get involved and finding solutions on her own, and if that's consistent helps us out, I have no problem with that.”

Another student noted how his fluency in Spanish, which was passed down through his family, was a valuable skill that could provide personal and communal advantages in college and career.

“I feel prepared for college...and I think maybe the hard classes that I've taken before that I've gotten credit for just bc um, it can really help in the long term, like um Spanish like you need high level Spanish to talk to your clients and you need chemistry, or you need anatomy for it. Knowing what you need to know for animals or whatever.”

The final example of linguistic capital was in students who were reclaiming Spanish. One student discussed learning Spanish and speaking “Spanglish” with her mother helps her feel connected to her Latine family members who live in Florida and Cuba. You can see that she starts to talk about “their different traditions” but stops and changes her language from “they” to “we” to include herself in the family traditions. Language seems to have this powerful way of creating and maintaining connection to family and cultural roots.

“It hasn't really intersected as much as it could have. The fact that I know I can be more involved in a Latino culture in Florida, as visiting relatives, they kind of we kind of see different traditions that I don't normally practice in my family and even through even learning Spanish. as something most of my family does through Florida and me and my mom do to each other. We speak English, I guess. Say some words in English and in Spanish and that's kind of how we communicate to each other.”

Subtheme 8c: Familial Capital

For all the participants, families were sources of motivation, inspiration, knowledge, support, and values that students applied to the school experiences and aspirations. The second theme of this study examined a wide variety of examples of family capital. These included examples of families providing emotional support to their children, older siblings providing college preparation guidance, families overcoming barriers to remain involved in their child's school programming, and families inspiring their child's higher education and career goals.

There were also examples of families passing down values that encouraged students to act in their community or informed how they responded to oppression. For example, in the quote below, the students talk about her mother's values which she greatly admires and tries to incorporate. Similarly, in the second quote, the student talks about the values of reliance on

community and mutual support. This quote is also a good example for how family capital extends well beyond the nuclear family to include extended family, friends, and community members.

“[My mom] is the perfect role model and I and I want to be like her, she’s so humble and welcoming, and she's strong, yet gentle, and she's just so inviting to all sorts of people, she’s so warm...she doesn't live for herself, she lives for others and I kind of want to do [that], I want to do things and I want to be a light for others and I I feel like that's why I also stopped being so shy because I knew if I wanted to speak up for other people and represent other people I couldn't be shy and I wanted to fiercely sign up for things I believe in.”

“I think because the Latino community, even though you may not be family, sometimes you would still help and support each other because I know that sometimes we would help friends with economic issues that they even had. You know, like sending them \$500 or something just to pay for their own bill or trying to get them into a connection with other community resources that might have grants...Our culture values family and family is all about helping others. I think the values within our culture helps make us stronger... It helped us get through COVID too because at the beginning of it, it really impacted us. But at the end of the day, we were able to get that support and whatever else we needed through our friends and our family, because we really value that support an trying to help each other out through this pandemic.”

Subtheme 8d: Navigational Capital

There is a lot of skill required to navigate the college preparation and entrance process. This is true for all students, but especially true for BIPOC, low-income, first-generation, and immigrant students who are potentially the first in their families to navigate the U.S. college system while also overcoming the barriers of racist and oppressive systems and institutions which were created to prevent their educational success. Yet students provided several examples of skills to help them persevere in their educational endeavors.

There were several examples of students relying on one another as confidants and support as they navigated racism and microaggressions in the school space. This student discussed how

her and her Latine peers look out for newly arrived Latine students, who are often targets of microaggressions and racism. She also points out the importance of sticking together and keeping to themselves as a protective measure. Interestingly, the student does not mention relying on the school for protection. Instead, she sees her BIPOC peers as the primary source of support and safety.

“We just really have to support each other and just make sure that even though the school district or the school doesn't really make sure we're ok, we just have to keep supporting each other and protecting ourselves within our own community, the Latino community. Just knowing that we just have to take care of each other in general.”

This student gave a similar example, except that she found support from a group of Latine students and community advocates outside of her school.

“So, we were kind of just, so for racism she was just telling us how it was mainly Latino and African American families who were just not receiving the right help and utilities to be prepared for Covid. Meaning we were not getting access to face masks or helping, like nobody was really helping us with groceries or money wise things. And so just kind of saying like oh, you know like this, this all comes back to racism and how minorities are always seen as something non important, but if it was a white neighborhood there would be a lot of help there, like we would, nobody would be unprepared as she would say.”

There were also many examples of students using qualities and skills like persistence, tenacity, bravery, and hope to navigate school and college paths. Despite immense challenges during the pandemic, this student maintained hope and persisted through the negative effects of the pandemic.

“Sometimes we would have bad days, like ‘wow! I just want this to be over, like I hate there's this whole pandemic that's going on.’ But I try to stay positive and think how everything happens for a reason. We've just got to keep going through it. I try to keep a positive attitude towards everything because we don't, we don't win anything with being sad or being frustrated. If anything we're just causing ourselves more negativity and just putting ourselves down so I'm just like, “yeah, let's not do that.”

Similarly, these students showed impressive sedulity and resolution. Students sought to test themselves and realize their goals despite challenges created and compounded by the pandemic.

“I looked at my schedule and I was like these are easy classes, I got to start challenging myself even more in these advanced classes and I'm just trying to ... piggyback off that through the two years that I have left, to try and get that chance at the scholarship later on.”

“Right now, I'm looking to apply some local scholarships, and also having some financial aid through the private application for C., and possibly start fund raising and working. Yeah, it's tough, but I'm not going to give up on my dream that easily.”

Subtheme 8e: Social Capital

Students provided notable examples of relying on social networks to help navigate school and the pandemic. They credited their helpful teachers or staff, community members, and peers in helping navigate college selection, applications, and selecting a major. For example, these students described the way they would work together with their peers to accomplish school milestones. In the first quote, the participant mentions how she and her friend worked together to overcome challenges and complete all their assignments during the pandemic. Whereas in the second quote, the participant discussed how her peers helped her think through aspects of choosing a good school that she had not previously considered.

“[My friend and I] hold each other accountable for certain things and we motivate each other like ‘we got this, we can do this.’ and that was the case for this school year too. Let's say that one of us was having internet connection problems, we're like ‘hey, you can come to mine, or I can go to yours’ because we don't live that far from each other. We live like 5 minutes away so we can work this out, you know? Um, and we would kind of help each other out with homework as well.”

“I have one friend who is extremely future conscious, and she knows everything that's going to happen in her life. She has most of it planned out and she's kind of helped me think about the finer details of ‘am I going to get an apartment close to campus or am I going to live on campus?’, ‘What's my plan for classes?’. Whereas my other [friend] is

more of the big dreamer kind of type, and she likes to give me that push into the unknown and, like, dreaming of other places I would like to live.”

Other students looked to community networks for support during the pandemic. Here a participant describes how she learned about and relied on valuable community organizations and services. She also mentions how she shares these resources with other members of her community, highlighting the value of social networks in navigating various systems.

“L. is part of [names parent organization] so they have been really helpful with helping families answer questions or just seeing where they could get assistance for rent or stuff like that. They've been really helpful. We've known of a lot of families who have come to us and then they go to them because we recommend them because we we've seen what they can do for us... So we've actually known A., which is one of the directors there. We've known her since, I would say, when I was 6 seven years old. My mom kept in touch with her and she told us about all these programs and all the everything that could assistance, assist us during these tough times.”

Subtheme 8f: Resistance Capital

All of the students recounted experiences of racism and oppression. According to liberation and critical psychology theories, there are many forms and stages of resistance that contribute to social change and challenging the status quo (French, Lewis, Mosley, Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, Chen, & Neville, 2020). There was a variety of ways that students displayed resistance including expanding critical consciousness, maintaining radical hope and positive regard for self in the face of racist messaging, challenging White supremacy values, deideologizing dominant narratives, values, and expectations, and directly challenging or interrupting dominant systems and institutions.

Critical consciousness is developed as oppressed groups become more aware and critical of their oppression (French, Lewis, Mosley, Adames, Chavez-Dueñas, Chen, & Neville, 2020). All students described some level of critical consciousness, albeit to different levels. Although there were examples of students managing internalized oppressive messages, most students were

actively questioning their experiences and the institutions they operated in them. In this first quote, the student refers to the Latine community as “ignorant.” This was not an uncommon term used to describe Latine parents and community members in the interviews and it is likely a remnant of internalized messaging that students have heard about themselves and their communities. While this student uses the term “ignorant”, she is also working on placing accountability for on those in power for the inequitable distribution of resources in the community.

“Yes, there is help out there, like from the community, but nobody knows about it. You have to do your digging and research and for Hispanics here, they're not very like up to date on technology so, a lot of people don't even check their emails. They don't even check anything so how are you supposed to be ... I feel like that adds on to our ignorance because you feel like there's nobody out there to help you, but there is, you just have to keep digging and ... like being ignorant about it and not really digging into it and being more educated about the things out there, you feel like there's nothing out there when, there is. You just have to really, really dig into it.”

This is in slight contrast to this student who is beginning to question and think critically about the intersection of race and class. At the end of the quote, she states that while Latine families share many struggles, class can add another layer oppression that some middle to middle-upper income families do not share.

“I would say the living situation because some, although we were predominantly well actually, all of us were Latinos, some of them were in low-income neighborhoods. Some of them were like in like the middle class and so just seeing how some families were like holding up well and some families, including mine, were just doing really bad. Its kind of just, it gave me a different perspective. I was like, oh, you know, like well, even though we're going through the same struggles when it comes down to it, [the struggle's also] very different.”

In this last example, the student expressed her increasing anger as she became aware of her teachers inaccurate and unconscientious beliefs that all students are managing the same challenges and navigating school on the same playing field. Here she states the reality of her challenges and how they look different than the challenges of her wealthier White peers.

“It makes me angry, and I would just say it's unfair, because I, as a Latina student, I have to work even harder for my grades, I would say. For the simple reason that my parents are not educated enough to understand, and I can't go to them for help, I can't go up to them and be like 'hey, can you review my essay, or can you help me with this homework because they don't understand that?' They don't even know how to speak English correctly. Whereas [White students], their parents, have gotten college degrees. Or even an associate degree, and they understand, and they can help more with their education, but for me, I'm limited to what I can do.”

White supremacy values vary slightly depending on the source. However, they often include hierarchy, puritan work ethic, individualism, quantity, perfectionism, exclusion, and respect for rules or order over people (Okun, 2021). Students challenge these by acting and making decisions in a way that is not dictated solely by these values and by maintaining their own values and cultural integrity. For example, In the quote below, the student recalls how she and her mother “broke the rules” of how many meals they could provide at a community-led food pantry. One of the companies helping to organize the pantry created a rule that determined the number of meals each person could receive. However, when the student and her mother noticed that families’ need was greater than the allotted amount, they placed their value for human wellbeing and need over the value of rules and order.

“And so, my mom was involved with a leadership group here called [name of group]. And what they did was that they partnered up with this one restaurant called [name of restaurant]. It's here in [names city of residence]. And they were preparing meals... my mom, other community leaders here, and then me and my older sister, we would stand in front of our neighborhood, and we would give out families this, these meals and what they wanted us to do was to just give two per family. But we're like no, that's not enough. So, we kind of broke the rules and just were asking how many. How many plates would you like? And they would be like “OK, give us 6” or “can you give us 8?” And so, we were doing that. And then they also started giving out free masks.”

Students challenged these values in school as well. Three students talked about challenging the school’s expectations of overworking themselves or taking classes beyond the high school level. This student points out the expectation that she should be taking as many

college-level courses as possible to be competitive for high school. She states that she would prefer her work expectations to match her level.

“Yeah, it's definitely overwhelming. Because some teachers are like ‘oh, you just need to, you should be taking classes now about what you're going to study.’ But if I don't know what I'm going to study, I don't know like which classes I'm supposed to take or if I'm like they're like you should be taking more classes at the college just so you can finish your bachelors when your end of high school, but I want to be a high schooler too I want to kind of have fun and not be so overwhelmed by school.”

While several students showed examples of deideologizing White systems, two stories that stood out to me were the two students who were not following the typically valued education path of going straight from high school to a 4-year college. Instead, these two students were seeking a trade job that provided them with a skill that would contribute to their families. The first student was attending an alternative GED program at the time of the interview and planned on attending vocational classes to become skilled as a welder. In the first quote, the student expresses his appreciation for his GED program and how it became destigmatized. In the second quote, he talks about his desire to pursue welding and his plan to use this skill in his family's business.

“[My program] is a really cool program because you get a lot of one on one with teachers, which is what you really can't get in a [traditional] classroom. And it's more of a, the whole class doesn't work at one pace. You get to work at your own pace. It kind of feels like a second home when you're there because you know everybody so well...I feel close to the other students at [name of program] because we're all in the same boat. We all struggled in school. We don't have to feel I guess insecure in that room because we all get along so well because we've all struggled and noticed that school wasn't for us... [My parents] were the happiest when they found out that I was going to be going to [name of program] because they thought it wasn't going to be the same as a high school diploma, which is, it's pretty much is it the high school equivalent.”

“I went on a field trip, and I liked everything that I heard from all the [welding] professors and students. And yeah, once I went on that field trip I kind of just knew set in stone that I wanted to go differently and get my welding certificate. They're really excited for me to do the whole welding program because it's a well-paid job and it's something that I found interest in. My brother and my dad, they have their own construction

company, so the plan was to make our construction company a welding and a construction”

For the second student, he was attending a traditional high school, but was already transitioning into his vocational school to study car mechanics, before he had graduated. He did not idealize the status that often comes with high school and college graduation, nor did he idealize traditional education generally. He found value in having a skill and trade that could help him fulfill his values of family and financial mobility.

“I was planning on going to [name of vocational school] this year and that is, but I've been going. It's been 50/50 in person in class and online class, but it hasn't changed anything. I still have my goals for myself and I'm still going to achieve them somehow. I want to work in automotive. I wanted to be a mechanic and I'm still going to be that...I've been doing that. It's been going well. I've never really felt stressed or pressured at all. I want to go again and just be done with school because I don't plan on going to a big school because - yeah, and then I want to work at Ford and just countdown my career for rest of my life.”

He went on to say -

“They definitely support me. They figured out ways to motivate me more and more. They have definitely helped me a lot. They just told me that this is my last year. I had to pass on my classes to keep it good and make them proud for when I graduate on time. So, I just want to do that and then move into my career.”

Lastly, students utilized resistance capital when they directly challenged or interrupted systems and institutions. This most often included calling people, experiences, and institutions out for their acts of oppression. In fact, many students saw their participation in this very study as a way to tell and distribute their stories that call out their oppression.

“I would like to see it make a permanent change in something, whether it's big or small. I wanted to see, I want this information to go out to the community and make it known that we're struggling but we continue to find ways to get through it. And perhaps we do it amongst ourselves but we need the community's help. And if they need our help, we're going to be there for them, but we just need to have it known that we're welcome. Yeah, and I would like to see this information educate people on the struggles Latinos actually encounter. That it's not just something that the media just poses out there. That it's something real. And it continues to happen whether we're in a pandemic or not. We struggle, we really do. And we need help.”

It was also clear that students learned from and modeled their parents' acts of resistance against oppression and racism. This quote concisely summarizes this observation when the participant said her mother advised her that she would sometimes need to start a commotion to resolve issues facing the Latine community.

“I've always tried to be involved with things because anytime there's an issue that needs to be kind of resolved or even addresses or like talked about like my mom always said to just like start a commotion and to make l a change. So, I've always like tried to like talk to influential teachers and kind of team up with them to [make change].”

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The current study is a qualitative study of Eagle and Larimer County Latine junior- and senior-level high school students as they prepared for college and career during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to understand the school experiences of these participants before and during the pandemic. It took a critical look at how systemic oppression operates and manifests in the everyday lives of the student participants and their families, peers, and community, how institutions uphold oppression, how the pandemic exacerbated existing inequities and marginalization, as well as the cultural wealth and strengths the students share with their families and communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic had far-reaching impacts on high-school students, their families, and their broader communities. Students reported challenges and barriers including inequities in income, infection and job loss risks, institutional and systemic support, healthcare access, and language access within the context the pandemic. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has been found to have immense negative impacts on the economic health of the Latine community throughout the US. Vargas and Sanchez (2020) found that up to 49% of Latine parents struggled to make their rental payments and 52% having experienced decreases in work hours and or wages. Sadly, this economic stress on Latine families was found to lead to 32% of families needing to postpone or cut education and career related expenses.

However, my results showed that many of these inequities were rooted in systemic racism, classism, and marginalization that predated the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the U.S., low-income Latine families were less likely to benefit from safety net program meant to offset increased economic vulnerabilities during the pandemic (Hibel, Boyer, Buhler-Wassmann, & Shaw, 2021). Additionally, Hibel et al. (2021) found that paradoxically, Latine families were

more likely to be laid off or experiences cutbacks while also being overrepresented in frontline and essential work positions and therefore at higher risk of exposure. This fact, along with housing and medical inequities among BIPOC communities in the U.S. contribute to the higher rates of infection and death from COVID-19 (Andrasik et al, 2021).

Despite this, students and families demonstrated strength and perseverance. As outlined in the students' stories, much of these strengths related to the six types of cultural capital that make up Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model. This model has been found to capture student talents, power, and resilience (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). As outlined in their stories, Latine students emphasized their many coping strategies and protective factors. Reliance on family and community for social support and mutual aid, maintaining aspirations, hope, and positive self-regard, and engaging in internal and or collective acts of resistance helped students find meaning and empowerment before and during the pandemic.

The students' stories highlighted their appreciation for education in the face of many challenges. School was valued as a space for connection, learning, and access to their college and career goals. It provided a space for exploration and experimentation where students learned about their interests and developed their vision for their future. The participants also expressed positive regard and admiration for many of their teachers and school staff, particularly those who reached out to students, taking the time to know, understand, and encourage them.

Additionally, family was found to be an inextricably intertwined with the students' experiences of and aspirations for school and college/career readiness. Students' value for education was passed down from their families and communities, many of whom made immense sacrifices for the opportunity for their children to attend school and prepare for college. Students carried the knowledge of these sacrifices with them using them as fuel to propel them through

the most difficult points in their education path. Family members were not only found to be sources of motivation, but sources of knowledge and support. This finding is supported by extensive literature on the relationship between familism and education outcomes in Latine students (Sabogal, 1987; Esparza and Sánchez, 2008; Piña-Watson et al., 2015; Germán et al., 2009; and Vargas et al., 2013).

While students and families maintained a deep appreciation and regard for education, schools were often found to be hostile environments for Latine students and their families. The students' stories included many incidents of school peers, teachers, and school staff perpetrating racist, classist, and anti-immigrant microaggressions and discrimination toward Latine students and their families. Latine students also emphasized experiences of erasure at school, even in cases where Latine students made up most of the student body. White-washed curriculums and college preparation with deprioritization of Latine inclusion and a pervasive myth of meritocracy contributed to Latine student erasure and college readiness interventions that were incongruent with Latine student needs and realities. Steketee, Williams, Valencia, Printz, & Hooper (2021) highlighted similar findings and discussed how schools in the U.S. are often hotbeds for microaggressions and prejudice given the lack of cultural frameworks built into school systems. While my results certainly support their claim that microaggressions and discrimination are commonplace in schools, I would argue that given the complexities, depth, and longevity of racism and classism in the U.S. (Fernandez, 2002; Valencia, 2015; Yosso, 2005), implementing cultural frameworks into the existing structure of the U.S. education system would only partially address the issues of systemic oppression in school.

Conclusion

This is a psychological study that examined the personal experiences of Latine junior and senior high school students as they prepared for their post-graduate plans during the COVID-19 pandemic and how the meaning they made of these experiences affected their internal world. However, there was a strong focus on the students' social, economic, and historical contexts. This was intentional in order to remain in line with critical race and liberation theories which criticize traditional psychological research for its attribution of people's distress to their own individual pathology (cite) rather than the contexts and power structures in which people are forced to operate.

Ultimately, students called attention to how acute barriers and challenges are rooted in classist and racist oppression. They also highlighted the strengths, bravery, and resilience of their community as they confront and persevere in oppressive systems. It is also clear that family and community engagement and inclusion in education systems is beneficial and essential for the Latine students' wellbeing and success in the U.S. education system. Rather than maintain school as a siloed space that should remain impermeable to the outside lives of its students and staff, education institutions must create a more humane learning environment with room for greater flexibility, transparency, and responsiveness.

Students' stories highlighted several possible recommendations. These include 1. schools and communities should prioritize appropriate, consistent, and accessible language access for their non-English speaking community members. 2. Prioritization of culturally sensitive and linguistically accessible mental health services. 3. Prioritization of Latine-centered school spaces 4. Implementing community-led efforts for increasing and normalizing inclusivity of BIPOC students and their cultures within school spaces. And 5. Following community-led suggestions

for appropriate school responses to socio-economic inequities often experienced by low-income and BIPOC students. It should be recognized that these suggestions are given cautiously. Each suggestion is based off only the 12 student interviews conducted and therefore may not represent the priorities of the larger Latine communities within Larimer and Eagle Counties.

It is commonplace and still seen as a powerful tool of advocacy for researchers, who hold significant power as the ‘qualified experts’, to provide a list of specific action points to community stakeholders who also hold power in terms of political and socio-economic sway. However, this is also a form of white supremacy in that it encourages unilateral decision making where those in power become the benefactors and the oppressed become passive beneficiaries. Similarly, it does not recognize the strength, knowledge, resilience, and leadership that already exists in those Latine communities. As liberation advocacy asserts – the answers to oppression come “from” the oppressed people rather than “for” the oppressed (Martín-Baro, 1994).

As this research is based in Critical Race theories, there is a call to action within these results. However, to remain true to the anti-racist and liberation goals of Critical theories and Anti-racist community advocates, any initiatives and actions should be led by the community members most impacted. This means that all these suggestions should be examined, discussed, directed, and opened to change or cancellation by the Latine community members of Eagle and Larimer counties. Therefore, the primary suggestion of these findings is for institutions and broader community leaders to reorient themselves away from prioritizing their own interpretations of the Latine community’s needs or protecting the interest of dominant and hegemonic groups (Martín-Baro, 1994) in favor of engaging and, most importantly, investing in local Latine community leaders and their initiatives as they define them.

Limitations

There are inherent strengths and biases due to my intersecting identities and lived experience. As a Latina woman that grew up most of my life low-income and living in a segregated and low-access trailer park, I am positioned to have some overlapping experiences with the students I interviewed. Additionally, I experienced many of the education barriers including discrimination, low expectations, White-washing, and school push out described by the participants interviewed.

However, while I identify as Latina, I am of South American descent and therefore experience different variations of the Latine experience including stereotypes, discrimination, political, historical and immigration experiences; whereas the students who will be interviewed for this project, will be Mexican and Central American descent. I am also White passing, which significantly differentiates how I navigate educational systems and institutions compared to the students in this study. Lastly, while I began my life as low-income, I have since gained significant upward mobility into the middle class starting in my mid-teenage years. This is not the case for most of the teenage students who will participate in this research project. My privileged identities certainly make me susceptible to blind spots, misinterpretations, or minimizations of aspects of the students' stories. These differences in identity and lived experience are worth noting since there will likely be student perspectives, strengths, supports, and challenges that were unanticipated. They are also relevant due to the interpretive nature of IPA. The narrative data in this study can be used to provide a rich understanding of the high school and college preparation experience and generate hypotheses for future research.

Due to the qualitative nature of this research, the finding will be exploratory and will not be able to answer hypotheses about the students' college readiness, access, or choice; nor can it

be used to apply the findings to the experience of all Latine high school students in college readiness programs. In addition, it cannot be used to determine causality or any statistical relationship between the phenomena explored in this study.

CRT/LatCrit research has most frequently relied on ethnographic and counter storytelling methods. These methods allow for deeper relationships with the study participant. In CRT-based ethnographic studies, researchers often position themselves as advocates, tutors, teachers, or mentors of the person they are studying for a span of years, which ultimately allows the researcher to give a more nuanced and textured account of the person's experience. CRT informed counter stories do not always require long term relationships, but also encourage a multidimensional relationship between the researcher and the participant. More traditional forms of qualitative research, such as IPA, will not allow for the same depth of relationship. However, in depth interviews can be structured in a way that allows for building trust between the researcher and participant. Lastly, IPA method allows me to gather data from multiple participants with various intersecting gender, class, and ethnic identities.

Future Directions

Since the conclusion of this analysis, I have continued to work with YouthPower365 to distribute these results to a number of school and community stakeholders. I continue to encourage institution and organization leaders to engage the Latine community in deeper conversation around the results of this study with the goal of developing community led action. Additionally, I am currently working with my colleague and fellow graduate student, Elizabeth Ballinger-Dix, to combine our results into a comprehensive community report that would be distributed at the local and state levels as communities advocate and apply for support related to their needs. Ultimately, it is the participants' and my hope that the community will hear their

stories and the call to action that lies within them. It is important to note, that there was not a call for White-led agencies and communities to wield their power to make changes based on their interpretation of student testimonies, rather to recognize, empower, and invest in Latine community leadership that is already the expert on the barriers, needs, and strengths of Latine people in Larimer and Eagle County. This is an opportunity for Larimer County, Eagle County, and Colorado wide systems and institutions to move further into radical advocacy that work in tandem with its most oppressed members.

In general, the results of this report could be individually explored in more depth. While there is an increasing amount of research on the impacts of COVID-19 on various communities, there remain gaps in the literature around the pandemic's relationship to systemic oppression within young people and emerging adults. In line with critical race and liberation psychology literature, I would recommend focusing on qualitative methodologies, such as counter narrative research, which allows for greater depth in the data and relationships between the participant and researcher.

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